

Distinguished Alumni Award Winners

Congratulations to all of the recipients of the Distinguished Alumni Award!

We thank all of the nominators for their suggestions, and we are proud of the winners for all of their hard work, dedication, and professional accomplishments.

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2006 Distinguished Alumni

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Christine Thomas: Choosing her path



Dr. Christine Thomas
Class of 1972

Christine Thomas had planned to become a high school teacher. But her experience at Central Michigan University set her on a different path.

"The experiences that I had in the biology department coupled with my chemistry minor were pivotal in my career," Thomas says. "Every position that I had, starting with teaching biology labs at Kalamazoo Valley Community College, involved both my biology and chemistry expertise."

"I started out to be a high school biology teacher. That never happened. But many other wonderful things did."

Since graduating from CMU, Thomas earned a master of science degree in water resources from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and a doctorate in land resources from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Thomas, named dean in May 2005 of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point College of Natural Resources, was the first female tenured professor in the college. Her achievements include developing a program that teaches women outdoor skills, "Becoming at Outdoors Woman."

Thomas has a lot of fond memories of her days on the CMU campus, particularly of her biology classes.

"I actually loved most of my biology courses at CMU," Thomas says. "Dr. (Larry) Caldwell was someone that I took a couple of courses from. He was tough! Those were good experiences."

"I also had great chemistry experiences. Dr. (Robert) Kohrman (now college dean) may have been my all-time favorite at the undergraduate level."

Thomas has remained active in regional issues related to women in natural resources and co-chaired two Midwest regional conferences related to workforce diversity.

She is an emeritus member of the board of directors of the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin and is past vice chair of the board of directors of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. She was appointed to serve on the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board and is currently vice chair. Then-U.S. secretary of the Interior Gail Norton also appointed Thomas to the Sporting Conservation Advisory Council.

In 1999, *Wisconsin Outdoor Journal* named Thomas among the "Twenty Most Influential Conservationists in Wisconsin in the 20th Century."

Jason Link: Crediting CMU's influence

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Dr. Jason Link
Class of 1990

During Jason Link's work takes guts. Fish guts. And lots of them.

Link, a NOAA biologist, manages a database that contains information on the contents from more than 500,000 fish stomachs collected throughout the entire Northwest Atlantic Ocean. He analyzes the feeding ecology for more than 100 fish species.

"When I started this business, I had no idea I'd ever be working on zooplankton in the Great Lakes or deepwater squids and fishes in the Gulf of Mexico or fish communities in the Northwest Atlantic," Link says.

"The ability to pick up these topics and assemble them with what I already knew has been invaluable for my career. The foundation for continually developing new knowledge was established through my education at CMU."

Link, in fact, credits much of his success to CMU.

"Anyone who has ever been to Beaver Island knows what a special place it is to learn about life and to gain the skills to be a functioning part of society," Link says. "Just being immersed in a culture where you speak this very specific, scientifically oriented jargon was an important step in becoming a professional in this field. The sense of camaraderie centered around biology helped shape my expectations for future steps in my career as a professional biologist."

After CMU, Link went on to earn a doctorate in biological sciences from Michigan Technological University.

In his work with NOAA, Link leads a scientific group called the Food Web Dynamics Program. Link received the 2005 Fisheries Society of the British Isles Medal for fisheries scientists who have made exceptional advances in the study of fish biology and fisheries science.

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Matt Andrews: Drawing on early CMU influence



Dr. Matt Andrews
Class of 1981

Matt Andrews believes Central Michigan University shaped who he is as a scientist, from his days exploring the flora and fauna on Beaver Island, to his current groundbreaking research in how understanding mammalian hibernation can save human lives.

"My experience at CMU's Biological Station on Beaver Island was my first introduction to scientific methods in the field."

"I came to understand the importance of conservation during the first Earth Day in 1970 and that studying our fragile ecosystem is not only interesting, it's important," said Andrews, professor of biology, University of Minnesota-Duluth.

After receiving his B.S. in zoology from the University of Michigan, Andrews enrolled at CMU and received his M.S. in biology in 1981.

"Unlike some of the bigger schools, the master's was the primary graduate degree at CMU and

provided financial support in the form of graduate teaching assistantships," Andrews said. "I also was lured by the chance to teach."

Andrews credits two CMU professors with shaping him as a scientist - Larry Koehler and Roy Burlington, emeriti professors of biology. Under their guidance, Andrews benefited from exposure to major scientific conferences and the area of study that would become his life's work - hibernation of mammals and the genes that control hibernation.

In 1984, Andrews received his Ph.D. in biochemistry from Wayne State University School of Medicine and went on to do his postdoctoral research in the Department of Embryology at the Carnegie Institution in Washington, D.C. from 1984-1987.

In 1998, Andrews published a paper in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* that identified two genes responsible for the fuel switch that occurs in mammals during hibernation.

In 2004, Andrews received a U.S. patent for his work and cofounded a biotech startup company, Molecular Rescue Technologies LLC, which applies hibernation strategies to combat pathologies associated with ischemia and stroke. He also sees promise in using his hibernation research to extend the viability of organs used for transplantation.

Todd Anson: Reflections from the West Coast



Todd Anson
Class of 1977

Todd Anson graduated summa cum laude from CMU in 1977 with a major in mathematics. He has a law degree from the University of Michigan, co-owns an international real estate development company, and lives in Coronado, California with his wife Teri (also a CMU alum) and two sons, Christopher and Ryan.

Through a fortunate turn of events, Anson found himself in the Silicon Valley with a front row seat in the technology boom of the 1990s.

Having literally grown up on the CMU campus, first as a student at The University Laboratory School, Anson went on to become a top student and three-sport athlete in high school, but then things changed.

Two years into his undergraduate work, he gave up baseball to focus on academics and other interests, an experience that helped start him along his career path.

In 1980, Anson moved to San Francisco to practice law, where the technology industry was barely a dream to anyone. Ten years later though, the technology boom was in full swing, and he built his law firm into a technology-focused international giant. It became the second largest law firm in California.

By the mid-1990's, Anson had been representing Cisco Systems in all of its real estate developments and financings around the globe. In 1999, he started Cisterra Partners LLC, a real estate development company, to build Cisco's real estate facilities around the world - something that had never been done before. The company built Cisco office campuses in Amsterdam, Boston, and Ottawa, Canada, and even added a life sciences research and development headquarters campus for Idec Pharmaceuticals (now Biogen Idec).

Anson credits listening to his "inner voice" for helping him identify his passions in life. In many ways, he has come full circle. The guy who thought he gave up baseball went on to develop the first office tower ever built as part of a Major League Baseball park - DiamondView Tower for Petco Park in San Diego. Anson is also now part owner of a new minor league baseball league in California and Arizona.