

# Environmental pioneer led UW-SP to fame



Fred Schmeckle  
1893-1967

*This is the fourth in a series of letters from people out of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point's past, reacting to the development of the institution as it approaches the centennial year beginning September, 1994.*

Dear Friends,

I am having a wonderful time being updated on all of the offerings that have emerged from the conservation education department I founded and headed at UW-Stevens Point.

I'm absolutely amazed.

For starters, my department is now the College of Natural Resources with its own building, nearly 1,600 students, more than 60 faculty and 16 programs in which to major.

It's difficult for me to fathom that what I instituted has become the nation's largest undergraduate program, with majors in forestry administration and utilization, forest management, urban forestry, parks and recreation, fisheries and limnology, water chemistry, watershed management, aquatic toxicology, groundwater management, water and wastewater treatment, general resource management, environmental education and interpretation, land use policy, soil science, wildlife and paper science. There also are 13 related minors, ranging from captive wildlife management to environmental communication.

Natural resources graduates of UW-SP are being placed in important positions around the world. They are much in demand, thanks to the high quality of instruction they receive.

I owe much of my success to the impetus of my dear teaching colleague, May Roach, who went to a seminar in Chicago, where she heard the president of the Ohio Medical Association express more concern for loss of elements in the soil than for germs. When May returned, she encouraged the development of a conservation course. And, as a chemistry and agriculture teacher, the job became mine.

One course led to two and so on. By 1946, we were able, with the strong support of President William Hansen, to secure a major in conservation education. I recruited several fine, young faculty members, including Bernard "Friday" Wievel, who eventually succeeded me in my administrative position and hired many of the important professors who pioneered the specialized programs which have brought fame to UW-SP.

The boys just back from World War II were prime candidates to study in the new conservation education department. I couldn't help but love those young men. They were full of fun but serious about their studies. I enjoyed teasing them, pointing out on our field trips such things as manure spreaders standing in barnyards. "There's one piece of machinery an implement dealer won't stand behind," I lectured, tongue in cheek.

When I retired in 1959 with 36 years of service, I moved to Eagle River to be closer to the Trees for Tomorrow operation, which I helped organize. I felt especially close to that facility and its staff - they even named the library there for me, and several national organizations honored my work there and on the campus.

As a teacher, my goal was to train professionals in the field of conservation and also make such people as lawyers, farmers, teachers and men and women in the trades aware of the problems created by eroding resources. By golly, I think I succeeded.

As UW-SP gears up to celebrate its centennial in 1994, a year after the 100th anniversary of my own beginning on a Nebraska farm, I send best wishes to the school in its noble efforts to keep Mother Earth clean and healthy. And whenever you are on the UW-SP campus, I'd be very proud if you would visit the wonderful nature preserve that bears my name.

*Fred Schmeckle*

