

**4/12/2010**

**The University of Montana Western  
May 2010 report to the Board of Regents**

U.S. Sen. Jon Tester will give the commencement address at the University of Montana Western's 113th commencement on May 8. Senator Tester will address the 2010 class, which is the third class to graduate under Montana Western's unique Experience One block scheduling system. The senator last visited Montana Western in March 2007 when he toured the university's biomass heating plant. Past Montana Western commencement speakers have included acclaimed reporter and author John Maclean, Gov. Brian Schweitzer, local businessman and attorney Peter Tomaryn, and owner of the J Bar L Ranch in Montana's Centennial Valley, Peggy Rockefeller Dulany.

Five students from a University of Montana Western environmental interpretation class recently made a lasting mark on two of Montana's most famous historic mining towns, Virginia and Nevada Cities. Environmental sciences professor Linda Lyon and students Alexa Conigione, Gina Pasini, Steve Keller, Buck Bradford and Tye Roth teamed up with Bill Peterson, curator of interpretation and education for the Montana Heritage Commission, on a self-guided informational tour of the natural history and current environmental state of the former mining camps. "We took on the role of a professional interpretive planning team," Lyon said of her class.

The students' project, "A Healing Environment," focused on the extensive environmental damage the mining created and the subsequent natural recovery occurring there. Their work will be incorporated in four interpretive signs for a new 1.5-mile trail through Virginia and Nevada Cities. The trail is part of a larger ongoing community-wide project spearheaded by the Montana Heritage Commission. Peterson said the students' work provided the Montana Heritage Commission with invaluable insight into the area's natural state.

The Terra Verde club Earth Day Festival was held Saturday, April 17 at the Museum and Depot Park in Dillon. Terra Verde, the University of Montana Western's environmental sciences club, co-sponsored the event with the Montana Western Tobacco Free Task Force. The Earth Day Festival gets people out and participating in their community," said Terre Verde President and UMW student Heather Reiss. "We like to be a part of this town, and this is our way to get out there and show our support."

Dillon may seem like an unlikely location for a luau, but the nearly 600 people who came to the University of Montana Western Polynesian Club's annual spring luau did not seem to mind. The 2010 spring luau, "The Circle of Life," was held at the Keltz Arena on April 24. It is the university's fourth annual luau. "We're one in a million here in Montana, and we have the unique opportunity to share our culture with people here," club president and UMW student Villi Haunga said. "Having the honor to do that is something great."

With the welfare of others in mind, members of the Montana Western Chi Alpha group spent their spring break taking the Habitat for Humanity Collegiate Challenge. Nine students from Montana Western and three from Carroll College helped build Habitat for Humanity homes in

Tacoma Wash. from March 6 through March 13. Chi Alpha has helped other parts of the community as well.

Nationally renowned poet and performance artist Edwin Torres was featured at this year's final installment of our acclaimed "Dances with Words" series. Torres read April 13 in the small auditorium of Main Hall. He was also the guest artist for the UMW Visiting Writer Seminar. A native of Puerto Rico, Torres was working as a graphic designer when he discovered the Nuyorican Poets Café, a non-profit organization that has become a forum for poetry, music, video, visual arts, comedy and theater.

University of Montana Western environmental sciences student Helen Sladek will be taking her studies all the way to Mars through an eight-week internship at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, Calif this summer. Ms. Sladek will be working under the Planetary Geology and Geophysics Undergraduate Research Program. She will participate in geomorphology data analysis centered on information returned by the Mars Global Surveyor, Mars Odyssey, the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter spacecraft, and the Mars Exploration rovers. Her work will specifically focus on finding a landing site for the Mars Science Laboratory rover.

The past two years of Ms. Sladek's undergraduate education have been busy for the Butte, Mont. native. Aside from preparing for the NASA internship and her graduation, she worked with Montana Western professor and botanist Linda Lyon on an ethnobotany interpretation project in Madagascar. In 2009, she participated in an honors class led by environmental sciences professor Sheila Roberts. The class included a trip to study geology, biology, and natural resource management issues in Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands. Ms. Sladek also accompanied her professor, Rob Thomas, to Washington, D.C. for the U.S. Professors of the Year ceremonies in November 2009.