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2010

## The Leading Objective: January 2010

John C. Owens

*NU Vice President and Harlan Vice Chancellor, IANR*

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Owens, John C., "The Leading Objective: January 2010" (2010). *The Leading Object*. 30.

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## Perspectives

New decade, new year, and a new method of delivering IANR's monthly *The Leading Object* newsletter, developed for the IANR community and shared with selected stakeholders, as well.

This month an e-mail notice let *The Leading Object*

readers know the newest edition of the newsletter was available. Clicking on the live link in that notice brought readers to a Web page and this issue, with its redesigned front page and online color photographs.

While *The Leading Object* has been posted online since 2005, printed copies were delivered to each newsletter recipient. Now we're distributing the newsletter electronically throughout our statewide campus, and to as many selected Institute stakeholders as possible.

We still print and mail a small number of newsletters to IANR supporters who aren't set up to receive the newsletter electronically, and we are happy to do so. We value their support.

Anyone who would like to be added to the list to receive the newsletter electronically can do so by visiting <http://ianrhome.unl.edu/leadingobject>, and following the easy sign-up instructions there. If you received this newsletter electronically, you're already on the list.

Electronic distribution to those equipped to receive the newsletter in this manner helps us cut our printing and postage costs, saving dollars. Such efficiencies, important to us at all times, come into even sharper focus in times such as these, when a legislative special session in November brought a second budget cut in 2009, and speculation of further cuts was in the news even before the 2010 legislative session began.

What won't change about *The Leading Object* is the focus it brings to IANR people and programs. It remains a good place to learn more about the diverse research, teaching, and extension education pro-

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John C. Owens  
NU Vice President and  
Harlan Vice Chancellor, IANR

# The Leading Object

*The Morrill Act of 1862  
established a Land Grant University  
in each state where  
**The Leading Object**  
would be instruction  
in agriculture and related fields.*

January 2010

## Diffendal fund benefits Chinese students 25 years later

When School of Natural Resources Professor Emeritus Robert Diffendal Jr. and his wife, Anne, first taught in China, little did they know a student beneficiary fund named for them would continue to benefit Chinese students 25 years later.

Bob Diffendal taught geology and Anne Diffendal taught conversational English at Sun Yat-Sen (previously Zhongshan) University in Guangzhou during their first teaching stint there in 1985.

The Zhongshan geology department, now Department of Earth Sciences, provided the couple with money for food, Diffendal said, with someone approaching him on foot or bicycle with food money every couple of weeks. At the end of their two-month stay, "There was more money than we could ever use," Diffendal said.

Leftover was about 1,000 yuan, then equivalent to about \$125 — a month's salary for a Chinese professor, Diffendal said.

The couple had no desire to spend the leftover yuan. Instead they proposed giving an annual "prize" to a Sun Yat-Sen geology student conducting the best research. The donation was called a "prize," he said, because unlike a scholarship, it was one-time award.

The concept was a first, and the department faculty agreed to try it.

The Diffendals returned to Nebraska and gave the matter no further thought until Diffendal continued his geological



Anne and Robert Diffendal at the Great Wall during one of their first trips to China.

research in western Nebraska in 1986. He mentioned the prize to ranching acquaintances, who became interested and shortly made a \$1,000 contribution to the prize fund.

"The fund started modestly and got considerably larger" from additional contributions by the ranching couple, the Diffendals, their friends, and the Sun Yat-Sen earth sciences department and its faculty.

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## Perspectives (continued from page 1)

grams occurring in the Institute, as well as the people who carry out that work so admirably. IANR is an economic engine for our state, educating tomorrow's scientists, leaders, and community members today, and carrying the knowledge of the university across Nebraska so people can put it to immediate use in their lives.

What won't change is our focus on students and graduates, as well as the international partnerships and opportunities IANR is growing on behalf of Nebraska. Each month when the newsletter spotlights one of our many distinguished alumni it is a pleasure to read of the accomplishments and contributions these people achieved after studying with us.

I hope no matter how you receive the newsletter, you will continue to enjoy the information found here. In highlighting the stories of our students, programs, faculty, and staff, each month the newsletter illustrates the value-adding ways we are at work for Nebraska.

They are many.

I hope, also, that you will take the time to share with me, your unit heads and (or) any of the deans ways you think we might implement other savings, large and small, within IANR, as well as methods we might use to enhance revenue in ways we have not done so before.

We've asked for such ideas before — I'm asking again. The more savings we can implement, the more ways we can add

income to our budget, the more we hope to mitigate the budget cuts our state's economic situation forces upon us. We all know budget cuts affect both programs and people. We wish to avoid that as much as possible. We are looking for as many potential solutions as we can find, and we welcome yours. Be assured they will receive careful consideration.

In the meantime, I hope you enjoy this first electronically delivered issue of *The Leading Object*. And, I wish you a happy new decade, and healthy, peaceful 2010!



## IGERT coordinator also leads fish and wildlife unit

The lead coordinator for a \$3.1 million Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship Program (IGERT) grant also heads Nebraska's Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit.

Craig Allen, wildlife ecologist, is one of three federal scientists for Nebraska's cooperative unit. Both it and the IGERT program are housed in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's School of Natural Resources.

Overseen by the Department of the Interior, the cooperative units were established in 1935 to fill the shortage of trained wildlife biologists. Today 44 units are in 40 states, with more than 160 scientists overseeing as many as 600 graduate students on virtually every type of North American ecological community.

The latest unit to be established, and the only one Congress approved last decade, is Nebraska's in 2004. It came about when John Owens, NU Vice President and Harlan Vice Chancellor of IANR, and past Executive Vice President and Chief Academic

Officer at New Mexico State University, saw the benefits to more thoroughly study Nebraska's abundant natural resources. Owens worked with the late Congressman Joe Skeen of New Mexico, chair of the House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies, to obtain funding for Nebraska's unit. Nebraska Senator Ben Nelson made certain the federal funding became permanent.

In addition to Allen, Nebraska's unit includes assistant leaders Kevin Pope and TJ Fontaine. All three are SNR faculty. They oversee 19 graduate students.

"Not every state has its full complement of three federal scientists," Owens said. "Nebraska is very fortunate."

Recently Fontaine obtained a multistate \$1 million grant relating to climate change, and Pope is the IANR lead for a five-year, \$2.9 million Nebraska Game and Parks Commission study to help state biologists better manage fisheries statewide. That study, funded from federal excise taxes

on fishing equipment and boat gas, is to gather information showing fishing patterns and how they affect fish populations. Anglers are being surveyed at 25 state reservoirs, with more occurring next year.

Don Gabelhouse, head of the Game and Parks fisheries division, said the study already has shown surprising results. For example, he said nearly half the people fishing at Holmes Lake in Lincoln would not fish anywhere else were the lake unavailable.

The surveys, conducted by Pope, students, and others, provide more information on more bodies of water than the state could do on its own, Gabelhouse said. Results will guide officials in their decisions to stock, regulate, and renovate habitat and fishing areas.

Each Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit is a partnership of the U.S. Geological Survey's Biological Resources Discipline, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the state fish and game agency, a host university, and the Wildlife Management Institute.

**Need to meet with the  
Vice President/Vice Chancellor?  
Drop-ins each Friday from 3-5 p.m.\***

**John C. Owens**

NU Vice President for  
Agriculture and Natural Resources  
and Harlan Vice Chancellor of IANR  
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\*Occasionally Dr. Owens will be  
called away on University business.

Editorial - Cheryl Alberts and Lori McGinnis • Layout - Anne Moore

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The *Leading Object* is published monthly for all IANR staff members by  
Communications & Information Technology. Questions or story ideas may be  
directed to the editor at

103 ACB, 0918; via e-mail (calberts1@unl.edu) or via fax (402-472-0025).

## University assistantship prompted Pohlman to go into laboratory work

A former agronomy faculty member likely had no idea of the outcome when he offered one of his students an assistantship.

That assistantship encouraged Ken Pohlman to become a soil scientist and start a successful laboratory that has clients in all 50 states.

"I could not have done what I've done without the university," said Pohlman, majority owner of Midwest Laboratories based in Omaha.

Pohlman grew up on a farm in Stanton and went to the university after graduating from high school because "it was the thing to do."

Having grown up on the farm, Pohlman studied agronomy because it was a field familiar to him. While still an undergraduate, agronomy faculty member Andrew Mazurak offered Pohlman an assistantship conducting soil research in a laboratory.

Until then, Pohlman didn't know where his career would go. After working in the lab, "I didn't know anything I'd like better."

Without Mazurak's guidance and his studies at the university, Pohlman said he might not have entered laboratory work.

Pohlman had the assistantship for two years, continuing after his 1962 graduation while he pursued graduate studies at Nebraska in soil chemistry and soil physics.

Pohlman's first job after his studies was from 1964 to 1969 at Harris Laboratories in Lexington, where he studied dehydrated alfalfa samples. He worked his way into a

supervisory position, and was overseeing employees by the time he was 24.

Pohlman then took a job at Northrup King, where he traveled between Nebraska, Kansas, and South Dakota introducing new seed varieties, conducting seminars, and working with seed dealers.

"After 2 ½ years I had an inkling to go back into the lab," he said. He returned to Harris Laboratories, working in Lincoln between 1973 and 1975.

Pohlman and some partners bought into a franchise with A&L Midwest Agricultural Laboratories in 1975. He worked there for 20 years before he had the opportunity to buy the company outright. In 1995 Pohlman became majority owner of what was renamed Midwest Laboratories.

The company of more than 100 employees does agricultural, food, environmental, and fuel laboratory testing for clients that include fertilizer dealers, manufacturers, and consultants. The company has clients across the country and adds new ones daily, Pohlman said.

"It's exciting to see the different markets we can touch," he said. "There's nothing like the laboratory field."

— Lori McGinnis



Ken Pohlman

## Diffendal (continued from page 1)

The Diffendals returned to China three more times to teach at Sun Yat-Sen University, each time donating leftover yuan to what now is the Diffendal Foundation.



Robert Diffendal Jr.

The foundation now has more than 101,000 yuan or more than \$14,000, sufficient to award prizes annually to a sophomore, junior, senior, and a graduate student. Diffendal and other members of the foundation committee review applications and select student recipients. He receives photographs and notes from the prize recipients, as well as an annual foundation report.

The first student recipient in 1985 was Zhang Ke, now an earth sciences professor at Sun Yat-Sen. Zhang recently notified Diffendal that the prize named for him is the "oldest and most famous" in the department. The department continues to support the prize and even lists it on the department's Web site.

"We think we've made a lot of friends," Diffendal said. Thus far 69 Diffendal prizes have been awarded to Chinese students.

The Diffendals also established similar prizes at UNL in the Department of Geosciences and in the School of Biological Sciences.

"I really appreciate the help of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources in supporting my trips to China," Diffendal said. In addition to his outreach and research activities, Diffendal also continues to review and edit manuscripts of Chinese colleagues at UNL when asked to do so.

Diffendal said both the U.S. and China need geoscientists to address natural resources concerns such as declines in soil and water quality and quantity, air quality, and mineral production.

Diffendal, past president of UNL's Faculty Senate, retired in 2003 and currently is a member of the UNL Speakers Bureau. He also is editor of the UNL Center for Great Plains Studies science journal, *Great Plains Research*.

— Cheryl Alberts

## IGERT award to prepare the way for addressing global water issues

Nebraska's first Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship Program (IGERT) award of \$3.1 million, announced late in 2009, will integrate scientific, socioeconomic, and legal aspects involved in studying and managing complex systems of people and nature.

Craig Allen, wildlife ecologist and program lead coordinator, said the National Science Foundation grant will prepare future scientists, policymakers, and natural resources managers to address increasingly global water issues.

This is Nebraska's first IGERT grant since NSF established the program in 1997. It will fund 26 doctoral trainees over the next five years, the first of whom arrived in

January. About 20 University of Nebraska-Lincoln faculty members helped develop the adaptive management curriculum and will work with the graduate students.

Studies will include every angle of scientifically managing stressed watersheds starting with Nebraska's Platte River, as well as understanding and enhancing the resilience of over-appropriated Great Plains watersheds, where agricultural production and critical habitats rely on fluctuating water resources.

Program partners include those at the national and international levels, as well as agencies and non-governmental organizations dealing with water management issues.

## Todd receives Omtvedt Innovation Award

An IANR horticulturist, who thousands of Nebraskans know as host of the long-running Backyard Farmer television program, has received an Omtvedt Innovation Award.

Kim Todd's students include not only television viewers, but undergraduate students, graduate students, and distance education students. Many learn in classes she developed, such as plants for architects, herbaceous landscape plants, landscape solutions for green living, and landscape management.

Todd led development of the Evasco Demonstration and Teaching Garden, and Backyard Farmer garden, east of Keim Hall. Students and Master Gardeners use the area for hands-on experience in the design, installation, management, and assessment

of landscape plans, woody materials, and turf.

The Omtvedt award, which Todd received Dec. 2, follows a long list of recognitions, including as seven-time honoree of the University of Nebraska Teaching Council/Parents Association for outstanding service to students.

The Omtvedt Innovation Awards are provided by Leone and the late Neal Harlan, who honored Irv Omtvedt on his retirement with funding to provide the awards recognizing areas of strength and promise within the Institute, as well as innovative research and programming by IANR faculty, staff, and students.



Kim Todd

## Lefholtz receives outstanding service award

Billie Lefholtz, office manager with the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, has received an award for outstanding service to the university. The Floyd S. Oldt Outstanding Staff Award was presented to her at the Nov. 10 University of Nebraska Office Professionals Association award luncheon.

Nominators described Lefholtz as an employee who determines goals and objectives and plans for the implementation of desired outcomes.

Lefholtz received a plaque, a year's membership to UNOPA, and a cash award of \$1,000. The award recognizes an office/service employee who demonstrates distinguished service and contributions to the university.



Billie Lefholtz

## Alumnus retires after 22 years with AFBF

An agricultural economics graduate from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln has retired after 22 years as senior economist with the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF).

Terry Francel earned his UNL bachelor's degree in 1965, then earned degrees from Washington State University and the Illinois Banking School at Southern Illinois University.

At UNL, Francel was president of the former Ag Union, which worked with university administration to organize student dances and other entertainment. He said that, other campus organization involve-

ment, and academics provided a solid background for a variety of business experiences and community involvement. He is married to the former Janell Quaring, both St. Paul, Neb., High School graduates. The couple now live in Crofton, Md. They previously served as child advocates for more than 100 foster children over a 10-year period.

At the AFBF, Francel focused on the agricultural market and financial outlook, farm programs, and energy-related issues. Prior to that he held positions with Cargill Investor Services, Continental Illinois National Bank, The Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, CF Industries, and Land O' Lakes.

## Welcome to *Leading Object* online edition

Many readers will be accessing *The Leading Object* online beginning with this issue of the newsletter. This cost-saving measure saves paper, printing, and postage costs, while continuing to provide information of interest to Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources faculty, staff, supporters, and others.

If you are reading this newsletter online, you need do nothing more. If you are reading a print copy and would like to be notified by e-mail when a new newsletter is posted, you may sign up at no charge at <http://ianrhome.unl.edu/leadingobject>.

## Four IANR employees receive OEA recognition

Four IANR employees have received Outstanding Employee Awards.

Harlan Sorensen, building service technician for the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center, received the OEA for office/service staff for December. Supporters wrote he is "the ultimate example of a positive role model" and "a joy to work with and learn from."

Rick Patrick, agricultural research technician with the Panhandle Research and Extension Center, received the OEA for office/service staff for January. Supporters wrote he "has shown true dedication and a most positive spirit" and has provided "a key link for the success of the research work done in the Panhandle area."

Robert Weber, research manager in the Industrial Agricultural Products Center in the Department of Biological Systems Engineering, received the OEA for managerial/professional staff for January and February. Supporters wrote that his "upbeat, can-do company-man attitude makes him a valuable asset to everyone he works with," and "he is very well-organized which makes him very efficient."

Karen Shuck, agricultural research technician with the Great Plains Veterinary Educational Center, received the OEA for office/service staff for February. Supporters wrote she "is willing to assist others in their tasks which encourages everyone to work together in improving the care of livestock." Another wrote "her efficiency and organization are admirable."

The four each receive \$350 and a lapel pin.



Harlan Sorensen



Rick Patrick



Robert Weber



Karen Shuck