

# MCGILL SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENT

## NEWSLETTER



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## Professors Win National Award

by Sari LaBelle, MSE Development and Alumni Relations Associate

It has been a challenging but illuminating journey for the seven professors who were recently declared winners of the prestigious Alan Blizzard Award for collaborative teaching. The Award, which will be presented at the annual conference of the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) this June, recognizes the team's "exemplary contributions to the scholarship of teaching and learning."

Working in five different disciplines, Martin Lechowicz (Biology), Don Baker and Jeanne Paquette (Earth & Planetary Science), Michel Lapointe and Wayne Pollard (Geography), Marcia Waterway (Plant Science) and Terry Wheeler (Natural Resource Sciences), developed and team-teach "The Evolving Earth." – The course is one of the four interdisciplinary core courses of the MSE curriculum, and addresses the history of the planet, with an emphasis on the patterns in biodiversity through time, and the nature of the physical and biological processes that underlie these patterns. The course demands a rich, cross-disciplinary perspective rooted in the natural sciences and a sensitivity to the roles of chance and historical contingency. Each of the



professors is present and active during the 39 hours of lectures held on both the Macdonald and the downtown campuses - a unique feature of this team's approach to collaborative teaching.

According to Professor Lechowicz, one of the course coordinators and the lead applicant for the award, the teaching team "faced a big challenge in weaving together the threads of their diverse training and experience to create this effective and innovative learning environment". He identified one of the keys to the team's success as the ability of its members to "get past the jargon" of their respective disciplines to communicate core ideas to students. He noted "without the framework for collaboration provided by the MSE, this course simply would not have come to be." He added, "While the award formally recognizes the quality of the course, it also validates the MSE's commitment to developing a rigorous, interdisciplinary curriculum in environment."

For more details about the award visit the following website in June 2002: [www.tss.uoguelph.ca/stlhe/alanblizzard.html](http://www.tss.uoguelph.ca/stlhe/alanblizzard.html)

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## Dear Graduates and Friends

by Dean Deborah Buszard, Dean Alan Shaver, and Dean Carman Miller

We are very pleased to inform you that Professor Marilyn Scott has agreed to serve as Interim Director of the MSE during the search period for a new Director. Along with her long-standing dedication to and involvement with the School as Associate Director, Professor Scott brings to her position her previous experience as Director of the Institute of Parasitology in the Faculty of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences for ten years. Professor Scott is an outstanding teacher and researcher with a true commitment to the MSE. She was appointed to the position of Interim Director after a wide consultation with MSE staff and students and was unanimously supported by the MSE community. We hope you will join us in welcoming Professor Scott to her new responsibilities.

We are grateful to Professor Peter Brown for serving as Director for the past three years and for steering the School to where it is today. He continues to hold his appointment as a Professor at McGill but resigned his administrative appointment as Director of the MSE earlier this spring. The MSE will continue to benefit

from Professor Brown's progressive outlook and expertise; as he remains very much a part of the School. He plans to teach several MSE courses and to participate fully in other activities.

The MSE really is an exciting and innovative program, and not surprisingly its staff and students are beginning to win prizes and recognition at home and nationally. This year's Valedictorian at the Macdonald Campus convocation will be Alex Macdonald, the first Valedictorian ever from the MSE. Congratulations Alex! During the entire period of his studies at McGill, Alex has held a Macdonald Campus (Stewart) Entrance Scholarship. The MSE will soon begin a campaign to raise funds specifically for its own scholarship program for students on both campuses.

Congratulations also to the team of professors: Martin Lechowicz, Don Baker, Michel Lapointe, Jeanne Paquette, Wayne Pollard, Marcia Waterway, and Terry Wheeler who will receive the national Alan Blizzard Award for Collaborative Projects that Improve Student Learning this summer at the Society of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education conference hosted by McMaster University.

We all look forward to being part of the MSE's continued success and thank you all for your continued support of the School.

## Gifts, Growth and Good News at the MSE

by Marilyn Scott, MSE Interim Director

It is certainly an honour to represent the MSE as Interim Director. As many of you are well aware, the MSE is an extraordinarily dynamic unit at McGill - one that involves nearly 90 contributing McGill professors in eight different faculties. Together with our nine jointly appointed faculty, our students and alumni, our external Advisory Board, and our many friends and volunteers, we have just completed another exciting year. This is due in large part to the boundless energy and infectious vision of our previous Director, Professor Peter Brown, who remains a very active member of the MSE.

In the past few months, we have had many reasons to celebrate:

**Growth in our student body and alumni:** We currently have 294 students in our program. We graduated 13 students in February 2002, and a further 27 will receive their degrees this June. This will bring our list of alumni to 90.

**New faculty:** We are delighted to announce that Dr. Lisa Sideris will be joining McGill as an Assistant Professor jointly appointed to the MSE and the Faculty of Religious Studies. Dr. Sideris, who studies how evolutionary thought has impacted religion and environmental ethics, brings the total of new, jointly appointed MSE faculty since 1999 to ten.

**Support for new equipment:** In April we received \$16,000 for computer equipment from the University, which will help us to enhance the undergraduate learning experience of our students. They will now be able to observe the effects of various actions on the environment using computer-based classroom exercises.

**Entrance scholarships:** Through a generous gift from the McConnell Family Foundation, entrance scholarships in the amount of \$5,000 each will be available for qualifying students entering the MSE program in September.

McGill conducts regular reviews of all its teaching and administrative units, and our first turn came this year. We were delighted to see the positive reaction of both the internal and external review committees to our achievements to date, and to receive their helpful suggestions about future initiatives.

As always, we welcome your involvement. It is always a pleasure to see you at our various events. Support from our alumni and the community allows us to enrich the MSE program and equip future decision makers to address the escalating number of environmental issues. I look forward to working with you to create a healthier world for future generations.

## MSE Membership in World Conservation Union Accepted

by David Runnalls, MSE Advisory Board Member

**W**e recently received the good news that the McGill School of Environment's application for membership in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) – the World Conservation Union - was approved at the October 2001 IUCN Council's 55<sup>th</sup> Meeting held in Gland, Switzerland. I was the Canadian member of the IUCN Board for six years and had the honour of heading up the IUCN Council Committee for the World Conservation Congress, which was held in Montreal in 1996.

Founded in 1948, the IUCN brings together 78 states, 112 government agencies, 735 NGOs, 35 affiliates, and some 10,000 scientists and experts from 181 countries. Its mission is to influence, encourage and assist societies throughout the world to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and to ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable. Although this membership structure makes the IUCN a very complex beast to govern, it also means that decisions reached by the organization can have a unique force internationally.

**"The MSE is one of the only three Canadian university-based environmental programs with membership in the IUCN"**

In addition to its formal membership, the IUCN has six volunteer Commissions organized around the themes of protected areas; species survival (the SSC, headed by a Canadian, David Brackett, is responsible for the production of the famous red list of endangered species); environmental, economic and social policy; ecosystem management; education and communication; environmental law; and the world commission on protected areas. The work of these Commissions directly contributes to setting global and national environmental standards and policies and to guiding the actions of governments and

civil society in sustaining the biological diversity and natural resources base on which human livelihood depends. For example, IUCN prepared the initial draft which formed the basis of the Convention on Biological Diversity, whose headquarters are in Montreal.

Canada has played an important role in the development of IUCN and the Canadian members form a national Committee for the organization. The MSE is one of only three Canadian uni-

versity-based environmental programs with membership in the IUCN, joining international NGOs such as the Friends of the Earth International, the International Council of Environmental Law, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference and the Sierra Club. Participation in IUCN affairs, conferences, workshops and campaigns, will provide MSE faculty and students with the opportunity to contribute knowledge and expertise from their respective fields of study to this unique worldwide network.

## Wangari Maathai Inspires Students

by Greg Mikkelson, MSE Assistant Professor & Sari LaBelle

**T**his past February students in Environmental Thought – one of the core courses at the MSE - held an inspiring dialogue with Dr. Wangari Maathai. Maathai founded the historic Green Belt Movement in Kenya - a true environmental success story that has now spread to other parts of Africa as well. She was to tell that story to a much wider audience that night in Leacock Auditorium. But in the early morning, she delivered a more spontaneous and interactive version to a spellbound group of 30 students. No one left the room unmoved.

While Maathai had been pursuing her education in the U.S. - becoming the first Kenyan woman to earn a PhD - forests in Kenya had been cleared for cash crops, resulting in soil degradation, a lack of firewood and clean water, and diminished food supply. Maathai returned to a country full of malnourished children and disheartened women.

When Maathai joined the National Council of Women, she began speaking directly with rural women about the issues they faced. Soon she made the connection between their lack of firewood and other required resources and how widespread the clearing of land had become since she'd been away. "When this dawned on me, I looked around; I started to see the environment with a different eye," Maathai said in an interview with the McGill Reporter in February.

Maathai described how two perspectives - her broad scientific training and her acute awareness of specific health, social, and environmental conditions in Kenya - converged upon a single, elegant response: plant trees.

Maathai's new vision of the environment led her to found the GBM. Beyond its apt goal of planting trees, several other features have contributed to the GBM's remarkable success. These include a focus on local seed sources, and on small, local groups of women to become, as she has phrased it, the "foresters without diplomas". GBM teaches local women how to identify and collect seeds from their neighbourhoods, how to dig wells, grow seedlings, and keep them safe from animals and destructive humans.

Learning about the GBM's achievements in this intimate setting was a truly unique and valuable experience, with plenty of food for thought about how we at the MSE can apply our own particular combinations of education and personal experience to the solution of environmental problems.

# Development and Alumni Relations News

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## Thank-you

We would like to take this opportunity to thank those who have made their annual contribution to the School. As of May 15, 2003 we have received gifts totaling \$45,740- an increase of \$12,500 over last year. This fund supported on-going activities in the School, such as student-led initiatives and guest lecturers, that are beyond our regular programming. Support from our Alumni and Friends is much needed and we invite you to contact **Sari LaBelle** at **(514) 398-8977** or [sari.labelle@mcgill.ca](mailto:sari.labelle@mcgill.ca) for information on how to contribute.

## Upcoming Events

### Homecoming Open House

Join MSE Faculty, Students, Alumni and Friends for our first Homecoming open house at both its downtown (**September 27th**) and Macdonald Campus (**September 28th**) locations. Please call **Sari LaBelle** at **(514) 398-8977** for more details.

## MSE Graduate *Greens College*

by Jean-Michel Cohalan, BA'01 (Environment and Development)

The McGill School of Environment has shaped my life and aspirations— not by giving me a clear career-oriented view of my future, but rather by helping me discover many new interests that have something in common: a new and profound commitment to sustainability. The MSE equipped me with knowledge, skills and values related to sustainability which I intend to apply to all areas of my life and to the improvement of the community in which I live.

I am currently the Student

and Community Affairs

Officer at Marianopolis College, a private CEGEP in Montreal. My job consists mostly of organizing special educational and recreational events for students, acting as an advisor for the Student Congress, managing a career mentoring program and developing special projects throughout the year. My interest in sustainability, however, has driven me to achieve much more. With the cooperation of some students and faculty, I have pushed to make awareness of the environment more of a priority at the College. We now recycle paper, plastic, glass and metal; we produce and sell notebooks made from re-used paper (paper which has only been used on one side); we have replaced all

the lighting in hallways and classrooms with energy-efficient fluorescent lights. This year, we attended the Sierra Youth Coalition's Sustainable Campuses conference held in Halifax and we have joined the movement of students committed to making college and university campuses across Canada living models of an ecologically sustainable society, training a new generation of environmental leaders. We have many innovative ideas for next year, such as greening the cafeteria, introducing a "greening the campus" course or

starting compost and an organic garden on campus, providing resources to help teachers address environmental issues in the classroom, and more. We have established a partnership with Éco-Quartier to help us reach some of these goals. I have also written a formal proposal to the Board of Directors of the College, asking the administration to lend its support to our cause.

My three years in the MSE taught me to be a passionate advocate for the natural environment and social justice issues, as I discovered the importance of earth's cultural and biological diversity and learned that barriers could be broken. The important lesson of learning that change for the better is possible has been a vital and invaluable part of my MSE education.

"My three years in the MSE taught me to be a passionate advocate for the natural environment and social justice issues"

## Students as *Ambassadors*

By Sari LaBelle, Development and Alumni Relations Associate

With the generous support of an anonymous donor and an initiatory gift from the Dean of Science, the MSE is launching a new program that will educate Montreal youth about environmental issues.

Beginning in September, four MSE students will begin planning and implementing a program to visit local schools assisting students to map-out their ecological footprint based on their consumption patterns. This educational activity helps participating youth increase their awareness about the impact their consumption patterns have on the environment

and identify ways they can be more environmentally responsible in their everyday lives. All MSE students are required to undergo the same process in introductory courses at the MSE.

Without support from concerned community members like those behind this new initiative, innovative programs that reach beyond the University Campus, would not be possible. If you are interested in contributing to this program or others at the MSE, please contact **Sari LaBelle** at **(514) 398-8977** or [sari.labelle@mcgill.ca](mailto:sari.labelle@mcgill.ca).