

INTERVIEW WITH  
TOM PETERS, ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT  
NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY  
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RM: Let's start with the "flab bowl."

TP: Well, the flab bowl was a little flag football game that was put on by the members of the Golden Wildcat Club many years ago, early in their existence. They decided to have fun, they'd draft teams, and they'd play a touch football game - flag football game - and call it the flab bowl and afterward they had some refreshments, and some hamburgers and hotdogs, and things like that. The whole thing behind it - the concept behind it at that time was at that time to try to build some osprey decor among the members of the Golden Wildcat Club, who initially really were involved in supporting football at the university, and it wasn't until a few years later when we got the Wildcat Club to expand their horizons and then to support all of the athletic programs at the university. But, the trophy which is a replica of Hedgecock Fieldhouse, was made by C.B. Red Money and Mr. Money gave it to us to present as the flab bowl trophy to the winning team each year. And, some how in another it remained in my possession - I certainly would qualify as the flabby person, but I was not on the winning team, but I was the repository for the trophy. So, that's what that really represents, and that was played in the spring of each year.

RM: About what year did that go back - I know on the thing it has 1971.

TP: I think that probably was the first year that that trophy was presented, and more than likely was the first year that we did that. I think Mr. Money was talked into making that trophy when we decided to do that event.

RM: And, how long did it continue.

TP: For maybe two or three more years and we found out the problem was the fellows got a little older and their knees got tired and weary and we were afraid of injury. The older we got we realized we couldn't play like we used to and so we decided just forget that. The Wildcat Club also during those years did a lot of work down at Memorial Stadium - Memorial Field - and we painted the stadium for the university, got a work gang together, we fixed up an area under the stands next to the locker room where we could go in and have coffee and donuts before the games, and things like that. So, the Wildcat Club was very active in doing little projects and activities in those days - much more than they are today and their major project today is membership drive and raising money. They don't do as many of the social things as we did







in 1956, we were still under the direction of the State Board of Education - the four regional colleges: Northern, Central, Eastern, and Western. Our funding and anything else that came to Northern at that time, then came vis-a-vis the State Board of Education and the Department of Education - that's where we got our funding. If we wanted to try to get a building or something all that went through that group. Well, Dr. Harden made, I think significant inroads in getting us some recognition in the state capital, in the senate, in the house, and so forth. With the state constitution and our own governing board and what have you, then the university became independent of the State Board of Education and then we really moved into the arena of trying to get recognition and funding, considerations above and beyond of what we had been getting before. A lot of people say, gee, Northern gets so much per \_\_\_\_\_ student as compared to every body else, and that's true but there were many, many years when we were at the bottom of the totem pole. Obviously, I feel that's just and right that we hold that lot and position. But, any rate we work very hard - Dr. Harden and followed by President Jamerich in creating a recognition or presence for Northern Michigan in Lansing. That, of course, was aided and abetted by the good hard work of Dominic Jacobetti, Rusty Hellman, Joe Mack - in those days they weren't Jack Gingras from Iron Mountain - they were very instrumental in getting Northern into a place of prominence, if you will, in terms of recognition in Lansing. And, then of course, the university began to grow in leaps and bounds in terms of the numbers of students. We had an absolute crunch on in terms of classroom facilities, dormitories, I mean everything. It was unbelievable how quickly we grew and what an impact it had on being about to deliver services to our students, the housing, and what have you. And so the campus began to grow and, of course, the self-liquidating things were easier to do because you did that with bonding rather than getting state financing. And, so we did get our dormitories, we got our university center, and then obviously we've moved ahead with the fine arts complex, with the Forest Roberts Theater, and Thomas Fine Arts facility, with McClintock building - and it moved on from there. It was not uncommon in those days - the late 60's early 70's to have several buildings being built at the same time. We really had quite a bit of capital outlay going on during those years. The base budget funding was reasonably well taken care of compared to the number of students we had. Northern was treated fairly. It's interesting - I was telling somebody the other day - about the controversial Dome project and, of course, that started back 25 years ago. We were looking at an all events building - we called it an all events building would be something large enough to play football inside, but would serve as a convocation and conference center, and all of the like. We worked very hard to get that going and it was in our capital outlay proposal and kept moving up on the list of things we wanted, and probably the thing that turned the corner on it was when we were designated as an Olympic Training Center and it was high on our list at that time. Of course, what was an all events



building then became called the Sports Training Complex and then, of course, the Dome and what have you. We went to Colorado Springs and Governor Blanchard was with our group at the time and President Appleberry and a group of us. We were out there and I can still remember following a reception that we hosted for the House of Delegates - this reception was put on by the State of Michigan, and Governor Blanchard was one of the hosts, President Appleberry was a host, and we had the commanding general of Norad -                      Mountain, General Bob Harres - as the people who were hosting this reception. After the reception was over, we're going to have a private dinner for our group and on the way from one part of the hotel to another in a tram - the governor turned around and he said to President Appleberry, "Well, Jim, I just want you do know that I am fully behind your Sports Training Complex and that will be in my budget recommendation to the legislature for 21.8 million dollars." It was like every light was a goal light from then on. So, we end up with what we have today. It's a wonderful facility and it's going to be even more than any of us had originally dreamed. President Vandament has given a whole new direction to us in terms of multiple use of the facility and, I think, it's going to be one of the premiere places for people to visit in, maybe all of Michigan. When we get all of our museum items and the artifacts of the Upper Peninsula and tracing the history of people in the institution and it's going to be a wonderful, dynamic place for it. Even though it started as - perhaps in some people's eyes as a pipe dream - it's really going to be a dream fulfilled.

RM: Do you feel that, in terms of it's second round when it was finally organized that there was more of a focus on the sports training facility and now it's going back to the original concept of a multi all-purpose events building. Do you it's going to get broader usage?

TP: Well, it will get broader usage and because we're able now through some additional fund raising and that to accomplish what was in our original program statement. The original program statement called for it to be a multi-use facility and that was only limited by the money that was available at the time. So, we're ultimately ending up where we want it to be in the beginning. In fact, I'm going to give this to you. This was a proposal that was put together for the students to consider years ago, and this was back in 1971-72 when we were putting to big press on - pressure on to try to build an all-events center and this little document was prepared for students to consider and vote on as to whether or not they wanted to add \$20 a semester to a fee - a building fund fee that would allow us to build a building without state appropriation. That did not fly unfortunately, but it was not overwhelmingly defeated but it was defeated. So, we had to move on from there then we had to wait for the state funding. If we could have gotten the pledge of the students to have like a building fee put on - as they've done at Michigan Tech and a lot of other places - we probably would have moved ahead with that; whether we would



have gotten what we have here today, I'm not sure. But, at least - that was very exciting.

The whole idea of vocational education is a part of our academic program and service program was also interwoven with all of this building and expansion and things. There was an aggressive point in time when Northern was moving ahead to find ways to be identified as the center of learning for the Upper Peninsula and "the" university of the Upper Peninsula. And we had a very ambitious public service programs that moved on it to the areas of training and retraining. We had classes of all kinds that were in rented facilities around the community. As the demands for those kinds of programs continued to grow and the need was identified, we got serious about putting together about a Voc Tech Center if you will, which is now the Jacobetti Center - the Skills Center cause we were into skills program. There was a definite need in this area to provide skill training for people. So we moved on into the Jacobetti Center and that, too, has become more than what it was originally intended to be. I'm sure as we turn the century prove to be a very fine facility for the use of our students.

RM: Could you just go back and I vaguely remember some of the places - could you go back to some of the areas that were rented where we had skill center activities around town?

TP: We had some - there's an old building and I wish I could recall the name of it - right across the street from the Chamber of Commerce Building - it's a big multi-story building probably a three story building. We had a good portion of our vocational center in there at that time. They had some classes in the Public Service Garage - the old Public Service Garage building. We moved quite a bit of the program into the orphanage building, which is up near the Jacobetti Hospital - Veterans Center - we were in there for quite a bit of the time. And, there were others, but I don't remember them all. Some of them were very small - some of them were a little bit larger in terms of the number of classes and instructors. Of course, you will also remember that for a period of time we had a program doing on with the prison and we were offering vocational programs for inmates and they'd bring them in the evening bus them in from the prison and the inmates would work on some of the programs that were here right on the campus. I wouldn't say that's gone by the wayside - that's no longer being funded by the Department of Corrections, so obviously the program doesn't exist. But, that was a contract arrangement we had with the Department of Corrections to provide some activity.

RM: Could you get into some of the - if you feel that's its necessary - did you have trouble getting the funding getting the Jacobetti Center. How did that sort of progress?

TP: Well, the answer is yes - you always have trouble getting funding because nobody just writes you a check. But, there was a



process through the capital outlay committee - it was a joint capital outlay committee represented the house and the senate and the Bureau of Facilities - you'd have to have a program statement and that would have to be approved, then you'd have some projected costs and so forth. And then you'd have to go and testify before the joint capital outlay committee and sooner or later they'd give you their blessing or send you back to the drawing board with some changes or recommendations. And, ultimately what happened was, we had some very good friends that had been cultivated in Lansing that served as key members of the joint capital outlay committee - and were both in the house and senate appropriations committees. That took many years of culmination - it just doesn't happen with the phone call or something like that. But, between actually we were very fortunate in the U.P. cause between Senator Mack and Jacobetti - Representative Jacobetti and Representative Rusty Hellman - they were in key spots on all of those funding committees. They then, with their friends and associations and what have you, were able to make sure that Northern got its fair share and also that Michigan Tech got its fair share and Lake State. So there - that trio was very important to all of us in the Upper Peninsula in terms of funding for facilities for higher education - well, funding for facilities - they played a major role. Not to down play either of the tremendous support we got from Senator Bob Davis - who later became our Congressman, and Bob Davis, of course, served in both the house and the senate and he established himself as a player down there and had the time and grade, and the things necessary to get votes when we needed votes. So, Bob Davis also was very helpful to us. And, as I mentioned earlier Jack Gingras - Representative Gingras from Iron Mountain played a strategic role and he was a Northern alum, as was his wife, and followed by Jack Payant from Iron Mountain who also was very friendly to us. Then, of course, we had Charles Varum from Manistique who represented that area for a good portion of time. He was very helpful to us too. But, it has not always been easy.

RM: What has happened today - I know just from my own perspective there was a lot of talk - a lot of what you were talking about here I had heard about and so on - today in the 90's you don't hear about a lot of this - the interplay, the interchange of these various people. Have things changed or they are just working a lot more smoother than they did at that time?

TP: I don't know if they are working any smoother, but yes, times have changed and they changed because the players are different. We still have, and again this goes on to years and years of cultivation and great service we get through Public Affairs Associates, David Haines' firm in Lansing that helps Northern. But, you know over the years Northern's spent a lot of time and energy cultivating leadership in both sides of the aisle and in both chambers. You recall, I'm sure from your days here Russ that we've had Senator Bill Foust, who is long serving member of the State Senate and a handicapper - he came up and gave the



commencement address when we celebrated the year of the handicap and was a Democrat from the Detroit area. We've had both Speaker Gary Owen and Speaker of the House Dodack on our campus and both have received Honorary Degrees. Senator Dick Posumus, who was the Senate Majority Leader has an Honorary Degree from Northern. Senator Vern Malers, who is now a congressman on Senate Higher Education Subcommittee - appropriations committee - has an Honorary Degree from Northern - serves on the Seaborg Center Advisory Committee as well. And others like that - we've honored and recognized and paid attention to many of our legislator friends to make sure that they know about Northern. And we have a story to tell and we don't want them to hear just the story that the downstate people are telling about it. And, we've made every effort to get them onto our campus for various programs and activities so they have a chance to see what Northern is all about. And they get to interface with some of the people.

So times have changed, and of course, the other thing with term limitations coming in - it's going to be harder and harder to establish as a chair of a committee or to have the kinds of commitments from people that make it possible for you to get things done the way we've done them in the past. It's going to be interesting - very interesting.

RM: How do you think Northern will fair?

TP: I think Northern will do all right for a numbers of reasons. We've been very fortunate with President Vandament - he's continued to carry the Northern torch, if you will, through the state capital and has done it in a magnificent fashion. He has a great deal of respect by people in both chambers and by the leadership on both sides. That's going to continue to help Northern, his presence and his leadership, and his ability to talk about Northern's issues and cases and needs there. Very important. There will be some changes in the elected officials, but again I think we have established a base that would allow us to continue and we've just have to continue the things we've done with the new people. And, Northern needs to continue to sell its story - which is a very good one. When you look at the successes of our graduates and the kinds of programs that we offer and the services that we prove to the Upper Peninsula and this region - I think Northern has a very good hook to hang its hat on.

RM: Are there any other programs or buildings or developments that you might want to include in this part of the interview where we're talking about the interface with the state legislature - any problems or anything that had to be taken care of or solved?

TP: Well, there's always problems and they usually focus on the availability of money and things like that. Probably not, I think that problems are really no more than - really translate into opportunities to talk about the institution and maybe for us to



rethink our approach to things or the way we do things - do business - it would seem that we're really going to continue to put emphasis on the executive office. More and more now with the balance there is in the legislature and so forth, our credibility in the governor's office is going to be extremely important and that's assuming we have the same governor for another four years - and I don't know that but regardless we're into a place now where there's a pretty good mix - a pretty good balance in the senate and the house and the executive office and so we're really have to work hard at that.

RM: So this is an ongoing process of the university.

TP: Exactly, as long as the way we're funded the way we're funded, it's going to continue to be that kind of approach and game plan. I think probably that would be the most diasterous for Northern is that if they were ever to get into a formula funding - a mode for the state because we're basically an under graduate institution. Because we've been funded quite well int he past, I think that any formula would be really detrimental to Northern.

RM: How would that - could you just briefly explain how that works?

TP: It would depend upon your upper level and lower level classes - programs. It would depend upon the number of graduate programs you had, you had your student population, student body - the numbers. They add in a lot of different kinds of factors that create a formula. And Northern because of the type of institution we are, it just doesn't have enough tens, if you will, if we're going to scale from one to ten - we don't have enough tens. We're good at where we are but then when you add in these other factors, we just don't have any to play with. Probably Paul Dubey, or even President Vandament could be more precise in terms of the problems formula funding would create. But suffice it to say, it's not good.

RM: Tom, could you tell us a little about the group there in the 70's called the Fantastics and their role on campus?

TP: The Fantastics were a group a young students organized in the music department by Tim \_\_\_\_\_ who was band director at the time. Tim was a young, aggressive guy and he put this little musical group - it may have been five guys and five gals - something like that - maybe 8 or 10 or 12. They played modern music, very modern music. And they were exciting, vivacious, energetic young people. I was very much involved in the alumni operation at the time, we took them to many of the schools in the Upper Peninsula, and down state - we'd take them to alumni meetings and events where we could bring them in and showcase their talent. They were not all music majors at all, but they were some instrumentalists, some singers - vocalists and they really put



Northern out as something other than a \_\_\_\_\_ type institution - we're a modern upbeat today type of thing. I think it appealed to the high schools where we visited and I'm sure that it helped us dramatically with our admissions - recruitment of students. Not that they all wanted to get into the group but they thought it was a good place to go. Similarly we had another musical group called the Arts Chorale - at that time under the director of Dr. Jim McCalvy

RM: What year was that?

TP: Oh, I would say that late 60's early on to the early 70's. And they were a magnificent group - sang entirely different kinds of music than the Fantastics which made it wonderful because there was a great balance then. We ended up even putting on a fund drive to send the Arts Chorale to Europe and they sang in some churches and places other there. But, they were an absolutely delightful group. We took them down - they sang a concert for our alumni in Detroit - I remember one time in the executive dining room of the Ford Motor Company - we had about 350 alumni in there listening to this concert and of course, all the men in tuxedos and ladies in long dresses (END OF SIDE A)

TP: I can remember one other time we took them to Chicago and they performed for our alumni in Chicago and they were in the Alerton Hotel - in the ballroom of the Alerton Hotel. It was a kind of thing - I relate it to, Russ, some of the same kinds of activities and things that we were able to generate through our athletic teams. This was another segment of the student body but it was so nifty to get them out and have them interface with our alumni, and it was also a great learning experience for the young people because they got to travel to places, they got to see some of the small, tiny little schools in the Upper Peninsula, they got to see some of the large schools in the Lower peninsula. They got into some nice places like I mentioned earlier in the executive dining room of the Ford Motor Company, in Chicago and so it was part of their educational experience. And so they gave, but they also received. I think it was just dynamic, and I wish in today's world we were able to get more of our student groups out to share their talent and expertise with the - not only the students of the Upper Peninsula but the public as well. They are just such wonderful young kids.

RM: Going back to the Fantastics, what years were they active?

TP: I almost have to go back into the yearbook and check, but I'm going to tell you the early 70's. And there was an overlap with the Arts Chorale and the Fantastics - they were going on at the same time as I recall.

RM: Then why did those two groups - and with the Fantastics, who is the fellow that was in charge of them?



TP: Tim Loutzinheizer (?) was his name.

RM: No, but there was a fellow on campus, he used to go around in a little green and gold - was it Del

TP: Yes, I remember the guy you're talking about, and he actually took over after Loutznheizer but

RM: And then both groups just - what finally happened to them?

TP: Well, the leadership left - the directors left and apparently the department decided not to continue that as part of their outreach programs. We had generated funding for both groups through our development fund to help assist them in a little bit. But, I think it was a departmental decision more than anything else.

TP: Del Powers, was that his name?

RM: Yes. I've been thinking about the Fantastics and the fellow. I remember he wanted to get - I was in charge of individually created program - I was the chair of the committee and he came to me one time and he wanted to use that as a means to get these kids - get them a degree and kind of popular music that way. But then he went around the U.P. and around the state and I guess he actually had brochures - I never saw them - but where Northern had a program in popular music - you can imagine the commotion that caused. Because I allegedly had given the okay for that to happen.

TP: Well, we do have a committee on university program that, I think looks at that and approves that and so forth.

RM: Del just went on his own.

TP: He created his own acceptance.

RM: We can end there and give you time to come back sometime.