

Oppliger Receives Faculty Service Award

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JUNE 28, 2004 -- For lecturer Doug Oppliger (Engineering Fundamentals), coming to work every day is about much more than what goes on in a classroom or in the lab.

The recipient of this year's faculty distinguished service award, Oppliger is deeply involved in several university programs with which he has no ties outside of his own interest in the students of Michigan Tech.

"It's not his job," said Mike Abbott (Auxiliary Services) of Oppliger's extensive volunteer work. "It's his passion and his interest; he's very committed."

Abbott has worked with Oppliger on a number of projects relating to the development of the internationally-recognized Tech Trails, Michigan Tech's own recreational trail system, located in the forest south of the Student Development Complex.

Oppliger was instrumental, according to Abbott, in helping to garner the funding necessary to develop the trail system and to save the Nordic ski team after it was nearly cut in 2001 due to budget constraints.

"The trails were in a state of neglect," said Oppliger. "In order to save the team, we had to do something about those trails. Without the trail system, there would be no way any of this could have happened."

Although Oppliger isn't directly involved with the ski team, it was his passion for the sport, as well as his status as an alumnus, that motivated his deep involvement in saving the team.

Abbott, who chairs the committee for the 2006 Junior Olympics, the national cross-country ski championship for ages 14-19, being held at the Tech Trails, also said that Oppliger has been extremely involved in that endeavor. "He's been my right-hand man in the early planning for the Junior Olympics," he said.

Oppliger also serves as advisor to the Robotics Systems Enterprise and the FIRST Robotics team. As a former science teacher at Houghton High School, Oppliger became involved with the FIRST Robotics program at Michigan Tech when he engaged MTU students to help his high school students with their robot.

FIRST Robotics is a competition in which students must build a robot to complete a series of tasks as outlined by the competition guidelines.

"Typically, the high school students would work with a corporate sponsor and industry engineers to develop their robot," Oppliger said. "Here, the college students serve as the advisors on the project."

Oppliger is also involved with the Lego League in the local schools, which is a competition similar to FIRST Robotics, but on a simpler scale geared toward younger students.

"For Doug, it's about getting more students interested in coming to Michigan Tech," said Abbott. "He gives up his nights and weekends to be a part of these extracurricular activities, all in the name of improving student life and learning."

Oppliger also volunteers throughout the community and is a lifelong advocate of physical fitness and well-being. "Just the other day, Doug stopped by to have me look at his daughter's bike - she had damaged it while they were out riding on the trails," said Abbott. "They're very involved in sports and fitness."

"I work with tons of people who work really hard at things that are very important," Oppliger said. "It's an honor, and you're proud, but you know without others, there'd be nothing."

The Faculty Distinguished Service award is given each year to one faculty member who has demonstrated exemplary service to the university and, by that service, has affected positive change in the university community. The award is given based on peer nominations reviewed by committee and carries a \$2,500 cash prize.