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MT. A ALUMNI FLOCK BACK FOR PHYSICS REUNION

🕒 Sep 18, 2013 ✍️ Allison O'Reilly

Physics weekend jam packed with science goodness.

Scientists from all around flocked to Mount Allison University this past weekend for a physics reunion. Mt. A alumni who graduated with a physics degree were treated to a multitude of events ranging from talks to banquets. The reunion also coincided with a tribute to Robert Hawkes, a Mt. A physics professor who is retiring at the end of this school year.

The weekend began with a series of talks by Mt. A alumni. The first to speak was Chris Milburn. Born and raised in Sydney, Nova Scotia, Milburn graduated from Mt. A in 1991. He then completed his masters in medical physics at McMaster University before going to Dalhousie Medical School. He spoke fondly of his physics upbringing, saying that it trained him well in his medical career. He claimed that the advantage of studying physics was that it taught him logical, stepwise, and analytical thinking, and that physics was a great "springboard" for all aspects of his

career. He also argued that there are aspects of physics in all other sciences, unlike other scientific disciplines.

"Physics is what made me the man I am today", Milburn said.

The second speaker was Dwayne Branch, who graduated from Mt. A in 1992. His specialty was in financial mathematics, and he explained that his physics degree trained him for a multitude of career paths, which include computational modelling, banking and finance, electricity generation and distribution, and commodity supply chain management.

"Physics is a lifestyle", Branch explained. He claims that he goes back to physics everyday in order to solve a problem.

The third and final speaker was Grant Williams, who graduated from Mt. A in 1988. Immediately after graduating, Williams went on to a career in science education. His presentation detailed how his love of science and teaching evolved, and how he ended up as an assistant professor of science and math education at St. Thomas University. His research is on investigating how simulations and analogies can support students' conceptual understanding, and his latest project is the development of "kinulations"—kinaesthetic simulations that are designed to actively engage middle and high school students in learning science concepts by acting out the functions and roles of key system components.

"Science education needs more physicists", Williams claims. He explained that physicists have an approach to solving problems that can aid in the educational process.

The next day of the reunion weekend kicked off with a keynote address from two other Mt. A alumni who had followed interesting careers post-graduation. Kate Braedley, who graduated from Mt. A in 2007, gave the first talk, entitled "Point A, B, and my Life at Sea." Braedley spent two years teaching with Class Afloat, an educational program aboard a tall ship with the aim to teach students how connected our planet really is. With this program, she sailed to over thirty ports around the Atlantic Ocean. In 2010, she was teaching onboard the SV Concordia when it sank off the coast of Brazil. Despite spending over forty hours lost at sea, Braedley returned to Class Afloat the following year.

Ankit Kapur gave the second address, entitled "Pulsars to Pulses: The Story of a Physicist turned Surgeon." Kapur made good use of his physics degree from Mt. A by creating a startup called Vayu Energy, which provided renewable energy solutions to homeowners. After selling his company, Kapur continued his studies at the University of Paris, earning a diploma in French

language and culture, followed by medical school. This past spring, Kapur graduated with honours from the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.

Later in the evening was the banquet for returning alumni. During the banquet, there was a tribute to Robert Hawkes, who has taught at Mt. A since 1980. Hawkes's research interests are in solar system astrophysics, with a focus on meteor structure, meteor ablation in planetary atmospheres, electro-optical detection techniques, and laser ablation techniques. Hawkes was also a key player in the construction of the solar-powered Gemini Observatory.

The reunion weekend ended with a Starry Sackville Night presentation conducted by Catherine Lovekin. The lecture, entitled "Small Bodies," focused more on the smaller structures found in our solar systems, such as dwarf planets, meteors, and comets. Hawkes was in attendance, and graciously helped answer audience questions. Immediately following the lecture, the audience was treated to a viewing of the sky through the Gemini Observatory.

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