

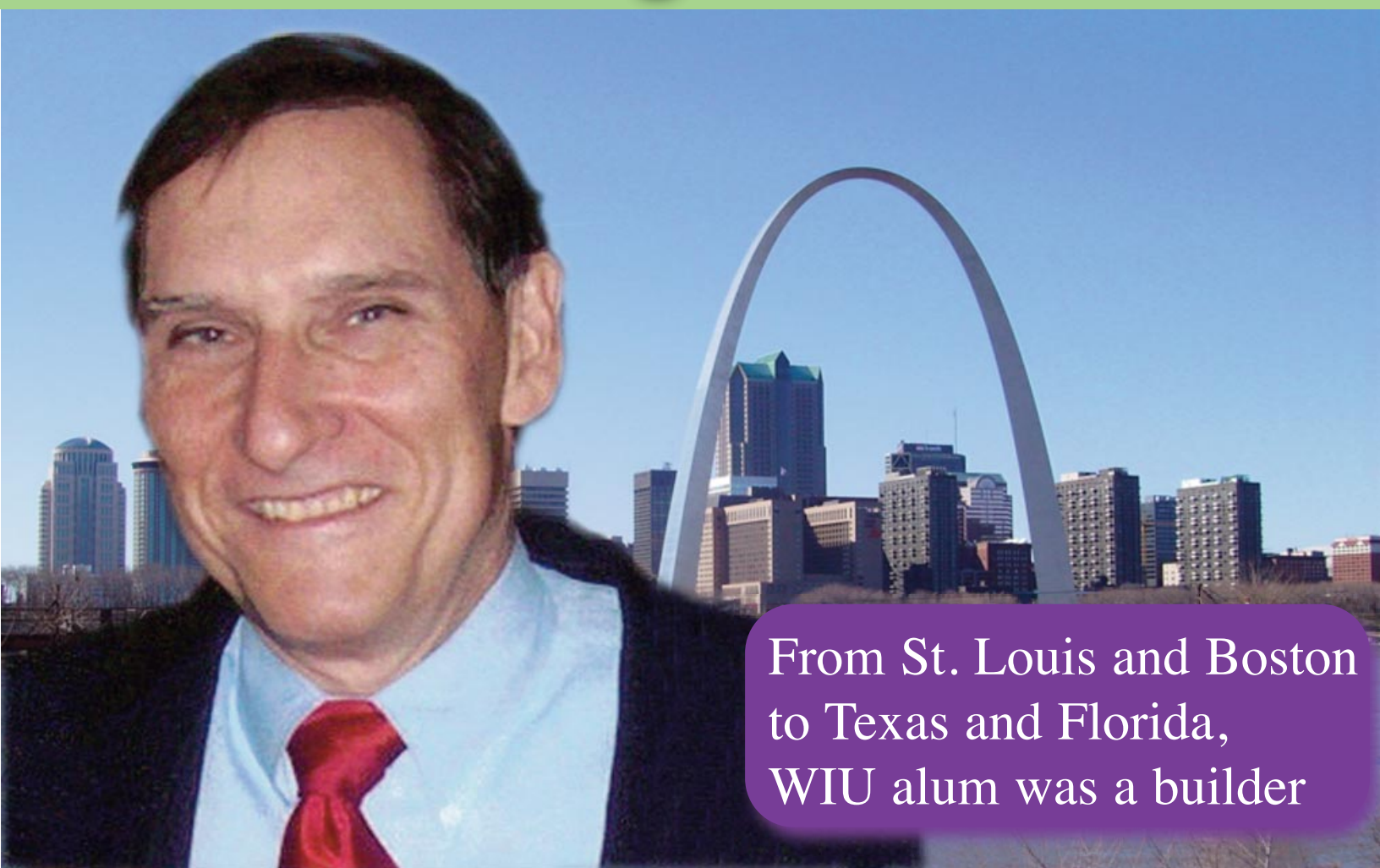
FOCUS

A COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES MAGAZINE

Spring / Summer 2010



Remembering Roland Burke



From St. Louis and Boston to Texas and Florida, WIU alum was a builder

**Rolling for the river*

**Physics, Poli Sci alums reflect*

**Media ignore education: Brookings*



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Roland Burke

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Photo by Robert Johnson

Titan arum and siblings, stars of the greenhouse.

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"*Focus* will inform college stakeholders about College of Arts and Sciences activities and encourage their involvement in the life of the college."

Mississippi River attracts attention, efforts of WIU, partners

By Roger Viadero

Residents of west-central Illinois often overlook the scale and the environmental, economic and cultural significance of the Mississippi River and its tributaries. From its headwaters at Lake Itasca, Minn., the Mississippi River makes its way along a 2,350-mile path, through 10 states, to the Gulf of Mexico. When combined with the Illinois River, the Missouri River, the Ohio River, and numerous other tributaries, the Mississippi River Basin forms a watershed that covers about 1.8 million square miles – some 40% of the total land area of the contiguous United States, covering 32 States and 2 Canadian provinces.

One unique portion of this vast network of waterways is the Upper Mississippi River Basin (UMRB), which is the only U.S. water body recognized by Congress for both its ecological and economic significance. The Upper Mississippi River consists of the 1,300 river miles that begin at its headwaters in Minnesota, continuing to its junction with the Ohio River in southern Illinois. Notably, about 850 miles of the Upper Mississippi River, from the Twin Cities in Minnesota to the river's confluence with the Ohio River, is commercially navigable due to a network of 29 locks and dams. This system of infrastructure allows the Upper Mississippi River to

serve as a transportation corridor for more than half of the nation's annual corn exports and approximately 40% of soybean exports. The UMRB contains more than 285,000 acres of national wildlife refuge, which is supplemented by an additional 140,000 acres managed by various UMRB states.

The significance of the UMRB extends well beyond wildlife habitat and river commerce. It also provides vital energy production and public services for the towns and cities that line its banks. According to the Upper Mississippi River Basin Association (UMRBA), an estimated 7 billion gallons of water are removed from the Upper Mississippi River and its tributaries each day. About 80% is returned to the system after being used in power generation and industrial cooling. The River also serves as a source of drinking water for millions of people living in communities along the River.

Clearly, many challenges arise when a limited natural resource is utilized by many different stakeholders for so many different – and often conflicting – uses. To address these issues, many groups have formed significant networks for the collection and sharing of important river observations. Ecologists meet with ecologists, planners with planners, activists with activists, etc. The positive outcomes of these efforts cannot be disputed; however, a key element was being neglected – discussion across stakeholder boundaries.

In 2007, representatives from federal resource management agencies, regional, state and local planning agencies, higher education, municipal government, and nongovernmental organizations came together to meet the need for dialog between stakeholder groups by convening the first Upper Mississippi River Conference (UMRC), held in August 2008. WIU was represented by the



Teaching and research “landing craft” from the Alice L. Kibbe Life Science Station on display at the i-wireless Center.

Institute for Environmental Studies (IES). Unlike other similar sounding conferences, the UMRC is a broad-based venue for stakeholders to exchange information on issues of importance to riverfront communities. Some of these topics include environmental and natural resource issues, the creation of river recreation opportunities, and riverfront development and planning. At the first two conferences, specific activities were structured into the program to foster collaborative discussions across traditional disciplinary boundaries. These included half day field trips to environmental restoration sites that also have economic and cultural significance.

The third annual UMRC will be held on August 26 & 27, at the i-Wireless Center in Moline, Ill. At the conference, major thematic areas will include environmental issues, economic development, and river recreation. However, the addition of structured opportunities for the multidisciplinary exchange of ideas is being taken to a new level with the addition of a half day of roundtable charettes – real-time collaborative design and planning exercises in which citizens, planning professionals, public officials, and subject-matter experts from a wide range of supporting fields work together to develop a solution to proposed projects. To ensure the relevance of the projects to the broader UMR community, proposals for real projects are currently being solicited from municipalities throughout the region. While some charrette topics can be very specific to a particular locale, the general issues and challenges are likely to be applicable to other cities in the Upper Mississippi River watershed.

According to Kathy Wine, Chair of the UMRC Planning Committee and Executive Director, River Action, U.S. Department of

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has tentatively committed to provide the keynote address at the conference.

“As the current USDA Secretary



Graduate students from the Department of Geography showing project work to a UMRC attendee.

and former Iowa Governor, Secretary Vilsack’s long history of involvement with the Mississippi River and natural resource conservation issues are sure to provide valuable insights into current and future river-related priorities,” said Wine.

In the past, the conference has hosted other well known keynote speakers including Richard Louv, author of internationally acclaimed book, *Last Child in the Woods*. In 2009, Joe Riely drew on his experience as the long-serving mayor of Charleston, S.C., when he spoke on the need to integrate environmental and community livability factors into urban development.

WIU maintains facilities located in the vicinity of three major regional rivers: The Mississippi River, the Rock River, and the Illinois River. Not surprisingly, WIU researchers have amassed a substantial amount of important information on these river systems. Consequently, WIU students, faculty and staff play important roles in understanding these complex systems. At UMRCs, WIU researchers share their findings

with stakeholders during a mini WIU environmental expo held on the opening night of the conference. Last year, the Department of Biological Sciences, the Department of

Geography, and the Institute for Environmental Studies were represented by eight faculty members, three staff members, seven graduate students, and one undergraduate student. Their exhibits included poster presentations, exhibits of live river fish, plus opportunities for conference attendees to have “hands-on” experiences with scientific equipment and field gear. A major highlight from the first UMRC was the showcasing of the Alice L. Kibbe Life Science Station’s new research and teaching boat – a 28-foot “landing craft” equipped to accommodate participants in wheelchairs.

Other groups such as the WIU Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Center have provided hands-on demonstrations of the latest geospatial data collection and mapping equipment. Rick Anderson, Ph.D., former chair of the Department of Biological Sciences and current Interim Associate Dean in the College of Arts and Sciences, even had a game for participants to play. Based on a real skill used by river ecologists in the field, Anderson’s game required participants to reach into a box, find, and identify common river mussels. The one “catch” was that the identification had to be made based on feel – no looking allowed. At the third annual conference, even more student, faculty and staff involvement is expected.

To learn more about the upcoming conference, visit www.riveraction.org or www.wiu.edu/ies.

Viadero is Director of WIU’s Institute for Environmental Studies.