

Getting Your Hands Dirty

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GETTING YOUR HANDS DIRTY

Three environmental studies graduates embody what it means to be stewards of God's creation.

Professor of Environmental Studies Dr. Robb De Haan and his students collect samples from the Floyd River.

It's not a burden to be heartfully blessed by the beauty of a waterfall or a gaggle of snow geese over your head just after dusk. The truth? Every dawn is a revelation. Mountains stop your breathing. A fresh lake's gaudy reflections somehow mirror the soul's peace. Think about it: where would we be without rivers?

For 35 years, outdoorsy Dordt professors have led students into and through Dordt's environmental studies program and sent dozens of sun-tanned graduates into the great outdoors. Three of the very early grads began careers in jobs and callings in the field of water management.

But don't call it "water management" in front of Professor Emeritus Dr. Delmar Vander Zee, whose voice was perhaps most formative at the outset of environmental studies at Dordt. He much prefers "water stewardship." In case you don't know, "stewardship" is familiar language to most any Dordt kid in the last 50 years.

We're stewards after all, caretakers. "Dordt's environmental studies program will challenge you to obey God's call to be stewards of his world in both your life and your work," says Dordt's environmental studies webpage. And why? "The Earth is the Lord's—he knows it intimately, sustains it lovingly, and delights greatly in the praise his creation offers." That's the trust, the vision, that lies beneath the program, that calls graduates into a host of jobs they may never have thought of when they left campus.

Meet a few of the early grads.

ROB RIBBENS, COUNTY SOIL EROSION AGENT (AND MORE)

He'd admit it himself, so why be shy about it? The fact is, Rob Ribbens ('87), despite being the son of former Dean of Instruction Dr. Douglas Ribbens was at best a fair-to-middling student when

he was at Dordt, not because he lacked ability, but because, like lots of others, he lacked what some might call "direction."

The missing "direction" in Ribbens's life took shape when he realized that radio broadcasting wasn't what he thought it would be—and learned at just about the same time that an introductory science course was perfectly fascinating.

But his real motivation arose with an independent study in what was at the time a fledgling major, environmental studies. Ribbens's project, as Vander

Zee remembers it, was "to sample shallow wells in Sioux County for the presence of nitrates, which are easily dissolved in surface waters and are the product of applied fertilizers on farmlands."

It was a big job, an important job—and Ribbens got really into it. He sampled 80 wells on 80 local farms and found, strikingly, half of them registered nitrates exceeding safe levels for drinking, an ecological disaster as well as a danger

to public health. What he'd discovered was bad news but real news.

In collaboration with Association of Public Justice local activist, Joyce Campbell, Ribbens's study of well-water nitrates was presented as the lead testimony to the Iowa legislature at that time. It was a huge story. After graduating, Ribbens went to work in Omaha on what had become a familiar task: testing water. Then he spent a couple years with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, establishing the state-wide household hazardous waste (HHW) program, as well as the rules and procedures for solid waste planning for Iowa landfills. His experience in the state's capital, Des Moines, taught him something a bit less than inspiring.

"I learned that science and politics are not compatible in many cases," he says.

PHOTO SUBMITTED



"My favorite things: being at the Big Lake sitting in the dune grass," says Rob Ribbens.

Undeterred, he stayed with environmental problems, but headed off to Muskegon, Michigan, where he's been since 1991, busy with recycling programs, upgrades to public parks, and vigilance for "the parabolic dunes along Lake Michigan, for magnificent wildflowers, and great birding areas" that comprise so much of the lakeshore he now calls home. Much of his work involves keeping the shoreline from the industrial pollution that played so significant a role in Michigan life for almost a century.

Cleaning up the beauty means knowing where to go with the dirt. To organize that onerous job, Ribbens wrote the county's solid waste plan, a plan that looked closely at waste reduction,

waste diversion and recycling, and finally, proper landfilling. For a year, while waiting to find someone to fill the position, he managed the county landfill.

Today he may well be purchasing water from the City of Muskegon, then distributing it to neighboring townships. His is no small task; he's responsible for water quality to all customers, which means doing all the lead and copper sampling.

As if that weren't enough, chances are good, this morning, he's wearing yet another hat, this one as Muskegon County Soil Erosion Agent, issuing soil erosion permits for any project that disturbs more than one acre of land or is within 500 feet of any body of water (lake, stream, drain, and more). Chances are, he's making sure that preventative measures are in place to keep soils from migrating into waterways. He may be stopping by one of the township offices to review plans for a new subdivision, to determine flow rates and fire protection, to prevent stagnation of water, and to test water quality. Then, he'll finish up by reviewing multiple plans for other construction projects throughout the county.

Is he busy?
Don't ask. He'll
call you when
he has a minute.

Once Rob Ribbens found the direction he was looking for, he was off and running. He hasn't stopped for a minute since; he's stayed the course and kept the faith, even though he's often done maybe more than his share of dirty work.

SHAR BARENDRECHT TE BEEST, HAZARDOUS MATERIALS SPECIALIST

The Monday after the Sunday of her graduation party, Shar Barendrecht Te Beest ('86) left for AuSable Institute, in Michigan, a study center where dozens of Dordt students have spent grand summer months listening to morning lectures, then moving out to study land and water in a gorgeous natural setting. AuSable's mission is "to inspire and educate students to serve, protect, and restore God's earth." With Shar



Shar Barendrecht Te Beest pictured in the *Signet* from 1986.

Barendrecht Te Beest, AuSable did just that.

While interning there, she determined graduate school really had to be in her future, so she went on to the University of Wisconsin-Madison to study with UW's Dr. Cal DeWitt, a much-revered leader among many Reformed environmentalists and at AuSable.

It's all nitty-gritty stuff, not necessarily pretty or neat and clean. It may not have been the way she dreamed of her work when she was back at Dordt or even AuSable, but it's the same work, the same environment, the same creation of the Creator-King.

But mapping out her life's paths in the wake of her grad school acceptance would be like charting the course of an untended dinghy across Madison's Lake Mendota. For some time, she sailed between differing jobs at the university and with the state, jobs like determining the efficacy of Wisconsin's dams, working with state-wide wetlands, even writing a wetland guidebook. She mastered a number of environmental jobs that were often funded by grants that, as advertised, eventually ran out of the other green stuff.

More than a few guardian angels—good friends—came along just when funding was about to end. They'd hold up blank

applications to suggest this or that position opening. Through it all, she kept accumulating both environmental experience and a solid reputation among her co-workers. When one of them suggested she apply for a state job in waste management, she balked—she hadn't had a class in organic chemistry, after all. But she took the required exam and got the job that has become home for her for the last 31 years.

Today, Shar Barendrecht Te Beest is the Wisconsin Department of Transportation's Hazardous Materials Specialist. What that title translates into is supervision of and coordination with every other state agency involved in properly managing and disposing of the hazardous waste generated by the state of Wisconsin.

How did she get there? Barendrecht Te Beest was the very first graduate of environmental studies at Dordt, a brand-new program in 1987. She credits her education, saying it was "well-rounded, requiring me to take classes in statistics, public speaking, creative writing, soils, political science and economics that have played as much of a role in

my career as field ecology, limnology, entomology and botany."

But she gives credit where credit is due, to her grandmother, "watching the birds and chipmunks feeding outside the window, walking around the yard and looking for nests, butterflies, and

wildflowers." As a child, she learned by example.

"She taught me the names of the birds and showed me which seeds the birds would eat," recalls Barendrecht Te Beest. "She answered my questions when I found a star-nosed mole drowned in a roadside ditch during the spring thaw. She introduced me to mysteries that sparked my curiosity and helped me figure out how to find the answers on my own."

Today, or any workday, she's likely dealing with a request to review and summarize a joint state Senate/Assembly bill on above-ground

CAMPUS KUDOS

storage tanks, and a Department of Natural Resources draft publication on management of contaminated soil during construction. Then again, maybe she's reviewing a chapter in an agency manual that deals with the design study reports. Later today, she'll get a call about a construction emergency, an underground storage tank, or contaminated soil where builders didn't expect it.

For fun, she and her husband, Howard Te Beest ('87) recently headed west to the Genoa National Wildlife Refuge in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, where they celebrated their 30th anniversary by tagging a couple hundred fingerling sturgeon.

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ERIC VAN DYKEN. ZONING ADMINISTRATOR

For Eric Van Dyken ('93), who lives in Prinsburg, Minnesota, it wasn't a grandparent who taught him the wonder of nature. It was his dad, a teacher who never quite left the classroom, even when he and Van Dyken were hiking, bird watching, camping, fishing, or hunting. "I was raised with a love for all things natural," he says, "and a conditioning to always observe and wonder, a need to feel connected to the earth."

The Van Dykens never went anywhere without seeing creation. "We couldn't simply drive, walk, or otherwise move past the world around us without stopping to look closely, without asking questions, and praising God for what we saw and learned."

And there was a high school science teacher, Dennis Plummer, who had "an infectious love of creation and was instrumental in further fueling my passion for the natural world."

Van Dyken liked the big animals that thrive in the rural Midwest where he grew up, liked them so much that he intended to study veterinary medicine at Dordt and take up residence somewhere in the farm belt as a large-animal veterinarian. But in college,

he increasingly found himself drawn toward ecology, a broader range of studies.

Dreams do shift and change with time and circumstance, so much so that vet school began to look less interesting. Instead, he says he began to envision himself more as a "natural resource professional of some sort, preferably a wildlife management position."

Van Dyken counts his experience at AuSable Institute as inspiring and formative, an experience he undertook as something of a challenge from Professor Vander Zee. He claims Vander Zee used a little "reverse psychology" on him when he said he was applying. "You couldn't hack it," Vander Zee told him.

"Vander Zee sharpened my resolve to go and do well," says Van Dyken. He did.

Before graduating, he married Sara Van Hofwegen ('93). With his diploma in hand, the two of them left for Arizona, where Sara's brother operated a large dairy southwest of Phoenix. While Eric lacked the veterinary degree, working with dairy cows answered the urge he'd always had for large-animal veterinary medicine. On the dairy, his work involved "husbandry, nutrition, and cow health."

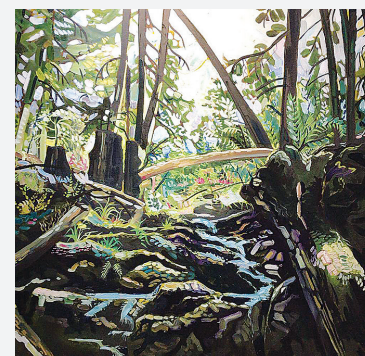
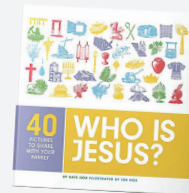


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Eric Van Dyken enjoys fishing in his spare time. Here, he's pictured holding a trout.

Katie (Boer) Hoksbergen ('05) wrote *Who is Jesus?*

This devotional includes 40 pictures of Jesus—20 stories from the Old Testament and 20 stories from the New Testament—that seeks to "guide family devotions and encourage rich conversation about who Jesus is, why he came to earth, and how we can get to know him now." The book is illustrated by Joe Hoksbergen, an illustrator as well as Katie's husband. To learn more, visit katehox.com.



Joshua DeGroot ('06) is an artist and teacher who paints in the remote northern Sunshine Coast of British Columbia. His paintings depict the land and forests of his home.

Sara de Waal ('14)'s book *48 Grasshopper Estates*

was recently published by Annick Press. Kirkus Press says that "De Waal's rhythmic prose and cyclical storytelling are delightful." *48 Grasshopper Estates* follows a little girl who uses her "imagination and inventiveness to spread friendship through her community. But will she find a friend of her own?" To learn more about De Waal and her book, visit saradewaal.com.



ALUMNI NOTES

Kelsey (Kooima) Heystek ('16)

recently published *God Made Blue*, a children's book that helps toddlers explore God's colorful creation. To purchase a copy from Dordt's Campus Store, visit bookstore. dordt.edu.



Dr. Brian Wilgenburg ('96)

was appointed to the position of Animal Program Director/Comparative Medicine Section Chief at the National Institute on Aging at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). His staff assists scientists with more than 100 studies focused on Alzheimer's research, immunology, behavioral research and other projects to benefit geriatric patients.

After Dordt, Wilgenburg earned his DVM at the Ohio State University, an M.S. in Comparative Medicine at the Penn State Medical Center in Hershey, and his ACLAM board certification in 2008. Prior to the Aging Institute, he worked at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke at the NIH, Merck, and Penn State.



Anna Drake ('87) upcycles plastic bags and bottles into art. Each piece addresses the impact of trash on our planet and ourselves. "The work is intended to spark though about how we treat trash, and what is trash," says Drake. "Sometimes it's not just plastic we treat as trash; sometimes it's other people, or even ourselves. If plastic bags can be transformed into art, why not our thoughts and feelings too?" To view Drake's selected works, visit annadrake.net.

Schaap: Getting Your Hands Dirty

When Van Dyken's father's health deteriorated, the Van Dykens left Arizona and moved back to central Minnesota, where he began to work as a breeding/gestation manager, later as finishing manager for a company called Holland Pork—hogs, of which there are many in central Minnesota.

In 2000, Renville County hired him as the County Feedlot Officer and sewage treatment system inspector. Four years later, he took a job for Kandiyohi County, where, officially, he is the county's Zoning Administrator. He manages all aspects of land use planning and development in the areas of the county outside of city limits, in a county that, state-wide, has the most hybrid mix of grassland prairies and the deciduous woods so quintessential to "up north" Minnesota.

Today, his calendar quickly fills with work brought on by anticipated projects for the upcoming construction season. He's scheduled a meeting with the County Administrator and his division director to discuss strained intergovernmental relations with a local township. He reviews permit applications, answering the phone and emails from people seeking input on their various dreams. He hopes to be completing a township-by-township review with clerical staff. Then there's the Environmental Assessment Worksheet for an 18-hole golf course to be situated near and around a sensitive, high-quality stream. And, oh yes, that proposed convenience store/gas station, as well as an enforcement letter to a party responsible for a repeated discharge of untreated wastewater in a sensitive area.

The work is sometimes grueling. He's discovered, as many of us have, that no one likes to be told what to do, especially when the law dictates what must be done with land—even though those same people might enjoy telling others what to do. But his work, he says, is a job he enjoys greatly.

"How do we live here without destroying that which we appreciate? How do we balance freedom with mutual responsibility? These questions are at the core of my work, but also are echoes of broader life questions that we all face in our local, state, and national contexts," he says.



DORDT ARCHIVES

Dr. Delmar Vander Zee served as professor of biology and environmental studies at Dordt before retiring in 2009.

STAYING CLOSE TO CREATION

All three of these Dordt alumni have gotten their hands dirty, they've stayed close to the creation, and they've hung in there to run significant public programs, as if *stewardship* were a creation mandate—which they know it is.

You might not think of a civil servant from India as someone who knows the riches of divine creation. Sir Robert Grant was born and reared and died in India, when that country was an English colony. He didn't spin out dozens of hymns, but one of them has stuck with the church for years: "O, Worship the King."

The environmental studies people at Dordt, profs and students, could use the fourth stanza as a theme, or even a fight song.

*Thy bountiful care, what tongue can
recite?*

*It breathes in the air, it shines in the
light;*

Sir Robert was riffing on Psalm 104, a scrapbook of nature's bountiful gifts. The fourth stanza finishes like this:

*It streams from the hills, it descends
to the plain,*

*And sweetly distills in the dew and
the rain.*

That, Emeritus Professor Vander Zee says, is water stewardship.

JAMES CALVIN SCHAAP ('70)