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Hello, Friend:

As another academic year comes to a close, we have so much news it is hard to say where to start. You may recall that we had Dr. Frank Wilczek, the co-winner of the 2004 Nobel Prize in Physics on campus in March. The lecture went really well and many students took the opportunity to speak with him. There was quite a line at the reception that followed the talk. Several people have approached me to say that they enjoyed the talk. I hope that SMAB will sponsor another such talk.

Recall also that the trebuchet had its inaugural launching over the winter. With some improvements, we are up to throwing frozen water balloons about 100 – 120 feet! There are a few more modifications to be made, but that's what future students are for. We had the trebuchet out in Wahwahtaysee Park for about an hour before the Nobel lecture. Some people came out to watch us throw water balloons and gallon jugs of water (which work very well). Dr. Russell asked us to set it up for the Student Preview (when high school students come to campus), but it rained pretty hard that day. We were also unable to get enough people together to take it out to the Midland High School catapult contest on April 21st. I hope that it can be arranged for 2008!

The next bit of news is that we had six students graduating this May (a new record)! Adam Davidson has been accepted to both the Construction Management graduate program at A&M and the Civil Engineering graduate program at Texas Tech – He chose Texas Tech. Chris Cumby has been accepted at the Mechanical Engineering graduate program at Texas Tech. John Garza will be teaching Nuclear Power at a naval base after a year of training. Jim Walsh will be in Physics graduate school at Purdue University. Joseph Glover and Kirk McGinty are planning to go straight into the job market. Assuming that the juniors continue on their current track, we should have 4-5 graduates next May as well. We are looking forward to their success.

Our final bit of news is that I will be handing the keyboard over next year. The reason for this is that I have accepted a position in the Department of Physics and Mathematics at the Thomas More College in Crestview Hills, Kentucky. The school is about the same size as McMurry and is very similar; so I will get to continue to do much the same types of things as I have enjoyed doing here. However, it is also a very short distance from Cincinnati, Ohio, where my wife (a CPA MBA) will be able to find some nice opportunities, which may better be able to support my teaching addiction. This is also a good bit closer to family for us and is more of a familiar climate. My new email address is: Joe.Christensen@ThomasMore.edu and I would enjoy hearing from you. If you are ever up near Cincinnati, feel free to look me up!

I will say that I hired Drs. Bykov and Keith with the intention of working with them and I have been pleased with the extent to which we agree on how the department should be run, the philosophy and management of the work-a-day chores. I know that they will find a worthy colleague to replace me and that they will continue the distinguished tradition of the McMurry Physics Department to which Dr. Thompson and I tried to connect. I am proud of my time here

and of the students that we have graduated. The group of freshmen have great potential and I look forward to hearing good news about them as well.

As I wrap up my final month, I would like to share my vision for where I think that the department is headed, or at least where I have been working towards sending it. McMurry has, over the past few years, encouraged the departments – especially the sciences – to develop a research experience for the students. Since we have in the past had only a handful of majors, we decided to require it of all of our students. Because of a generous scholarship fund that was unable to be awarded one year and which specifies that any unawarded funds revert to the department, we have been able to fund these projects even with the recent growth in the department. However, in order to maintain this level of activity, we need to figure out how to set up a long term solution. So, here's my thought:

About 55 people receive this letter. If everybody donated an average of \$20 once a year – in August – then we would have \$1000, which would fund four very nice projects per year. If we maintain the graduation rate of 3-5 students per year, then this will maintain a steady stream of even-better prepared students! If you decide to give, then please mark your check “**FOR PHYSICS STUDENT RESEARCH**” and we will put the money into an account which will carry-over into subsequent years if it does not get spent. In addition, the student reports funded from this account will acknowledge the Project 20 funding and we will make those reports available to all donors.

When I first starting writing this letter, I promised it would be for information and not for money requests. I hope that the fact that this will not affect me personally balances my crossing the line, just this once. This is a project that I would like to see developed for the coming fall, but because I am leaving I won't be able to push this initiative further.

Friend, I wish you all the best and I have enjoyed getting to know so many of the McMurry Alumni. You are a great group of people. As always, if you're in the Abilene area, even if you don't want to give a presentation, we'd love to visit if you can spare the time.

Joe Christensen (Soon to be of) Thomas More College
Tikhon Bykov – Wayne Keith
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