Viewpoint:
“Michigan Tech helped me. I’ve done well, and I return the favor.” Ron Pasquinelli ’59 removes tuition-bill obstacles for more than 20 students.

Bay Watch
Are You Experienced?

Four days, 12 visits, 28 hours of company tours. The annual Silicon Valley Experience embeds 20 students smack-dab in the middle of high-tech. Powered since 2011 by fellow Huskies and friends of Michigan Tech, it just keeps getting better.

“It’s become a signature program,” says logistical mastermind Adam Johnson, director of industry program development at Michigan Tech.

Silicon Valley Experience reflects the entrepreneurial emphasis embedded in Michigan Tech’s strategic plan—as well as geographical economic realities. The Bay area is where the action is. And Huskies are infiltrating at a rapid rate.

“It’s fertile ground for being an entrepreneur. Students see themselves in these entrepreneurs, in some cases their former classmates that have raised tens of millions in start-up funding,” says Johnson. Michigan Tech alumni and friends are on hand at every stop, guiding tours, Q&As, and hosting receptions. This year’s schedule: Cisco Meraki, Autodesk, Porter Family Vineyards, Netflix, Facebook, Apple, Ford, Brocade, and Clari. Also Skymind and Handshake, two alumni start-up companies rocketing to success.

The trip is so popular that nearly 100 students compete for slots with timed pitches to a four-person panel: this year it’s professor Mary Raber of Pavlis Institute for Global Technological Leadership, professor Russ Louks and associate professor André Laplume from the School of Business and Economics, and Johnson.

Accepted students are asked for a minimal buy-in, a few hundred dollars. All other expenses are covered. Even that’s an exercise in entrepreneurial ingenuity. “This year a startup transportation company provided a tour bus for us,” says Johnson.
Economics in collaboration with the Innovation Center for Entrepreneurship in Pavlis Honors College. The 2016 trip is also supported by gifts from Rick Berquist, who served more than a decade on the Board of Trustees and as a Michigan Tech Fund Trustee, and entrepreneur and philanthropist Tom Porter ’68.

The experience expands as Tech connections are continually discovered, says Johnson, who works one-on-ones with individuals and industry and spontaneous meet-ups into the mix. He’s so at home that students ask him if he lives there. And Silicon Valley regularly returns to Husky Nation to spread what mentor and venture capitalist Kanwal Rekhi ’69 refers to as a virus—the contagious entrepreneurial bug he wants every student to catch. “When you have a half-dozen of these very successful entrepreneurs spending a week here, it propels that message,” says Johnson. “It infects them with the virus.”

Not too shabby themselves. Johnson says there’s nothing more attention-grabbing than a contingent of charismatic, STEM-savvy, sharp-dressed Michigan Tech students. “They become our ambassadors,” says Johnson. The tour is the brainchild of late SBE Professor Bob Mark. “Attending a conference in Silicon Valley I toured a high-tech business and saw technology that blew my mind,” he told Impact Magazine in 2011. “It hit me that Michigan Tech students would really benefit from seeing what’s out there.”

Travel itself can be transformative, says Johnson. “One student had never been on a plane. To get off the plane and see palm trees...”

The Silicon Valley Experience is organized and supported by the School of Business and

“After 2008 we began building our Pacific Northwest Network.”

Adam Johnson

Outreach on the Rise

- The Michigan Tech Center for Pre-College Outreach offered 17 Mind Trekkers events via a mobile road show staffed by 195 MindTrekker student volunteers. MTCPO’s 42 Summer Youth Program Courses brought STEM inspiration to 1,163 students from around the world, the most participants since 2005. College Access programs brought 200 middle school students to campus for the day, and Tech to local schools. Total Pre-College Outreach in 2015: 72,479.

- Average GPA of our 150 Women In Engineering Summer Youth Program participants: 3.99—and 91 percent said it’s more likely they’ll pursue engineering careers.

Students Give Back

- MTechLine, formerly Telefund, since 2001 has employed 333 student callers. In 2015 their 8,763 conversations with alumni and friends raised more than $225,000 that benefits 134 departments and programs.

- Fall 2015 student service hours: 5,524. Student philanthropy dollars raised: $15,020.

Career Services = Student Success

- Placement percentage by degree: BA and BS, 93.5. MA and MS, 90.7. PhD, 91.7.

- Total companies recruiting on campus in 2014-15: 466.

- More than 7,000 interviews available to students during Career Fair.

Athletic Achievement

- The MacNaughton Cup comes home to Michigan Tech Hockey after 40 years.
Because of Ron
This retired civil engineer is still building—for the future

“You’ve learned how to work at Tech and all you have to do is go out in the world and do it.”
Ron Pasquinelli’s advice to Michigan Tech students

Seven graduated. All have jobs. Two are going right into PhD studies. One into a master’s.”
Bill Roberts, associate vice president for advancement and alumni engagement, reels off the latest student progress report to Ronald J. Pasquinelli ’59.

“Go get ‘em, guys!” says Ron, who does more than cheer ‘his’ students on. His $20,000 in annual scholarship gifts breaks down financial barriers and keeps them in school. They are here because of Ron.

“Ron’s scholarship is for the student with no other options to pay their student bill. They’re truly going to have to go home,” says Bill.

There are four more due to graduate next year. Ron is helping two sophomores. Two juniors. In the past two years, his generosity has affected 21 students with an average 3.18 GPA.


He earned his bachelor’s in civil engineering at Michigan Tech and later a master’s in business administration from Golden Gate University. The 1999 Michigan Tech Board of Trustees Silver Medal winner and 2009 Civil and Environmental Engineering Academy inductee is a prime example of what this year’s student commencement speaker Drew Markel highlighted: the many hats Michigan Tech Huskies wear. Ron’s hats include military service, construction, financial management, international business consulting—and sailing, deep-sea diving, community service, and philanthropic endeavors from coast to coast.

He still gets together with his former sailboat crew, but these days stays off the high seas. “I stay out of trouble. I don’t mind causing it for others,” he says, laughing. “But I like to stay out of it myself.”

He’s still up for the thrill of seeing Michigan Tech students succeed.

“It’s a pleasure to see it happening while it’s ongoing, and get the feedback while I’m here,” says Ron. “Students benefit, and so does the country, and the world.”

Bill tells Ron that he’s somewhat of a celebrity around Tech. The “Pasquinelli Style” of giving appeals to present and potential donors who appreciate immediate, gratifying results.

His annual gift is offered in addition to the $1 million planned gift under the Ronald J. and Marie B. Pasquinelli Education Opportunity endowed scholarship fund established in 1995.

Bill, who previously headed financial aid and saw Ron’s transformational gifts in action firsthand, will tell you this kind of interaction with the generous people who support Michigan Tech on every level is his favorite part of the job. “There’s good people out there doing good things.”