

KAREN HALBERSLEBEN

FOR MAKING WISCONSIN'S ENVIRONMENTAL COLLEGE EVEN GREENER

BY MARY ELLEN GABRIEL

As befits the president of an environmental liberal arts college, Karen Halbersleben tries to live sustainably. She drives a fuel-efficient car, buys organic food, and walks and bikes around Ashland, home of Northland College. On a 1-to-10 scale of environmental responsibility, she'd rate herself an 8. Nationally speaking, that is.

"At Northland, I'm probably a 4," she says with a laugh. "Some of our faculty live off the grid."

Halbersleben is also the first full-time woman president at Northland. But labels and ratings don't concern her much. A historian whose abiding interest is social reform, she's interested not just in how to achieve but in how to transform. She's always wanted to know: What calls people to decide to change the world?

Several major green initiatives have been nurtured at Northland under her tenure, and a big part of her job is to get the word out. She talks about Northland's participation in Sustainable Chequamegon. (See page 18 for more on this.) She touts the installation of a geothermal heat exchange system in the student center and a state-of-the-art campus composter. An organic community garden, shared bikes, and a straw-bale energy lab are other Northland initiatives.

How to connect? is the question that constantly engages Halbersleben's mind and heart. How to reach potential students who would thrive with a Northland education? How to learn from the school's Anishinaabe neighbors? How to share Northland's life-affirming values with far-flung communities? A favorite phrase of hers, inspired by C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, is "dreaming further up and further in."

Raised in Buffalo, N.Y., Halbersleben taught history at the State University of New York-Oswego, on the shores of Lake Ontario. For this self-described "child of the Great Lakes," Ashland feels like home. And for her part, Halbersleben is feeling "boundless joy and fulfillment." After years of studying people who've changed society, she is now actively involved in the effort.

"Northland College has added meaning and urgency to my life, for which I am forever grateful," she says.

For more information on Northland College, call (715) 682-1699 or visit northland.edu.

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