It’s Official!
St. Norbert breaks ground on its new science center
Attendees at the May 10 groundbreaking heard from Miriam Mulva and Paul Gehl among other distinguished guests, including Vice President Joseph Karschren from the Medical College of Wisconsin. Abbot Gary Neville, O.Praem., ’73 provided the invocation and benediction. President Tom Kunkel fielded questions from local media prior to the event.

We’re off!

Work begins on the new Gehl-Mulva Science Center

Thanks to the extraordinary leadership of St. Norbert’s benefactors, the college has begun construction of its new Gehl-Mulva Science Center.

A groundbreaking ceremony took place on Friday, May 10, with the center’s lead donors, Paul O. and Carol H. Gehl and Miriam B. ’69 and James J. Mulva, in attendance.

During the ceremony, President Tom Kunkel reflected on the gifts and their impact on the college:

“The building will be a game-changer for St. Norbert College in terms of what we can offer our students, our faculty and the community. … With it, the sky is the limit and the possibilities are thrilling for us to contemplate.”

The college’s board of trustees gave approval in February to begin work on the facility to replace John R. Minahan Science Hall, which is almost 50 years old. It will allow St. Norbert faculty and undergraduates to work on the leading edge of science and mathematics.

The Gehl-Mulva Science Center will also house the

Campaign St. Norbert:
Full Ahead

GOAL: $90 million
RAISED: $73 million
Medical College of Wisconsin’s Green Bay campus. The medical college will have its classrooms, offices and some learning laboratories in the new building, with the expectation that the community medical education program will admit its first 15 students in July 2015.

The new facility will reflect the changing nature of science pedagogy. Science teaching historically has been neatly divided: lectures in lecture halls, lab work in labs. But today the focus is on integrating the two, allowing faculty to use laboratories as interactive classrooms and to engage more fully with their students. The Gehl-Mulva Science Center will emphasize these collaborative workspaces.

It will also be organized to reflect the increasing fluidity of science disciplines. The lines between chemistry, biology, physics and even math continue to blur, and there is an ever-growing need to “tear down the walls” between the disciplines – something the new facility will do both literally and figuratively.

From there, things get more exciting still. Innovative “green” features, dramatic public spaces, state-of-the-art classroom technology, dedicated labs for both collaborative and faculty research – all will combine to make the new Gehl-Mulva Science Center a hotbed of scientific inquiry and a beacon for those who want to pursue it.

The total cost of the project is approximately $39.2 million. Construction will be done in phases and will take two years to complete.

In her remarks at the groundbreaking, De Pere native Miriam Mulva explained why she and her husband felt moved to make such a profound commitment to the college and the community: “Oftentimes, you go away and you come back and you realize how something is so fantastic, and that’s how we feel about St. Norbert College and De Pere. … We want to tell you how lucky you are to have St. Norbert College; to me, it’s the Gem on the Fox.”
Paul O. and Carol H. Gehl have a long relationship with St. Norbert College. Paul, former president and co-founder of Lunda Construction, is a trustee of the college and has served as such since 1991. Chair of the college’s building committee, he is an investor with Hilbert Communications and chairman of Othmar Group, LLC. Paul is a veteran of the United States Air Force and served during the Korean War. Carol, like her husband, grew up in the Hilbert, Wis., area, and they have been strong supporters of their hometown region.

Miriam B. ’69 and James J. Mulva provided the lead gift toward construction of the St. Norbert College library, which bears their names. Miriam grew up close to the college’s campus, and graduated from St. Norbert in 1969. She is an active volunteer and a member of the college’s board of trustees. James Mulva is also a De Pere native, whose mother, Phyllis Mulva Martine, worked for several years at St. Norbert College as a member of its library staff. A former naval officer, he recently retired as chairman and CEO of ConocoPhillips, headquartered in Houston, Texas.
The evolution of our science facilities

The St. Norbert College science program is blessed with an outstanding faculty, as it has been throughout its history. Today’s professors carry on the tradition of distinguished figures like the Rev. Anselm M. Keefe, O.Praem., and Dr. David L. Klopotek.

When it comes to facilities, however, there is not the same legacy of excellence. In the early days of the college, the science facilities were, to put it charitably, modest. The contrast with the Gehl-Mulva Science Center could not be more stark.

In the early years of the college, there was no “science building” at all; as programs and departments came into being, they were crammed into any available space. The chemistry department, for instance, lived for a while in the old heating plant behind Main Hall.

The physics department was relatively fortunate: During the ’40s, it occupied the basement of Main Hall, and later the basement of Pennings Hall of Fine Arts, and later still the basement of JMS.

As for the chemistry department, when it was able to escape its heating-plant home, it moved, along with the biology department, to an army surplus building that had been hastily reassembled behind Main Hall. Years ago, biology professor Dr. Harold Baeten ’55 recalled it as “a dismal place, all on one floor, with no heat in the winter and no cooling in the summer. The roof leaked so bad that we had to put buckets on the lab tables during heavy rain.”

The modest facilities didn’t prevent the college from producing standout science students (“army hut” alumnus Benjamin Chu ’55, for example, now Distinguished Professor of Chemistry at the State University of New York at Stony Brook). It’s a testament to the triumph of good teaching over Spartan surroundings.

But now, as today’s faculty anticipate moving into a new, state-of-the-art building, they will at last have facilities the equal of their teaching talents. Small wonder they, and the entire college community, so excitedly await the ribbon-cutting of the Gehl-Mulva Science Center – just a few steps from the heating plant, yet so very far removed.

The army surplus building that housed the biology and chemistry labs for many years.
The biology room in Boyle Hall.

Physics in the basement of Main Hall.

Chemistry in the quonset building.

Architect’s rendering of the Gehl-Mulva Science Center.
For Mark Stinski ’63, the college experience extended well beyond the two years he spent at St. Norbert from 1959-61, but the retired University of Iowa professor never forgot the positive direction his life took as a result of his time here.

The Menasha, Wis., native’s first major gift to the college provided the necessary funds to pay for architectural planning on a renovation of the John Minahan Science Hall. It was the gift that laid the foundation for creating the Gehl-Mulva Science Center and providing a home for the Medical College of Wisconsin’s Green Bay campus.

“I asked what I could do to contribute to the science program, and they suggested three options,” Stinski recalls. In deciding which charge to give the architects, he says: “I chose the option to renovate and extend the science building. It’s nice to be able to give back; I’m very fortunate.”

Stinski enrolled at the college as a biology major with an interest in becoming a high school teacher. He developed a keen interest in microorganisms after taking a course from the Rev. Anselm Keefe, O.Praem., on worldwide diseases and vaccinations. The noted biologist later helped his young student transfer to Michigan State University to complete his undergraduate studies, and Stinski eventually earned his doctorate in 1969.

After spending a few years in the military, Stinski launched his own research program at the University of Iowa and began studying a little-known virus. Funding from the American Cancer Society and the National Institutes of Health supported work that led to a patented process to promote gene expression. Pharmaceutical companies soon realized they could use the process to produce remarkably effective drugs in the fight against cancer.

Dr. Stinski and his wife, Mary Ellen, have recently made an additional major gift toward the 150,000-square-foot Gehl-Mulva Science Center. The project, true to the plans they funded, will feature a complete transformation of the Minahan Science Hall, along with a 57,800-square-foot addition. Among the displays will be one honoring the scientific contributions of Norbertines, including Stinski’s mentor, Fr. Keefe.

“The second gift was part two of my plan, which depended on how well the Advancement team did in raising money for the new building,” Stinski says. “They obviously did very well, and the Medical College was a pleasant bonus to the overall plan. I favored a small, liberal arts college where I could make a gift rather than a huge institution. St. Norbert is a college to watch. It’s got a great future.”

There from the start …

The science center gained early impetus thanks to one donor’s vision
Cheryl Vaughan ’92 carried few academic expectations as she progressed through Waupaca (Wis.) High School. She earned good grades, but as the third of seven children in a farming family with extremely limited financial resources, college was a far-fetched proposition.

To everyone except Cheryl.

“There was no talk about college at home, other than the financial burden,” recalls Vaughan. Even though she would graduate as her high school’s valedictorian, that seemed it might be the end point of her education.

All that changed when Vaughan boarded a bus with her senior classmates to attend a college fair. Since the idea of attending a small, liberal arts college appealed to her, she paid a visit to the St. Norbert College table. Vaughan soon applied to the college and filled out an application for the Trustees Distinguished Scholarship.

“I knew there was no way I could afford a private college without scholarship help,” Vaughan says. “Kids in my situation have no idea what the entire process is about. I wasn’t nervous for the scholarship interview, because I frankly didn’t know what was at stake. I also was admitted to the Honors Program, which was all a mystery to me.”

What was at stake was approximately $20,000 in tuition aid over her four-year college career, renewable annually by maintaining good standing and solid grades. Combined with a summer of work at the Waupaca Foundry, and room and board stipends as a resident assistant, the aid allowed Vaughan to cover the vast majority of her expenses.

Vaughan considered a career working in a lab after college, but St. Norbert faculty members encouraged her to think bigger. She picked up some research experience along the way and ended up graduating with a double major in biology and chemistry.

“This is where the high faculty-student ratio at St. Norbert is so important,” she says. “And it’s not just the ratio; it’s faculty who care and make time for casual conversations with students in the halls. They told me, ‘You can do so much more than work in a lab.’ ”

Vaughan went on to earn her doctorate at Harvard University, where she now serves as director of ALM (Master of Liberal Arts) in the biotechnology program, and assistant director for science instruction.

“I took something away from every single one of my honors courses at St. Norbert,” she says. “That liberal arts background helps me engage with undergraduates better. I can converse with them about a variety of subjects that relate to the courses they’re taking.”

Vaughan will forever appreciate the scholarship aid that made it possible for her to attend St. Norbert and pursue her dreams. “I guarantee you,” she says, “there are more people just like me.”
Mark Schemmel ’14 will graduate before the ribbon is cut on the Gehl-Mulva Science Center – but the biology major can barely contain his excitement over what the project will mean to the college and future students. “Even if I’m not going to experience the new building, it’s going to be huge,” he says. “Kids who might have written off St. Norbert in the past now will give it a serious look. With a new library, a new cafeteria, and a new science building … when you’re a senior in high school and you see facilities like that, you feel a commitment from the college that you’ll get the best education possible.

“There will be nothing holding St. Norbert back from competing with anyone in the country, especially at the small-college level. The cream of the crop will come here. It will boost the quality of student coming to St. Norbert, and you’re going to see an increase in applications for the sciences. Now there is no reason for a kid not to come to St. Norbert College.”