



# ***SPARTAN SENIOR***

A newsletter for Michigan State University Retirees

COMBINED EDITION February-March 2014

## **We All Grew Up Watching TV Westerns — What Happened to Them? Our March Speaker, Prof. Gary Hoppenstand, Will Discuss This**



During the late 1950s in America, the Western was THE most popular type of programming broadcast on television. At one point during this period, seven of the top ten ranked television shows were Westerns. With the advent of the 1960s, however, the Western began to forfeit its popularity, so that by the 1970s and 1980s it all but disappeared from the small screen. Today, if a Western somehow finds its way to a television audience, it has become noir-like and disturbing in tone, decidedly antithetical to the traditional “good vs. evil” format of the 1950s’ Western. Today’s television Westerns, in fact, can be defined as anti-Westerns. They are morally ambivalent, profane, and hyper-violent. What has happened to create this dramatic change over the past 50 years? Professor Hoppenstand will offer a discussion of possible reasons for the disappearance and subsequent transformation of the popular television Western, examining evolving cultural, political, and social trends that help to explain how the ethically comforting TV Westerns of GUNSMOKE and THE RIFLEMAN malformed into the contemporary, nightmarish, anti-Westerns of DEADWOOD and HELL ON WHEELS.

Gary Hoppenstand is a professor of English at Michigan State University, and he is currently serving as Associate Dean of Undergraduate Academic Affairs in the College of Arts and Letters. As a graduate student, he studied with Professor Ray Browne, one of the most important scholars involved in the creation of popular culture studies at the university level. Hoppenstand’s major research interests are in genre and formula studies in popular fiction, film and television. He has published eighteen books, including nine scholarly reprint editions of classics novels for Signet Classics and Penguin Classics, and over fifty scholarly articles on topics ranging from popular culture studies, to literary studies, to media studies. His early work as editor of the periodical, Midnight Sun, was twice nominated for the “World Fantasy Award,” and his Popular Fiction: An Anthology (Continued on page 2)

**Currently MSU Health Care plans meet all Federal standards. To the best of our knowledge, your benefits as a retiree of MSU will remain the same. If at any time changes occur that will impact retiree benefits, you will be notified during Open Enrollment which will next occur in Fall, 2014.**

## **Board Recommends Increasing Number of At-Large Board Members**

At the January Board Meeting there was a unanimous vote by the participants to change the by-laws so that we have 4 at-large board members instead of 2. Up until May, 2010 we did have 4 but it was changed to 2 when we updated the document.

Why change it again? As you know we have had difficulty in getting people to run for the officer's positions on the Board. Some people that we have approached have said that they might be interested in an at-large position as an orientation period before seeking or accepting an officer's position. That makes sense. The proposal will be voted on during our business meeting and luncheon on May 5.

—Ron Smith, President

## **Put Our Coming Meetings on Your Calendar**

**February 10**— Ginny Haas, from Community Relations, Office of Governmental Affairs, MSU, on the university's involvement in local community enrichment and development activities.

**March 3, 2014 MSU Florida Retirees Luncheon**, 11:00 AM, Bradenton Country Club, Bradenton, Florida. Speakers: Acting Provost June Youatt and Sharon Butler and Renee Rivard from MSU Human Resources Department. Email for Info: hestenes@msu.edu

**March 10, 2014** Professor Gary Hoppenstand, MSU: What Happened to the Western: From Programming Dominance on Television to Obscurity and Transformation

**April 7, 2014** representative from Tri-County Commission on Aging to talk on Medicaid/Medicare fraud and abuse.

**May 5, 2014** Annual Luncheon with presentation by members of Summer Circle Theatre

All meetings begin at 2:00 PM in the Community Room of the MSU Federal Credit Union at Farm Lane and Mt. Hope Road, East Lansing. For more information, follow our web site and Facebook page.

(TV Westerns, Gary Hoppenstand, continued)

(Longman) won the Popular Culture Association's "Best Book" award in the Textbook/Reference category for 1997. He is a former Area Chair, Vice-President, and President of the national Popular Culture Association, and for the past eleven years he has served as the editor of The Journal of Popular Culture. At Michigan State University, he has won the College of Arts & Letters 2008 "Paul Varg Award for Faculty" ("in recognition of outstanding teaching and scholarly achievement"), and Michigan State University's 2008 "Distinguished Faculty Award" ("in recognition of outstanding contributions to the intellectual development of the University").

## **MSU Extension 4-H Staff to Hold Reunion at Kettunen Center**

A reunion for MSU Extension 4-H staff is planned for May 15 and 16, 2014 at Kettunen Center. Everyone who worked for Extension 4-H Youth Programs is encouraged to attend. This event is held every three years and provides a social opportunity and updates about Extension. Invitees include all county and state office staff affiliated with 4-H during their careers. Extension agents/educators, county directors with 4-H responsibilities, support staff members, program assistants, associates and coordinators, on campus specialists, program leaders, regional supervisors and others are all invited to attend. Please save the dates. A letter with more details will be sent this spring. Please contact Larry Johnson at johns153@msu.edu if you are interested.

# What's New at the U

Stan Hecker

Did your grandkid just miss qualifying for a gifted and talented program? Well, relax; a new study contradicts the popular theory that students perform better when surrounded by higher-achieving classmates. The study, in the *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, provides an important first step in understanding the effects of gifted and talented programs on students.

MSU's Scott Imberman and colleagues found that marginal students in a middle school gifted and talented program – despite learning alongside the “best and brightest” – performed no better on national tests than a similar group of students who didn't qualify for the program. Iberman holds a joint appointment in Economics and also in Counseling, Educational Psychology, and Special Education.

The study targeted a group of students who qualified for a gifted and talented program by barely meeting a certain threshold based on past academic performance. Their test scores were compared to the students who just missed meeting the threshold – in other words, students who were very similar academically. There was no significant difference between the two groups' scores.

“This paper is part of a growing body of literature suggesting that just because you have stronger peers doesn't necessarily mean you are going to perform better,” said Imberman, Associate Professor of Economics and Education.

Using a sample of more than 14,000 fifth-graders in an urban school district, Imberman, Sa Bui (Cornell University), and Steven Craig (University of Houston), analyzed the students' standardized test scores in math, science, reading, social studies and language arts.

The study also looked at gifted and talented students who were picked in a lottery for a “magnet” program, which emphasizes a more intensive, specialized curriculum. The researchers compared test scores of the magnet students who won the lottery to the gifted and talented students who lost the lottery and found no significant difference in four of the five subjects: math, reading, social studies and language arts. The magnet students did show improvement in science.

So, keep giving those grandchildren all the support, help, and love you're giving them. THAT might mean more, in the long run, than that special program at school.



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5020 Northwind, Suite 107  
East Lansing, MI 48823

(877) EDU-403B  
info@myRplan.com  
<http://www.myRplan.com>

**SPARTAN SENIOR** Local Edition, MSU Retirees Association, Suite 22 Nisbet Building,  
MSU, 1407 S. Harrison Ave, East Lansing, MI 48823-5239. Tel (517) 353-7896.  
e-mail: [msura@msu.edu](mailto:msura@msu.edu). Editor Al LeBlanc (655-6454); [aleblanc@msu.edu](mailto:aleblanc@msu.edu)  
Website : <http://www.retirees.msu.edu>

