

# Founding – 1929

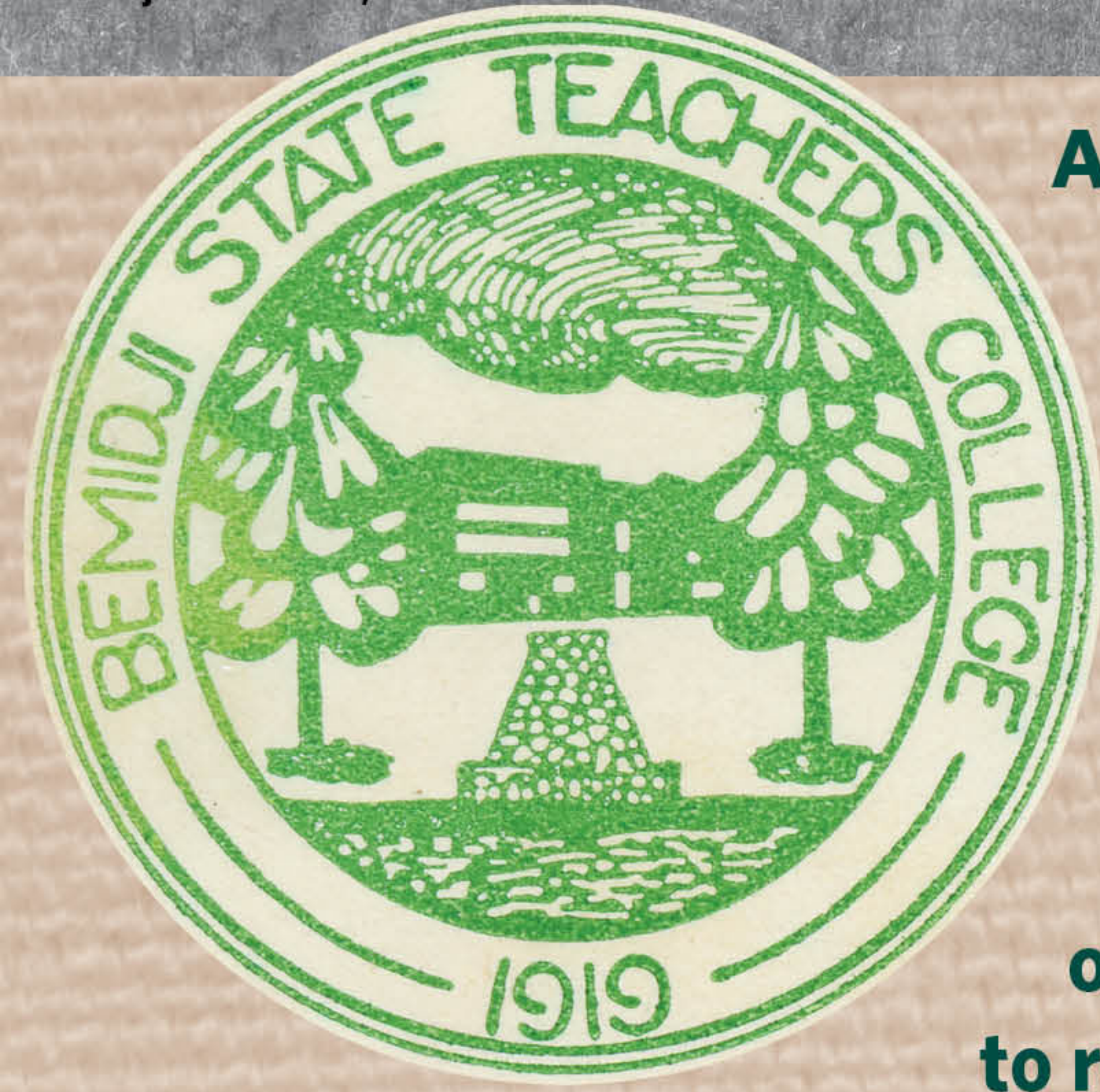
## Bemidji Takes the Prize



Bemidji school site, 1915.



Library, 1923



As the 20th century began, a dire teacher shortage and growing population presented a clear need for a sixth state Normal School to train

teachers in north-central Minnesota. By 1907, the towns of Bemidji, Cass Lake and Thief River Falls were vying to reap the rewards. When word came on July 15, 1913, of a commission's unanimous decision, Bemidji rejoiced. The fire siren howled, lumber whistles blew and residents celebrated into the night.

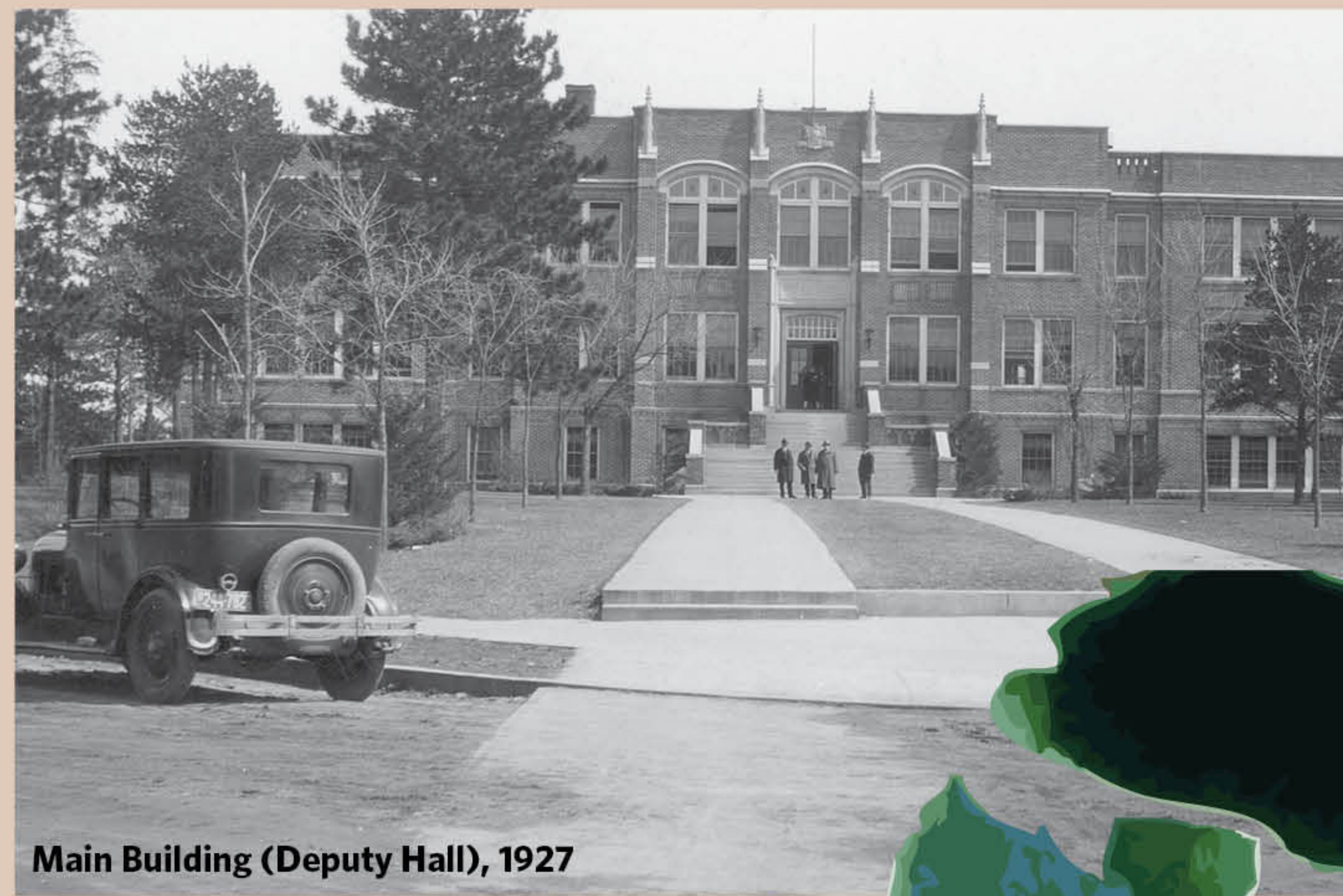
## Training Minnesota Teachers



Manfred W. Deputy

With funding from the legislature, work began in April 1918 to clear the thickly wooded school site a mile north of town on the west shore of Lake Bemidji. Veteran educator Manfred W. Deputy would be its president. Bemidji Normal School opened on June 23, 1919, starting with 130 students, all but

six of them women. Its main curriculum was a two-year program that prepared high school graduates to teach in any elementary school in the state.



Main Building (Deputy Hall), 1927

## College Becomes a Campus

Soon renamed Bemidji State Teachers College, the school added a 50-bed women's dormitory, Sanford Hall, in 1920. Classes were held Tuesday through Saturday. A men's basketball team formed in 1921, lectures and musical programs were offered, and students organized a glee club and literary society, with other activities to follow. By decade's end, women were competing on intramural teams in track, soccer, volleyball and basketball. Enrollment in the first decade peaked at 537 in 1924.



Skiing lakeside, 1920s.



1920s

Glee club, 1927



# 1930s

Diamond Point, 1932.



**A Depression felt in rural Minnesota since 1922 deepened with the stock market crash of 1929. The timing was terrible for Bemidji State Teachers College, which needed resources to grow and mature. Though teaching jobs were scarce, enrollment actually increased briefly before a downturn. In 1933, the legislature cut state salaries by 20 percent and began charging tuition for the first time — \$10 a term. Community donations from members funded small loans to needy students.**

## Hard Times Hit Home

### Mrs. Deputy Suggests a Fireplace

**I**n keeping with President Manfred Deputy's appreciation for regular gatherings of students and faculty, his wife, Carrie, suggested building an outdoor fireplace near the lakeshore. Students, alumni and faculty began collecting stones from which the hearth and benches were constructed in 1932 by M.O. Morse, a Bemidji mason known for the tight fit of his work. The original fireplace survives to this day, though without benches and in a location closer to the lake.



Fireplace dedication, 1932.

### BSTC Adds a Gymnasium – and More



Memorial Hall gym, 1939.

**H**aving pulled BSTC through a lean decade, and nearing his own forced retirement at age 70, President Deputy got some good news in spring 1937: legislative approval for \$220,000 to construct a physical education building. Thanks to another \$140,000 from the federal Works Progress Administration, plus \$25,000 more from the state, the new Memorial Hall included a gymnasium/auditorium, a bookstore, a student union and three industrial arts rooms. The Art Deco building opened in 1940.



Memorial Hall groundbreaking, 1938.

Costume party, 1932.



# 1940s



Sanford Hall women's dorm, 1943.

## A College Answers the Call

Bemidji State Teachers College had record enrollment of 501 in fall 1940. Then World War II arrived and nearly emptied the campus of men. In 1944, only 18 male students remained, and enrollment had sunk to 123 by spring of '45. Grads were in great demand, as women teachers stepped into administration and coaching. When President Charles Sattgast enlisted in 1943, A.C. Clark filled in until 1946. Twenty former students were killed in the war.



## The GI Bill and Soldiers' Return

The 1944 Servicemen's Readjustment Act, better known as the GI Bill, brought a new age of education to postwar America. Enrollment at BSTC shot up to 575 by 1946, and men outnumbered women 3 to 1. Men and married couples were crowded into two relocated barracks that had previously housed conservation corps workers and German POWs. Students' attention turned to things like athletics (hockey included), dating and the green and white beanie caps now required for freshmen.



World War II veterans, 1945.



Memorial Hall, 1940s.

## Sattgast Employs a Forceful Style



Monument Men medal, U.S. Mint.



President Charles Sattgast, 1946.

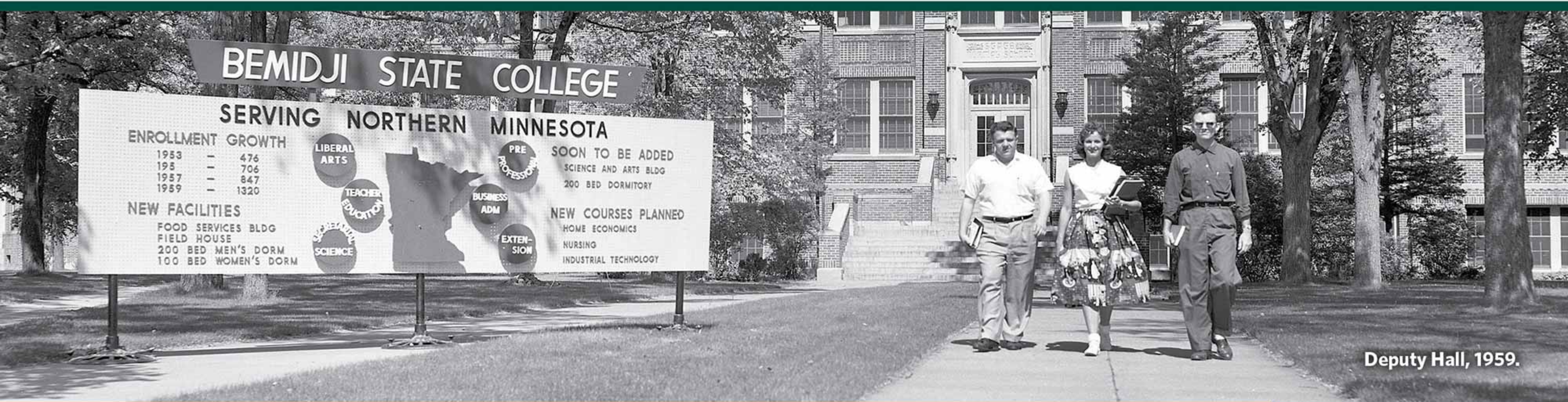
After returning from his military service as one of the "Monument Men" who helped safeguard European cultural treasures, President Sattgast had strong views and a strong hand. Faculty responded by forming an organization to promote their interests. Nonetheless, the president sought to hire all new faculty before finally turning that duty over to deans and division chairs in the 1950s. At monthly college meetings, he was known to chide individuals who failed to exhibit the proper spirit.



Hockey on Lake Bemidji, 1948.



# 1950s



Deputy Hall, 1959.

## Expanding Programs and Degrees



Enrolling the 1000th student.

After only incremental curriculum change during the first two decades at Bemidji State Teachers College, a Bachelor of Arts degree was added in 1946, though it had few takers. Not until 1950 did BSTC offer a specialized B.S. in business education and a major in American humanities — and a drama workshop was created in 1952. A Master of Science in education was begun in 1953, and in 1969, the college awarded 55 master's degrees.



Birch Hall construction, 1952.

## Keeping Pace with Growth

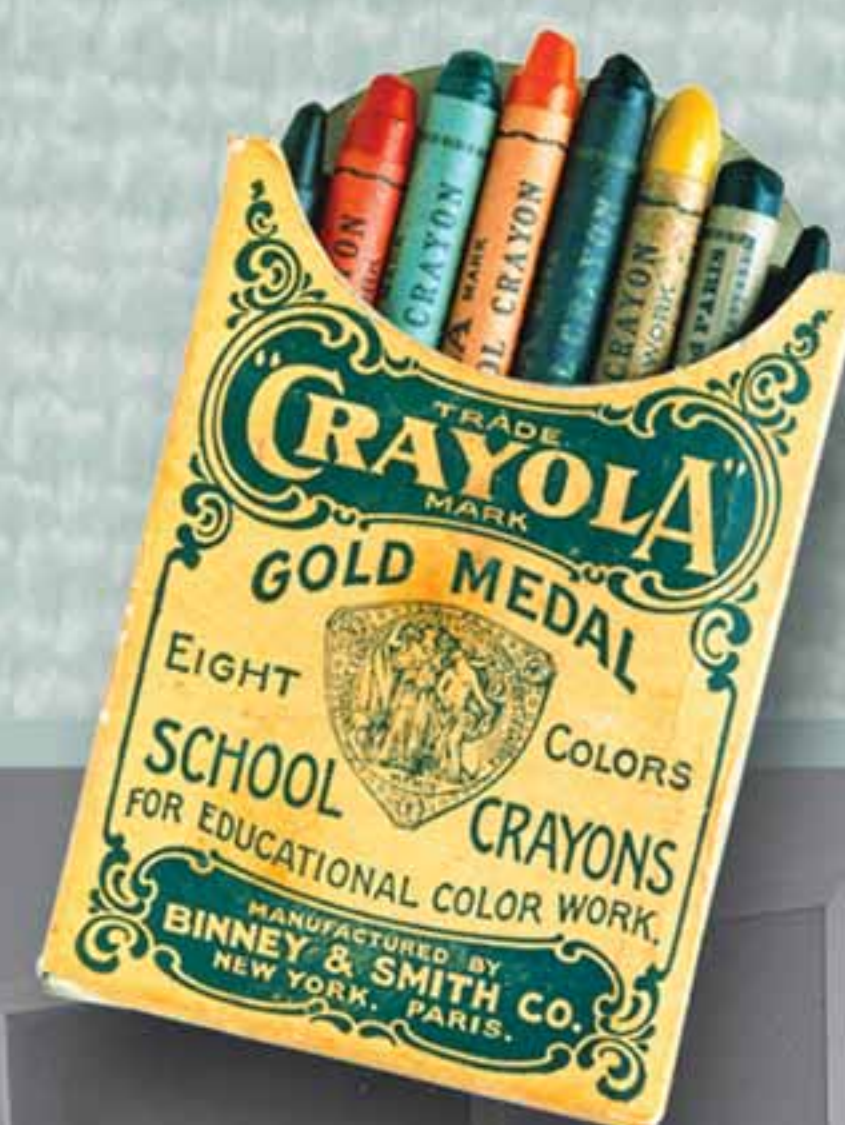
A 20-year wave of campus construction, remarkable in hindsight, began in 1950 with completion of a new home for the Laboratory School, which became Bensen Hall in 2012. Birch Hall, first of seven new dormitories built by 1969, was completed in 1952, followed by Linden Hall in 1959. The first phase of a new physical education complex, also completed in '59, included a gymnasium, swimming pool and fieldhouse with seating for 2,300.



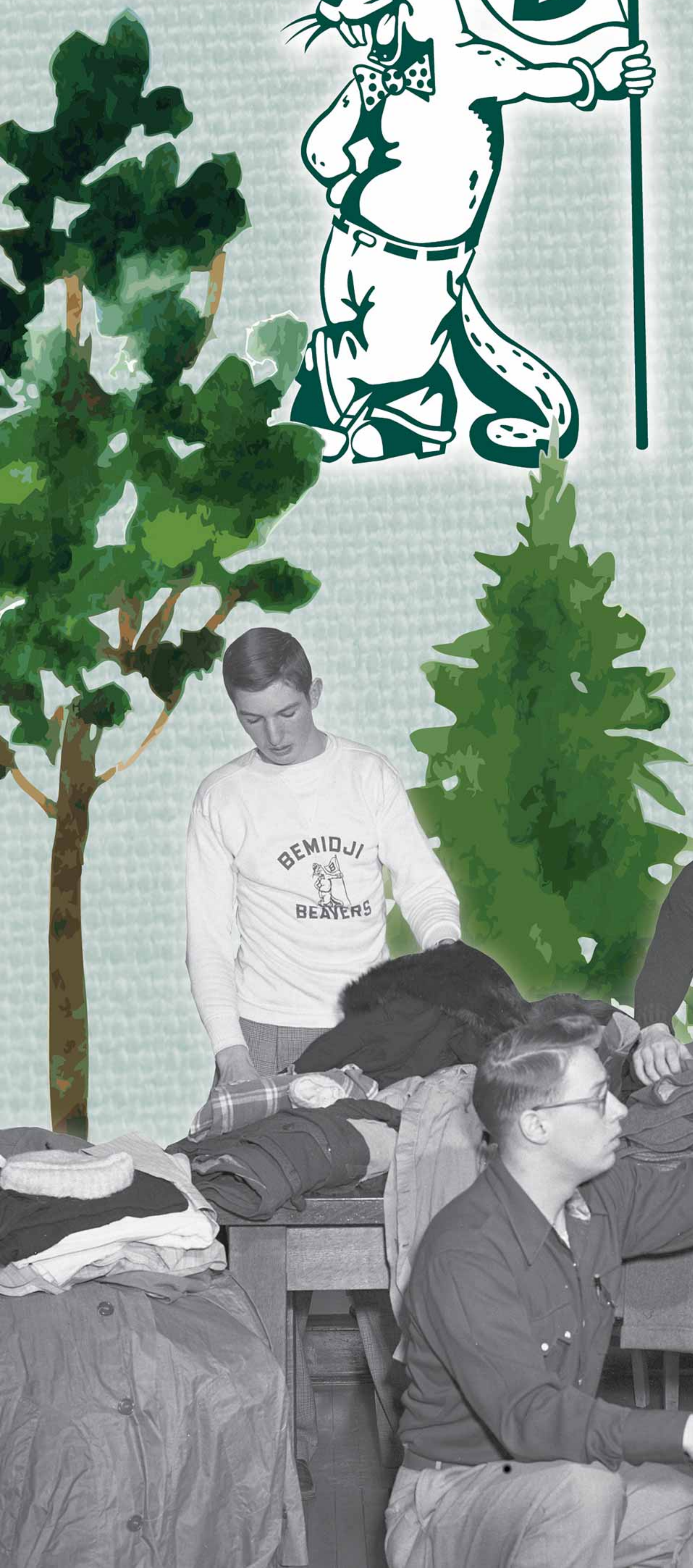
Birch Hall cafeteria, 1950s.

## 'Lab School' Esteemed by Bemidji

A brand new building merely heightened Bemidji's appreciation for the K-8 "Lab School" on the BSTC campus. Parents considered it the premier place for their children to attend, and many former students continue to look back fondly on their experience. The story goes that one new dad applied for his son's admittance on the same day the child was born. But in the face of competing college demands, the school closed in 1975.



Laboratory School, 1953.



Korean War clothing drive, 1952.



# 1960s



Dr. Harry F. Bangsberg and family before his 1967 trip to South Vietnam.

## Promising Presidency Cut Short



March 24, 1967, edition.

The 1967 death of President Harry Bangsberg was made more devastating by his youthful enthusiasm as successor to Dr. Charles Sattgast, whose own death ended his 26-year presidency. The way Dr. Bangsberg died also was tragic — in a plane crash with seven other educators on a U.S.-sponsored trip to assess higher education in South Vietnam. A child of Wisconsin and infantry vet, he saw education as a path to social change. His first building project was the A.C. Clark Library, completed in 1966.

## A New Focus on American Indians

Discussion of Bemidji's indigenous history and how to serve students from surrounding tribal nations coincided with the American Indian political movement of the late 1960s. In 1969, Bemidji State launched the first collegiate Ojibwe language program and a degree in Indian Studies. The next year, the Anishinabe Family Center opened on campus, and native students formed the Amerind Club, which became the Council of Indian Students. Momentum led to completion of the American Indian Resource Center in 2003.



American Indian artifacts, 1960s.



Protest over interim BSC presidency, 1967.

## Faculty and Students Rise in Protest



Vietnam protest at Bemidji City Hall, 1969.

In a year rocked by the 1968 assassinations of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy, faculty and students in 1968 began to publicly oppose America's war in Vietnam. Protest, always peaceful, came in classroom digressions and at campus forums. In 1969, marchers in black armbands strode downtown and engaged in public dialogue with Bemidji's city manager. In 1967, students had also protested delay in appointment of a president to succeed Dr. Bangsberg.



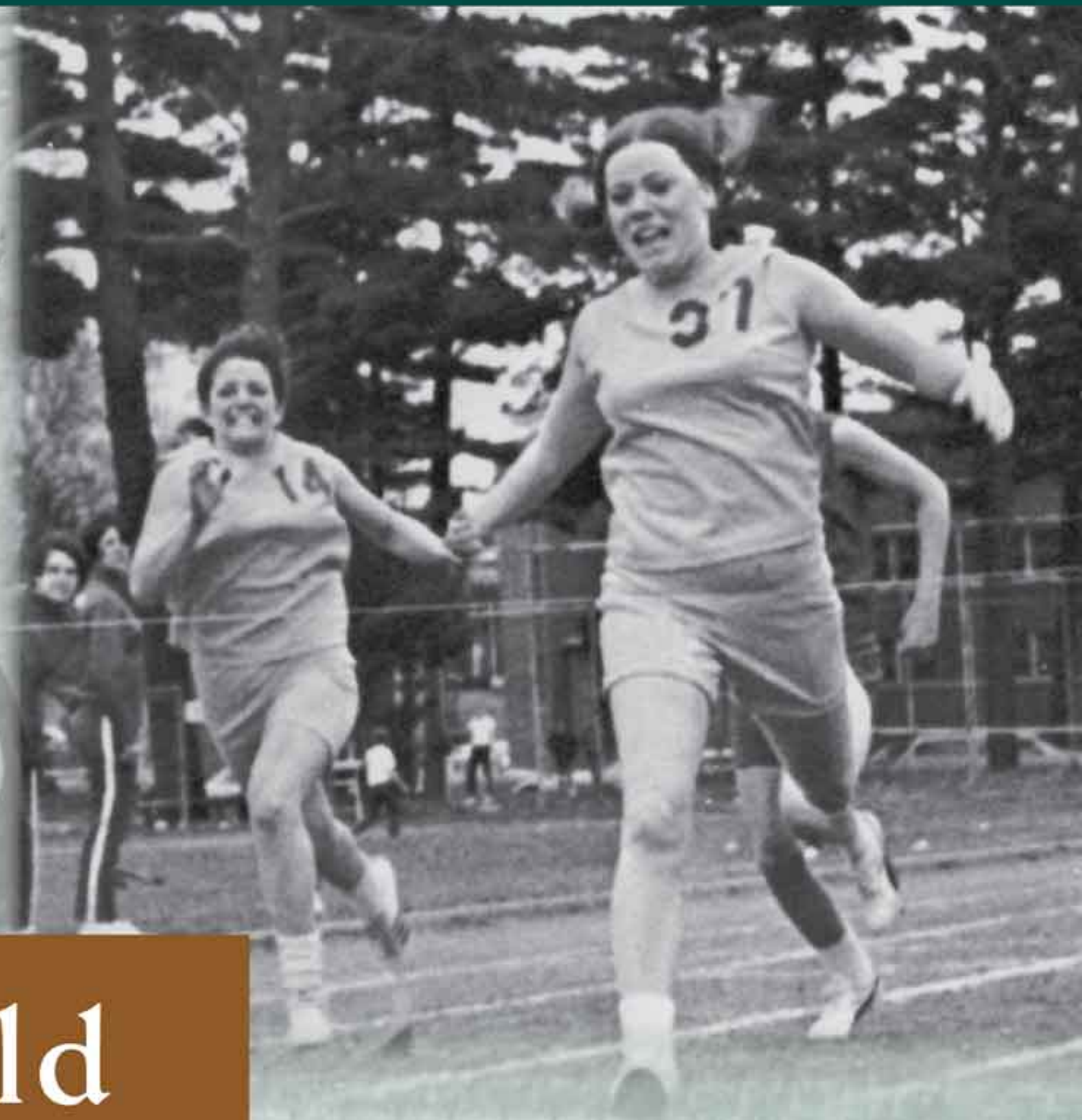
Pine Hall lounge, 1960s.



# 1970s



Field hockey, 1971.



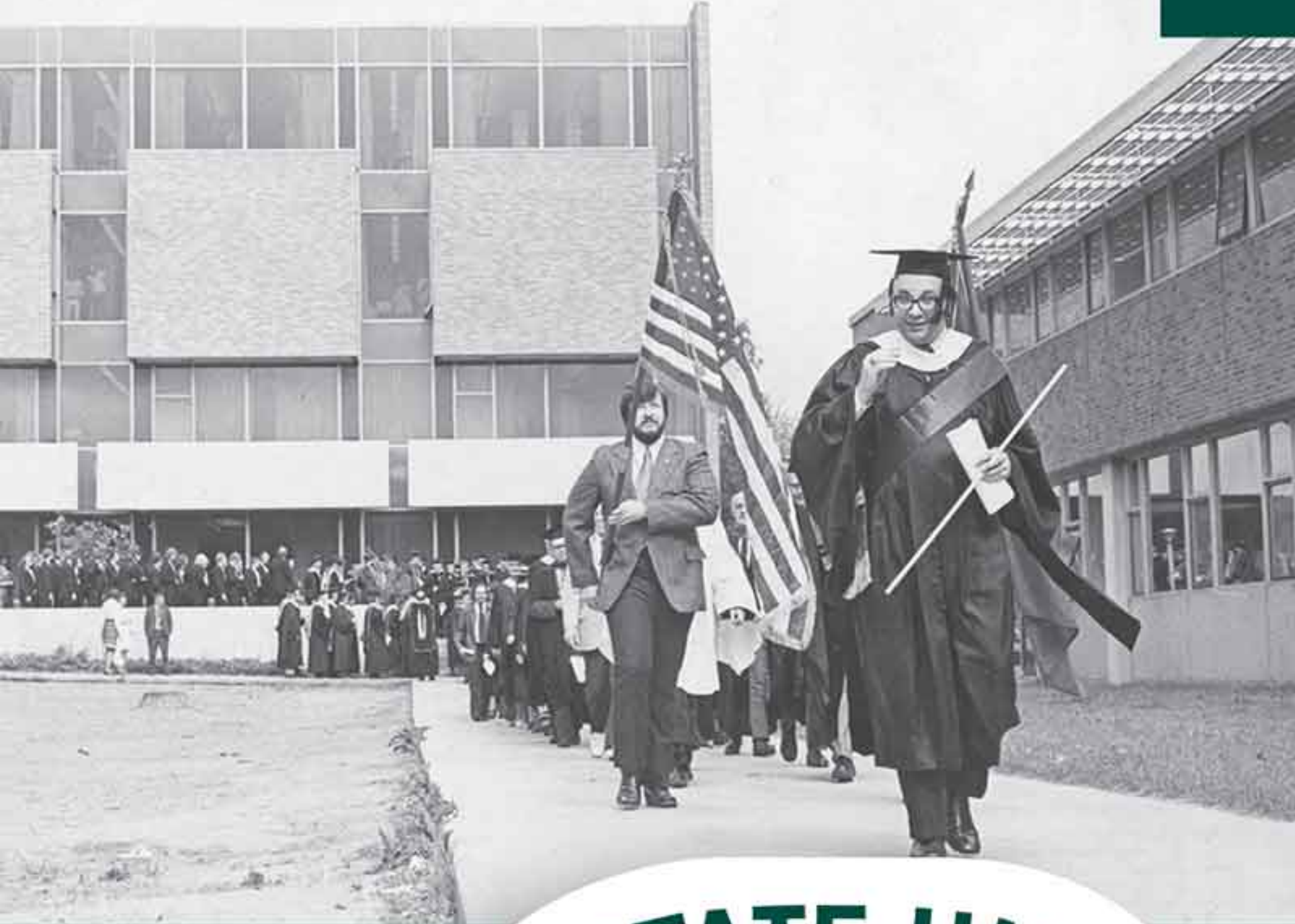
Women's track, 1971.

## Women's Athletics Take Hold

A group of pioneering women positioned Bemidji State to help lead a revolution in varsity athletics. The college was a charter member of the women's Minn-Kota Conference in 1969, four years before a new law called Title IX required gender equity in intercollegiate sports. Beginning with field hockey, track, volleyball and basketball, BSC quickly became a regional power. By 1979, it also had women's teams in tennis, cross country, swimming and gymnastics, though not all would last.

## College Becomes a University

Hagg-Sauer Hall dedication, 1970.



New logo, 1975.

BSC became BSU in 1975, amid a decade of maturation that concluded a 20-year building boom, with Hagg-Sauer Hall (1970), the Bangsberg Fine Arts Complex (1971) and the Peters aquatics lab (1972). On-campus enrollment reached 4,865 in '71. The university had 70 undergraduate programs, although in 1979 only 34 women were among its 197 faculty. Dr. Robert Decker, president since 1968, shocked employees in '79 by announcing his immediate resignation during a back-to-school address.



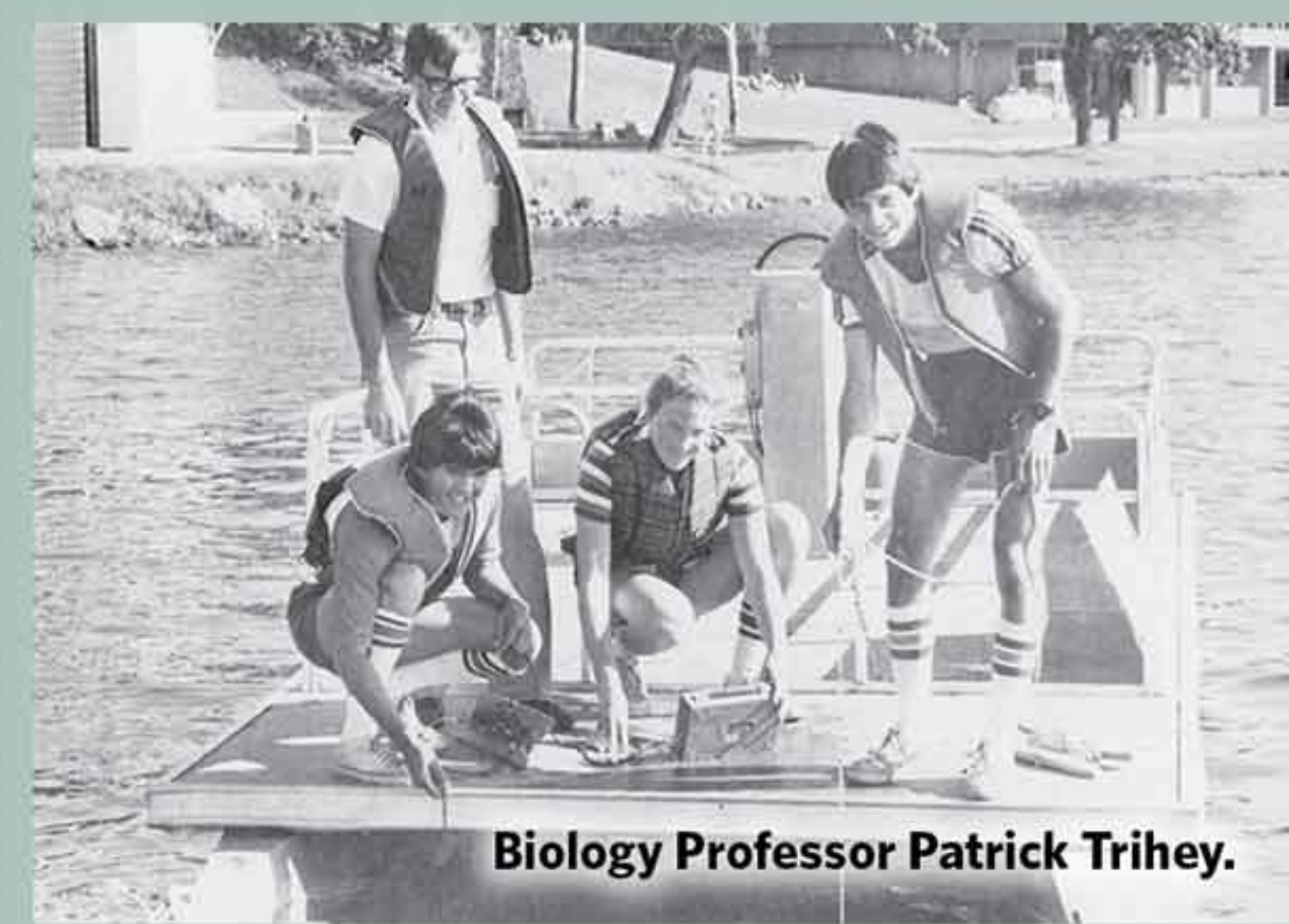
President Robert D. Decker, 1968-80.

## Legislation Enables Faculty Union

With the Democratic Farm Labor Party holding the House, Senate and governor's office, Minnesota adopted the Public Employment Labor Relations Act in 1971, authorizing unionization for state college teachers. The result was the Inter Faculty Organization, or IFO. In '71, the average base salary for Bemidji State faculty with doctorates was \$14,995. By the end of an inflationary decade, the doctoral average was \$21,867. Other employee groups also organized.



Humanities faculty.



Biology Professor Patrick Trihey.

Homecoming Queen and Court, 1970s.



# 1980s



Registration, 1980s.

## Presidential Styles in Contrast



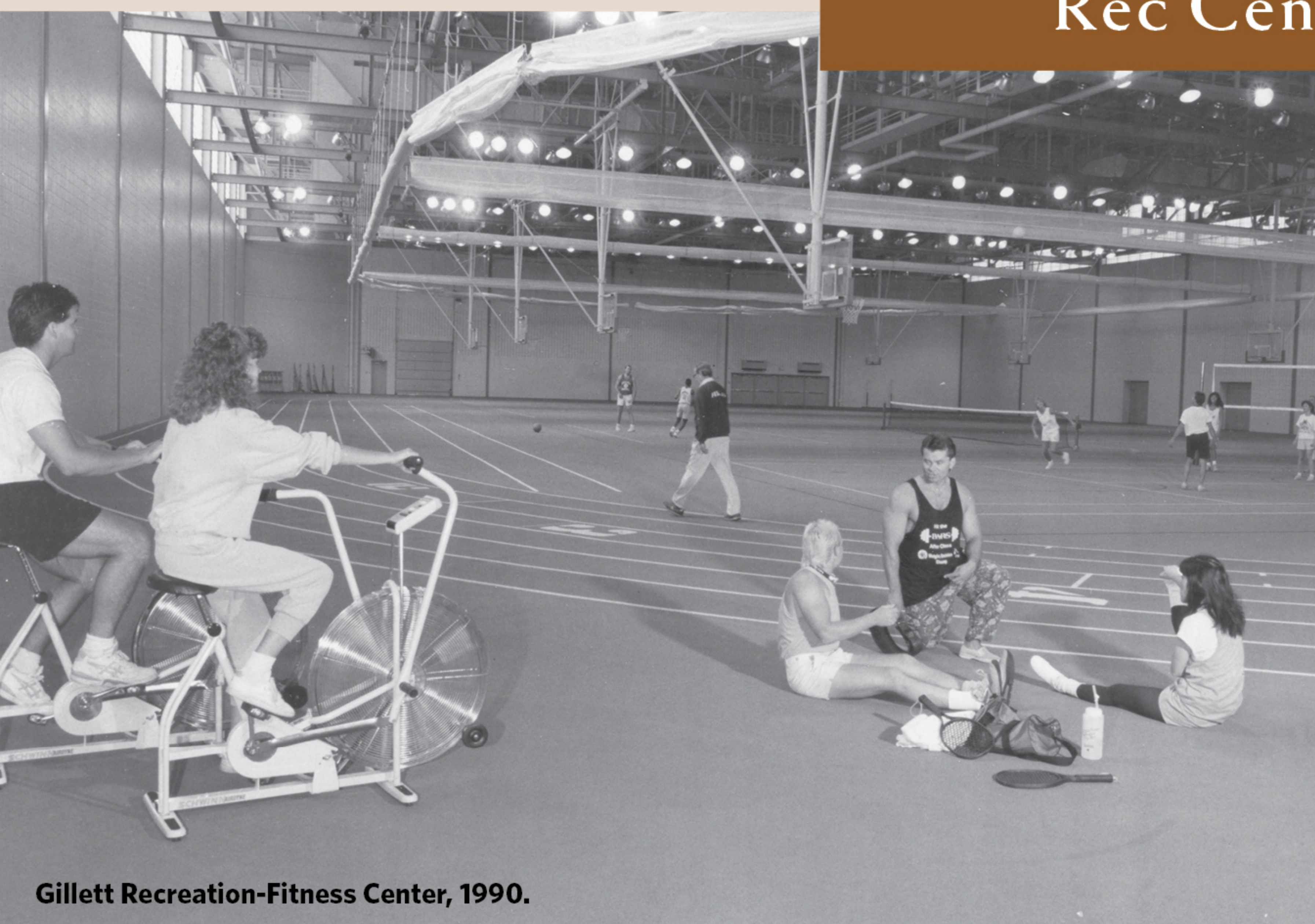
President Rebecca Stafford, 1980-81.

Bemidji State began the 1980s with its first woman president, Dr. Rebecca Stafford, a Harvard-educated sociologist. She raised alarm with a "Program Planning and Review" that required departments and offices to justify their existence. Budget constraints made the effort moot, but morale suffered. After 20 months, Dr. Stafford quit mid-year to take another job. Her replacement was Dr. Lowell "Ted" Gillett, a down-to-earth leader who resisted staffing cuts despite a recession and declining enrollment.



President Lowell "Ted" Gillett, 1982-90.

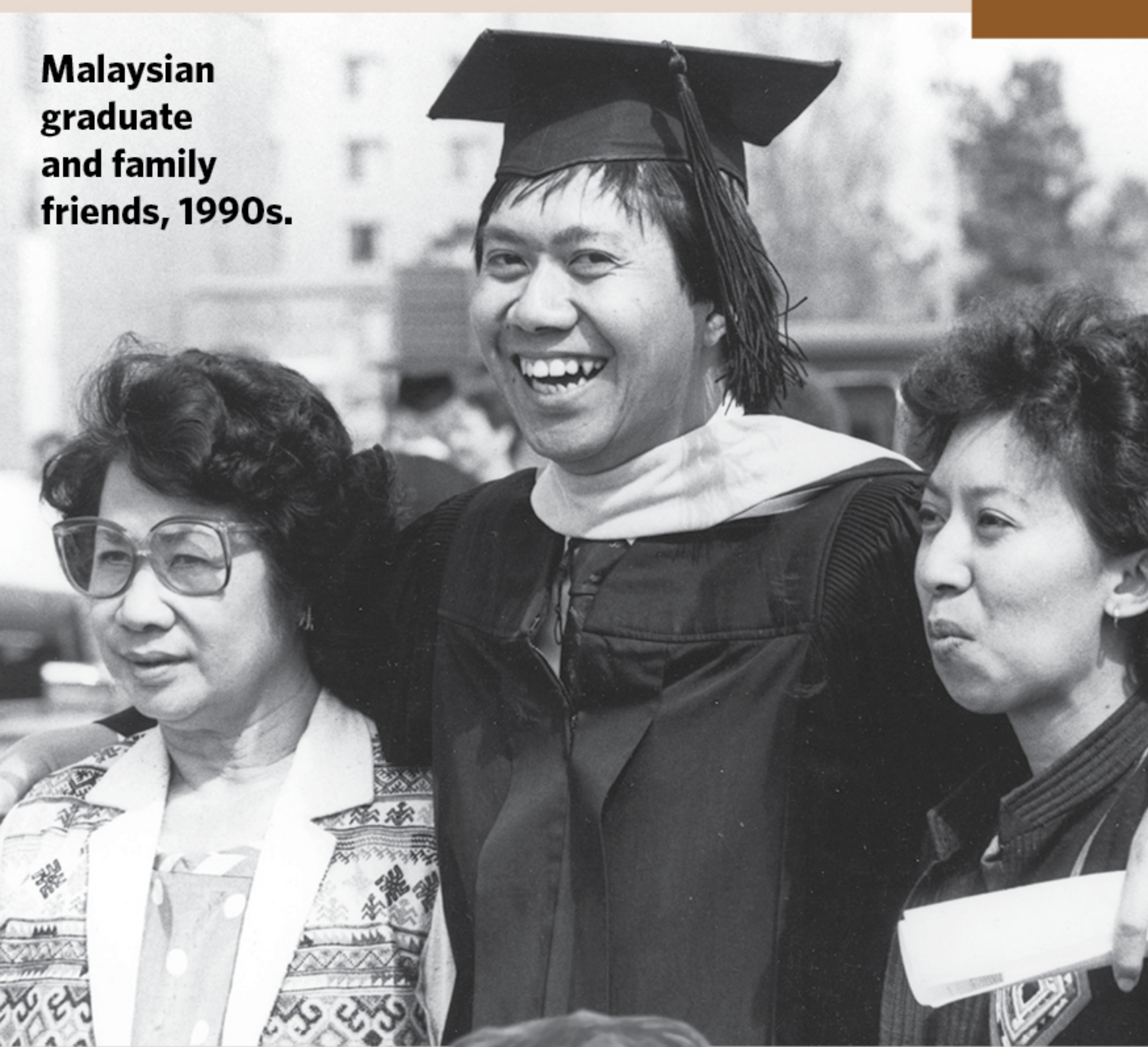
## Rec Center is Year-Round Benefit



Gillett Recreation-Fitness Center, 1990.

Completion in 1989 of the 85,000-square-foot Gillett Recreation-Fitness Center, named for the president who built it, met a dire need in the land of long winters. Along with a weight room and exercise machines, the center featured racquetball/handball courts, a 200-meter track and tennis/basketball courts. Dr. Gillett was overcome with emotion when he phoned his wife from St. Paul to say funding had come through. Renamed the Gillett Wellness Center in 2016, the building serves both campus and community.

## The World Comes to Bemidji State



Malaysian graduate and family friends, 1990s.

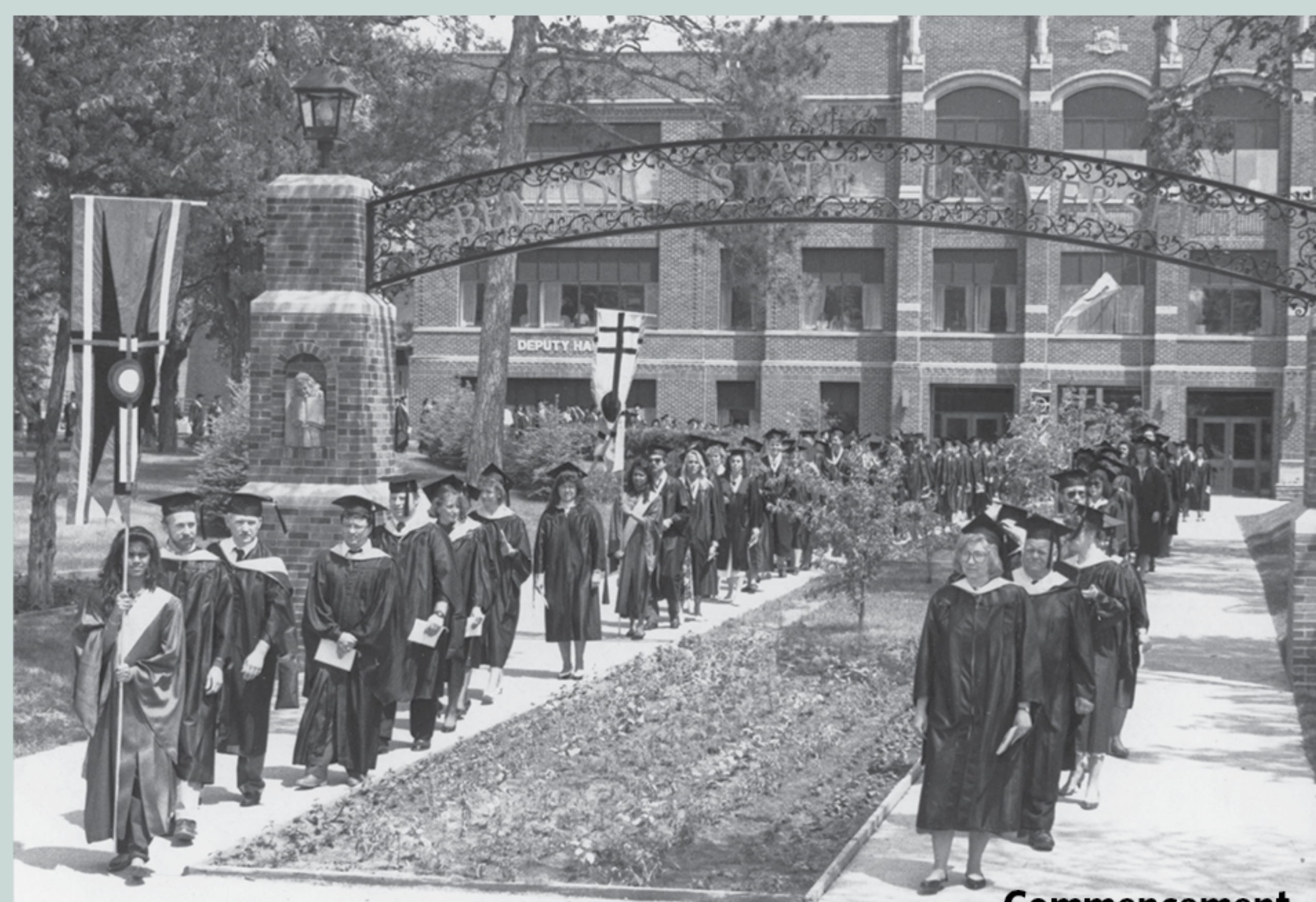
In 1982, BSU had just 15 international students, including Canadians. By 1990, there were 250 representing more than 30 countries. Study abroad opportunities included Eurospring, begun in 1975, and a new summer travel program in China, as well as exchange programs there and in Japan, Sweden and Malaysia. The curriculum also evolved, with a new emphasis area in international studies and a requirement for 12 general education credits in global, multicultural and/or gender study.



Apple computer, 1980s.

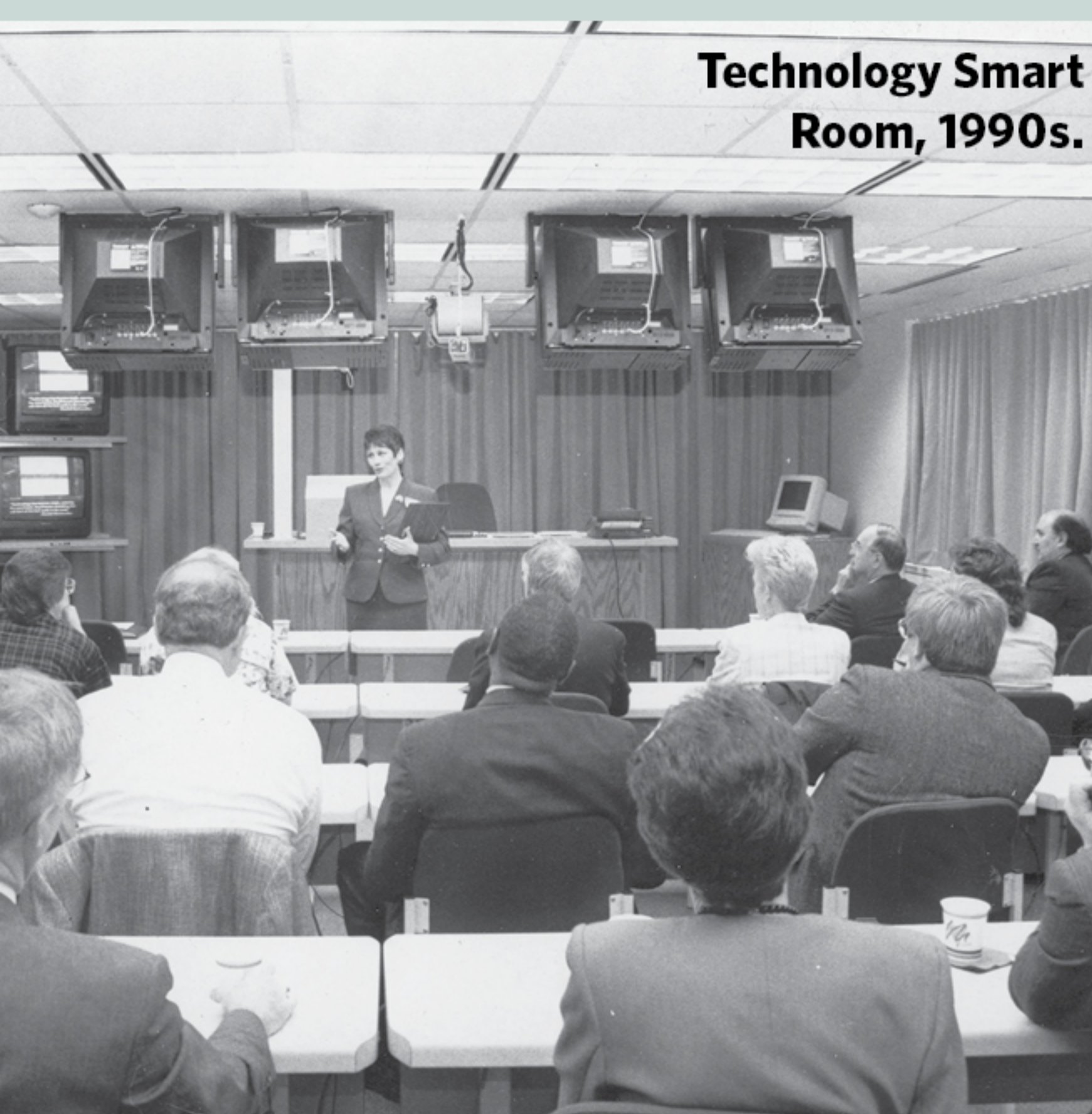
# 1990s

President Leslie C. Duly, 1990-93.



Commencement, 1990s.

## Sudden Loss Interrupts Momentum



Technology Smart Room, 1990s.

As Dr. Ted Gillett stepped down, Dr. Leslie Duly stepped up to the Bemidji State presidency in 1990 after a decade in the understudy role of chief academic officer. Known for an even keel and ubiquitous presence, Dr. Duly championed his vision of a comprehensive and multicultural university, with academic departments split into three colleges. His fatal heart attack in 1993 left BSU with interim leadership until Dr. James Bensen's appointment a year later.



David Park House.

## Park House is Home to Foundation

An art deco building across Birchmont Drive became part of the campus in 1991 when the Bemidji State Foundation & Alumni Association bought it from the Park family for \$92,000. Completed in 1936, the gem of Moderne architecture had been home to creamery owner David Park and was added to the national historic register in 1988. Interim President Linda Baer formally dedicated the house, which remains headquarters for the BSU Alumni & Foundation.

## Apartments Help Parents Succeed

Among BSU's noteworthy innovations was the 1990 renovation of an entire wing of Pine Hall into Cedar Apartments — a home for some of its 300 students who were single parents. The 28 units were one-, two- and three-bedroom, and daycare and playground facilities were extended outside.



Pine Hall, later Cedar Apartments, 1990.

The initiative, certified by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, drew inquiries and later imitators from around the nation.



Hands Across Campus multicultural event, 1990s.





# 2000s



## Beaver Hockey Ascends



President M. James Bensen, 1994-2001.

A decision by President Jim Bensen led to the 2010 opening of a sparkling 4,700-seat arena as home ice for BSU hockey, funded with state bonds and city taxes. The new Sanford Center enabled the men to join the Division I Western Collegiate Hockey Association. That leap paid off with national fame when they were a Cinderella "Frozen Four" semi-finalist in the 2009 NCAA tournament.



Planting perennials, 2009

## Pledge and Investment for Planet

As consensus coalesced behind human-caused climate change, environmental concern intensified at Bemidji State. In 2004, that stewardship became a university "Signature Theme," and in 2008, students agreed to a \$5-per-semester "Green Fee" for education and action. Also in '08, President Jon Quistgaard signed the

Presidents' Climate Commitment, pledging that BSU will be carbon neutral by 2050. Thanks to ongoing efforts, BSU was named a Green Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education in 2017.

Dr. Jon Quistgaard signs the Presidents' Climate Commitment, 2008.



Student Scholarship and Creative Achievement Conference, 2007.

## Annual Conference Showcases Students

What is now known as the Student Achievement Conference was first held in 2000, encouraging undergraduates to complete and present in-depth research and share their musical and artistic talents. The all-day program, traditionally held in April, has continued to grow in size and importance. The 2018 event involved a record 300 students and 150 posters and presentations.

Dedication of American Indian Resource Center, 2003.



# 2010s

Image Tomorrow celebration at the 2016 Homecoming Honors Gala



## Fundraising Follows Budget Cuts

Six months into his presidency, Dr. Richard Hanson decisively addressed a two-year, \$5 million deficit by cutting 60 faculty and staff positions and men's track. Critics focused on elimination of theater and consolidation of visual art with design and technology.

But Dr. Hanson also developed resources — leading BSU's first comprehensive fundraising campaign, **Imagine Tomorrow**, which raised \$36 million in five years. He gained state bonding support for the transformation of Memorial Hall into an energy-efficient home for Business and Accounting.



President  
Richard A. Hanson,  
2011-16.



BSU Director of Choral Music Dr. Dwight Jilek, left, and Alumni Choir Director Mark Carlson, right, join former choral director Dr. Paul Brandvik at a 2017 reunion concert.

## Music Celebrates Tradition of Quality

The decade brought musical milestones, beginning with the 80th anniversary of the Bemidji Choir in 2017, celebrated with a Homecoming reunion attended by legendary former director Dr. Paul Brandvik. His Madrigal Dinner brainchild will reach the half-century mark in 2018. Excellence in instrumental and vocal performance and education date back to the likes of choir director Carl O. Thompson, hired in 1937. Also still going strong is a summer music camp for middle and high school musicians.

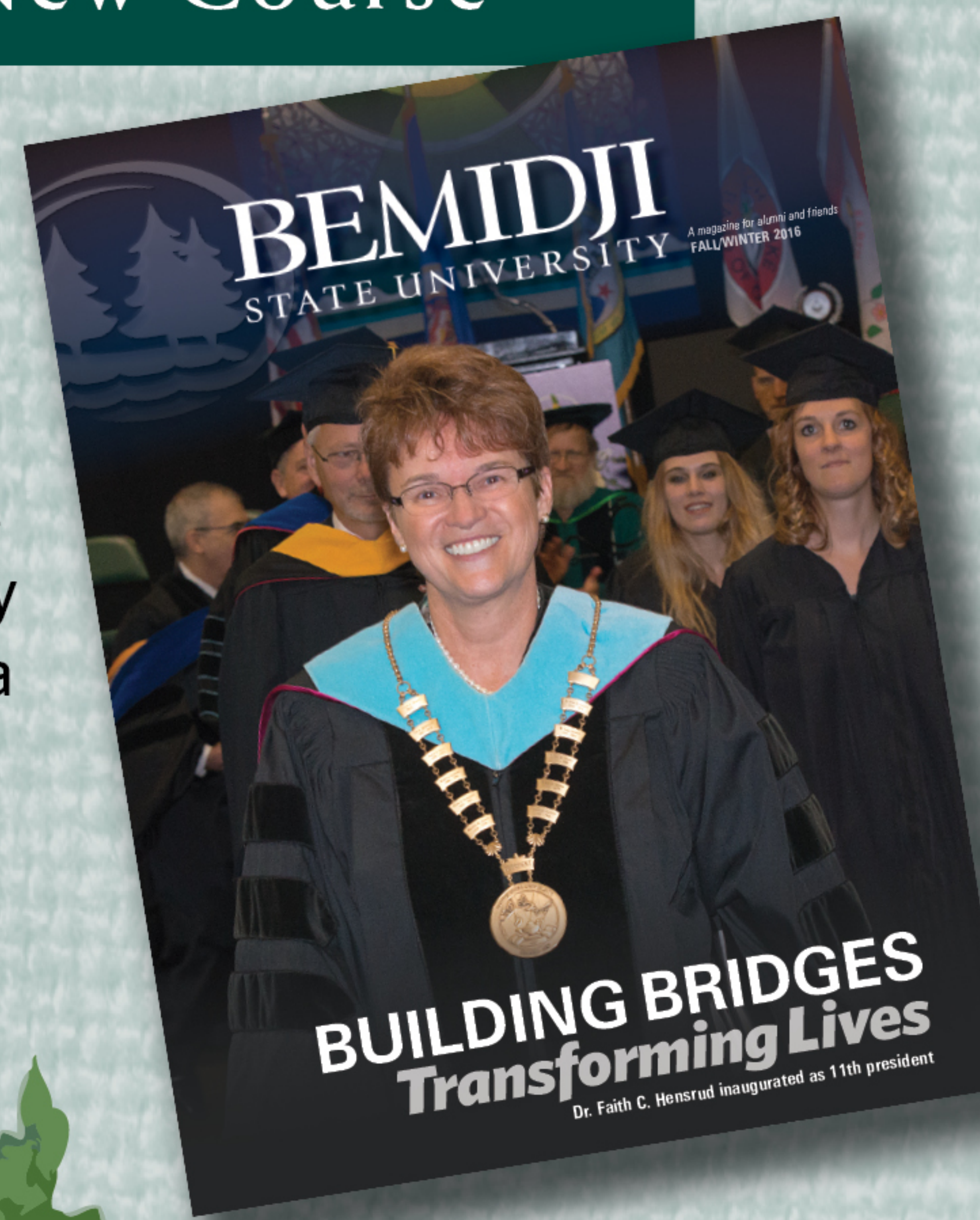
## New President Charts New Course



President Faith C. Hensrud in the 2017 Homecoming Parade.

President Faith Hensrud, who succeeded Dr. Hanson in 2016, enlisted employees almost immediately in development of a five-year university strategic plan for 2018-23. The plan stresses Bemidji State's distinctive

location, strengths and culture, as well as calling for much higher enrollment and employment of people of color, including American Indians, and improved engagement of students and the community. The push for diversity will also support Dr. Hensrud's goal of driving total enrollment toward 6,000.



Fall/winter 2016 edition of  
BSU magazine.



Madrigal  
Dinner,  
2015.