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Ian M. Klein : Young Alumni Award

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2016 Young Alumni Award

Ian M. Klein '10



“The selective and catalytic hydrodeoxygenation of lignin in model components and intact biomass” is hardly a staple of cocktail-party conversations.

What is conversation-worthy, though, is the direction in which research on that topic has taken Ian Klein '10.

Ian's work in the Ph.D. chemistry program at Purdue University can be expressed in more layman-friendly terms as “turning waste products that result from wood processing into useful things.”

The work has global environmental implications, as Forbes Magazine

recognized in 2015, naming Ian one of its “30 Under 30 in Manufacturing and Industry” while he was still pursuing his doctorate.

Also before graduation, Ian helped form Spero Energy, Inc., a start-up company aimed at refining the processes from his research and applying them to the creation of everything from food additives to biofuels. He currently has two patents pending and has written five papers in support of this work.

Ian has won several competitions for seed money for the venture, and most recently Spero was awarded a \$1 million grant to expand its research into technologies that have a “significant economic and societal impact.”

That impact is eagerly anticipated – not just at home but abroad: In 2015, Ian was invited to be a

keynote speaker at the Powered Africa Conference in Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa.

One of those writing in support of Ian’s nomination is a St. Norbert professor who, while acknowledging Ian’s classroom excellence, also said he felt Ian was “fueled by something beyond natural academic talent.” He attributed Ian’s success to a remarkably strong work ethic and the understanding that it was his responsibility to get everything he could out of his education.

Committed to making the most of every bit and piece, and letting nothing go to waste: Ian’s work is a fitting reflection of his life, and for that reason, we are proud to bestow on him the college’s Young Alumni Award.

St. Norbert College

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