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The landing of NASA's Perseverance rover on Mars made me wonder: Have any SNC alumni been to space?

Paul Meske '72

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March 2021

Question:

Dear Abbot Pennings:

The landing of NASA's Perseverance rover on Mars made me wonder: Have any SNC alumni been to space?

Paul Meske '72

Answer:

My dear Paul,

Green Knights in space – goodness me! I could scarcely have comprehended such a scenario in all my years as president of our humbly earthbound college. My, how times have changed!

St. Norbert alumni have certainly taken part in research and development efforts that shaped the evolution of space travel and enabled historic achievements, and you will have read of two such in this very issue of our newsletter – our dear Darrel Mahlik, Class of 1959, and Sara Schreder-Gomes, Class of 2019. While I am not aware of any undergraduate alumni who have traveled to space themselves, I am proud to say that one special St. Norbert degree-holder did just that.

Colonel John Glenn Jr. (1921-2016) held many titles of distinction: Marine fighter pilot in World War II and Korea, one of NASA's original Mercury Seven astronauts, first American to orbit the earth, and United States senator, to name a few. In 1965, three years after Col. Glenn first orbited Earth, my dear confrère and successor as college president, Father Dennis Burke, proudly presented him with an honorary Doctor



Ask the Abbot

As the founder of St. Norbert College, and having a prime seat in the center of campus throughout the years, I, Abbot Bernard Pennings, hold the answers to many of your burning questions about the college.

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of Science degree at Commencement. Col. Glenn addressed the graduating class of 184 students, warning them to expect to make mistakes and to know that the best ideas are not always accepted. Wise words, indeed, delivered by a man strongly influenced by his own undergraduate experience at a small private liberal arts college – Ohio’s Muskingum College (now Muskingum University), where he and his wife, Annie, who also attended, would remain deeply involved throughout their lives.

Col. Glenn was far from finished making history after his pioneering flight in 1962. In 1998, at age 77, he became the oldest person to fly into space, accomplishing that feat not only as an honorary St. Norbert alumnus, but also as a sitting senator.

As I reflect upon the career of Col. Glenn and the triumphs of human ingenuity in space, I cannot help but wonder how our current St. Norbert students will change the world by dreaming beyond the realm of what presently seems possible. After all, it was one such vision that produced, sustained and grew St. Norbert College from a time preceding the first airplane to an era of rovers exploring Mars!

Responses to “Ask the Abbot” questions are penned by St. Norbert College staff in the name of Abbot Bernard Pennings, who founded St. Norbert College in 1898.

St. Norbert College

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