



Kitchen Cabinet

Dinners On Wisconsin bridges the generational divide.

The Dinners On Wisconsin program is supposed to be simple — a networking event to bring students together with alumni who are working in their field of interest, so that the students can learn what the professional world is really like. But sometimes, the education can flow both ways.

About two dozen Dinners On Wisconsin were held last November. Alumni provide food, hospitality, and experience; students bring enthusiasm and questions. The program, designed by the Wisconsin Alumni Student Board (WASB), began in 2004. According to **Aaron McCann x'07**, director of the group's Alumni Connections Committee, it's helped more than five hundred students dine with alumni during the last three years. But it's the intergenerational conversation that makes the events particularly delightful, as the participants in one dinner, held days after the November election, discovered.

The setting was the historic Spaight Street home of long-time Republican operative **Bill Kraus '49**. His co-hosts were

former Democratic Governor **Tony Earl** and **Jay Heck**, head of the Wisconsin chapter of the nonpartisan advocacy group Common Cause. The idea was that old pols would enlighten the students and encourage them to see politics as an honorable profession.

The students dining *chez* Kraus in November already had a good deal of political experience. **Adam Schmidt x'08**, of Campus Young Republicans, served as a White House intern. **Lisbeth Zeggane x'08** worked in the Washington, D.C., and Madison offices of U.S. Senator **Russ Feingold '75**. **Matt Dulak x'08** spent the summer driving Lieutenant Governor **Barbara Lawton MA'91** to campaign events. Rounding out the group were **Nicole Gulatz x'08**, **Nick Osiecki x'08**, and **Heather Walker x'08**.

While they come from different places on the political spectrum, all share the same keen interest in government — and they were happy to share their thoughts on the 2008 presidential election with the gang of seasoned politicians. They offered a quick assessment of the field of candidates:

- Hillary — no.
- Condi — yes.
- Barack — maybe.

Tommy Thompson '63, JD'66 — who?

Mitt Romney, Evan Bayh, Bill Richardson, and John Edwards also got potential thumbs up from the students.

Earl told them he's known Barack Obama for years, as both are on the Joyce Foundation board. Although Obama is now a member of the U.S. Senate, Earl recalled that Obama's first run for Congress ended with "him getting his clock cleaned. He lost two to one."

"You're going to lose," said Kraus, by his count a veteran

of thirty-two campaigns. "But there are worse things than losing," added Earl, "like not playing the game at all." Earl won races for the legislature and governor, but lost re-election as governor and a primary race for U.S. Senate.

The discussion stretched across decades, from Kraus talking about voting against Joe McCarthy at the 1954 state convention, to the students educating the oldsters on the role of Facebook in giving students an online way to support candidates.

"There's a Facebook group called 'Barack Obama: Fun to say and even more fun to support,'" Walker said.

At the same time, the students said they are suspicious of political blogs, as most are too partisan to provide reliable information. The students get their political news from subscriptions to the *Financial Times*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*. Osiecki, who is looking at a career in television journalism, favors MSNBC and CNN.

Some political talk didn't translate between generations. Earl noted the narrow defeats of Senators Conrad Burns of Montana and George Allen of Virginia.

"It's interesting that the last Republicans standing were Burns and Allen," he said, expecting laughter, but getting polite stares. "You know," he prompted. "Like George Burns and Gracie Allen."

But his explanation only received more stares.

Dinners On Wisconsin are held twice annually, in April and November. McCann says that WASB is looking for more alumni to host. Those who are interested should contact him at apmccann@wisc.edu.

— Susan Lampert Smith '82



BOB RASHID

Fred Plotkin '78 (right) talks music with alumni during Opera Up Close, a Wisconsin Alumni Lifelong Learning event held at Madison's Overture Center in January. Plotkin, a frequent commentator for National Public Radio and for the Metropolitan Opera International Radio Broadcasts, is the author of *Opera 101*. The event marked his first return to Madison since graduating, and 132 alumni and friends of the UW attended his lecture.

From Russia with Love

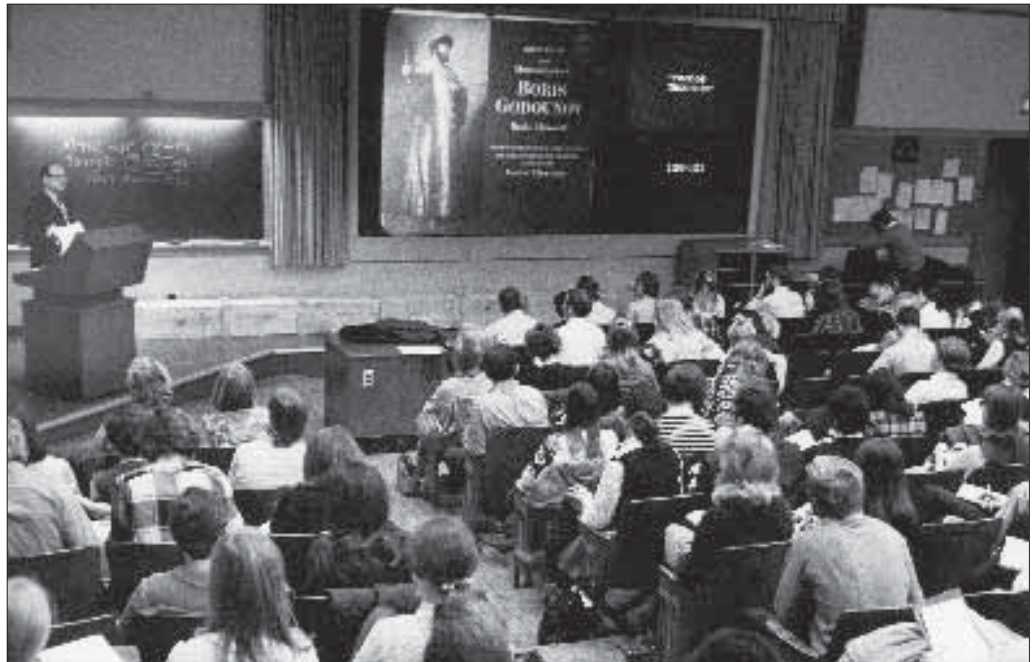
New online course opens the UW's doors to the public.

History will soon repeat itself, thanks to Wisconsin Alumni Lifelong Learning. A professor who last taught in the 1980s will lecture to students once more — not from behind a podium, but over the Internet, through a new online Russian history course geared for the general public.

During the late 1950s, **Michael Petrovich** was a multimedia pioneer. The Russian history professor experimented with slide shows and recorded classes for broadcast on public television. These early endeavors in electronic teaching were tucked away for safekeeping in the UW archives, and Petrovich passed away in 1989. Half a century later, when the history department began digitizing the tapes, chair **David McDonald** realized that Petrovich's lectures could be a powerful outreach tool. So he worked with the Center for Russia, East Europe, and Central Asia (CREECA), the Division of Continuing Studies, and the Wisconsin Alumni Association to create an online course featuring the Petrovich footage.

"Big state public universities have an obligation to discuss what we know with the citizens of our state," says McDonald, "and to try and enrich their lives."

The lectures are available at CREECA's Web site, imp.lss.wisc.edu/~creeca, but the six-week noncredit course, which began in February and runs through March, helps add structure. It explores the development of the Communist movement in Russia from 1883 to the present through Petrovich's lectures, interviews with current UW professors, and newspaper stories from the 1950s. There are two online lectures per week, recommended reading materials, and a message board so



UW-MADISON ARCHIVES

In the 1950s, Michael Petrovich was a pioneer in multimedia teaching. In lectures such as this one, he drew upon the technology of the era, including slides and audio.

participants can share ideas with each other. The Petrovich lectures offer a glimpse of how Americans thought about Russia during the Cold War, and clips from current UW professors explore today's viewpoints.

"You don't have to come to campus to learn from great professors," says **Sarah Schutt**, director of the UW's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. "People can take this course on their own time, in their own homes."

Many of the Petrovich lectures were digitized from their original reel-to-reel film format, and just in the nick of time. After spending decades in the archives, some of the recordings are in danger of being lost to the damaging effects of time. This project may have helped to save a priceless piece of UW history.

"I hope people understand a tradition that Mike really established here," says McDonald. "There's top-notch research and teaching going

on all over campus, and a lot of groundbreaking work that people in the state don't hear about."

A partnership between the Wisconsin Alumni Association and the Division of Continuing Studies, the UW's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute is a membership organization that primarily serves Madison residents over the age of fifty. It provides a variety of stimulating learning opportunities led by UW faculty members on campus and across Wisconsin. After the launch of the Russian history course, Schutt plans to offer more online topics, including fiction-writing and Wisconsin landscapes. A full course schedule can be found at www.uwalumni.com/uwolli.

"These online courses open the UW's doors to everyone," says Schutt. "Learning doesn't just stop once you're done with school. It's something you can enjoy for a lifetime."

— Erin Hueffner '00

Nominate 2008's Distinguished Alumni

Do you know a UW-Madison grad who exemplifies the best of the university? To nominate someone for a Distinguished Alumni Award or Distinguished Young Alumni Award, which recognizes graduates under the age of forty, visit uwalumni.com/awards. The Wisconsin Alumni Association will accept nominations for the 2008 awards until October 15, 2007.