

Tom Protus symposium, Martin's speech

Tom was nominated for the Lamont service award in 2009.

I hear from admin that nominations are supported by as few as 3 letters, Tom had 29!

Diversity of letter writers is remarkable.

1 Undergraduate student

5 graduate students

3 Postdocs

11 Research Scientists

9 technical and administrative support staff

Wordle

So let me summarize these letters for you:

What does Tom do:

You heard a lot about this in the previous presentations

Shahla Ali: Tom's extraordinary effort is vital in keeping current instruments running and developing new instruments for lab and field use.

One of his main jobs is fixing things that probably should be thrown out or recycled.

Pierre Biscaye therefore calls Tom Mr. Fixit

Gisela: For the last decade, I have worked continuously and closely with Tom, often – due to the age and sensitivity of our lab equipment – more than I had hoped for.

Martin: I really don't know who I could keep up my machines without his intimate knowledge of its history.

But Tom goes beyond fixing things

Shahla Ali: Tom's capacity to anticipate and solve issues before they are problems is thoroughly appreciated by everyone getting ready for field-work

Along the same lines

Karrie Radloff: I most appreciate his knowledge about what tools I might need should something need repaired; this has saved me precious field time!

Moanna St. Clair: He's the man who stops a leak before it comes to a flood.

Develop new tools and instruments

Martin: On numerous occasions, Tom has constructed new instruments for me. Tom is unusually invested in his work and really thinks thoroughly about what he does. It is a great pleasure to build new things with him, because these projects turn into joint developments and instruments always turn out to be a lot more functional than I ever envisioned them myself. Many people rely on his services and it must be hard to manage all these demands, yet in my experience, things get always finished by the deadline, sometimes only by a tiny sliver of a margin, but they get done.

Gary: His creativity and willingness to think outside the box makes him stand out in the Lamont community. I think of him more as a collaborator on projects rather than just technical help.

Tim Newberger: In my many interactions with Tom, his breadth of knowledge and experience has always assured a solution to any problem presented. He sets a great example for us all.

Karen Wovkulich: Tom has always done an amazing job, tending to the finest details and getting things done on impossible deadlines. Even with the diverse and numerous demands of the geochemistry department Tom finds time to give your project the personal attention it requires and he always does it with a smile.

Marty: He brings to the job a set of skills that I believe are disappearing. He also interacts extremely well with the service engineers who come on site. More than one of these people remarked how lucky we are to have someone like Tom in our division.

One of his very special contributions was during the move from the ‘pigpen’ as it was described by Gary Comer to the new building in 2008:

Louise Bolge: He has helped resurrect most if not all the instruments that have been moved to the new Comer building. This is not an easy feat considering some of the machines are as old as the graduate students.

Bill Smethie: Tom was invaluable in this move, disconnecting and then reconnecting complex instruments and coordinating the electrical work in the new labs that was needed to power the instruments.

Gisela: Each single move of the labs went fine, much smoother than expected, and this is to a large extent, beyond the support provided by Dick Greco and his team, due to Tom’s involvement and anticipation. Tom’s pivotal role in supporting the move of the geochemistry labs to the new building came on top of his “main job” (or his many “main jobs”), supporting all the electronic and mechanic needs of the geochemistry labs.

How does he do it?

There are many demands on Tom’s time. He keeps everything going and develops new tools and instruments. This can result in conflicts.

Baerbel put it this way: The best and worst about him is that he takes care of emergencies immediately.

Steve: Due to this demanding and uncontrollable work load (i.e., instrument

breakdowns), Tom ends up spending many a night or weekend at work to allow scientists to make their deadlines.

Pierre: When I have been preparing to leave for a cruise or field excursion to Greenland, Tom has gone home late for supper and then returned at night to finish the job for me.

Moanna: His home phone number, 845-268-3722, is known to all and you can call him whenever with a problem.

Sidney: Tom is the guy you can count on night and day and on the weekends. My most extreme example is late Saturday night during the July 4 weekend a few years ago, Tom came in to help me with a problem in the lab. His extreme dedication to the job is mind-boggling.

Let me take this opportunity to apologize to Tom's family about those many hours we took Tom away from you. We are extremely thankful that you let him come to Lamont on holidays and at odd times.

Ronny Friedrich: Even more than his professional work I appreciate Tom Protus for his personal qualities. Despite his busy schedule, were he often handles multiple projects at the same time, he's always patient, kind, listens patiently and gives advice. Working with Tom Protus is enjoyable. The way he does his work is beyond all my expectations.

Steve Goldstein: Tom is great colleague. He is always cheerful, and interacts extremely well with PIs, post docs, students, technicians and engineers. He is one of those people that everybody likes. We are lucky to have someone with Tom's experience, dedication, and patience to keep our labs running.

Karen Benedetto: If he doesn't know something (which is unlikely) he finds it out. His attitude is always upbeat, no matter how much work he has on his plate.

How important are Tom and his services to us:

Stephen Cox: I cannot count the number of times that we have encountered a major problem in the lab, often with several well-paid PhD scientists standing in the room, only to hear someone state the obvious: "we better call Tom!" Whether a pump on the mass spec is malfunctioning, or the power back-up is overloaded, or we spilled water all over one of the machines, the answer is always the same: call Tom. However, during that short time I have learned from the PIs, graduate students, and other lab staff that Tom is the gear that keeps the division running.

Linda Baker: Besides being a professional and personal pleasure to work with, the depth and breadth of Tom's knowledge and experience is priceless to those of us trying to keep valuable aging and obsolete lab equipment operating. He is fundamentally essential to the success of much of the new and ongoing research accomplished here at Lamont.

Paul Schmieder: The following is a common perception among Ph.D. students in geochemistry: Tom has been a pivotal resource for the completion of my Ph.D. Without his knowledge in the construction of my scientific equipment, my research would have suffered. He is knowledgeable, courteous, and a strong root in the Geochemistry community.

David McGee: Work in the geochemistry labs would quickly grind to a halt without him!

Jamie Ross: I don't know what we would do without him.

Patty Catanzaro: Tom is a Star!

Shahla Ali: Tom Protus is described as the soul of the geochemistry division by everyone who works with him.

Baerbel had this thought: I wish we could clone him and keep him forever.

Let me close with Moanna: Tom honors Lamont with his presence, his work ethic, and the kind of person that we have all come to depend on. He is truly priceless. For everything else there are NSF, DOE, NIH, and yes - MasterCard.