J. Garth Thompson, born in 1935 in Logan, Utah, graduated from Brigham Young University with a BES degree, where he designed and built a plasma generator for evaluating missile nose-cone material ablation characteristics for his senior project. He completed his M.S., 1961, and Ph.D., 1966, in mechanical engineering from Purdue University, focusing on automatic controls. Thompson then worked in the mechanical engineering department at the University of Texas, Austin, developing its automatic controls program, before he joined the mechanical engineering faculty as department head at Kansas State University in 1971.

Thompson was hired with a plan to increase research activities in the department, which he said at that time, he had underestimated how much work it would take. With a change in deans, he asked to step down as department head in order to spend more time developing his own research resume. The following year, he wrote four proposals and secured four externally funded projects. Since then, he has been PI or Co-PI on more than 40 projects valued at more than $10 million.

In 1984, Thompson was the founding director of the Center for Research in Computer-Controlled Automation – a State of Kansas Center of Excellence, which later evolved into the Advanced Manufacturing Institute (AMI). More recently, he was the director of the engineering partnership between Kansas State University and Kabul University in Kabul, Afghanistan. In that capacity, he lived and represented K-State in Kabul for three years. Thompson is pleased with the stature of having a strong research department. While he has had a number of research projects over the years, his focus has been on automatic controls. One research project sponsored by NASA in 1968 included making a computer-interactive, automatic control design system, including linear and nonlinear elements. In 1974 another project included using one of the then new eight-bit microcomputers to control the fuel injection of an internal combustion engine in order to study the use of a combination of hydrogen and gasoline to fuel the engine. With rapid advances in instrumentation and micro-controllers, he continues to work in improving and preparing undergraduate and graduates to pursue careers in automatic controls.

Throughout his years at K-State, Thompson has enjoyed working with students and the diverse set of opportunities and challenges. Thompson has been major professor for 36 M.S. students and nine Ph.D. students. He served another period as head of the department from 1997 to 2001, during the early integration of the mechanical and nuclear engineering departments.

While in the department, he has taught the undergraduate automatic controls course and laboratory. More recently, he has taught the senior design courses, which he thoroughly enjoys. Along with undergraduate teaching and research, Thompson has been involved with the student aviation competition teams. Seeing the teams succeed in designing, building and flying their aviation systems has been a highlight of his work at K-State.
I would like to wish you a happy and joyful holiday season. This newsletter presents some of the notable events and successes of the students and faculty in our department over the past year. We hope you enjoy the progress that the MNE department had in 2011.

Thank you for your support and interest in the MNE department, its faculty and its students. We strive to offer great undergraduate and graduate programs, but as you know, are challenged by reduced financial resources. The support we obtain from other sources such as research grants and contracts, as well as private donations, is crucial to the department. In the thermal science area, we hired a new assistant professor and a temporary instructor, Dr. Amy Betz and Dr. Kevin Wanklyn, respectively. Additionally, Sarah Buchanan has joined the department’s staff as our academic program coordinator. See page 3 for more information on our new faculty and staff.

During late October, the College of Engineering, including the MNE department, was visited by ABET, the engineering accreditation agency. The faculty, through the coordination efforts of Dr. Kevin Lease and Dr. Bill Dunn, and assisted by the department’s undergraduate committee, developed an excellent “study self-report” which served as the main document used by ABET in the review of our program. The ABET review process is still underway and will continue until the upcoming summer. The MNE department will be fully ABET accredited at the end of the review.

As with previous years, this past year for me in the MNE department has been highly rewarding. The department’s faculty, students and staff have been very active this year with new and updated class materials and new directions in research. We are expecting much productivity from these changes in the future. Connecting with alumni has been a great deal of fun this past year, and I hope to meet many more of you in the coming year.

Our undergraduate students have competed well in their design competitions, learning considerably from the activities they have experienced. Additionally, the senior design projects, as usual, created innovative solutions to actual industrial problems, which highlight the excellent capabilities of our students and faculty. Further, we were fortunate to have NASA and Lockheed Martin sponsor a senior design project this past year, providing students the opportunity to work with Orion, the next manned spacecraft. I wish to thank the companies that have contributed to these great projects, thereby making our capstone design course such a success. Our graduate students, along with their faculty advisors, have made excellent progress with their research and with updating several of the research laboratories in the department.

As you know, the MNE department is the combination of its faculty, staff and alumni. Thanks so very much for your continued interest and support.

Donald L. Fenton, Ph.D.
Department Head

MNE department hosts international conference

In the summer 2011, the MNE department hosted the eighth International Topical Meeting on Industrial Radiation and Radiosotope Measurement Applications (IRRMA). More than 90 international scientists from over 25 countries attended the conference. William Dunn, MNE associate professor and general chair for the session, Ken Shultis, MNE professor and chair of the K-State session, and Douglas McGregor, MNE professor, were all instrumental in the success of the conference. McGregor gave a workshop prior to the meeting on detection of ionizing radiation. While the conference was based in Kansas City, the attendees traveled to Manhattan to visit the K-State TRIGA research reactor and the Semiconductor Materials and Radiological Technologies (S.M.A.R.T.) laboratory. The conference and workshop have led to several invitations for international collaborations with K-State.

Sarah Buchanan joined the MNE department staff in February as academic program coordinator. She is well-equipped for this position having an M.S. in counseling and student development from Kansas State University, along with several years of professional experience as assistant coordinator at the Office of Student Activities and Services on campus. Her responsibilities in the department include handling undergraduate student advising and graduate student admissions, in conjunction with maintaining all student records. Outside of the department, Buchanan enjoys visiting family and exploring other areas of the country.

Kevin Wanklyn joined us to take some of the “heat” and taught our introductory thermodynamics course this past summer. Wanklyn is now fully engaged teaching three thermal science courses this fall, including ME 513 Thermodynamics 1, team teaching ME 573 Heat Transfer with Mo Hosni, and ME 633 Thermodynamics of Modern Power Cycles. He received his Ph.D. in mechanical engineering from Kansas State University in 2008. Before joining the department, Wanklyn was an applications engineer for seven years at Uncopters, Inc., Manhattan, Kan. He and his wife, Melissa, are proud parents of their son, Jonah, born last summer.

Amy Betz joined the department this fall as a faculty member specializing in microfluids and heat transfer. She finished her Ph.D. research this past summer at Columbia University, moving to Manhattan shortly after in time to begin the fall semester at K-State. Betz has personally fabricated complex microfluidic devices she had specially designed to study the features of these flows. Currently, she is developing a new laboratory in the department to support research in microfluids, which will include equipment to fabricate the experiments. She and her husband, Paul, are learning about and enjoying the many activities in Manhattan and the surrounding area.

MNE welcomes new faculty and staff

In the fall 2011, the MNE department began offering a minor in nuclear engineering. The minor is offered through the K-State Division of Continuing Education, where courses are taught by Kansas State University as well as other Big 12 Engineering Consortium schools. The minor is available to students attending any engineering program in the country that is ABET accredited.

While many of the courses are offered online, there are laboratory courses that require two weeks to be spent on campus to conduct experiments. The minor is a 15-credit-hour program, and students must complete the required courses with a grade of C or better, and a minimum cumulative 2.5 GPA.

Nuclear minor now offered

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The American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) hosted a new university-wide design competition, Whip’n Around Campus, during the University Open House in April. Teams designed a weed-eater-powered bicycle to compete in several different competitions. The bicycle had to be completely powered by a two-stroke engine.

Whip’n Around Campus was comprised of three different competitive events. The competition started with a lapped race, taking participants on a route around campus. Second, a drag race of 50 feet was won by the first team crossing the line. Third, a maximum speed competition was designed to see who could get the most speed going downhill from the Engineering Complex to the Alumni Center.

Seven teams showed up to compete, but unfortunately due to malfunctioning engines, only two teams were able to race. For the Formula Team, the main difficulty was staying on the bike and getting it started from a dead stop. Team Slow Bike, made up of freshmen in mechanical engineering, won the first-ever Whip’n Around Campus competition.

ASME is already in the process of making next year’s competition bigger. The aim of Whip’n Around Campus is to provide students the opportunity to see beyond the classroom, putting into motion real-world applications of mechanical engineering in a fun, exciting competition.

Crystal Hinterweger
MNE senior

In February, the MNE department was privileged to have alum Jim Gieber, ’63, recognized as the 2011 College of Engineering Alumni Fellow. Gieber is CEO of Shrink Packaging Systems (SPS), an innovative distributor of packaging solutions, which he co-founded in 1970.

After graduation, Gieber joined DuPont at its cellulose film plant in Clinton, Iowa. While at DuPont, he worked on a number of patent-producing projects and was promoted to provide engineering support to major customers. Soon after, he recognized the opportunity for a company that represented both the film and equipment manufacturers to better serve customers with single-source responsibility.

For more than 40 years, the work of SPS has led to the development of new technology beneficial to the growth of the packaging industry. In 1999, SPS was presented with Kraft Foods “Supplier of Excellence” for its work in the aseptic packaging industry. Innovations have included patents on a high-speed straw and security tag applicator and a high-speed side sealer, known as the “Green Machine.” Currently, SPS has four locations and 63 associates, with sales of more than $33 million.

Gieber is a charter member of the National Independent Packaging Association (NIPA) and Lantech’s Advisory Council. Recently, he and SPS were honored with the Bemis Clysar Distributor of the Year award at Pack Expo in Chicago.

Jeffrey Hicks, ME doctoral candidate, was one of six K-State students to receive a 2011 National Science Foundation (NSF) Graduate Research Fellowship. The award recognizes outstanding students pursuing research-based master’s and doctoral degrees in science, technology, engineering or mathematics. Each NSF student fellow receives more than $120,000 over a three-year period, which includes a yearly stipend of $30,000, as well as $10,500 in lieu of tuition and fees.

Hicks graduated magna cum laude from K-State in 2010 with bachelor’s degrees in mathematics and physics, and a minor in music. His research focus is on fluid mechanics, with an emphasis on cavitation.

In November, the MNE Women organization hosted its first-ever carbonated car competition. Teams were required to build a car that would hold a two-liter bottle of carbonated soft drink. At the starting line, Mentos were added to the soft drink in order to create enough power to move the vehicles. Six student groups from around campus showed up for the challenge, where the winning car would be the one that finished furthest distance from the start line.

Champions of the fun and sticky competition were “The Seniors” from chemical engineering.
The Kansas State Student Unmanned Aerial Systems (SUAS) team is a student group focused on utilization of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to solve complex missions. In particular, the group competes in the Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International (AUVSI) sponsored SUAS competition. Here, teams are asked to implement an unmanned system capable of transmitting information back and forth to a ground station for data processing.

Last year, the KSU SUAS design team competed for the first time. The team’s mission included an autonomous takeoff and landing, autonomous control with in-flight re-tasking, autonomous target identification and real-time actionable intelligence. In a competition of 26 international teams, the KSU “Team Spycat” placed 5th overall, beating such prestigious universities as UT - Austin and Cornell, and even the most prestigious aeronautical university, Embry-Riddle. The KSU SUAS team placed 7th in the mission category and 6th in the journal category to help secure its high ranking.

The team started with 12 members from various engineering disciplines including mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, computer engineering, and computer science. In order to be more competitive, the team has already tripled in size and is expanding its budget rapidly, allowing for more opportunities for students to get involved and contribute to developing a high-functioning autonomous vehicle. To solve the mission objectives, the team has split up resources across the following dedicated groups:

- autopilot
- camera
- computing/transmission
- data analysis
- airframe
- systems integration
- peripheral equipment
- fundraising

Each group includes students from different engineering disciplines, all contributing towards a working component. Due to the complexity and dependency on one another, each student interacts with every other group member in order to truly understand all the operations that will occur, and to become familiar with a real-world design experience.

In 2011, the K-State Mini Baja team was fortunate enough to compete at the water competition in Birmingham, Ala., and the Midwest competition in Pittsburg, Kan. They were a very young team this year, with none of the members having any experience with a water competition.

The Baja team tested its design skills by putting a lot of thought and time into designing flotation devices for the car. Once they had a solid design, they did extensive testing and found minor issues but nothing that couldn’t be fixed. When the team took the Baja car to Alabama, they surprised not only themselves but several other teams as well by earning 17th place in water maneuverability and 18th overall in the competition.

For the Pittsburg competition, it was K-State Mini Baja’s goal to show other competitors they were the top Kansas team and pull out a top-10 finish overall in the competition. The team was a top contender in the endurance race until they were hit by another team. The force of the hit on the steering system was too much and several teeth were sheared off in the steering gearbox. Unfortunately, it took just over an hour to fix the problem and get back into the race, which led to a disappointing 54th place finish overall.

After neither competition yielded a top-10 finish, the Mini Baja team is determined to turn things around next year during their trip to Auburn, Ala., in the spring. With a brand new car, the team should have a greater chance of success.
K-State’s SAE Formula Car team at full speed ahead

Powercat Motorsports continues to press forward with the design and manufacturing of its car. The 2011 car, “Panther,” was built with simple, light and reliable design principles in mind. The new design went on an extreme diet losing 20% of its weight from the previous model. After being put on a chassis dynamometer, the Yamaha R6 engine produces 78 horsepower and 40 ft-lbs of torque at the rear wheels. After adding a full aero package and fine tuning the suspension, the team is hoping for one of the fastest cars in the nation.

In June 2011, the team traveled to Fontana, Calif., to compete for the FSAE West title. They started off by tuning the suspension, the team is adding a full aero package and fine tuning the suspension, the team is hoping for one of the fastest cars in the nation.

Since the competition in June, the team has been extremely busy pursuing new sponsors, testing and racing. Six members traveled to race in Arlington, Texas, for two days in late July. Tim Mountam and Eric Cunningham represented Powercat Motorsports at SCCA Nationals in Lincoln, Neb., in August. The team continues to practice at Salina SCCA Solo events. During each test, they see more speed in the cars and the drivers becoming faster. It is their goal to gain knowledge and speed while striving for nothing less than a win at the next national competition in Brooklyn, Mich., in May 2012.

The design of the 2012 car, “Lynx,” is well underway as the team has begun manufacturing it, which has given them their fastest start to date. Lynx will weigh in at a miniscule 350 lbs., with a Yamaha YFZ450R powerplant and fully optimized aero package. Most other designs on this car will be revisions of “Panther’s” designs, in order to speed up the build cycle. Moving into the winter, the team will push through the manufacturing of the car in order to complete it by February 2012. Then it will be time for extensive testing and optimizing every section of the car.

Follow the team’s progress at powercatmotorsports.com, and go to Facebook and “like” the group, Powercat Motorsports, to keep in the loop.

Eric Cunningham
MNE junior

The K-State SAE Aero Design team is getting back to work after a record-setting 2011 season. With the payload bay dimension rule being lifted last year, the team designed a unique cylindrical fuselage for its plane, the Purple Albatross. Other features included a new airfoil and landing gear designed to yield upon landing.

The first competition was Aero Design West in Fort Worth, Texas. Despite 30-mile-per-hour winds, the Purple Albatross was able to lift a total payload of 28.72 lbs, a K-State Aero Design record. The team placed 2nd overall in the Regular Class and lifted the third-heaviest payload, continuing its streak of top-three finishes at Aero Design West for the 5th year.

A few weeks later, the team traveled to Marietta, Ga., for Aero Design East. After enjoying a tour of the Lockheed Martin facilities in Marietta, which included assembly lines for the F-22 Raptor and C-130 Hercules, the team set out to continue the success experienced at the West competition. After a test flight with a new pilot resulted in a crash, the team decided to hand over the controls to team member Josh Goertz. An evening of hard work had the plane good as new for the first day of competition. Trees lining the field meant short, fast approaches for landing. After a few crash landings, the Purple Albatross completed its only successful scored flight of the competition, a heroic piloting effort that used every bit of airspace available. Despite the last minute pilot change and difficulties faced in getting the plane back to the ground in one piece, the team was able to finish 14th overall. Even though the final results were disappointing, the team learned valuable information including validation of the repairability and durability of the design.

Currently, the team is finishing up the design and beginning to construct its airplane for the 2012 season. They will travel to Van Nuys, Calif., and a new airfield in Marietta, Ga., for competition this spring. A vast amount of knowledge was lost to graduation but interest has been high and a number of newcomers has the team excited and confident in the program’s ability to succeed this year and in the future.

Chris James
MNE senior

Purple Albatross lifts aero team to new heights

Left: Team after Aero West competition, front l to r: Kelly Jones, Chris Johnston, Janessa Wedel (team leader) and Josh Goertz; back l to r: Erik Hellmer, Jon Albrecht, Rick Byrd (pilot), Chris James and Bob Reagan

Above, l to r: Chris Johnston, Jon Albrecht, Erik Hellmer and Bob Reagan retrieve the Purple Albatross after a successful flight. Below left: Josh Goertz performs a final tune up before a flight attempt, while Chris James holds aircraft.
NASA wants K-State senior design team to fail...a jet engine

ME 574 and ME 575 is a two-semester senior design capstone course for aspiring mechanical and nuclear engineers at Kansas State University. Many local and distant companies provide senior design projects that challenge students to research, design, prototype and produce a working product upon the company’s request. Students gain firsthand knowledge and real-world engineering experience through these projects. NASA Dryden Flight Research Center (DFRC) in California has definitely provided an interesting senior design project for one team.

In the world of aviation, it is vital to know what conditions aircraft can handle safely during flight. Aircraft can potentially encounter a wide variety of hazards, ranging from ingesting foreign objects into the engines to flying through clouds of volcanic ash. The NASA DFRC works to monitor vehicle health in its vehicle integrated propulsion research (VIPR) program. The first two phases, VIP I and II, aim to collect engine data under both regular operating conditions and simulated fault conditions. The third phase, VIP III, will analyze engine performance and degradation while the engine is subjected to a simulated cloud of volcanic ash over an extended period of time.

The NASA senior design team’s involvement in this project concerns the ash distribution method for VIP III testing. Basically, the team is designing a mechanism to kick out volcanic ash, which will be sucked into a USAF C-17 aircraft engine. The team meets on a weekly basis via videoconference with engineers from NASA DFRC and NASA Glenn Research Center. By carefully controlling and measuring the amount of ash ingested by an engine, further insight into engine degradation over time due to volcanic ash ingestion will be obtained. Since the Icelandic volcano in April 2010 shut down most air travel over Europe, the need for researching volcanic ash ingestion effects has increased. Understanding the effects of volcanic ash ingestion will result in a safer environment for not only military aircraft, but also within commercial aviation.

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Yes, I wish to demonstrate my support for the students, faculty and MNE department programs with my gift of

- $500
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Telefund 2011 reminder

Just a quick reminder that engineering students will be calling you the week of February 13–17, during Telefund 2011. When you get your call, please consider letting the caller know your gift is designated to the department of mechanical and nuclear engineering.

Return to:

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