

# Kinsels' chemistry lends itself to public, university service

*by Tim Crosby*

Making career and family life work is always a challenge. Two researchers at SIU have not only figured out how to do that, but give a lot of extra time and service, too.

Gary and Mary Kinsel spend their work days delving into the intricate interactions of chemicals in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, where Gary is a professor and Mary an associate scientist. Both work with cutting-edge equipment and take special interest in further research at all levels.

But when they're not pushing the envelope of what is known, they can be found up to their ears in other activities aimed at giving young people a good start in life.

## **Public service a priority**

Since 2005, both have been co-advisors to the Beta Psi chapter of the Alpha Chi Sigma professional chemistry fraternity, which they helped reactivate upon arriving at SIU. The group performs all kinds of community outreach activities including science demonstrations and science fair judging.

In 2008, Mary also took over organizing a long-time SIU tradition – the Great Cardboard Boat Regatta – under the auspices of the fraternity, working ever since to expand the involvement of campus and community groups and businesses.

Last spring, there were 117 participants with 35 boats and several thousand spectators in attendance, helping ensure the Saluki tradition will be around for years to come.

## **Scouting leadership brings annual event to SIU**

The pair also are heavily involved in scouting, serving as leaders and fundraisers.

Gary organized the annual STEM NOVA Universities event at SIU, which started in 2016 and typically brings 250 to 450 scouts and adult volunteers to the SIU campus for a variety of merit badge and STEM related activities.

Many SIU faculty and student organizations also participate.

Gary serves on the board of directors for the Southern Illinois Science Center, as well.

The pair stays busy with other service activities, and their entire family has performed in three Nutcracker ballets and Gary has been an “extra” in two Southern Illinois Music Festival operas.

### **Volunteers make a community run**

“The simple fact is that so much of what enriches a community happens through what are basically volunteer organizations,” Gary said. “While we are both strong believers in the fundamental importance of volunteerism, the reality is that organizations like professional fraternities and scouting, and events like the Cardboard Boat Regatta and STEM related activities could not survive without all of the individuals that volunteer their time to help out.”

Mary agreed.

“For us, it has always been the case that ... if there is something that we can do to help out, then we should,” Mary said. “While it is true that there are times that we both consider how nice it might be to just sit home, it seems that there’s always something new and exciting to get involved in.

“Plus, there are times when it’s just plain fun to be involved – especially when you can look back after some activity has been completed and really see the positive impact you had on the people involved, the university and the community.”

### **Pairing up on getting things done**

Working as a couple brings a lot of advantages, as well.

“For the most part, we work very well together,” Mary said. “We have to admit that once in a while being involved with and organizing so many things can cause some stress. But, more often, we end up supporting each other in whatever happens to be going on.”

Gary said the team approach only amplifies their efforts.

“Ultimately we’re both involved to different degrees in almost everything we do,” Gary said. “In fact, there can be some real advantages to this approach. Both of us find out about resources and contacts within the community and the university that we can share with each other to help with whatever activity the other person is involved in.”