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Keep an eye out for Jim Hall, new Morris IT director, on campus and in the community

Summary: Hall has had his eye on Morris for some time. Now, keep an eye out for him on campus and for new IT happenings.

(August 26, 2010)-Jim Hall, the University of Minnesota, Morris's new director of information technology (IT), has had his eye on Morris—both the campus and the community—for some time. For the last 12 years, he's served in the Office of Information Technology (OIT) on the Twin Cities campus. In his most recent role as senior manager for OIT operations and infrastructure, Hall partnered with Morris colleagues and learned the campus's strengths, challenges, and opportunities. He's more than excited about the campus's future and energized by the collaborative spirit he's experiencing.

An introduction to information technology

Opportunities during his undergraduate years at the University of Wisconsin, River Falls, inspired Hall's passion for computers and IT. The physics and math major completed two internships, the first involving computerized data at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory and the second involving computer programming. These opportunities fueled experiences that set him down his career path. For example, in reaction to Microsoft's 1994 announcement that DOS would be eliminated, he founded the FreeDOS Project, an open source implementation of MS-DOS. As coordinator, Hall built an active worldwide community of independent developers. FreeDOS is available as a pre-installed operating system option on certain HP and Dell computers.

"The DOS project really started my career aspirations and also characterizes my career," says Hall. "I won't let a problem 'sit around.' I find a way to respond. That's what I plan to do here at Morris, too."

Morris's strengths and opportunities

Hall will support the University's mission through strategic development and implementation of academic, administrative, and network technologies. His experience at the Twin Cities campus will benefit Morris, says Hall. "I managed a large portion of IT. I know the people in the Twin Cities who I need to talk to in order to get things done here at Morris. I can 'cut right through' to the right person."

As the campus becomes acquainted with Hall, he, too, has begun experiencing Morris campus qualities. "Everyone here at Morris is interested in helping you be successful. It is refreshing. They ask, 'What can we do to help you?' I love that."

A five-year IT plan is on Hall's "to-do list," and he's also working on two projects that will begin during this academic year. First is a transition to Gmail by Google for e-mail communication. Having one e-mail client on campus will reduce costs and will improve service to users. The second project is an active directory that allows a single user name and password for all programs and shared network drives, simplifying the sharing of documents and increasing efficiency.

"Ultimately, my goal for IT is for it to be transparent and easy," says Hall. "The campus should not even have to think

about it at all. It is just there.”

Hall, who grew up in Stillwater, and wife Sara Rouser are enjoying their new Morris home and “small town spirit.”

“Moving to Morris from St. Paul has not been that big of a transition,” shares Hall. “We have a great house. We love walking everywhere—to work, downtown, out for dinner, to the movie theatre. We like the small town atmosphere, and we are glad to be in Morris.”

Reflecting his IT background, Hall enjoys video gaming, and he and Rouser are both avid readers and gardeners.

Keep an eye out for Hall on Big Block of Cheese Day

Hall, with a smile, suggests that the campus and community now “keep an eye out” for him. He’s planning a President Andrew Jackson-like “Big Block of Cheese Day” on campus, and he might not be hard to spot in the crowd.

“Jackson was known for making himself available,” says Hall. “In 1885, he received a huge block of cheese as a gift, and he invited the public to the White House to enjoy it with him. While my event may not include a 1,400 pound block of cheddar, I will be serving cheese, and I’ll be available for questions.”

His dress for the special occasion, a kilt, will reflect another Hall attribute, his Scottish heritage.

As Morris IT director, Hall reports to Lowell Rasmussen, vice chancellor for finance and facilities at Morris and Steve Cawley, University of Minnesota vice president for information technology and chief information officer. In addition to his campus responsibilities, Hall also represents the University of Minnesota to the Committee on Institutional Cooperation, a Big Ten collective that explores technology issues.

Photo credit: Ben Zvan

Through personal and academic discovery, the University of Minnesota, Morris provides opportunities for students to grow intellectually, engage in community, experience environmental stewardship and celebrate diversity. A renewable and sustainable educational experience, Morris prepares graduates for careers, for advanced degrees, for lifelong learning, for work world flexibility in the future, and for global citizenship. Learn more about Morris at morris.umn.edu or call 888-866-3382.