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## Jon Hoferle of Barrington Hills, Ill. Student Learns Critical Thinking Skills from Road Kill

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Sept. 30, 1997

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*Hometown***Jon Hoferle of Barrington Hills, Ill.**

## **Student Learns Critical Thinking Skills from Road Kill**

**Editor's Note:** This story is part of an occasional series of articles about the backgrounds, interests, and experiences Illinois Wesleyan University students.

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--Their names are Joe and Barb. They're stuffed squirrels--road kill residue--and they "live" in Jon Hoferle's garage.

Joe and Barb are relics of a high school class taken by Hoferle, who now is a National Merit and Presidential Scholar at Illinois Wesleyan University.

Hoferle dabbled in taxidermy as a high school sophomore at William Fremd High School in Palatine, Ill., as part of a class designed to sharpen students' critical thinking skills.

The IWU freshman became an amateur taxidermist because, he said, "I wanted to do something different--something I hadn't been exposed to."

Armed with a phone book, Hoferle found a mentor--a taxidermist in Rolling Meadows, Ill.--after three or four calls.

"He was real busy," Hoferle said, referring to the taxidermist, "so I went to his shop, brought my animal, and worked on my own."

Hoferle also began learning the taxidermy trade by watching a video, recalling "it was difficult."

"I worked exclusively with squirrels--two of them," Hoferle said. "The first one came off a local highway. It was difficult to work with since it was hit by a car going fast and its bones were pretty shattered. It made it difficult to get the skin off--blood and internal organs were close to the skin."

Hoferle's chief taxidermy tool was a scalpel--a remnant of his mother's college career--which he used to slice open the squirrel's chest, removing the skin from fat.

"It smelled bad," he said. "I had to hold back my gagging reflex."

The dead squirrel's aroma--akin to rotting meat--was hard to shake. It lingered, Hoferle said, for at least 24 hours under his fingernails and on his hands.

A trick to taxidermy, according to Hoferle, is to make sure there

**(more)**

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are no holes in the skin, the main part of the project. After removing the skin, he "pickled" it in denatured alcohol. The skin was stretched over a squirrel mannequin and pasted to it.

"I learned a great deal," Hoferle said. "I learned how to do something I had never done before and to do it by myself without guidance from someone who was an expert in the field. I had to function on my own and solve my own problems. I didn't have anyone to turn to."

Hoferle was age 15 when he experimented with taxidermy, recalling, "It gave me a great sense of accomplishment on a tough journey. I did it."

Hoferle has not decided on a major at IWU. He is looking at the natural sciences and languages since he likes to travel.

Hoferle is among 22 National Merit Scholars in IWU's 1997 freshman class of 560 students. As a group, these 22 freshman IWU National Merit Scholars averaged a score of 32.1 on the American College Test (ACT), a widely used college entrance exam with a top score of 36. They also averaged a score of 1420 on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), another popular college entrance exam with a maximum score of 1600.

He also is among 15 freshmen who were named IWU Presidential Scholars earlier this month. Collectively, the Presidential Scholars averaged 1461 on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). The Presidential Scholars' Program, established in 1978, recognizes entering freshmen distinguished for their past achievements and future promise. They are students who have taken on many challenges in and out of the classroom. Selections for the academic honor are based on personal interviews and application materials.

Hoferle lives at 7 Eagle Pointe Dr., Barrington Hills, Ill.

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 1,900 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and its Schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art, and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletic center, a \$25 million science building, a \$6.8 million residence hall, and a \$5.1 million liberal arts center. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching ranks Illinois Wesleyan a "Baccalaureate I" institution, a classification that places it among the 159 highly selective National Liberal Arts Colleges. IWU won the 1997 NCAA Division III men's basketball championship.