



News Release

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WESTERN PROFESSOR HONORED WITH NAMING OF A SPECIES

St. Joseph, Mo. —Oct. 6, 2004—The isopod is blind, has no pigment, can only be found in a cave in southern Missouri and is only one-quarter inch long. But the recent naming of that tiny invertebrate was a very big honor for Dr. David Ashley, professor of biology at Missouri Western State College.

Brackenridgia ashleyi is now the official name of the species that was discovered in the late 1970s in Tumbling Creek Cave near Protem, Mo. in the rural Ozarks. Julian Lewis, the taxonomist who described and named the invertebrate, wrote that he chose the name to honor Dr. Ashley in recognition of his years of outstanding effort monitoring the ecosystem of Tumbling Creek Cave.

“It was totally unexpected,” said Dr. Ashley of the naming. He said he was very honored that an isopod species was named after him, and that “indirectly, it also honors Missouri Western students because it (the cave work) is a group effort.”

However, he said does not feel his cave work is the most significant work of his professional life. “My most significant accomplishment is that I am an educator. I teach. That is how I would identify what I do with my life,” he said. “I love to research, but it’s much more fun when you have students to share it with.”

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Dr. Ashley, who teaches several cave-related courses at Western, has been traveling with students three to four times a year to research and monitor habitats in Tumbling Creek Cave since 1992. For six years, he and his classes have conducted a systematic count of the cavesnail in that cave for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

But, Dr. Ashley said, along with the cavesnail work, he and his students make the most of their time in the cave, monitoring several species and studying a number of cave habitats. “If it’s alive and in the cave, I make them (the students) count it.” For example, he and students have studied crickets, crayfish, snails, salamanders, bats and flatworms in caves in order to understand natural history, population dynamics and movement.

They also take advantage of the aboveground “laboratory” of the Ozarks, studying streams, insects, and scorpions and tarantulas in glades.

“These experiences have been invaluable to the students,” he said. “It is career-related experience that will help students reach their ultimate goals.”

Dr. Ashley noted that in his upper level cave ecology course students are required to participate in two caving trips throughout the semester to study cave ecology and biodiversity. He said of the handful of cave ecology courses that are taught throughout the country, this course is unique because of its intense research and hands-on opportunities for students. Students actually complete projects for federal and state agencies through the course.

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Missouri Western State College is a four-year public institution providing a blend of traditional liberal arts and professional degree programs. The college offers student-centered, high quality instruction that focuses on experience-based learning, community service, and state-of-the-art technology. Western is located in St. Joseph, Mo. and is committed to the educational, economic, cultural and social development of the region it serves.

