

MAKING THE MOST OF YEAR ONE: Bubba, Sarah, and Matt on Their Own

by Michelle Broom

Our interviews were conducted during spring quarter '97, just as the following students were finishing up their first busy year at Cal Poly.

Neel "Bubba" Murarka Age: 19 Major: Computer Science Hometown: Cupertino, Calif.

As he strolls through the University Union, Neel "Bubba" Murarka has his own audience. "Hey, dude —

After only two quarters, Murarka is well known to many because he is so active on campus. "I'm not that busy, really," he says. "I like people, and I like getting involved."

"Involved" is the right word.

Murarka is a member of the Cal Poly Plan Communication Task Force and the Cal Poly Plan Action Committee, two groups that disseminate information to the campus community on the Cal Poly Plan. He serves on the Associated Students Inc. (ASI) Advancement Committee's Advisory Council and was elected from the College of Engineering to the ASI board of directors. He also is a member of the board's Interhall Council, acting as a liaison between ASI and nearly 3,000 dormitory residents.

Residence hall living is something he prizes. "Living in the dorms is an experience of a lifetime," he says. "It's like summer camp on the stairways." He is president of Yosemite Hall and Multicultural Tower. "Last quarter we had a huge potluck," he says. "Different students prepared food from their ethnic backgrounds, including Ethiopian beef, Vietnamese stir fry, Mexican food, and Belgium almond cake."

Murarka is training to become a Week of Welcome leader for fall '97 to help incoming freshmen learn about the campus and community, and he is a member of the

Running Thunder Spirit Club. "It's fun to go to an athletic event, sit with the spirit club, and yell to get the crowd involved," he says. "Our athletes are important because they represent our school."

"I like working on teams instead of traditional self-directed projects. . . . No matter what, I want to be where technology and people meet."

Murarka maintains a 3.0 grade-point average, although he says, "I didn't expect my classes to be this hard, nor the quarter system to be so fast-paced. It's been very challenging, and it keeps me on my toes." He has found his professors to be accessible and helpful — "They go beyond the norm."

His dream career is to program video games of the future, and he believes it's Cal Poly's reputation that will one day get him in the door of Microsoft or Nintendo. He claims he's a people-person and enjoys the group-work aspect of his classes. "I like working on teams instead of traditional self-directed projects," he says with his usual broad smile. "No matter what, I want to be where technology and people meet." **CP**



see you tonight," he says as he points to a friend. "What's up?" he asks, gesturing with a nod of his head to two more people passing by.

Sarah Wickersham Age: 19 Major: Business Hometown: Ukiah, Calif.

Sarah Wickersham came to Cal Poly to learn. "But not so much the things you learn in a classroom," she says. "I want to learn about living on my own and responsibility. I

off campus, explaining, "I wanted to live in the dorms, but I sent in my application too late." She says it was hard to go from her parents' house to being totally independent. "I have great roommates and neighbors, but I think I would have been better off socially living on campus. The dorm would have been a nice transition." She doesn't have a car, so she uses the bus to get

around. "It's handy — I like it."

Although she says she was not too worried about making new friends, she was concerned about college-level classes and professors. "I thought

I'd fail," she

says. "Midterms terrified me." Yet Wickersham's 3.1 grade-point average reflects her capacity to do well. "I don't really have to study hard," she says. Wickersham says she also didn't expect her professors to be so personable. "They already know my name," she says.

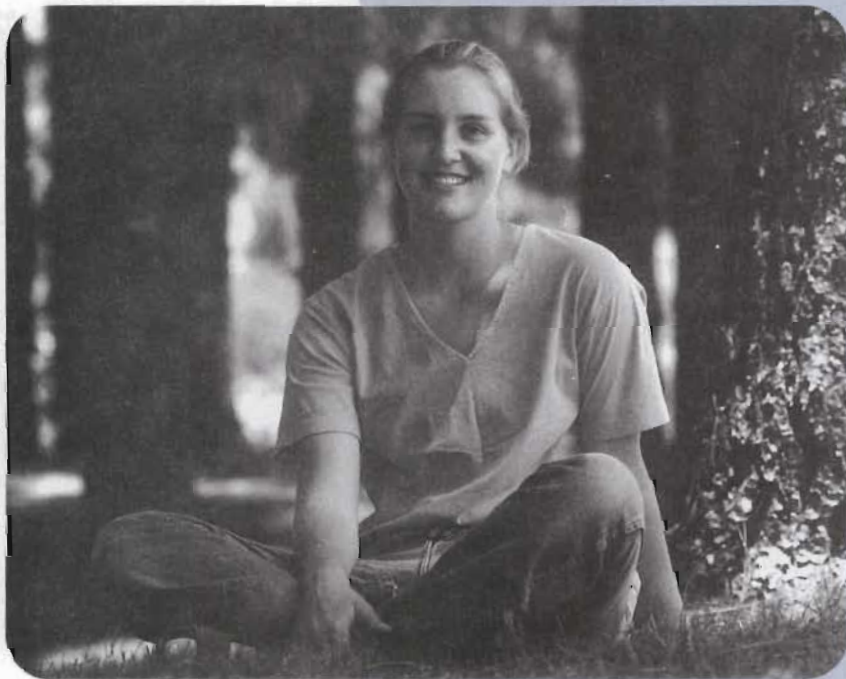
Of all the new opportunities open to her, she's most surprised by the number of extracurricular activities and intramural sports

available. "There are so many choices offered at Cal Poly. You don't have to look off campus." Wickersham has frequented the ASI Craft Center and enjoys taking pottery classes. She also hopes to secure a position on Cal Poly's swim team next fall. She was a member of her high school dive team for four years and the swim team for three.

"I want the opportunity to make an impact on others and make a difference in people's lives. I see college more as a life experience."

One of her most exciting and fulfilling activities is her involvement with the Environmental Council, one of many campus community service clubs. Approximately one weekend a month, Wickersham and 30 other students participate in activities like tree planting and beach clean-up. Wickersham's consistent involvement with the council earned her the title of "star volunteer" last winter.

As she speaks of her future goals both at Cal Poly and in a career, Wickersham maintains that it is important for her to enjoy what she's doing. "I want to do well in school and get out in four years," she says. "I want to be satisfied with myself and the path that I choose." **GP**



want the opportunity to make an impact on others and make a difference in people's lives. I see college more as a life experience."

Wickersham was thrust into learning about living on her own her first year at Cal Poly. She lives in an apartment

Matthew Martin Age: 19 Major: Forestry & Natural Resources Hometown: Novato, Calif.

Shy but confident, Matthew Martin is pleased to be at Cal Poly. "By far it has the best forestry department in the state," he says. With the best comes hard work, but also a faculty that is helping him adjust to

"I expected school to be hard — which it is. But I didn't expect the professors to be so interesting and helpful."

college by recommending classes and giving him advice. "I expected school to be hard — which it is. But I didn't expect the professors to be so interesting and helpful," he says. "They're better than I thought."

Martin admits that he's surprised at the difficulty in finding enough study time. "It's a bit overwhelming," he says. But not without reason. As an employee of The Avenue, a multiple-restaurant campus complex, he works in the daytime and studies at night. "I'm collecting financial aid to help pay for books and materials," he says. Then he smiles. "My job provides some extra spending money for the little things like detergent, toothpaste, and extra food when I'm hungry."

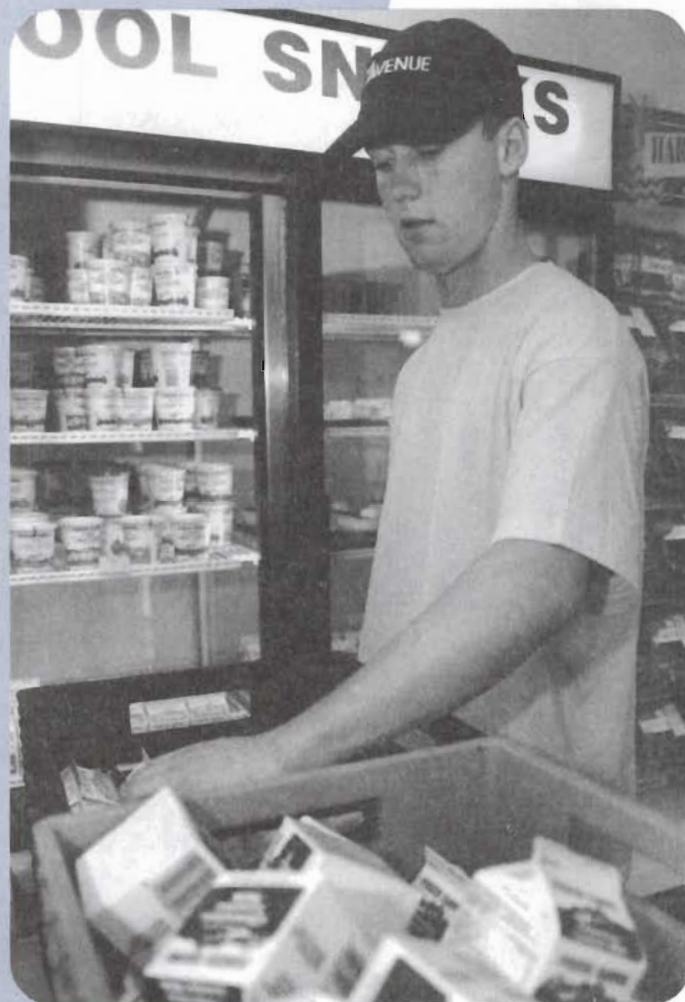
In addition, Martin plays on the softball team every Sunday. "I play to relieve stress, and I play for the competition," he says. "I also pick up basketball games at

the Recreation Center. It's fun for me."

Martin says his favorite class so far has been resource fire control. "I found it so interesting," he says. "We learned about going out and creating fire lines, about engines and equipment, and about fire behavior." It was this class that moved Martin to shift his career interest from forest ranger to firefighter. "Firefighting interests me more," he says. "And my Cal Poly degree will give me the edge."

In the summer of 1998, Martin plans to try out for one of 12 positions on the Santa Lucia Fire Crew. If he is hired, he will remain on call all summer to lay fire lines throughout the state. "It's a lot of dirty work, but it's what I want to do," he says. He hopes to earn anywhere from \$6,000 to \$9,000 during the three-month period so he can live off campus the following year.

Martin adds that he hopes to graduate in five years and looks forward to earning his EMT (Emergency Medical Training) certificate after graduation. Until then he's looking for a little more time to keep up his lab work, homework, and 3.0 grade-point average. **CP**



Photos by Joe Johnston