

Alumni Magazine

# TODAY

Spring 2022

Tiffany Moe '11, made a lasting decision during a national championship.



## The Moment That Mattered

Stories of hard work, great timing, big breaks and split-second decisions that made all the difference.

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Find expanded versions of these stories as well as web-exclusive features at the new TODAY website at [today.magazine.mnsu.edu](http://today.magazine.mnsu.edu).



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**MINNESOTA STATE**

Minnesota State University, Mankato  
A member of Minnesota State



# FROM THE PRESIDENT

## THE MOMENTS THAT MATTER

Those of us fortunate enough to make higher education our life's work see it happen all the time. I call it the Spark: that moment—or string of moments—when students see their potential, find meaning, and discover their passion because of something that happens during their college experience. You might think we'd become jaded to those magic moments, but for me, the opposite is true. Each time I see that spark ignite a student's life, I'm reminded of my own moment—and of why I've pursued a career in higher education.

My moment crept up on me. In high school, I was on the Math Team and enjoyed figuring out complex problems. I figured that being good at math meant I should major in accounting when I got to college. But it was the debate coach at Bainbridge Island High School, Cindy McAllister, who inspired within me a passion for research, argumentation and the power of persuasion. When I began college, I started taking accounting courses. But Larry Richardson, the chair of the Communication Department, was a tremendous mentor and I changed my major to Speech Communication. These two people mentored and supported me and set me on a path and career working with students, teaching, and coaching. I have never looked back.

I've had opportunities to work closely and travel extensively with students. I built my career out of helping them discover their spark and passion just as Mrs. Mac and LR had done for me years earlier. Sometimes, the smallest nudge can affect a person's life in profound ways. Sometimes it might take many nudges. I am profoundly grateful for the experiences I have had in my education and career. They are special to me. They provided me with opportunities to connect with people around the world and eventually led me here, to my role as president of Minnesota State University, Mankato. My hope and goal for all of our students is for them to have those experiences that create sparks.

This issue of TODAY is full of moments that changed a student's life—and some that changed the lives of alumni, faculty and staff as well. I hope that as you read these stories, you'll remember your moment and how it shaped your life.

As I near the end of my first academic year on this beautiful campus, I want to thank everyone who has been so gracious in welcoming me, Belen and Biscuit to Mankato. We are quite happy here.

Follow me on social media to keep up with the many moments I'm experiencing on campus and in the community...and to catch a glimpse of Biscuit as well. I'm @MavPrezEd on Twitter and Instagram.

Go Mavs!

Edward Inch  
President

# FOUNTAIN FODDER

- The University has launched a **bachelor of science degree in agribusiness and food innovation** through the College of Business. The faculty director of the program is Shane Bowyer, an assistant professor of management.
- **Robert Larson** of Leesburg, Florida, **donated \$1.4 million to the University in honor of his** late wife, **Virginia Larson**, a Minnesota State Mankato alumna who taught elementary school for 12 years. At least 14 students annually will receive scholarships as a result of the gift.
- The Minnesota State University, Mankato Foundation awarded **more than \$2.07 million in grants and scholarships** to 1,062 students in fiscal year 2021, marking the first time in its history that the Foundation has awarded more than \$2 million in student support. The Foundation raised a total of \$12.78 million, the third-highest single-year fundraising total in its 63-year history, contributing to its endowment level reaching a record-high \$70.39 million at the end of fiscal 2021.
- The U.S. Department of Education awarded the **Educational Talent Search** program at Minnesota State University, Mankato **\$1.9 million in funding for the five-year grant cycle that began Sept. 1**. Educational Talent Search, which has been housed on the Minnesota State Mankato campus since 1985, serves 694 students from sixth through 12th grade in 13 target schools in the southern Minnesota region.
- The College of Social and Behavioral Sciences converted the former dining services kitchen in the University's Caroski Commons to a permanent **EARTH Systems Laboratory** in August. The conversion creates a larger lab space that allows for expanded collaborative research, an endeavor that was difficult in more confined campus locations.
- Representatives from **Kenya's Kisii University** toured Minnesota State Mankato Nov. 9 **as part of a pursued expanded exchange agreement** that was signed during the visit. Minnesota State Mankato has a partnership with Kisii University for education, and the agreement expanded into a greater variety of exchange activities with a special interest in opportunities related to the College of Science, Engineering and Technology.
- For the second consecutive year, the University **ranks 12th nationally in international student population** among master's institutions, according to an annual "Open Doors Report" recently released by the Institute of International Education. The rankings, which reflect data from the 2020-21 academic year, list Minnesota State Mankato as having 1,121 international students over the course of that year. It's the third time in four years Minnesota State Mankato has ranked 12th nationally.

## ALUMNI FOR TODAY

*An ongoing spotlight on some of the alumni contributors who help bring you TODAY magazine.*



**Christine Nessler '02** is a freelance writer with extensive experience as a public relations manager, writer, website manager and relationship builder. Her years of work experience include starting and building a home care business, and public relations and marketing positions in government, nonprofit and for-profit sectors.



**Drew Lyon '06** has called Mankato home since arriving on campus in August 2001. A 2006 graduate of Minnesota State Mankato, he's worked as a freelance writer, record store clerk and home health care manager. He is now managing editor of Soybean Business Magazine and curates a Little Free Library from the front lawn of his home in Mankato's Tourtellotte neighborhood.



# SCHOLARS SERVING TIME

## A SECOND CHANCE AT EDUCATION

By Grace Brandt '13

*Vicki Hunter is program coordinator for the Scholars Serving Time Program*

**M**elissa Petesch was in her fourth year in prison when she enrolled in Minnesota State Mankato's Scholars Serving Time program.

"I was a drug dealer," said Petesch, 33. "I never thought I could go to college. I didn't think I would make it or was smart enough. So when they posted the criteria I just said 'What better place to start clean and fresh but prison.'"

The Scholars Serving Time Program provides the opportunity for incarcerated students to earn associate of arts degrees. Program coordinator Vicki Hunter said the goal is for graduating students to have a broad level of knowledge and understanding that can also serve as a solid base if they want to continue their education.

"That kind of a base is so important for many reasons, both for personal growth and [for students'] ability to be civically engaged, to be able to enter into professional conversations and feel confident," Hunter said. "It increases the likelihood that they'll be considered for job opportunities, and, from an academic perspective, one of the important things is that it prepares them to go on to further education. All their general education requirements are completed. That really puts them at a great position to move on to a bachelor's degree."

Thirteen professors from Minnesota State Mankato partic-

ipate in the program, which was inspired by the Bard Prison Initiative offered by Bard College. Minnesota State Mankato was able to implement a program at the Waseca Federal Correctional Institution, which began with 15 students in January 2021.

Hunter was later contacted by the Minnesota Department of Corrections, which asked if the University could launch a similar program in Shakopee and Faribault. Faribault's program started with 20 part-time students in summer 2021, and Shakopee and Faribault began full-time programs that fall.

Students are selected for the program through entrance essays, which are used to gauge applicants' motivation and readiness for college level work. "We need people who are ready to work hard," Hunter said. "We chose by really selecting what the committee saw as the most compelling essays."

Throughout the last year, Hunter has worked with students from all three programs; she describes their experiences as transformational.

"I think it just changes their vision of themselves in such a positive way," she said. A lot of them talk about feeling like they can assert themselves in ways that are much more effective now because of the confidence they get from their experience in college. You can just see the confidence in their face when they come in the room. Sometimes, it's honestly hard for me to get a word in because they are so engrossed in the conversations about what they're studying. It feels magical to me to be able to witness this happening."

After being released from prison and living in Iowa, Petesch arranged with Hunter to continue pursuing her associate's degree online at Minnesota State Mankato. From there, she'll continue at the University to get a bachelor's degree.

"It has made me feel amazing," she said of Scholars Serving Time. "Getting that opportunity in Waseca to prove that I could do it and then to continue doing it out here ... it gives me purpose. It gives me something to fight for and gives me a better future." ✍️

*Read an expanded version of this article online at [today.magazine.mnsu.edu](http://today.magazine.mnsu.edu)*



*A class session in Faribault.*

## Backing the Basics

Departing student president aiming at civil rights laws



**R**eauna Stiff was early on in her time as a student senator when her off-campus kitchen caught fire and, in a way, lit a different one.

Her complaints to management about a faulty dishwasher had received little attention. Eventually, it caught fire and burned her apartment kitchen. Even then, little attention was paid or responsibility taken.

“That was just a really scary and surreal moment for me,” she said. And it prompted her to think on those who didn’t have friends or family in the area to calm them down and help in a similar situation.

“I can imagine what this experience would be like for an international student who is thousands of miles away from their family,” she said. “I can imagine what this experience would be like for a student who is barely hanging on and is only able to afford their apartment through working 40 hours a week... That’s the moment I realized housing is something that needs serious advocacy.”

Stiff went on to lead the student senate as its president, a role that gave her access to make movements on students’ behalf in food, housing and health. She dubs her platform as a back-to-basics campaign.

“Students need housing and food first,” she said. “They’re not going to be focused on a test or a quiz or even going to a football game if they’re hungry or their housing is insufficient or unsafe. That is the

effect I’m looking to have this year before my term ends.”

Stiff grew up in a small, rural town of 700 in southern Illinois, one of two kids of color in her high school of 300. It was at Minnesota State Mankato that she found the kind of programs and diversity she’d sought.

“I toured here, I was amazed by the [political science] program, I was amazed by the community,” she said. “This is one of the few places I toured that actually felt like what my idea of college was in my head: I imagined a campus community, I imagined buildings, I imagined being able to walk between classes and make friends and join clubs.”

She and her vice president, Karla Svercl, who organized a Swipe Out Hunger program in which students could donate meals for others, have focused on those basic key issues

Inspired by her own experience, Stiff continues working toward a web-based resource for students that will allow them to read evaluations of off-campus housing.

She’s also aiming at establishing a comprehensive wellness center on campus to combine already available services in a more easily accessible location for students.

Graduating this spring in political science and communications, Stiff will head to law school in the fall—another step toward her goal of being a civil rights attorney.

“This experience of getting to advocate for people is going to play directly into what I see myself doing in the future, advocating for people who need it the most.”

-Joe Tougas '86



## A Major Score

With international experience, Lin Chase is heading a new phase of computer science

A worldwide force at the commercial end of computer science, Lin Chase now works toward making Minnesota State Mankato a top-tier place to learn it.

“I’d like this [University] to be a top five computer science program in the U.S.,” Chase said. I don’t see any reason why it couldn’t be.”

Chase was brought on in 2021 to revitalize the computer science program. The new approach is project-based; a student’s experience in the program is not virtual, simulated or otherwise a rehearsal for the big time. It is real-world experience with real projects undertaken by University partners.

“We literally had almost 400 new students show up, just by listing the major,” Chase said.

“We hadn’t done any marketing, no advertising. Just by offering computer science, all of a sudden we were the most rapidly growing major and department in the University.”

Chase’s 35 years in the industry began with a software startup in Silicon Valley following her Carnegie Mellon undergraduate work. Most of her working life has been spent outside the U.S.—France, Scotland and Korea, among others—in roles ranging from VP of a software company to CEO of her own firm.

“There’ve been so many roles. I love coding, I love design, I love leading

technical teams. I loved doing sales, I loved being a CEO. Really what I ended up being in the end was a well-respected and kind of influential product designer.”

Near her home in tiny Amboy, Minnesota, Chase—who is also a multi-instrumentalist and performer—operates a recording studio and performance space.

“I’m busy now, so I’m not selling engineering time in the studio. But I’m interested in creating a space where people can come and enjoy music, and play music and learn music and be in a community that’s musical and artistic.”

Keeping her busy is a University life that, she said, has put her in the enviable position of taking her experience and applying it to an exciting new chapter for the University’s computer science education.

“We have a recipe. We have a small number of excellent, trained faculty. We have a supportive administration and we’ve got a little momentum,” she said.

“I don’t have to deal with a massive egotistical framework. People here are open-minded about improvement.”

*-Joe Tougas '86*





# THE MOMENT

when they realized they were on the right track, had what it took and were indeed capable of being who they wanted to be from that moment on.

Five stories of alumni who were ready when their moment arrived.



*Former Reporter  
editor Myron Medcalf*



# Myron Medcalf's Top Story

The Editor-In-Chief didn't hesitate, and beat others to the incendiary scene.

**M**yron Medcalf was live on the KMSU airwaves during a balmy Homecoming Weekend on Oct. 4, 2003. The editor-in-chief of *The Reporter*, Minnesota State Mankato's student newspaper, co-anchored a sports talk show Saturdays from 10 p.m. to midnight.

Midway through the evening's show, Medcalf and co-host Brian Boothe received a rare call from a listener, struggling to catch his breath while describing a dangerous standoff unfolding between law enforcement and students just a couple blocks from the campus radio station.

"I said, 'Brian, put down the headset, run to the scene,'" Medcalf recalled. "Brian literally sprinted over, and Brian's calling in now from the scene and he confirms everything. The streets are going crazy in Mankato."

"We went into reporter mode and did what a news team does—we were the first news team on the ground for that riot," Medcalf said. "It was our school, so we wanted to be on top of it."

Homecoming weekend parties had converged and gone awry. Drunken behavior descended into chaos. Up to 3,000 participants loitered into the wee small hours, setting fire to vehicles, dumpsters, trash bins and wooden fences. More than 150 police officers across 41 agencies arrived to quell the crowd.

"We wanted to make sure that no one beat our coverage," Medcalf said. "And I've got to be honest: I don't think anyone did."

The Reporter's unflinching, acerbic coverage spared no one. The spirited writing exercises Medcalf conducted the previous summer bore fruit. "Riot! They Never Imagined" blared the headline. "Rioters Wreak Havoc, Epitomize Lawlessness" and "The Blame is Everywhere" read another. "Excessive Force?" The paper pondered in a later issue.

"We saw those things firsthand," he said. "Our coverage was rooted in that. We lived it."

The events of that evening indirectly laid the groundwork for Medcalf's journalism career. In the days after the melee, he assisted veteran *Star Tribune* writer Bob Franklin in locating information on the arrested students. Franklin recommended Medcalf apply for a *Star Tribune* internship.

"That's how I ended up at the *Star Tribune*," Medcalf said, "through the riot."

## Open doors

Medcalf, a Milwaukee native, moved into his Gage B



dorm room in summer 2001 to begin his freshman year as a running back on the Mavs' football team. His athletic career at the University, however, ended abruptly when, in spring 2002, he broke his jaw during practice.

Before returning for his sophomore year, he emailed then-Reporter editor-in-chief Sarah Ibero, inquiring about a position.

"I'd always wanted to write and be involved in journalism," he said. "I jumped in with both feet and never looked back."

Ellen Mrja, a since-retired professor in the mass communication department and former advisor to *The Reporter*, spotted the "it" factor in the burgeoning journalist.

"From the very beginning, Myron had great talent in terms of writing and editing," Mrja said. "He had the leadership and charisma, and the department had seen him as a great student."

In spring 2003, Medcalf decided against running for the vacant editor-in-chief-position. But Mrja—"one of my favorite human beings on Earth," he said—refused to let her promising student pass up the opportunity.

"I could see he was the perfect editor-in-chief because one of the things the editor has to do is convince the writers to pull together and pursue certain things," Mrja said. "He had that innate talent and certain intangibles."

## Great expectations

At 19, Medcalf became the Reporter's first Black editor-in-chief during the 2003-2004 academic year. Throughout the year, Medcalf estimates he oversaw around 50 aspiring writers. He also started the University's first chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists.

"We were all in," he said. "My hope was: 'How many people can I get involved?' It was pretty remarkable. There was an interest and a buy-in that I could appreciate."

Medcalf forged tight bonds with his coworkers during the frenetic, caffeine-fueled evenings in the Reporter office, building an independent newspaper.

"It was definitely exciting that year," said Tanner Kent '06, The Reporter's assistant news editor at the time. "Myron had expectations and he backed it up."

Myron spoke with *Today Magazine* the night before flying to Kansas City to cover college basketball for ESPN, his employer for the past decade. Despite his national profile with the *Worldwide Leader in Sports*, a social media following and bi-monthly column in the *Star Tribune*, Medcalf insists nothing



quite compares to Reporter production nights in the Centennial Student Union.

“Getting that paper out the door, man, the pressure of that, the intensity—it’s still one of my favorite experiences of my whole life,” he said.

In 2003, Medcalf broadened his journalistic talents by launching “The Ace and Boothe show” with encouragement from then-KMSU Station Manager Jim Gullickson. Medcalf also gained valuable broadcasting experience as the public address announcer at Mavericks athletic events.

“Myron is a special guy,” Gullickson said. “I’d walk around the student union and you’d see students reading the paper. It was cool to see. ... I’m super impressed that he parlayed what he learned at KMSU.”

Medcalf, who had no formal broadcast training, credits his KMSU show with providing an outlet to hone his radio skills in a low-pressure setting. The gig led Medcalf to becoming a nationally syndicated ESPN Radio personality.

“I don’t think I’d ever be at ESPN without KMSU,” he said. “As a matter of fact, I know I wouldn’t.”

### **B.A.M.M.**

For many readers, Medcalf’s tenure at the helm of the Reporter is most remembered for a bracing column that debuted on Thursday, Sept. 18, 2003. He titled it B.A.M.M.—“Black and Angry Myron Medcalf”—and tackled racial topics in blunt, assertive language. In his first dispatch, Medcalf called for reparations for Black Americans; a column after the riots shined a light on white male privilege.

“I understood my position,” he said. “If you’re going to hire me and you want my perspective and my opinion and my voice, I’m going to give it to you.”

The visceral feedback from readers ranged from empathetic to defensive to flat-out racist. In later issues, Medcalf printed dozens of replies both supporting and criticizing his commentaries in the Reporter’s Letter to the Editor section. In a rare exception to his no-profanity editorial policy, Medcalf published transcriptions of racist slurs left on his voicemail.

“There was definitely a reaction,” he said. “It changed a lot for me, honestly. People still talk to me about it today. B.A.M.M.—you either loved it or hated it—but it was definitely something people remember.”

In later columns, Medcalf spoke out against cultural appropriation, slavery, systemic racism and Columbus Day.

“Myron was writing stuff that was uncomfortable for some people,” Gullickson said. “I think it was amazing, that he was addressing this before it became part of the public dialogue.”

In summer 2004, Medcalf interned at ESPN The Magazine in New York City, and remained a Reporter staff writer before graduating in 2005. The Star Tribune tabbed Medcalf to cover the University of Minnesota’s college basketball team before ESPN hired him in 2011 for its national college basketball beat.

“I got some great opportunities at Mankato,” he said. “It changed my whole life.”

Medcalf’s life changed again after May 25, 2020, when a Minneapolis police officer killed George Floyd. That fall, several months after the harrowing Twin Cities riots, Medcalf became a leading Black voice at the Star Tribune when he returned to pen a bimonthly Sunday column that broached the same issues spotlighted in B.A.M.M.

“For me, [B.A.M.M.] is a reference point. I tell people: ‘I didn’t just start talking about these issues today,’” said Medcalf, who lives in the Twin Cities suburbs. “If I never got a column, I’d still talk about these issues.”

“Myron’s reappearance on the pages of the Star Tribune in the wake of George Floyd’s murder as a Sunday columnist marks another significant moment in his career,” said former mass communications professor John Gaterud. “He continues to develop, stretch and mature as a writer of consequence, I believe. He knows the value of hard work, keen observation and the power of the press to give voice to the voiceless.”

While the message remains the same, his Star Tribune column is more akin to B.A.M.M. 2.0. Medcalf’s tone is sharper and more refined, written from the perspective of a father of three Black daughters who’s using his platform to jumpstart conversations.

“This is more of a tempered version of B.A.M.M.,” he said. “But B.A.M.M. started the idea of: I think I have something to say.”

Medcalf says with a rueful chuckle that reader responses from his Sunday column aren’t far removed from the hateful rhetoric he received at the Reporter. Still, he adds, dissenting viewpoints can lead to constructive discussions.

“The positive is, I’m overwhelmed by the response of people who want to build relationships,” he said. “That’s what I value. I get people who disagree with me, but still want to have a conversation, and I respect that. That’s ultimately the goal—if we talk about these issues in a way that leads us somewhere.”

—Drew Lyon ’06

Read an expanded version of this article online at [today.magazine.mnsu.edu](http://today.magazine.mnsu.edu)



Myron Medcalf today.



# The Election Win

A reluctant candidate meets unwavering success.

Jim Lund '85, '86 gets put in charge a lot. "I keep getting thrown into leadership positions, and I guess it's just the way of the world," he said. "That's who I am and how people see me. I should just accept that and go with it."

He does admit to an ongoing desire to change things for the better if nobody else is trying. The biggest example, perhaps, is when he created a Twin Cities financial advising firm once he felt he could improve the industry by doing so.

That approach crystalized and became apparent to Lund years earlier when, in 1984, he was a Minnesota State Mankato biology major from St. Paul who decided to run for student president. He and VP candidate Sandy Schoonover had formed the College Action Party with the issues of the day being tuition, fees and parking. Lund said his thinking was: Somebody's got to do it.

"I ran on a platform of 'I don't really want this job, but I know that it's important,'" Lund said. "If you're going to have a voice, you've got to work with the system that's available."

He won the election. Later that same year he was selected by Minnesota Gov. Rudy Perpich to serve as student representative on the board of trustees that oversaw the operation of all schools in the state university system. The election win and subsequent appointment, both in his junior year at the University, clinched his role as a leader—reluctant or otherwise.

As a graduate student, he was instrumental in obtaining funding for the stone arch on the campus walkway and what would come to be named the Ostrander-Student Memorial Bell Tower that stands in the campus arborum. After receiving his MBA from the University, Lund's post-college career in financial services began with working for American Express. He remained with the firm for 27 years,



Jim Lund has always found himself jumping into situations to improve circumstances.

leaving in 2013 to form his own financial services company to better serve clients and, in doing so, the industry.

Today he heads NorthRock Partners, a multi-faceted financial planning agency in Minneapolis. The firm manages more than \$1.7 billion with a team of about 40 people.

More than anything, he said, winning the college election solidified that he was built to lead when change was needed.

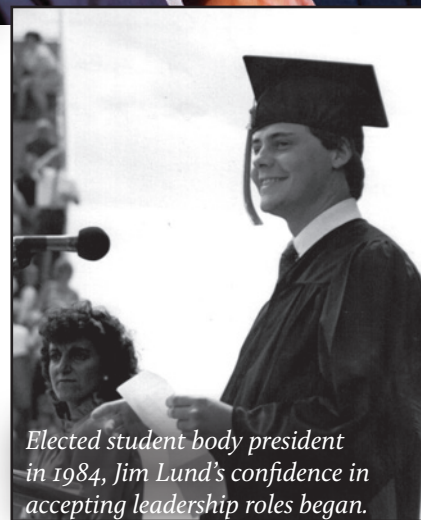
"I think my [campaign] related to why I'd be willing to step into the ring and donate the time and work for the broader good of the student population."

While a graduate student, he was approached by the Democratic party in Minnesota and encouraged to run for state legislature. He declined. It was validating, again, but he preferred real-world experience to political office.

He's since become used to being the one called upon to take the helm of efforts large and small.

"I didn't think of myself as a natural born leader, yet people see that in me. For example, in my church I simply wanted to go on a mission trip. Now all of a sudden I'm running it. Why? I don't know—maybe I'm a glutton for punishment... At the end of the day I apply my own sense of common sense and logic to handle whatever situations are coming up. And evidently that appears to others to be leaderful."

—Joe Tougas '86



Elected student body president in 1984, Jim Lund's confidence in accepting leadership roles began.

## CAMPUS ACTION PARTY

- JIM LUND**  
for President
- SANDY SCHOONOVER**  
for Vice President

**Last year we:**

- held down tuition increases
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- organize voter registration
- offer 22 years of combined experience
- and more . . .

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# THE MOMENT: Taking the Next Stage

Two student actors climbed in competition to the Kennedy Center.

The lights of the theater dimmed, the audience hushed and Kimberly Willow '12 readied for her entrance as the sole character, Athena, on the dark stage for the beginning of "The Odyssey."

Ordinarily a big moment for any acting student at Minnesota State Mankato, Willow found it to be far more. The third-year student from Spencer, Iowa, found herself about to take the stage of the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in Washington, D.C.

"It really hit me right before I went on," she said. "I was like: OK. Here I am. And I know what to do, I've been doing it since November."

Backstage, Clayton Rutschow '11 was pacing. Only months prior, it seemed, the junior had faced down frustration and self-doubt about his acting abilities and now was eager to get on stage and have a good time in the leading role of Odysseus.

Submitted as an entry in the 2010 Region V Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival at Ames, Iowa, the drama and the pair's performances kept advancing in competition to the point where it bested more than 1,300 entries to be one of four staged at the Kennedy Center April 21, 2011.

Willow and Rutschow both recall vividly how it felt before taking the Kennedy Center stage, and they both recall it validating the choices they'd made in their lives and school careers up to that point.

"I never had doubts of what I wanted to study in college," Willow said. "But knowing what you want to study is different than being successful in what you're studying and feeling quite confident in your future in that field."

In that D.C. trip, Rutschow spent most of his time in his hotel room rehearsing his lines. He was awed by the Kennedy Center's theater space, which he found majestic—"perfectly built for theater. You have this accommodating atmosphere that is begging you to go out and perform."

Then came show time.

"There's actually a half hour before Odysseus comes out," he said. "I remember being in the dressing room. I couldn't sit still, thinking: 'I just want to get out on stage. This is that moment. This is the zenith. We've reached the top.'"

Both found the show exhilarating, an experience that served them throughout their lives.

"That whole process was very validating for me," Willow said. "I really felt 'Yeah, I'm doing the right thing. This is my direction, this is where I'm going. It's working.'"

Rutschow said he was able to approach the Kennedy Center performance with the same concentration and work ethic as he had in performances leading up to that championship show. He laughs that he still needs to return to D.C. to see the national monuments as he spent all his time preparing for the play.

"Just staying dedicated to the same work ethic

I put in from the start was something I had vowed to carry through to the end," he said. "To this day I still apply that: You can live with the pain of regret or you can live with the pain of discipline. Which one do you want? It's not always fun running your lines over and over on the weekend, and you want a break .... but if I would have screwed up even one line I would have regretted it. And I regret absolutely nothing."

After some acting work in Seattle and the Twin Cities, Rutschow is now a freelance writer and personal trainer in Red Wing. He mentors actors in the Twin Cities where he also teaches battle and stunt choreography.

Willow's acting at the Kennedy Center received top honors as well—the national Distinguished Performance Award.

Today she works several roles in Minneapolis area theater as music director, choreographer and actress. She lives with her husband and their toddler.

"It definitely was an experience that helped shape a lot of future direction for me in terms of validating the direction I'm going," she said. "And also seeing theater outside of college, seeing where things go, seeing the professional venues, seeing how these networks are established in the theater world. The professional theater world is a very connected world, and I think that was an eye-opening experience for me in what that world looks like."

Receiving the national acting award was gratifying, she said, but the production proved to be a case study of collaboration in which all involved were responsible for any and all recognition.

"But it's still on my resume," she smiled. "I haven't taken it off."



Willow and Rutschow today, and in a 2010 scene from "The Odyssey."

—J.T. '86



## The Comeback

Jamie Pass' work in a phenomenal 1993 comeback remains motivational

Jamie Pass '96 is one of those friends or family members you need when things look hopeless. The one with encouraging words about keeping your head in the game and not giving up. And the story he uses to back it up is an historic moment in Maverick sports.

"When something's big and you're in a moment, you have to concentrate on what's important to get the job done. Then there is no pressure. And I think that's what we did in that game."

That game. It was Minnesota State Mankato's homecoming 1993, and Pass was in his third year as starting quarterback for the Mavericks. Up against first-place North Dakota State University, the Mavericks were completely scoreless in the first half as North Dakota cruised by with three touchdowns. There had been at

least two heartbreaking passes dropped by a Mavs' receiver. It was 21-0 at the end of the third quarter.

Then the surge happened. Pass threw four touchdowns in the remainder of the game to not only close in but eventually tie the North Dakota with a few minutes left. Pass' friend and roommate was the team's kicker who would attempt the game-winning kick.

"Normally when he'd come out to kick a field goal or extra point we would just kind of joke around with each other," Pass said. "And I was thinking OK—what wise thing can I say



Jamie Pass in 1993 as a junior.

to this guy so that he stays calm and makes the kick? And I thought, nah, I'm just going to keep my mouth shut. ... So I didn't say anything. He put it through the uprights and it was over."

Pass' performance in that incredible comeback not only became a legendary story in Maverick sports history, it earned him Sports Illustrated's College Player of the Week. Yes, he said, it gave him confidence about his ability to throw a ball and lead a team, but he knew better than to think he was solely responsible for the victory. It's a truth he's since applied to work and family.

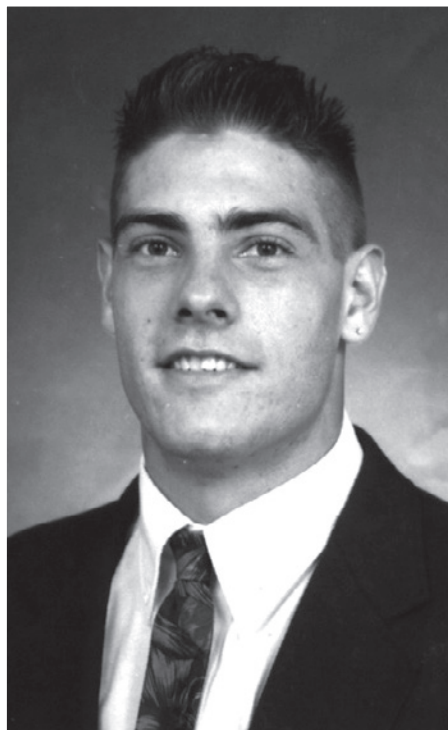
"Earlier in the game, we had a receiver drop two touchdown passes," said Pass. "We didn't get on him, didn't yell at him. I knew this kid was capable of making those plays, and he's the one who in the second half made two of 'em to get a couple of scores. It's believing in yourself and the guys around you that do their parts."

"You're a product of the environment around you," said Pass. "I was only as good as the ones blocking for me, the ones catching the ball. That's what it comes down to. Those awards I did receive were a reflection of all the hard work our team did together."

After leaving the University, Pass played professionally in the U.S. and overseas. He returned to the University to get his degree in psychology with a law enforcement minor. For the past 20 years he's been in the scrap metal industry and living in the Chicago area. His take on that amazing game and his role in it remains big-picture as opposed to egocentric.

"That stuff doesn't just turn on in a game. It's developed in the off-season, through the workout programs when you're getting up at 7 in the morning to go run. And Friday morning breakfast clubs and stuff like that. That's where the fabric is developed. The game's just the fun part."

—J.T. '86



His experience on the Maverick football team and the 1993 homecoming game in particular gave Jamie Pass an outlook on life that stands to this day.

# The Snap Decision

In a championship game, a risky move made all the difference.

With seven minutes left in the national championship basketball game, Tiffany Moe '11 on a fast break had a moment to decide: Take the sure shot in front of her or risk it and pass behind her. Her decision shaped the game and helped win the national title.

Moe, a junior, was consistent, competitive and as dependable as anybody on the 2009 Maverick women's basketball team, which faced Franklin Pierce in the NCAA Division II championship game that year.

The Mavs had been trailing throughout the game, and with the score at 84-81 Moe was driving toward the net and an easy two points to narrow that gap.

In a moment that is still talked about to this day, she passed the ball back to Heather Johnson, who was poised to make a three-pointer that could tie the game.

"I'm in that lane, I'm going up to take it and I hear Heather Johnson say "Trail. I'm trailing," Moe recalled. "In that moment I'm thinking, cognizant of the time, cognizant of the score, knowing we're a couple of huge plays away from shifting this momentum, I thought: 'That's it. She's clutching these moments, she's our best shooter, she's going to be a hall-of-famer someday. "I literally heard her"—Moe snapped her fingers—"and didn't think twice and turned around. I trusted it the whole way."

Johnson made the shot, tying the game at 84-84 with just under seven minutes remaining. The Mavericks never trailed again in the game, ultimately winning the national championship 103-94.

Moe went on to coach basketball and today lives in the Twin Cities. She remains close friends with many on the team. Those friendships were key to making that particular team work, she said.

"We developed something a lot of college athletes and coaches dream about, and that's simple chemistry," she said. "Knowing what kind of mindset one player and one team member is in every single game. And it's maybe different, but understanding and maybe channeling the direction they were going. We had that. You didn't even have to speak about it. You just knew."

*"All it takes is a simple choice to change the narrative, a simple choice to change the pace of life."*

-Tiffany Moe '11



Moe in action, 2009.

Moe had come to the University from Brookings, S.D., joining the team as a first-year student.

"I came in and I was young and I was working with these talented individuals who were competitors and brought this level out of me as me being a competitor. I hate losing." While competitive, she said, she wasn't after individual glory—which clearly led to the decision to pass vs. shoot on that play in 2009.

"When I speak about myself competitively, it's competitive in the sense that the team needs to win," she said. "I'm not one who needs accolades. I'll get mine when I get mine, essentially. When it comes to crunch time, I'm going to help carry us."

"That moment still means a lot to a lot of us, to the entire team and the entire community. What it brings into perspective is that all it takes is a simple choice to change the narrative, a simple choice to change the pace of life. You just have to trust the process and trust yourself," she said.

"Sometimes you're going to make decisions that seem crazy to some people. And they may go through the rim and they may not. Just trust the process." ♫

—J.T. '86



# Hear the One About **MIKE LEECH?** *He Struck Comedy Gold*

By Robb Murray '95

Photograph provided by Mike Leech



The aspiring comedy writer got his start at KEYC television studios in Mankato.



While a staff writer on "Late Show with David Letterman," Mike Leech '08 played a government official interrupting a monologue on a 2013 show.

When he describes the joke today, Mike Leech '08 pauses and offers a qualifier. "It wasn't the most highbrow joke," he says.

Still, the moment was electric. He'd spent several months submitting jokes to the writers on "Late Show with David Letterman," hoping one of them would be funny enough to make it into Letterman's monologue.

He'd already worked for the show as an intern, then parlayed that into a job in the mailroom. Day after day he submitted jokes, learning a little bit each time he failed. He studied the show every night to learn the nuances of the material Letterman used and, perhaps more importantly, didn't use.

And then, on June 25, 2012:

"Jennifer Lopez has announced she'll be leaving 'American Idol,'" Letterman said during a monologue. "Good luck filling that seat."

His joke had made it.

"I jumped out of my seat, I screamed, I was so excited," Leech said. "And every day since I've been chasing that feeling."

## Local intern

Leech's career in show business began at Mankato's television station, KEYC, where he spent six years as a production assistant. While attending Minnesota State Mankato he worked in the Memorial Library's video services department. As he approached graduation, he needed an internship and figured he'd return to KEYC, but his mother urged him to think bigger.

"She said 'Why don't you actually

try to get an internship somewhere where you'd like to have a career?'" Leech recalled. "And she suggested I reach out and see if Letterman had internships."

He reached out, got the internship, and thus began his ascent from interning to producing and writing for television comedies.

After the Jennifer Lopez joke, Leech says his confidence swelled.

"It just let me know that I was at least on the right track and it wasn't all a waste of effort," he says. "It meant there was hope for me to someday become passable at this job."

Leech eventually earned a spot in the "Late Show with David Letterman" writer's room, working for Letterman until the show's run ended in 2015. After that he worked with Robert Smigel on "Triumph the Insult Comic Dog," writing jokes for the show's coverage of the 2016 election. From there he went to work as a story editor and voice actor on the Showtime animated show "Our Cartoon President" (he's the voice of former Speaker of the House Rep. Paul Ryan).

Today Leech is at work on a new venture called "Tooning Out the News," a mostly animated show on the Paramount Plus network.

## Early signs

"From the first time I read something that he wrote, I thought 'Either this guy's really off the rails or he's one of the most original student writers I've ever seen in my life,'" said Nate LeBoutillier, an adjunct instructor who had Leech in an intro to creative writing class. "Nothing good that happens to Mike Leech surprises me. He is just one of the most original characters I've ever met in my life."

Though Leech has met and worked with writers with Ivy League backgrounds, he's never questioned the value of his time at Minnesota State Mankato.

"If I could go back and change my life I wouldn't try for Columbia or UPenn or any of these other schools that all my friends out here went to," he says. "I feel like things worked out perfectly at Minnesota State Mankato, and I have nothing but gratitude for that institution."

Read an expanded version of this article online at [today.magazine.mnsu.edu](http://today.magazine.mnsu.edu)



# FINDING A HOME AND HISTORY

Poet Laureate Gwen Westerman's work is inspired by and rooted in life as a Native American.

BY JOE TOUGAS '86





“Junior high,” Gwen Westerman reminisced. “Where poetry goes to be beaten to death.” Westerman was in her Armstrong Hall faculty office recalling her days as an eighth-grader in Wichita, Kansas and having to memorize poems such as “Paul Revere’s Ride.”

Teaching writing and poetry has, for her, recently taken a more amplified turn with her designation as Minnesota’s Poet Laureate this past fall. Westerman is the third to serve in the role and the first Native American.

As she travels the state to meet the job description of elevating poetry to Minnesota communities—particularly kids and underserved communities—Westerman aims to let people know poetry is everywhere and quite within reach.

“Just to get people to understand that if they have a favorite song that comes on the radio and they can sing along to it—including ‘American Pie’—if you know the lyrics to the song by heart, you know poetry. It’s not like ‘The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere’ that I had to memorize in eighth grade where it was like, ugh.”





*Westerman was raised in a multi-tribal neighborhood in Wichita, Kansas.*

Westerman grew up fashioning her own songs, stories and artwork with the encouragement of a family whose Native American roots were front and center, ingrained into as much life as could be in 1960s Wichita, Kansas.

"It was a working-class neighborhood with friends who knew I was

Indian," said Westerman, daughter of a Cherokee mom and Dakota father. "There was some discrimination there, but there was also a large inter-tribal community. ... I grew up hearing the languages of other tribes and hearing people pray and talk and share food from their own specific backgrounds. It wasn't something that was hidden, it wasn't something that was whispered about. It was "This is who you are and this is our community here and we may not be exactly the same but we are the same because we're Native."

It wasn't until Westerman, decades from that childhood, took a job as a professor at Minnesota State

Mankato that she learned of the 1862 Dakota-U.S. War and the dark legacy the Mankato area has in the story of the Dakota.

"It wasn't anything I had ever heard about; nobody talked about it, it wasn't in any of the history books I had ever read. It wasn't in the welcome packages from HR, 'by the way, this is where you're going to be living,'" she said.

Yet in the Mankato area and at the University, Westerman found not only a fit, but a calling of sorts. That calling has resulted in research works, art works and, of course, poetry influenced by her heritage.

"The longer I was here the more I realized how deeply connected I am to this place," said Westerman, a direct descendent of the Dakota chiefs Sleepy Eye and Wabasha.

She has been teaching in the English department since 1991. Before that, she'd spent years as a corporate copy writer—not too dissimilar from poetry, she said.

"It's all about finding the right words to get your message across to the right people," she said. "It was just a continuation of what I had always loved about words and rhythm and pattern."



*Westerman's quilts have been exhibited in galleries across the U.S. Though practiced by her grandmother, it's an art form Westerman didn't begin until her 40s.*





*"It's all about finding the right words to get your message across to the right people," Westerman said of her careers in English and corporate communications.*

Westerman has blended writing and history in a number of ways, including the Minnesota Book Award-winning history of the Dakota in Minnesota, "Mni Sota Makoce: The Land of the Dakota." The book is the result of research examining the Dakota's history in Minnesota long before the 1862 war, a project to go beyond white-written accounts. Making much of personal interviews, oral histories and artifacts, the result is an exhaustive look at how the Dakota lived in Minnesota before, during and after the War.

"There's more to this history than December 26, 1862," Westerman said, noting the date of a mass execution of 38 Dakota Sioux in Mankato. "And there are more than two sides to this story. And yes, there are things to be angry about but there are also parts of that history to be thankful for and grateful for and that we have an obligation to make sure everyone understands it is not a binary situation in any way, shape or form."

In serving the underserved, Westerman has her own history, including working with Hmong kids and Somali moms and others in communities around the state.

"What was nice about working with the moms was they're tribal people, so there's a connection there about extended family and food and song and poetry," Westerman said.

She continues work on a series of poems for War Mothers, being the mom of a Marine, Travis Griffin, who did two combat tours in Iraq. And she works

with her daughter, Erin Griffin, on Dakota language projects. Erin teaches Dakota language in Hawaii.

Westerman and her husband live in rural Good Thunder, where she writes and continues working on quilts. Her grandmother sewed quilts, something Westerman picked up in adulthood and turned into works that have been exhibited in galleries across the state. She's created pieces that are part of the permanent collections of the Minnesota Historical Society, Great Plains Art Museum, University of South Dakota and the Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota.

Those works also demonstrate a connection with the landscape of Minnesota, and thus a connection with her ancestry and larger home.

"I finally felt like I was in the place where I belonged," she said of her arrival and settling in Minnesota. "Even as strong as my upbringing was in Wichita, I never felt like I belonged there."

"I knew I was here for a reason. Why else would I come to a place like this that I never heard of except on 'Little House on the Prairie' when Ma and Pa wanted to get away from the kids and went to Mankato?"

"She speaks powerfully for so many people," said fellow English professor Geoff Herbach when Westerman was announced by Gov. Tim Walz as the state's poet laureate. "We're just lucky to have her here. Given her giant impact on our community and in the state, I'm almost not surprised she's the new Poet Laureate. Almost." ✨





# Stand and Deliver

**An accident changed his world. Today he changes it for others.**

**By Christine Nessler '02**

**T**he bright blue sky was deceiving on the frigid January day in 2007 when Aaron Holm '90 had his life-changing moment. Holm, working as the regional sales operations manager for CDI Corporation in downtown Minneapolis, received a call from his administrative assistant. She was stranded with a flat tire on Highway 394 in Wayzata, Minnesota. Holm came to her aid and while changing her tire was struck by an oncoming vehicle traveling on the shoulder of the road. He was just 40 years old.

“Your whole life changes in an instant,” said Holm, who as a result of the accident lost both legs below the knees. “I remember thinking to myself how much trouble we were in.” Holm and his wife Amanda had three young kids.

While in the hospital, a team of friends, family, caregivers and medical staff set to work researching what life could look like for a bi-lateral amputee. They began by identifying the components of recovery: prosthetics, medical, legal, financial, insurance, transportation and home modification.

“It just became a project for all of us to fulfill,” said Holm. “We figured out how we were going to reach the desired outcome we had identified for my life.” Transferring his business experience of overseeing operations, recruiting, sales, administration and human resources, Holm assigned project managers to each component of his recovery and delegated tasks accordingly.

Word spread of Holm’s accident and remarkable team-based recovery. People in similar situations started to reach out to him for assistance.

“We realized at that point we had built up such a wealth of knowledge that we could give back to individuals or really what ultimately became a community,” said Holm.

For the past 14 years, Holm has turned his experience into a program to mentor and advocate for amputees of all ages. Wiggle Your Toes, a 100-percent volunteer-run nonprofit, uses a business-like approach to the components of recovery. The group helps people, often at the



lowest points of their lives, navigate through the changes and uncertainty of becoming an amputee and also given them the tools to live their best lives.

For instance, Wiggle Your Toes helps clients access reimbursement for everyday prosthetics, while also offering help obtaining activity-specific prosthetics.

Board member Courtney Godfrey lost her leg in a boating accident on Christmas Lake near Excelsior, Minnesota, in 2017. Searching for help, her sister in California found the Wiggle Your Toes website. She reached out to Holm in the middle of the night with an urgent plea for help.

“Within a day, Aaron was in the hospital visiting with me and telling me I would be alright,” said Godfrey. Holm assisted Godfrey’s family in various ways, but perhaps the most meaningful was obtaining a prosthetic specifically for snowboarding. Holm had taken to heart Godfrey’s fear of never snowboarding again. In fall of 2021 she took a leave of absence from her position at Fox 9 News to pursue a spot on the Paralympic Snowboard Team.

For Holm, staying active in what an amputee loved before their loss is not only important for their enjoyment, but also their confidence. Wiggle Your Toes provides coaching and clinics for various activities including fitness, running, mountain biking, wake surfing and golf.

“Golf was rehab for me,” said Holm, for whom the undulating greens, the cart paths, the sand traps and the sprinkler heads on a golf course provided better real-life experience on his prosthetics than the controlled environment of traditional rehab.

“Every time I played 18 holes I got a better grasp on what my prosthetics were going to do in certain environments. So my confidence level was raised by the game of golf.”

Obtaining reimbursement for prosthetics can be one of the biggest hurdles Holm faces for his clients. Because of this, educating legislators and policy writers for insurance has become a big piece of his advocacy efforts in both his role as executive director of Wiggle Your Toes and his job as manager of marketing and consumer engagement for Ottobock North America, a designer and manufacturer of prosthetics, orthotics and mobility equipment.

“Public speaking, and sharing the story of my setback, recovery, and overcoming adversity has become a big part of my life,” said Holm.

He doesn’t stop at the Capitol or insurance giants—he brings his message back to his alma mater as well.

Craig Galvin, an adjunct instructor in speech, hearing and rehabilitation services at Minnesota State Mankato reached out to Holm to speak to his Sensitivity to Disabilities class.

Galvin says Holm’s story touches his students, giving them perspective that people with disabilities shouldn’t be treated differently, but with compassion, understanding and, in this case, awe.

“He not only overcame adversity, but then gave back to others in a similar situation,” said Galvin. “That speaks volumes about his character.”

For Holm the benefit of sharing his story to Galvin’s class for the last couple years is twofold. He has the opportunity to help educate students and the community on the mission of Wiggle Your Toes, and he also enjoys being back on campus where he created so many incredible memories and friendships.

Holm, a White Bear Lake native, attended Minnesota State Mankato in the late 1980s and lived on campus in the legendary Gage Towers. He graduated in 1990 with degrees in communications and history.

“I really enjoy getting back onto campus and exploring the city—the place I called home for a short period of time,” Holm said. 🍷



*“My confidence level was raised by the game of golf.” —Aaron Holm.*



# SCHOOL COLORS

An education grad goes home for vacation. Then gets to work helping his old school.

BY JOE TOUGAS '86



*Nana Boakye with students in his old school, which he helped restore on a vacation home to Kumasi, Ghana in spring of 2021.*

**I**n the spring of 2021, the second week of visiting family in Ghana had Nana Boakye '10, '15 heading to his grandmother's home in the town of Kumasi when he saw a group of young children walking to school. One wore only a single shoe. Another wore no shoes at all. Another had no backpack.

As his heart sank, his eyes focused on what the children were wearing.

"I recognized those colors," he said. "I recognized the school uniform."

These students were indeed walking to the same school he attended years earlier. It prompted him to visit the school the following day and see if he could help with anything. The question upon arriving was where to start.

Windows seemed the first priority—there weren't any. School supplies were sparse as well. "They were lacking basic necessities," Boakye said.

He talked to teachers, took pictures and then jumped on social media, swiftly organizing an emergency fundraiser for his old school and soliciting friends via Facebook and Instagram. Money poured in immediately.

"Oh, man, I was at a loss for words," he recalled. "I got lots of love and support from people. Ten dollars here, 15 here, 20 there. I combined all the money and by the end of the week I bought supplies and windows and cupboards to put their books in."

Within a week of seeing those few kids in his school's colors, Boakye with the help of cousins and a carpenter had purchased, hauled and installed the windows and bookshelves.





Contributions had been so generous that money was left over, which he then used to help make improvements to the school his parents had attended.

“I was able to roof that building for them,” he said.

He has since formed a nonprofit corporation for area schools to go toward more improvements, from utilities and plastering to new playground equipment. “There’s a bunch of schools in the surrounding area that are even poorer condition than this one,” he said. “But I kind of want to focus on this one first. If I’m lucky enough to get more funds, then I could be on to the next school.”

Boakye’s family moved from Ghana to Eagan, Minnesota when he was 10 years old. He attended Minnesota State Mankato partly to have a close-but-not-too-close-to-home school, but also because he wanted to get into education as a career.

“I looked into the teaching program and what I know is it’s one of the most competitive ones and once you complete it you can land something,” he said. He received a bachelor’s degree in English and speech education, obtained a master’s degree in teaching English as a second language and today teaches in Arizona.

His parents, uninterested in continued Minnesota winters, had moved back to Ghana when he started college. He’s pleased that his recent visit home prompted some improvements to the schools that were important to his family.

“I was just going there to visit my parents, but this came along and I thought I’d take this opportunity and just help out,” he said. “I saw myself in these kids. I used to be in this situation.

“So it touched home. And I decided to give back.” ✨



# CLASS NOTES



Russian Club students gathered around the piano, 1962.

## 1950s

**EDWARD PUTZIER, '50**, Boulder CO, is a retired health science manager.

**GEORGIA (ENFIELD) SCHULTAZ, '53, '55**, Mankato, MN, taught at St. Clair High School and the Minneapolis Society for the Blind before working in human resources at Rosemount, Inc. for 25 years prior to her retirement. She volunteered at the Blue Earth County Historical Society for 33 years. She remains active.

**DOLORES (SMITH) PETERS, '59**, Mountain Lake, MN, retired from teaching in the Mountain Lake Public Schools.

## 1960s

**ROBERT VINT, '60**, San Diego, CA, recently retired after working 18 years with General Motors Chevrolet Division, six years as owner/operator of a GM dealership and 25 years as the manager of a motor coach company.

**STEPHEN FOWLS, '68**, Glen Rock, NJ, retired after 34 years of selling medical supplies. He now spends his time hiking, biking and traveling in his RV.

**CAROL (HARRER) VICKERY, '68**, Brooklyn Park, MN, retired from the Hopkins School District.

**MICHAEL HOWE, '69**, Dayton, MN, recently was recognized as one of the 2021 Outstanding Directors by "Twin Cities Business" for his service on the Delta Dental board. He also remains a proud member of the 1967 Minnesota State University, Mankato Athletic Hall of Fame for wrestling.

## 1970s

**KATHLEEN (BARTA) HINES, '70**, Excelsior, MN, along with her husband, has retired from their optometric practice. The couple split their time between Excelsior, MN and Fountain Hills, AZ.

**GEOFFREY WASCHER, '70**, Plymouth, MI, lives in Michigan.

**JOHN RULMYR, '71**, Oro Valle, AZ, and his wife, **RACHEL (SPENCER) RULMYR, '72**, have retired from education. Both were inducted into the MSC Athletic Hall of Fame; John for baseball and Rachel for volleyball.

**STEVE WILSON, '71**, Minneapolis, MN, recently was appointed to the board of directors of music company K-tel International.

**DIANA MCGLOVER COBB, '72**, North Hollywood, CA, is the CEO of Oasis Business Supply.

**RANDALL GRILLE, '72**, Key West, FL, has moved to Florida.

**JAMES ZOTALIS, '73, '78**, Faribault, MN, was elected dean of the First Cathedral in Faribault in August.

**FRANCIS MOE, '73**, Cedar Rapids, IA, retired from teaching for the Cedar Rapids Public School System.

**DEBORA (WESTERMAN) RYAN, '73**, Prior Lake, MN, is retired.

**PENNY (SAMUELSON) KINNEY, '73**, Austin, MN, retired in 2016 from Hormel Foods.

**LAWRENCE MANDT, '74**, Qualicum Beach, BC, Canada, lives in Canada.



**GEMARIAH (HARTMANN) LOVE, '75**, El Paso, TX, lives in Texas.

**THOMAS POSZ, '75**, Concord, CA, is retired and living in California.

**CHARLES NELSON, '75**, Wheaton, MN, is retired and living in Minnesota.

**CHARLES HOTT, '75**, Los Lunas, NM, is retired.

**BARBARA (WINN) KLINGBEIL, '76**, Dayton, MN, retired after working 27 years at M Health Fairview in information technology. Her latest position was a senior application security analyst. Barbara is looking forward to visiting with friends and other activities soon.

**ELLEN (PENGRA) HOFFMAN, '76**, Chesterfield, MO, is a senior IT program manager with Centene Corporation.

**STEPHEN MOHN, '76**, St. Paul, MN, is retired.

**HARRY CHROMY, '77**, The Villages, FL, retired from his CPA practice in 2020 and moved to Florida with his wife.

**SANDRA EITEL, '78**, Visalia, CA, is living in California.

**DANNY SUGGS, '78**, Brooklyn Center, MN, is retired.

**MICHAEL DOW, '79**, Farmington, MN, lives in Farmington.

## 1980s

**LESLIE (PFEIL, UHL) ZARO, '80**, Walla Walla, WA, is a registered nurse in the ICU at Providence St. Mary Medical Center.

**MARY KAY (WOLFF) HAUER, '80**, La Quinta, CA, lives in California with her husband.

**JOHN SMITH, '81**, St. Paul, MN, is a research specialist I with the University of Minnesota.

**SANDRA (POLLOCK) BRUER, '82**, Apple Valley, MN, is a parks director with Washington County who recently received the Clifton E. French Distinguished Service Award from the Minnesota Recreations and Park Association. The award recognizes long and outstanding services and is the highest professional award given.

**MICHAEL LEPAGE, '83**, Mesa, AZ, is working remotely as a software engineer with Boston Scientific in Arden Hills, MN. He enjoys bowling and recently bowled two perfect games—300 each.

**GODWIN AFANGIDEH, '84, '87**, Uyo, Akwa Ibom, Nigeria, is the chairman/CEO of Goshen Voyage Nigeria Limited.

**JAMES POTTER, '84**, Hartford, SD, is employed doing tax support.

**MICHAEL HERMANN, '85**, Akeley, MN, works for Delta Air Lines.

**TED YOUEL, '86**, Edina, MN, is the director of software development with Optum.

**KIMBERLY (SCHAIBLE) FRIEDRICH, '88**, Richfield, MN, is a registered nurse.

**TODD OLSON, '88**, Newport, OR, is an agent/owner of Farmers Insurance in Oregon.

**SANDY (MOHR) HOWE, '89, '98**, North Mankato, MN, retired after 20 years as a patrol officer with the North Mankato Police Department.

**JOHN RYAN, '89**, Las Vegas, NV, is retired.

## 1990s

**KRIS (LHOTKA) CLEVELAND, '90**, Canby, MN, is a doctor of physical therapy who practiced full time until 2012. Since then she has been teaching exercise science at Southwest Minnesota State University where she also runs a free physical therapy clinic on campus.

**GARY THOMPSON, '90**, Baltimore, MD, is living in Maryland.

**MARY (GREDEEN) KLEPPER, '90**, Rochester, MN, is a business analyst with the Mayo Clinic, Department of Anesthesiology & Perioperative Medicine.

**JUDY (VOGL) BROWN, '92, '94**, Woodbury, MN, is a human resources manager with the City of Woodbury, MN.

**DAVID VENZKE, '92**, Iowa City, IA, is a research specialist II at the University of Iowa/Howard Hughes Medical Institute.

**KERI (ZAJAC) MORITZ, '93**, Elgin, IL, is the chief human resources officer with Steiner Electric Company.

**ANAND RANGANATHAN, '94**, Oro Valley, AZ, lives in Arizona.

**LARRY ROCKOW, '94**, Middleton, ID, is a truck driver for DFI Temp Control.

**TINA (LAWRENCE) SCHRIEVER, '94**, Rochester, MN, is an administrative office manager with Mayo Clinic.

**WILLIAM GOEKEN, '98**, Dell Rapids, SD, is a project manager.

**SPENCER KRAMBER, '98**, Los Angeles, CA, is a working actor who was recently cast in the feature film, "The Woods," which is scheduled to be released later this year or early next year.

**MATTHEW ANDERSON, '98**, Beatrice, NE, is a senior designer with Exmark.

**CHAD DALBERG, '98**, Ypsilanti, MI, works for Stellantis.



## 2000s

**YVONNE A.K. JOHNSON, '00**, Spokane Valley, WA, is the executive artistic director who is leading the team planning for The Spokane Valley Performing Arts Center. Plans are to build a \$64 million state-of-the-art performing arts facility. She also is the founder and leader of Spokane Valley Summer Theatre.

**MIKE ABBAS, '00**, Maple Grove, MN, is a sales manager with Crown Equipment Corporation.

**RYAN STEWART, '02**, Roberts, WI, is a home inspector/radon mitigation contractor with Straight Answer Home Inspections LLC.

**JODY (RANKIN) FREDERICK, '02**, Mankato, MN, is an elementary STEM teacher at Loyola Catholic School.

**MARIAH FORMAN, '03**, Hartland, MN, is the president/owner of Good Steward Consulting.

**AHMAD SUFYAN, '04**, Spring, TX, is a project analyst with Wells Fargo.

**BRYAN JOYCE, '05**, Windom, MN, is a principal at the Windom Area Middle/High School.

**ASHLEY (KNAKMUHS) GRAMS, '06**, Marshall, MN, is an assistant manager with North Star Mutual Insurance.

**NATHAN HEMILLER, '07, '11, '12, '20**, Hartley, IA, is a high school principal who also holds his superintendent certification.

**RYAN (GRANATA) HVITLOK, '07**, Hutchinson, KS, is the director of planning & development with the City of Hutchinson.

**SCOTT NELSEN, '07**, North Mankato, MN, is the assistant athletic director/marketing, promotions and community engagement with Minnesota State University, Mankato.

**MALCOLM CARTER, '08**, Zachary, LA, is a site manager with Amazon who served on the Baton Rouge Area Chamber Board of Directors and was an Ascension Chamber officer from 2016-2018 and received the 2017 Ascension Parish Business of the Year award. He also is a recipient of the Scott's Miracle Gro Citizen of the Year award.

## 2010s

**ALEX BURG, '10**, Brownsville, MN, is an investigator with the LaCrosse Police Department. His wife, **ALEIGHA BURG, '11**, is a civil engineer with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation.

**KATHIE (KALLEVIG) PETERSON, '10**, Chino Valley, AZ, is a professor at Yavapai College.

**ANGELA (CLITTY) NITSCH, '10, '12**, Otsego, MN, is a speech language pathologist with the Osseo Area Schools.

**CLAYTON WAGNER, '10, '14**, Apple Valley, MN, is a physician with HealthPartners.

**BRIANN (JENNISSEN) MORBITZER, '11, '14**, St. Paul, MN,

is a speech language pathologist with Superior Speech Therapy who also runs a social group for adults who stutter. She and her husband are expecting their third child.

**SARAH (RICKERT) POPPLER, '11**, Eden Prairie, MN, is a senior HEMA analyst with Boston Scientific.

**STELLA (GEORGAS) ABRAHAMSON, '11**, Cottage Grove, WI, lives in Wisconsin.

**NICHOLAS LAXEN, '13**, Brainerd, MN, is an auditor with the Department of Defense.

**CARLEE (KONZ) ARELLANES, '14**, Normal, IL, is a talent development specialist with F&G.

**BRETT KOCH, '15**, Otsego, MN, is an attorney with Bosch Law Firm.

**BRANDON SCHMIDT, '17**, River Falls, WI, is a buyer with The Sportsman's Guide, Inc. His wife, **ANGELA TELL, '18, '20**, is a speech and language pathologist with the South Washington County School District.

**JOHANN HOLLAR, '17**, St. Paul, MN, is an overnight stocker at Target.

**MAGGIE (O'CONNOR) D'SILVA, '18**, Prior Lake, MN, works at Prior Lake High School. Her husband, **AARON D'SILVA, '17**, is a lab supervisor with Agropur.

**NICOLE HALLMAN, '19**, Shoreview, MN, is a community editor and photographer with Adams Publishing Group.

**LAROY MCGEE, '19**, Milwaukee, WI, is a financial accountant with McGee Accounting & Tax.

**PATRICIA DOMINGUES-MEJIA, '19**, Maple Grove, MN, is the regional ombudsman for long-term care with the State of Minnesota – Office of Ombudsman for Long Term Care.

**RAIHAN UDDIN, '19**, Miami Beach, FL, recently was promoted to a full-time business expert at Apple.

**ADRIAN ANDERSON, '19**, Mankato, MN, is a civil engineer with the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

## 2020s

**OLIVIA (THOMAS) MARTH, '20**, Mankato, MN, is a sixth grade teacher in the Waseca Public Schools.

**TREVOR BELT, '20**, Iola, KS, is the director of theatre at Allen Community College in Kansas. He also continues to work as an actor and director.

**DAVIDE KLINE, '21**, Maplewood, MN, lives in Maplewood.

**JARRETT MECHER, '21**, Sioux Falls, SD, is a manager of game operations with Iowa Heartlanders.



# IN MEMORIAM

## 1930S

Lois Marian (Anderson) Larson '38  
Lucile C. (Carpenter) Matson '39

## 1940S

Margaret Ellen (Johnson) Stuart '40  
Ben J. Wiens '42, '45  
Doris Jean (Moore) Benjamin '43, '67  
Ronelva Arvella (Thompson) Peacock '43  
Donna Margaret (Dezell) Bergerson '46, '70  
Marjorie Helen (Manke) Peterson '46  
William Eugene Martin '47  
Gladys Erminnie (Youngdahl) Schmidt '47, '64  
Marion L. (Fitzloff) Drescher '48  
Doris Lorraine (Hope) Meyer '48, '72  
Betty Jean (Mahler) Passer '48  
Paul Joseph Butzer '49  
Beulah Arline (Beelow) Ewald '49  
Elizabeth Christine (Noreen) Grey '49  
Mary Ann (Popowski) Olson '49, '67  
Bernice Ann (Farrell) Unze '49, '73

## 1950S

Mary Alice (Wanstrom) Franzman '50  
Isabelle Leona (Schulz) French '50  
Marilyn Merle (McCready) Grove '50  
George Ralph Lambrecht '50  
Joyce Irene (Schmalz) Newman '50  
Elizabeth Merle (Miller) Williams '50, '72  
Norma Jean (Imlay) Bergquist '51, '67  
Beulah Doris (Buchan) Erickson '51, '69  
Mary Elizabeth (King) Kotthoff '51, '64  
Ralph Nicholas Wolf '51  
Burton Lee Anderson '52, '55, '64  
Marie Ann (Cassel) Dannan '52  
Carole Joan (Vancura) Rost '52  
Dorothy Aganetha Fast '53  
Elizabeth Ann (Lyman) Spartz '53  
George Robert Haefner '54  
Nancy May (Thom) Heidal '54, '59  
Evelyn Grace (Havemeier) Frazier '55, '56  
Harry R. Harder '55, '60  
John Francis Just '55, '65  
Lloyd Harry Kornmann '55, '60  
Norma Jean (Froehling) Larson '55, '72  
Mary Martha (Meyer) Leach '55  
Elizabeth Ann Biren '56  
Violet Rose (Hauptli) Johnston '56

Donald Edward Leider '56  
Muriel Frances Sargent '56, '58  
Mary Dorothy (Schuck) Burghardt '57  
Meritt James Henry '57, '64  
Sophie M. (Stepka) Kubes '57  
Robert Lee Meyer '57  
John Junior Paulson '57  
Leo George Traurig '57, '65  
Margaret Kathleen (Kallberg) Braff '58  
Gene Gavin Brandvold '58  
Eileen Dolores (Wolff) Burns '58  
Dean Lyle Schentzel '58  
Mary Diane (Gits) Ehlers '59  
Curtis Luke Eichers '59  
Robert Maurice Gaarder '59  
David C. Hintz '59  
Gary J. Koster '59  
David Norman Menton '59  
Richard Warner Minkel '59  
Dolores Jean (Jorgensen) Unke '59  
James H. Zitzmann '59

## 1960S

Elenore Lea (Palmby) Boots '60  
Kathleen Rae Cain '60  
James Alton Erie '60  
Lowell Duane Koch '60  
Charlotte Edna (Gerken) Murphy '60  
Eunice Ruth (Neve) Simonson '60  
Rosemary B. (Busswitz) Tripp '60  
Jerome A. White '60  
Steven Lewis Crane '61  
Karilyn Rose (Wilber) Danielson '61  
Ronnilee Emil Doggett '61  
Walter Bjoen Gislason '61  
Roger Allen Goettsch '61  
Jerry Lee Waters '61  
Kenneth Dawson Bishir '62  
Gaylen Richard Case '62  
Dale Walter Groth '62  
Wayne Kelly Wykoff '62  
Doris Lorraine (Subra) Callahan '63  
LaVern Charles Christianson '63  
Joan Mary (Cooney) Jenks '63  
Gladys Marie (Hubacek) Macoy '63, '73  
Gary Lee Olson '63  
Monte Lemuel Peterson '63  
Sandra Lee (Maertens) Prechel '63  
Adryn Lowell Sponberg '63  
William Henry Frederick '64  
Robert Emmett Hand '64  
Karen Ann (Schons) Iffert '64  
Leota Marguerite Larson '64  
Shirley Lavonne (Petersen) McConnell



# IN MEMORIAM

Utzman '64  
John Carl Schmidt '64  
Daniel Francis Schroeder '64  
Harry Leroy Stock '64, '80  
John Lindley Stockdill '64  
Sallie Ann (Johnson) Stockdill '64  
Allen Dean Svalstad '64  
Lynne Eileen (Reed) Goodburn '65  
Diane Virginia (Garbisch) LeVake '65  
Dorothy Jean (Hanson) Long '65  
Patricia Lois (Ashing) Mulford '65, '70  
Marietta J. (Johnson) Storlie '65  
Darrell Dean Strampe '65  
Nancy K. (Chamberlin) Gabel '66  
Dean Roman Haefner '66, '79  
Barbara Gail (Juliar) Horsager '66  
Ray C. Lehmann '66  
Richard Alfred Mackdanz '66, '85  
Ronald Eugene Miller '66  
Ruth Marie (Sippert) Sibbett '66  
Doriann Elizabeth (Fredrickson) Thompson '66  
Ralph John Todd '66  
Robert Wayne Van Den Einde '66  
Steven George Waterman '66  
Ruth Alice (Peterson) Zill '66  
Florinne Marie (Glebe) Alders '67  
Gary Lee Christiansen '67  
Gerald Ivan Glore '67, '73  
Gregory Clarence Goblirsch '67  
Jeanne Lynn (Olson) Hoffman '67  
Janice Phyllis (Krampitz) Lewison '67  
Gary Lee Pawlitschek '67  
Richard Lee Pratt '67  
Thiel K. Reinecke '67  
Marquita R. (Quijano) Schmitz '67  
Steven Ralph Temple '67  
William Gregory Annexstad '68  
Evard Pohlman Best '68  
Doris Irene (Backlund) Boyce '68, '71, '85  
Robert William Brown '68  
Rebecca A. (Willmert) Johnson '68  
Richard C. Lundy '68  
Paul Michael Poehling '68  
David Allen Reiter '68  
Llynda Esther (Edberg) Rhoades '68  
Earl Roy Schindeldecker '68  
James C. Donlinger '69  
Larry Alan Duden '69  
Roger Lee Elmquist '69  
Gary Guy Erickson '69, '04  
Rita Mae (Amberg) Gomsrud '69  
Gary Alland Grunwald '69  
Karen K. (Bahr) Kortuem '69

Marlin K. Niss '69  
Kary Scott Paulson '69  
James Francis Pietan '69, '71  
Robert E. Sallee '69  
Roger W. Simon '69  
Brenda Susan (Johnson) Skurdahl '69  
Evon Marilyn (Rosewall) Struthers '69  
Fred Allan Wall '69  
Donald Ambrose Welsch '69  
George Rath Wolner '69

## 1970S

Thomas J. Baumann '70  
John Michael Bray '70, '72  
Marilyn Ann (Olsen) Gerdts '70  
Sister Eleanor Ann Granger '70  
Thomas Francis Heaney '70  
Michael J. Hubbard '70  
Erik Steven Jorde '70  
James Anthony Krasky '70  
James Allen Nelson '70  
Sister Kenric Ruppert '70  
Michael Anthony Schafer '70, '82  
Douglas George Spinler '70  
Janice Ann (Haisman) Swartz '70  
Daniel Bruce Abbott '71  
Harley Frank Baker '71  
Norman William Burgess '71  
Mary Marvel Daley '71, '74  
Geraldine Kay Hauge '71  
John Charles Landkamer '71  
Edward William McLean '71  
Sarah Jane Paasch '71  
Leland Ernest Raley '71  
William Alfred Sorbo '71  
Kenneth Ray Stockdale '71  
Allen R. Trebelhorn '71  
Lynne Elizabeth (Nelson) Weber '71, '04  
William Junior Beimers '72, '74, '77  
Barbara Jean (Kraus) Claussen '72  
Steven Henry Crosby '72  
Audrey H. (Bell) Elliott '72  
Philip Eugene Fleischer '72  
Lorraine S. (Samuelson) Hansen '72  
Elizabeth Jean Kelsey '72  
Graydon J. Kickul '72  
Rodney Dwayne Larson '72  
Charles Edward O'Connor '72  
Donald Randall Carnahan '73  
Darwin Edward Donner '73  
John Lawrence Gilbertson '73  
Mark Clarence Halverson '73  
Thomas Edwin Hoerchler '73

Cheryl Ann (Beck) Hurst '73  
Darlene Marie (Sasse) Kaiser '73  
Daniel Lyle Rohman '73  
Dwight L. Simonson '73  
Gary Lee Untiedt '73  
Rolan Dean Albers '74  
Jerry Michael Clark '74  
Sister Ramona M. Kruse '71, '74  
John Anthony McDonald '74  
Robert Eugene Menk '74  
Kathryn Nell (Backman) Schallert '74  
Dale A. Skoda '74  
Dallis Faye Solsma '74  
Debbie Jo (Arduser) Suedel '74  
Louise Rose (Horchler) Gass '75, '83  
Debra Jean (Ramthun) Ramsey '75  
Paul Edward Trauger '75  
Judith Helen Yung '75, '76  
Donald Wallace Ciriacks '76  
William Jeffrey Cole '76  
LuAnn Irene (Menden) Nead '76  
Tommy Russell Stewart '76  
Joan Harriet (Johnson) Wicklund '76  
Susan Kae (Bjoraker) Kohlmeyer '77, '89  
Janice Kay Nuffer '70, '77  
Dorothy Jean (Gosen) Redding '77  
Kim Marie Anderson '78  
Morris Ralph Arvidson '78  
James Brian Cina '78  
Sister Mary Dominic Klaseus '71, '78  
Janet Ruth (Osmundson) Schneider '78  
Timothy Joel Schultz '78  
Dale Robert Lamp '79  
Timothy John Letner '79  
Thomas Edward Ross '79

## 1980s

Joan Louise Ellison '80  
Constance Susan (Schneider) Gowder '80  
Joan Lucille (Guth) Hurry '80  
Sheila Ann (Germain) Stahler '80  
Marva Lene' (Bentdahl) Thurston '80  
Kathy Ann Allen '81  
Olufemi Olusegun Alugo '81, '86  
Gerald Allen Antes '81  
Melody Dawn Brandenburg '81  
Linda Beth Johnson '81, '87  
Mark Andrew Brooks '82  
Malda Spolans (Spolans) Farnham '82  
Joyce Ann (Heinzerling) Odegaard '82  
William Emmet McCabe '83



Douglas Oliver McCoss '83  
Kevin Edward Meyer '83  
Lenore W. (Wanzek) Sweers '83  
Brenda Sue (Kremin) Hagen '84, '10  
Daniel J. Patton '84  
Lucille F. (Jenks) Squires '84  
Lori Jane (Havlicek) Torres '84  
Ross Robert Rugroden '85  
Alex J. Stork '85  
Michael James Danielson '86,  
Cindy Rae (Kopischke) Pautzke '86  
Bethann "Betsy" (Steinhagen)  
Warrick '86  
Susan Marie Harty '87, '11  
Lee Thomas Schwanke '87  
Barbara Jean (Burkel) Swenson '87  
Mary Jane (Hilgendorf) Olson '88  
Beverly Lou (Krug) Reed '88

## 1990S

John Henry Camp '90  
Amy Joann (Smisek) Domonoske '90  
William Jeffrey Nord '90  
Kenneth Joseph Scheiner '90  
Thomas Arthur Skarohlid '90  
Darrin David Bahr '91  
Alan Ray Steinhoff '91  
Lewis E. Whitlock '91  
Troy Donovan Gilbert '92  
Jeffery Allan Hove '92  
Nancy Lee (Polivka) Reuvers '92  
Kathleen Frances (Strohl) Dettmer  
Skelly '93, '97  
Sherry Lynn (Bahr) Heil '93  
Melinda Marie Shamp '93  
Cynthia Sue (Kuebler) Contreras '94  
Peggy Ellen (Gilbert) Cummings '94  
Roxanne Michelle (Borchers) Powell  
'94, '96  
Gerald William Tietje '95, '05  
Myron Michael Dummer '96, '99  
Robin Ann (Hall) Haines '97  
Mark David Distel '98  
Mary Elizabeth (Laske) Rubbelke '98  
Steven Mark McKenna '99  
Beth Leatrice (Haen) Orłowski '99

## 2000S

Ryan Wayne Gohlinghorst '00  
Kathleen Anne (Bagan) Wille '02  
Mara Monique (Burginger) Devens  
'03  
Amy Patrice (Schmid) Schmitz '03  
Bradley Paul Barnard '07

Nicole Renee (Gersch) Radermacher  
'08  
Rebecca Rose (Wickenhauser)  
Shamla '08  
Kimberly Anne Dvoracek-Anderson  
'09  
Jack Eric Rupert '09  
Brooke Nicole (Woitas) Gulbrandson  
'10  
Christine Elizabeth Henke '12  
Susan Christine (Moe) Farmer '13  
Shelby Lynn (Morell) Sandahl '13  
Derek Michael Lindely '14

## FACULTY & STAFF

Bradley Paul Barnard  
Rebecca Lee Bell  
Marion Juliet (Gillett) Carrison  
Hope Ann Cook  
James Richard Daines  
William Roy DeMaree  
Malda Spolans (Spolans) Farnham  
Frederick Eugene Goetz  
Cheryl Beth (Asleson) Haefner  
Judith Ann (Carlson) Lokensgard  
Deloris G. (Kubishak) Miller  
Beatrice Helen (Tolppi) Moosally  
Teddy Jean (Erickson) Ollrich  
Elmer Wayne Opheim  
Margaret R. (Robinson) Preska  
Kathleen Frances (Strohl) Dettmer  
Skelly  
Marva Lene' (Bentdahl) Thurston  
Charles William Waters  
Lynne Elizabeth (Nelson) Weber  
Lewis E. Whitlock  
Kathleen Anne (Bagan) Wille  
Gerald L. Wise

## FRIENDS

Bernard Michael Bidelman  
Bruce Randall Davis  
Lois J. (Hartmann) Kodet  
Arthur William Reese  
John David Sandquist  
Paul Robert Stollard  
Robin Neil Zernechel



## THE LONG WAY HOME

By Drew Lyon '06

**R**ichard Raffesberger's long and winding journey to earning his degree took its share of back roads and discouraging detours—spanning six decades.

"Things never clicked," said Raffesberger. "The timing just was never right."

A native of western Wisconsin, Raffesberger came to Mankato on a football scholarship in the summer of 1979. A series of concussions, however, ended his football career. After quitting the team, the effects from the concussions made studying difficult, and Raffesberger lost his scholarship following his junior year.

### Heartbreak

Raffesberger left Mankato a year shy of graduation and took a job in the Twin Cities. In the 1980s, he took another step toward his degree, attending the University's Extended Campus program and taking courses at the University of Minnesota. In 1987, Raffesberger returned with renewed vigor to Mankato to complete his studies.

"It still felt like home," he said. "I felt like I was back on a mission."

Raffesberger, then 27, immersed himself in his curriculum and the campus community. He joined Mankato's Toastmasters Club, sat on a student-athlete relations committee, penned articles for *The Reporter* and made the Dean's List.

"Those two quarters writing for *The Reporter* were some of my fondest memories in Mankato," he said. "The University was giving me a real sense of drive, purpose and leadership."

In spring 1988, Raffesberger donned his cap and gown for graduation. A few weeks later, his report card stunned him. While he scored eight A's, Raffesberger failed his

ninth course, rendering him credits shy of graduation.

"I was heartbroken and discouraged," he said. "I felt like a failure."

He moved back to the Twin Cities before settling in his hometown of Osceola, Wisconsin. The years, then decades, passed.

### 'It's never too late'

An ardent follower of Maverick athletics, he visited Mankato a handful of times to attend homecoming events and football games. Yet, he says, the missing credits made him feel like an outsider at his almost alma mater.

"There was always an open gap in my life, even in my adult trips to Mankato," he said.

Then the pandemic hit, altering Raffesberger's job prospects. Laid off from work, he decided once and for all to finish the job he started during the Carter administration.

"I just needed the right person with the right spark to think outside of the box," he said.

He found the faculty he needed in Ann Kuzma, chair of the Marketing & International Business Department, and Student Relations Coordinator Linda Meidl, who worked with Raffesberger to figure out a way to convert his 1970s and 1980s studies into a 2020 diploma. It was a complex, albeit rewarding, task for Kuzma and Meidl.

"This took a long time," Kuzma said. "But everyone wanted to have this happen, because he had such a positive attitude about it."

Raffesberger started pursuing a degree in applied leadership. Two semesters later, he deemed himself an outsider no longer. Raffesberger returned to Mankato with his wife, Deb, and daughter, Emily, for fall virtual graduation, reuniting with the campus he first encountered 41 years earlier.

"I was adamant about the full circle of Mankato," said Raffesberger, who used his degree to find a new job. "I started a Mav and wanted to finish a Mav. I was serious about that. I really wanted to close it here." 📍

Read an expanded version of this article online at [today.magazine.mnsu.edu](http://today.magazine.mnsu.edu)



*He first came to the University on a football scholarship in 1979.*



*It's official: He's Richard Raffesberger '20.*



# ALUMNI UPDATE

Please list any career changes, awards, honors, marriages, births or memorial information you'd like to see in TODAY in an email to [today@mnsu.edu](mailto:today@mnsu.edu) or [msuupdates@mnsu.edu](mailto:msuupdates@mnsu.edu). Due to publication schedules, your news may not appear in the next issue. Class Notes may be edited for length and clarity.

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Name (including maiden) \_\_\_\_\_  
Nickname \_\_\_\_\_  
Graduation year(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Major(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Degree(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
Mailing address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Home phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Preferred email \_\_\_\_\_  
Professional title or position \_\_\_\_\_  
Employer \_\_\_\_\_  
Work phone \_\_\_\_\_

## ABOUT YOUR SPOUSE / PARTNER

Name (including maiden) \_\_\_\_\_  
Spouse/partner \_\_\_\_\_  
Graduation year (if Minnesota State Mankato graduate) \_\_\_\_\_  
Professional title or position \_\_\_\_\_  
Employer \_\_\_\_\_  
Employer's address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Work phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Notes \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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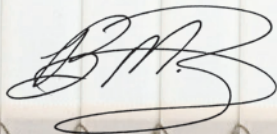
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Minnesota State University, Mankato  
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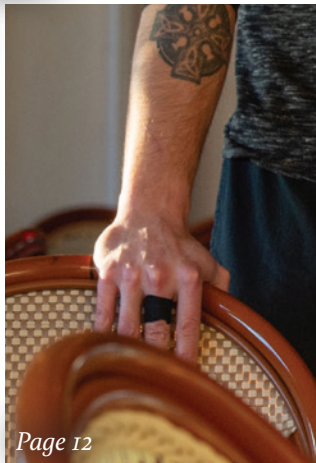
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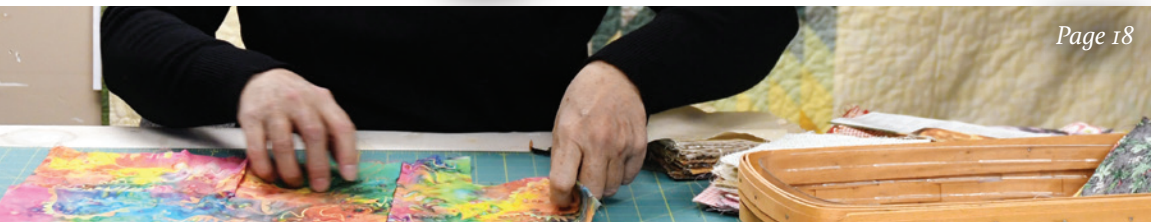
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