

# the SECOND MESSENGER

*St. Olaf Biology Alumni Newsletter*

## Your Gift, Your Way

Thank you, Biology Alumni, for your gifts to the St. Olaf Fund! Many of you have designated your donation to specifically support the Biology Department. We are so grateful! Every year, your generous donations enable the Biology Department to provide for extra things like student travel to conferences and the annual Senior Banquet. If you are already considering making a contribution, would you consider designating your gift to the "Biology Department?" If you are celebrating a reunion this year, your gift will be counted in your class gift as well. Thank you for your consideration!

## Congratulations, Biology Class of 2022!!



TOP (L-R): Christiana Cholakis; Becky White

MIDDLE (L-R): Miranda Lentz and six close friends come together with their illumination ceremony candles; Talulah Mitchem, Iya Abdulkarim, Molly Prytz, Prof. Kevin Crisp; YiWynn Chan redeeming senior banquet fishing trip prize with Prof. Steve Freedberg

BOTTOM (L-R): Madelyn Wood in the greenhouse with research subject (milkweed!); Dana Nelson, Anna Weirtz, Lauren Sherman, Michelle Soltis; Mailao Xiong; Kenzie Todd with Professor Kevin Crisp at the "Pie Your Prof" senior days event.

**Fram! Fram!**

## The Nature Conservancy's Resilient Forests Team benefits MN North Shore

By Hannah Friesen-Holmes ('13)



Figure 1: A planting bag is filled with white pine (*Pinus strobus*) seedlings to be planted at a site north of Finland, MN, in mid-May 2022.

I joined The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in MN, ND, and SD in September of 2021 in the new role of Forest Resilience Partnership Coordinator. In this role, I work with TNC's Resilient Forests team to engage TNC's partners in local, state, and federal land management agencies in order to expand TNC's work restoring diverse, resilient forests to northern Minnesota. In this position, I frequently collaborate with partners in the US Forest Service, the MN DNR, and St. Louis, Lake, and Cook counties to identify potential sites to receive diversity planting and

follow up care (e.g., implementing browse protection measures, removing competing brush from around seedlings, pruning to prevent blister rust spread). I also participate on or lead several collaborative efforts aimed at improving forest cover across the region, including the North Shore Forests Collaborative, the Arrowhead Collaborative, and the Manitou and Sand Lake-Seven Beavers Collaboratives.

TNC's Resilient Forests team recently completed planting a record 1.4 million seedlings in NE Minnesota and along the North Shore of Lake Superior. You may have seen or heard mention of this work in the [Star Tribune](#) or on [MPR](#) as it relates to our team's efforts to help reforest the area impacted by the 2021 Greenwood Fire! While it is super exciting to be a part of the collaborative effort to reforest the Greenwood area, this planting is but a small piece of our work in north-eastern Minnesota: this year, we planted seedlings on nearly 7,000 acres!

The Resilient Forests team's work also includes promoting riparian resiliency in streams and rivers that drain to Lake Superior by planting and tending native long-lived conifers (such as white spruce, white pine, and cedar), along with climate-adapted species (such as red oak and yellow birch) in gaps along streambanks. I was recently asked to lead this program, including coordinating and communicating with a diverse suite of partners, from private landowners to local, state, and federal land managers. Despite a late start to spring and wet conditions

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Figure 2: A planting crew plants a mixture of white pine (*Pinus strobus*), white spruce (*Picea glauca*), and cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*) seedlings at a non-harvest site north of Finland, MN, in mid-May, 2022.

### Alex Wolner ('21)

Since September of 2021, I have been living in Madrid, Spain as an English teacher. I actually found a couple of ways to use my biology major there, especially while preparing lessons/activities for my primary school's science classes. Recently, I have moved back to Minnesota. I am living in Minneapolis and working at Abbott in Hospital Pathology Associates as an "Education Coordinator" as I apply to medical schools this cycle.



Alex at the Plaza Mayor of Madrid

### Olivia Sullivan ('18)

After spending this past year as a public health coordinator for a primary care clinic (and getting married!), I will be moving to Johnson City, TN to start my DrPH in Community Health. My focus will remain in access to healthcare for gender and sexual minority populations.



## Nancy Baker ('75)



In 1975 I graduated from St. Olaf with a Biology and English double major. In 1979 I graduated from the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Medicine and spent the next 4 decades working as a Family Physician and Hospice Physician until I retired in 2019. During my career I was pleased to work with hundreds of medical students and Family Medicine residents, first at Ramsey Family Medicine (now Regions Hospital) and later at the University of Minnesota Physicians' Smiley's Clinic.

I was also a core faculty member in the UMN Rural and Metropolitan Physicians (RPAP/MetroPAP) program. One of my many responsibilities in these settings was to teach and practice Community Oriented Primary Care (COPC) and Medical Humanities. COPC promotes the health of individual patients and their family and strives to improve population and public health. I helped develop a framework that defined various unique, but related community health terms. We recently published our work in an academic paper titled "Shared language for shared work in population health." *Ann Fam Med*. Sep-Oct 2021;19(5):450-457.doi: 10.1370/afm.2708.

Since retirement, I've also been able to take a series of poetry classes at the Loft Literary Center. I'm now part of a poetry writing group and find myself extremely grateful for the liberal arts education I received at St. Olaf.

Nancy J. Baker MD

## Greg Suskovic ('80)

After 40 plus years as a veterinarian and over 32 years with the State of MN Board of Animal Health, I have retired as of July 5th, 2022. I was a field veterinarian with the Board for 27 years; for my last 6, I have been the Program Director for Emergency Planning and Emergency Response. I finished out my career working the 2022 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza event as the co-incident commander.

June 2022, three of us 1980 biology major classmates went on the St. Olaf sponsored trip to the Holy Land. Dr. **Laurie (Pearse) Hudgins**, a retired OB/GYN physician from Virginia, myself, and **Sarah (Ponto) Suskovic**, retired instructor from the biology department Mankato State University MN reconnected and had a wonderful time visiting sites in the Holy Land. Here we are pictured while cruising the Sea of Galilee.



## Resilient Forests Team (cont.)

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which affected many of our access roads, we were able to plant more than 600 riparian gaps along North Shore streams, adding species diversity and resiliency to the forest, helping to prevent erosion, and improving trout habitat.

Our team also works with landowners along Hwy 61 (the North Shore highway) to help restore native forest to areas where the forest land has become degraded or has failed to naturally regenerate. You can see some of this work at Split Rock Lighthouse State Park, Cascade River State Park, and at other public and private lands up and down Minnesota's North Shore!

Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions about my work with TNC's Resilient Forests team! My email at work is [Hannah.Friesen@TNC.org](mailto:Hannah.Friesen@TNC.org).



Figure 3: A freshly-planted white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*) seedling is housed in a cage to prevent it from being browsed by deer, hare, and other critters along Minnesota's North Shore.

## From *St. Olaf News*: Caring for the earth, starting with efforts on campus



If you haven't already seen it, *St. Olaf News* published a great article on what we are doing as a community to care for our land and adopt practices that will render it productive for future generations of Oles! [Go to the article](#) (published April 2022) to watch the videos featuring Biology faculty, Kathy Shea, and Biology alum Gunnar Bodvarsson ('22) with Biology major Claire Michelson ('23). Learn how the land use policies and practices have been shaped by - and continue to be shaped by - our students and faculty.

Pictured are Claire Michelson ('23) and Gunnar Bodvarsson ('22) who were the student farmers for StoGrow, summer 2021.

## St. Olaf Biology Alumni Updates

### Lindsey Andres-Beck ('14)

In December of 2020, I earned my Masters in Molecular Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics from Mayo Clinic Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. In January of 2022, I began working as a Technology Development Associate at the Mayo Clinic.

### Jena Hauch ('21)

I have accepted a seat at the University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine in the class of 2026!!! The program starts this fall and I am extremely excited :)

### Paul White ('86)



Busy hiring young talent to help develop new renewable energy projects!  
#energytransition!

**Mark Madsen ('71)** is active on the Hendersonville, North Carolina city tree board advocating for better tree canopy coverage as developers seek to clear-cut their way through every building project. "We vigorously advocate for tree preservation whenever possible on every construction project we review. Tree canopy helps reduce soil erosion, reduces air temperatures and air pollution and generally adds to our quality of life." Mark is also an International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborist.

In case you missed it...Biology faculty, alumni and students in the St. Olaf News

**Sherry Shi ('21)**  
[Developing a passion for nursing on the Hill led alumna to Johns Hopkins](#)



**Cully Hauck ('23)**  
[From St. Olaf to Sweden, student researches the impact of climate activist Greta Thunberg](#)



**Dr. Norman Lee**  
[Two St. Olaf faculty members simultaneously receive prestigious NSF CAREER Awards](#)

