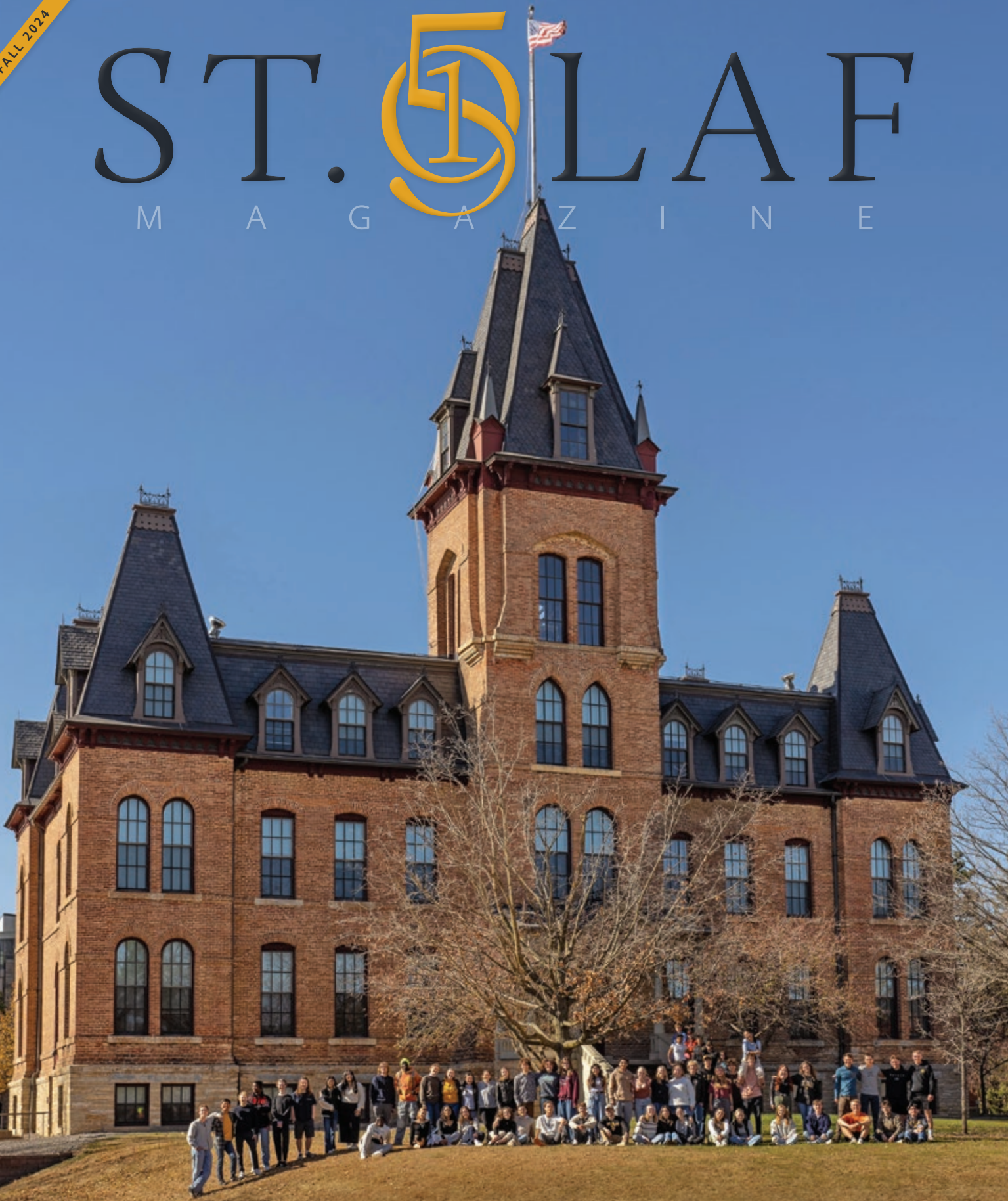


FALL 2024

# ST. OLAF

M A G A Z I N E



## ST. OLAF SESQUICENTENNIAL

1874 1884 1894 1904 1914 1924 1934 1944 1954 1964 1974 1984 1994 2004 2014 2024

## ON THE COVER

To recreate the iconic 1887 photo of some of the earliest St. Olaf College students gathered in front of Old Main (right), we invited current students to take a few minutes out of a beautiful fall day to capture the same photo on the eve of the college's 150th anniversary. Flip between the two for a glimpse of St. Olaf now and then. PHOTO BY FERNANDO SEVILLA

## ST. OLAF MAGAZINE

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FALL 2024

# ST. OLAF

M A G A Z I N E



## ST. OLAF SESQUICENTENNIAL

1874 1884 1894 1904 1914 1924 1934 1944 1954 1964 1974 1984 1994 2004 2014 2024

FROM THE DESK OF  
PRESIDENT SUSAN RUNDELL SINGER



Dear Oles,

It's our sesquicentennial — a time for celebration and reflection as we mark the 150th anniversary of the founding of St. Olaf College. We are flourishing as a college, with a full campus of exceptional Oles and annual rankings and ratings highlighting our strengths. *U.S. News & World Report* places us among the top 50 national liberal arts colleges, ranking 11th for best value, 17th for global opportunities, 23rd for our undergraduate teaching, and 30th for innovation. We've earned the top national ranking for student voter participation. What matters most is the alignment of these recognitions with our mission and strategic priorities. We are a college with a clear sense of who we are. For the last 150 years, we have been guided by our true north of preparing our students for meaningful vocations — living life on purpose for the common good — through high-quality learning experiences. That will continue to be our foundational force as we head into the future.

As Professor of Sociology and Anthropology Thomas Williamson '86 writes in this issue, we're reflecting on our first 150 years in multiple ways. I've just finished reading Professor of Norwegian Kari Lie Dorer's translation of *Muus vs. Muus*, a rich portrait of St. Olaf's founding president, Bernt Muus, and his wife, Oline, detailing life for Norwegian immigrants in Minnesota. The central roles of faith and education reverberate through time, shaping us as a college. Today, we celebrate being deeply rooted in our Lutheran faith and boldly open to insights from other religious and secular traditions. This more inclusive approach to faith has taken time. Educating men and women was a priority at St. Olaf from the beginning, but gender equity was not on the table. We are on a never-ending path to be inclusive, to be a place where everyone is in community and thrives. Joy plays a more central role in campus life today. Ann Wagner's story in this issue leads us on her journey as an entering student in 1954 when social dance was forbidden to becoming the faculty member who established dance performance not only as a major at St. Olaf, but one of the first nationally accredited programs.

Developing vocation is a thread through time, preparing Oles for lives of meaning and contribution. The vocations our students pursue have shifted over time, as has our support for them. Today we have ample resources on campus — from our Lutheran Center for Faith, Values, and Community and Piper Center for Vocation and Career, to our robust St. Olaf Orientation to Academics and Resources (SOAR) program, to our gifted faculty and staff — to support Oles in imagining their future vocation. This issue provides a snapshot of vocation at 150 years, reaffirming our commitment to student success.

Enhancing vocation is also one of our strategic priorities in *Solution Seekers: Our Strategic Plan for a Bright Future 2024–2030*. Launched this fall, this plan builds on 150 years of excellence and moves us into the future. It is the result of a year of planning, imagining, and prioritizing by our campus. Students, staff, faculty, alumni, and regents worked in teams, gathered feedback, and iteratively shaped our path to a bright tomorrow. We are now turning our plan into action. It will not be a dusty novel on a shelf but a vibrant, living map guiding our journey.

*Solution Seekers* promises each Ole a holistic, intentional, integrated experience to support them on a path to becoming an innovative thinker; prepared, engaged citizen; leader of character; experiential learner; and culturally competent global explorer. We will prioritize elevating vocation, expanding innovation, and sustaining our community. We are reimagining Rolvaag Library, our academic hub, as a modern center for learning and innovation. For our college to thrive in the future, we are attending to financial sustainability and our beautiful campus. Sustaining our community includes attention to the well-being of everyone in our community. Together, we will all flourish.

Fram! Fram!

*Susan Rundell Singer*



UMI YAH! YAH!





1874 1884 1894 1904 1914 1924 1934 1944 1954 1964 1974 1984 1994 2004 2014 2024

# 150 Years in 150 Words

By Fernando Sevilla

**This fall marks the 150th anniversary of the founding of St. Olaf College in November 1874.**

**To commemorate our sesquicentennial, we would like to share a promise. In 150 words.**

150 years of history. A time to reflect on our past, celebrate our present, and push for the progress we know is possible for our future. To commemorate the journey that brought us here, and to look with optimism to the road ahead of us.

We promise to continue to care. Care for our Oles, for our community, for the world, and for our planet.

We also promise to grow ... with you. We will continue to embrace change, cultivate innovation, adapt to new challenges, and seek solutions.

And we promise to learn. Because we always have. We know what it takes *and* where it takes us. Learning requires humility, courage, openness, and forgiveness. It makes us feel vulnerable but also hopeful. It brings us together and pushes us forward.

This promise is our pursuit. It started 150 years ago, it continues today, and it will take us to tomorrow.

Scan this code to watch our St. Olaf Sesquicentennial video.

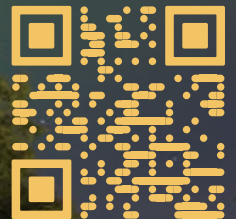


PHOTO BY EVAN PAK '19

These are our 150 words for 150 years. What are yours? Throughout this year, we are inviting Oles to share reflections about their St. Olaf experience. To submit your story, go to [150th.stolaf.edu](https://150th.stolaf.edu). You can write or record your story, and submit up to 10 photos from your days on the Hill. The history of St. Olaf is not one story, but many — and we want to hear yours!





St. Olaf graduates and alumni in 1885 (top), and a scene from the 2023 Commencement photographed by Christoph Hodel '20



# CONTINUITY AND CHANGE: St. Olaf College at 150 Years

By Thomas Williamson '86

Thomas Williamson '86, the Kenneth Bjork Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Anthropology, has spent years researching the evolution of American colleges and universities. As St. Olaf marks its sesquicentennial, he reflects on how the college has become increasingly complex over the last 150 years — and what that means for its future.

**W**RITING THE STORY OF ST. OLAF gets increasingly difficult with each passing year. If the familiar narrative mode for such accounts is “continuity and change,” the sheer amount of change makes the story more and more intricate. In 1924, the story might have been “St. Olaf survived.” In 1974, it might have been “St. Olaf is managing intense growing pains.” In 2024, the headline might be “St. Olaf is complexifying in ways that challenge its coherence.”

To better grasp these dynamics, it helps to think historically and in a larger frame. Institutions like St. Olaf were always optimistic, fragile ventures in the American landscape. When the college was founded as an academy in 1874, its prospects were not so promising. Many colleges and universities opened in that decade, as the United States expanded westward and recovered from the Civil War. Joining St. Olaf in 1874 were Macalester College, Smith College, and Colorado College. Others from that era, like Illinois’ Lombard College and Michigan’s Grand Traverse College, floundered and then went out of business.

For St. Olaf College, there were many questions with unknowable answers. Would students show up, and would Norwegian-Americans find this particular school useful? Would benefactors donate money, and the church sustain its support? Would Minnesota grow and thrive, and would Northfield prove to be a fortunate location or a dismal one?



By 1924, there were affirmative answers to most of these questions. The college had moved from Northfield town proper to the hill on its outskirts. There were buildings beyond Old Main, including dormitories for men and women, a library, and the grand construction of Holland Hall. The institution no longer depended on younger students but instead solely enrolled those ready for post-secondary education. Rail magnate James J. Hill had offered some of his largesse as support, and Minnesota had grown from a few thousand people to nearly a half million. The United States was in the midst of an enormous industrial transformation.

Fifty years later, in 1974, the college had experienced decades of phenomenal expansion. The number of structures mushroomed, including a music building, a student center, an impressive chapel, and a major athletic complex. New dormitories ringed the quad. The student body had shifted from the children of farmers, clergy, and teachers to young people from professional families in the affluent suburbs of Minneapolis and Chicago. The counterculture had ended single-sex dorms and dress codes, bringing in a party scene, dancing, and political activism. Assumptions that students would be Lutheran or attend worship services ended, and the institution dreamed of being more cosmopolitan.

Reaching the present period, the changes continue. The United States is much more prosperous in 2024 than was the case even a half century earlier. St. Olaf now features elaborate academic buildings, first-rate laboratories, well-appointed dorms, and a rich range of dining options. Students can study all over the world, and a number of them arrive on campus with international travel experience. The campus community is more diverse in most demographic categories, including region, religion, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The student parking lots are packed full of cars, and many faculty and staff commute to Northfield rather than live in it. The college endowment might one day soon begin with a “B.”

How else has the college shifted? If the humanities disciplines of religion, history, philosophy, and literature once formed St. Olaf’s academic core, they have been replaced by the STEM fields of chemistry, biology, statistics, and mathematics. New fields like neuroscience, environmental studies, gender and sexuality studies, and public health are highly popular with students. The college now

Laying the cornerstone of the college’s new administration building on September 4, 1924. Later named Holland Hall, the building remains one of St. Olaf’s most iconic structures. ST. OLAF COLLEGE ARCHIVES





features a host of institutes and centers, like the Lutheran Center for Faith, Values, and Community; the Taylor Center for Equity and Inclusion; the Piper Center for Vocation and Career; and the Institute for Freedom and Community. These significantly stretch the college's functions and expand its mission. Athletics continues to grow in intensity and skill, recruiting players from across the country (and internationally). Ole teams travel far beyond the Midwest for competition, including the baseball team going to Florida, the football team to Norway, or the Ultimate Frisbee team to North Carolina. Many of these games are streamed online with multiple cameras and commentators.

All of these changes reflect a widely enhanced institution in a highly affluent society. That is what makes narrating what St. Olaf "is" in 2024 such a complex task. Colleges like St. Olaf have grown to be so many different things that it is not always clear what holds them together. The campus continues to expand, out into the prairie



Above: St. Olaf students get ready in their Larson Hall room in 1964. PHOTO COURTESY OF ST. OLAF COLLEGE ARCHIVES



Left: St. Olaf students study in their room in Rand Hall in September 1986. PHOTO BY DOUG BRATLAND '87

Below: St. Olaf opened a new residence hall and townhouses along St. Olaf Avenue in 2022 that house 440 students. The new hall features modern kitchens and large, bright community spaces that are designed to bring students together. To add a distinctive St. Olaf touch, a multistory tile wall in the main lounge depicts iconic campus buildings like Old Main and Buntrock Commons. PHOTO BY EVAN PAK '19





Top: A view of Hoyme Chapel from the physics lab in Old Main in September 1912. ST. OLAF COLLEGE ARCHIVES

Bottom: A view from nearly the same vantage point in Old Main looking out across the campus today, with stunning views of Regents Hall of Natural and Mathematical Sciences on the left, Holland Hall on the right, and Tomson Hall and Larson Residence Hall in the distance. PHOTO BY EVAN PAK '19

but also down Ole Avenue with the new housing project, featuring townhouses and a large dormitory dramatically expanding the campus eastward. A new president's house, renewable energy projects, new sports fields, and endless renovations keep the existing campus environment a work-in-progress. St. Olaf also now extends outside the Midwest. It recruits students in California, Texas, and East Asia, it sends students everywhere, it maintains connections with employers in New York, Seattle, and Denver. "Where is St. Olaf?" is a question not so readily answered by "in Northfield, Minnesota" anymore.

These dizzying changes have also made the past more difficult to understand. Where the institution once featured a triumphant confidence in its Norwegian

founders, it now wrestles with a land acknowledgement statement that recognizes the significant violence that made Minnesota a state and St. Olaf a college. The students and faculty of old St. Olaf are no longer regarded solely as immigrants but also thought of as colonial settlers, in ways that previous chroniclers rarely considered. The year 1874 has moved from a date of pride to a much more mixed emotion. Is St. Olaf unambiguously a force for good in the world? Or something perhaps a bit, as the saying goes, "problematic"? It's fascinating that the 2024 sesquicentennial will not feature





a celebratory college chronicle detailing diligent presidents and accomplished musicians, but rather a volume titled *Honest Storytelling: A Sesquicentennial Exploration of Identity, Mission, and Vocation at St. Olaf College* that also includes the more ambiguous and painful aspects of the college's past. This will include voices rarely highlighted in St. Olaf history, like Oles of color, Oles who identify as queer, and low-income Oles.

Indeed, the ways that St. Olaf is now mediated continues to shift in complex ways. The institution now highlights news and campus events through a professional Marketing and Communications team, an Athletic Department news service, and multi-channel broadcasts to alumni. Many prospective students first encounter St. Olaf through admissions videos, Instagram, and TikTok. "St. Olaf" exists in these virtual spheres as much as it does in real life. If the 20th-century technological progression went from film, to radio, and then to television, the arrival of the internet has clearly reshaped campus life in ways we are only beginning to understand. Work from home, Zoom office hours, and students at dinner glued to their phones are all key features of contemporary campus life. They no doubt stress the campus experience of community just as they expand its enactment in cyberspace.

As previously mentioned, the dominant narrative of institutional biography is "continuity and change."

This brief accounting has emphasized "change" that has thoroughly reshaped "the St. Olaf Experience." If Oles from 1874 or even 1924 could visit our contemporary campus, they would no doubt be a bit lost. What is this place, with all these fancy buildings? Where did these thousands of people come from, in all their multiplicity? Why, they might wonder, is there an enormous wind turbine and so many shiny solar panels?

For all of the likely confusion, the ancestors would still notice resonances of their age in ours. St. Olaf is still in Northfield, still shaped by the sleepy rhythms of small town American life. Students study in small classrooms, taught by faculty adept at capturing their wandering attention. The library remains busy on Sunday nights, and daily chapel, if only modestly attended, still happens. Music thrives everywhere, from the spectacular choirs and ensembles, to solo singing in the shower. Mealtimes persist as a primary form of socializing, sports and the arts command community attention, and Carleton still endures just across the Cannon River. As always, these Minnesota campuses magically transform young people into adults, transmit and extend knowledge, and serve as a stabilizing force in a dynamic society.

Fram! Fram! into the next 50 years, whatever that might bring us. Happy sesquicentennial, St. Olaf College! 🍷







St. Olaf community members (clockwise from top left) Kirsten Cahoon '98, Anthony Bateza, Pin-Ni (Gloriana) Ye '24, Todd Wilkinson '84, Lauren Ferry '17, and Dick Nchang '25 reflect on the meaning of vocation.



# How we learned to live on purpose for the common good

SINCE ITS FOUNDING, ST. OLAF COLLEGE'S EMPHASIS ON VOCATION HAS HELPED THOSE IN ITS COMMUNITY DISCOVER THEIR PLACE IN THE WORLD. STUDENTS, ALUMNI, FACULTY, AND LEADERS TALK ABOUT THIS EVOLVING PURSUIT — AND WHAT VOCATION MEANS TO THEM.

BY ERIN PETERSON

Students often visit the Piper Center for Vocation and Career for a specific reason: to revise a resume or cover letter, to apply for a job or an internship, or to prepare for an interview. Yet in conversations with the center's coaches, students typically explore much larger questions: What is their purpose? How can they express their values in their lives and work?

That's no accident. Director Kirsten Cahoon '98 says that one of the priorities of the Piper Center is to help students think more deeply about the shape that their lives will take — a focus not just on a job or career, but on a larger sense of vocation. "We spend time talking with them about their whole selves," she says. "That includes their backgrounds and lives, their values and abilities, and how all of those things fit together."

This holistic approach might be uncommon for a typical career center, but it's fully aligned with St. Olaf's

longstanding emphasis on vocation — and a focus that students will find in every part of their education, from coursework to co-curricular programming. Since the college's inception 150 years ago, St. Olaf has aimed to give students the tools and mindsets to live purposefully in the service of others and the world.

To be sure, the way that St. Olaf has defined vocation has evolved since 1874. Then, the word vocation had explicitly religious overtones: families sent their children to St. Olaf in no small part because of its promise to instill the principles of Lutheran Christianity into its students.

That said, St. Olaf's inclusiveness for the time — welcoming women, immigrants, and farmers — paired with a concept of vocation that was about responding to God's call in all aspects of life. The founders' vision helped lay the groundwork for the more expansive view of vocation the college currently emphasizes today.

Lutheran Center for Faith, Values, and Community Director Deanna Thompson '89 describes St. Olaf's approach to vocation as both "rooted and open."





Deanna Thompson '89 (top left), director of the Lutheran Center for Faith, Values, and Community, speaks at the Conference on Worship, Theology, and the Arts in 2022 alongside Willie Jennings, the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Systematic Theology and Africana Studies at Yale University. The Lutheran Center partners with the Piper Center to help students explore the idea of vocation at St. Olaf and beyond. Piper Center Peer Educator Aya Elawad '26 (bottom left) works with Manabie Harbi Ahmed Harbi '28. Professor of Biology and Director of the Health Professions Committee Kevin Crisp (bottom right) meets with Zadia Martin '28 in the Piper Center. PHOTOS BY STEVEN GARCIA '20

“It’s rooted in a Lutheran Christian understanding, and it’s also open to, and connects with, concepts of vocation in other religious and non-religious traditions,” she says.

As defined by the college, vocation is about who people are called to *be*, as well as what they are called to *do*. This includes an individual’s professional identity, but also encompasses family and friendships, community engagements, a relationship with the Earth, a search for meaning, and the pursuit of justice. At St. Olaf, vocation carves a path between practical and idealistic. It is grounded in the real world, but it is also aspirational in its aims.

In some ways, St. Olaf’s emphasis on vocation diverges from the broader culture’s increasing fixation on higher education’s monetary return on investment. While St. Olaf performs well by these measures, it has also remained steadfast in its commitment to consider the less measurable rewards of a life well-lived in community with others.

To help students understand and pursue this vibrant idea of vocation, St. Olaf infuses elements of it kaleidoscopically into its teaching and programming throughout the entire course of a student’s education.

For example, the Lutheran Center, in partnership with several other offices on campus, offers a “Vocation of a Student Leader” session. Students can also become one of the numerous student Interfaith Fellows who deepen campus understanding of the role that religious identity plays in many people’s lives. Professors, meanwhile, tease out answers to questions of students’ meaningful relationships and to their sense of themselves in the world.

In the coming years, St. Olaf will continue to strengthen the support it offers its students in their pursuit of vocation, says Vice President for Mission Jo Beld. It’s an aim highlighted in the institution’s current strategic plan, which seeks to elevate vocation through expanded opportunities for students to study abroad and away, participate in experiential learning, and engage in guided reflection on their vision and values. “We will take up questions of vocation even more intentionally,” Beld says.

To understand the prismatic ways that students, alumni, and faculty think about vocation in their own lives, we spoke to Oles in an array of different positions and places in their lives to understand what propels them and how they stay true to their values — in their own words.



## “I try to give an empathetic voice to wildlife, which cannot speak for itself.”

· TODD WILKINSON '84 ·

I've always been passionate about nature and wildlife. As a conservation journalist, I try to illuminate what is often invisible to humans in our daily lives, and give an empathetic voice to wildlife, which cannot speak for itself.

Much of my work is about “big ideas”: those that push us out of our comfort zones and force us to rethink the way we're doing business. Once we consider them, we can't “unthink them” or return to the stuck places we were in before. I think of journalism as a catalyst for getting the reader to ponder a new point of view.

For example, I recently collaborated with the renowned photographer Thomas Mangelsen on a couple books about Jackson Hole Grizzly 399, who had been the most famous mother bear in the world until her recent death. She transformed the way people think about grizzlies, erasing frontier-era myths that portray them as human-eating killers. She demonstrated how grizzlies and other

animals possess sentience — both incredible intelligence and emotions.

And in April 2024, a colleague and I launched a new online, nonprofit conservation journalism site called *Yellowstonian* ([yellowstonian.org](http://yellowstonian.org)). The site is devoted to elevating ecological literacy, celebrating Greater Yellowstone — which is the cradle of American wildlife conservation — and raising awareness about serious threats including population pressure and climate change.

I've been incredibly fortunate to have zero degrees of separation between vocation and avocation. While it was never stated overtly during my years at St. Olaf, I think it was clear among my classmates that the goal was to live a purposeful life.

**Todd Wilkinson '84** is an award-winning journalist and author who has been writing about wildlife for four decades. He is a Bozeman, Montana-based correspondent for *National Geographic* and *The Guardian*, and he is the founder of *Yellowstonian*, which delivers impactful, fact-based conservation journalism.



Todd Wilkinson '84 at Horseshoe Bend, on Navajo Nation land near the East Rim of the Grand Canyon  
PHOTO BY THOMAS MANGELSEN





Lauren Skare Ferry '17 at Methodist Hospital, where she is a social worker in the intensive care unit. PHOTO BY STEVEN GARCIA '20

## WHAT VOCATION MEANS TO ME

“I believe in sharing our lives and vulnerabilities with one another.”

· LAUREN SKARE FERRY '17 ·

**M**y role models, when it comes to creating and maintaining relationships, are my parents. They're both pastors, and I watched them make connections with other people. It gave me a foundation — and a yearning — for social connection.

My parents were good at cultivating relationships among my siblings with daily check-ins. Every night, for example, we did “highs and lows” as a family, talking about the best part of our day and not-so-great part of our day. I liked the way that it allowed us to be individuals, but also to share our lives, our vulnerabilities, and our emotions with other people.

I'm drawn to people who are able to sit with me and celebrate my joys, but also show up and be with me during sadness or trials.

I also think it's important to understand the way that relationships have different seasons. My friends at St. Olaf

are incredibly important to me. When we were students, I saw them every day, I lived with them, and I ate with them. But when I left St. Olaf, we had to find new ways to maintain those connections. For a couple of my friends, that has meant watching *The Bachelor* together each week. Of course, it's not about *The Bachelor* at all. It's an excuse to get together once a week.

As an ICU social worker, I see a lot of people grieving — either a critical illness, or at the end of life. Big moments, like trips together, come up. But simpler things do too — like they will miss talking to their loved ones. They will miss their smiles. These little things create a strong sense of connection.

So much of what builds meaningful relationships is our ability to be vulnerable with one another, and to express our authentic selves.

**Lauren Skare Ferry '17** is a social worker in the intensive care unit at Methodist Hospital in St. Louis Park, Minnesota.

## “I am always trying to fit each thing that I’m doing into this larger puzzle.”

· DICK NCHANG '25 ·

I was born with sickle cell disease, a painful blood disease that caused episodes where I could be hospitalized for up to two months at a time, about four times a year. In 2016 I underwent a yearlong bone marrow transplant, which was successful.

I had crossed the rubicon, but I thought: How can I help others who are going through this? How can we share experiences? So I started a foundation. I reached out to family members, to hospitals, and other potential funders. I wrote a letter to Turkish Airlines, which agreed to a partnership. Today, the Sickle Cell International Foundation has supported more than 140 families, and we’ve saved them \$75,000 in medical expenses.

I want to cure this disease once and for all, and so for me, I am always trying to fit each thing that I’m doing into this larger puzzle.

For example, I saw there was a lab at Stanford University that had received funding to work on a gene therapy cure for sickle cell. I sent the lab’s principal investigator, Matthew Porteous, an email, and he got back to me almost instantly. We talked for an hour about working together.

When I was working on a population model as part of a gene therapy treatment idea, I kept running into brick walls. One thing I did was plead with my statistics professor, Associate Professor of Practice in Mathematics, Statistics, and Computer Science Joseph Roith, to give me five minutes at the beginning of his class to pitch the specific problem I was working on to all of his students. I said: “Please join me. You will be surprised what you are capable of. Let’s see how it works.” Now, I’m working with five other students on a paper that I am hoping will be published by the end of the year. And I just wrapped up a Summer of Science internship in biomedical research at Novartis, leading a comprehensive analysis on the barriers and enablers to state-of-the-art gene therapies for sickle cell disease in Africa.

The questions I ask myself are: Am I doing the most I can do? Am I challenging myself enough? I always want to figure out what’s next.

**Dick Nchang '25** is a quantitative economics major from Cameroon. He is the founder and CEO of the nonprofit Sickle Cell International Foundation and was named a Future Nobel Laureate Scholar by the Nobel Prize Museum and EF Education First.

Dick Nchang '25 was named a Future Nobel Laureate Scholar last fall, an honor that enabled him to travel to Sweden and attend the 2023 Nobel Week Dialogue.

PHOTO BY SAMUEL GWIN '25







Pin-Ni (Gloriana) Ye '24 leads a discussion at a "death cafe" gathering in a Rolvaag Library classroom in April 2024.  
PHOTO BY CARTER SCHAFER '24

## WHAT VOCATION MEANS TO ME

# "I see my life today as interconnected with the work I did then."

· PIN-NI (GLORIANA) YE '24 ·

I'm from Taiwan, where discussing death is often considered taboo and is rarely addressed within my family. Growing up, I frequently recited a quote from the Analects: "How can one know death when one does not understand life?" Confucius encourages us to shift our focus from fearing death to considering how to live well.

When I came to St. Olaf, I kept this idea in the back of my mind. After Covid, more young people have things to say about loss and grief.

I learned about the idea of a "death cafe," which is an event that brings people together to have conversations about mortality. The idea is to increase awareness of death to help people make the most of their finite lives. It was something I was interested in doing as an Interfaith Fellow.

We invited people to these events, and typically 15 or

20 people came. They included students from philosophy, religion, chemistry, and biology — across all disciplines.

At the beginning of these events, we asked participants to write about their emotions around the topic, and to write down any things they wanted to talk about. Then we put people into groups of five or six for conversations. It was truly a shared experience.

I see my life today, where I am a nurse, as interconnected with the work I did then. Nursing is a profession that is in touch with people's phases of life, from newborns to end of life. We accompany people in their most vulnerable times. I think the death cafes have given me a greater capacity to accompany people going through different phases of life, to listen, and to empathize with people's emotions.

**Pin-Ni (Gloriana) Ye '24** is a nurse at Mount Sinai Hospital on the southwest side of Chicago. She served as an Interfaith Fellow in the St. Olaf Lutheran Center for Faith, Values, and Community.

## “I ask students: What are the things that give you life?”

· ANTHONY BATEZA ·

When I help students think about their vocation, I often ask them to start small: What are the things that give you life? What do you get excited about? What skills do you have? And how do all of those things match up with what people say they need?

When students come to St. Olaf, some have a clear sense of their vocation, like pre-law, pre-med, music performance, or education. Some have no sense at all. And the joy of a liberal arts education is to encourage and push folks at the same time. We don't want to dissuade

people from pursuing what they believe their callings to be. But I also hope they are open to being challenged. We want to give all students the permission to explore, to make mistakes, to try different experiences.

Not everyone has the privilege or family to chew on these issues. But hopefully, college is a place where they can use their freedom to reflect about the different ways their lives will have value for them and have value for others. 🦁

**Anthony Bateza** is associate professor of religion and chair of the Department of Race, Ethnic, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.







Students from the Modern  
Dance Group at the 1977  
St. Olaf Christmas Festival  
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE  
ST. OLAF COLLEGE ARCHIVES





How St. Olaf Stepped into

# DANCE HISTORY

From nearly nothing to national leader: Ann Wagner '58 shares the story of St. Olaf College's surprising ascent in dance.

By Erin Peterson



When Ann Wagner '58 arrived at St. Olaf College as a first-year student in 1954, the institution was among a dwindling few that still strictly forbade social dancing on campus.

Yet by 1983, Wagner had helped St. Olaf become a groundbreaking leader in dance as a performing art, complete with its own major, department, and first-of-its-kind national accreditation.

The transformation was the result of national and institutional shifts — and accelerated by Wagner's tireless efforts. She championed dance at St. Olaf by skillfully harnessing opportunities, building alliances, and giving fledgling projects and programs the support they needed to grow.

St. Olaf may have gotten a late start in appreciating dance's value, but Wagner helped ensure that it became one of the first colleges in the nation to earn national recognition in dance through accreditation. "No one person can start something from nothing," Wagner says, with stereotypical Midwestern modesty. "But I was committed, and it was important."



Wagner's efforts are emblematic of a larger ambition for the fine arts at St. Olaf that continues today: The institution is one of only two colleges in the state of Minnesota that is an accredited institutional member of the National Association of Schools of Dance. And it is one of only two liberal arts colleges nationwide that offers fully accredited majors in art, dance, music, and theater.

#### EARLY YEARS

If Ann Wagner proved to be a singular force in dance at St. Olaf, her ambitions in 1961 were more modest: she just wanted a job.

Wagner had spent two years as a student at St. Olaf before family matters led her to move back home to finish her education at Augustana College. She earned degrees in physical education and history, then spent three years teaching in public schools.

Still, she dreamed of returning to St. Olaf, so she wrote a note to Mabel Shirley, chair of women's physical education. If a position ever opened up in the department, Wagner wrote, she'd love to be considered.

Shirley wrote her back almost immediately, and by the fall of 1961, Wagner was on campus teaching students everything from swimming to field hockey to first aid. While she taught folk, square, and modern dance as part of the women's curriculum, the most buzzworthy news in dance at St. Olaf was happening on the social side.

St. Olaf had accepted dancing as part of the social program a few months before Wagner's mid-1961 arrival. To say that St. Olaf was behind the curve in this area was an understatement: Macalester College was tacitly allowing student dancing as early as 1903; Carleton permitted dancing on campus by 1919.

Still, some Oles viewed the change with skepticism. President Clemens Granskou fielded letters from outraged alumni, while Pastor Clifford Swanson pleaded with students who attended school-sponsored dances to "demonstrate true Christian manhood and womanhood at all times."

Wagner only heard about it secondhand. "I was told the first dance was *extremely* well chaperoned," she says dryly.

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The group of St. Olaf alumni who brought modern dance to the Northfield Arts Guild in the 1960s and early 1970s included (from left) Ann Wagner '58, Myrna Hanson Johnson '50, and Elaine Holst Kringen '45.

While this debate raged, the seeds of dance as a performing art at St. Olaf were being planted. Interest in dance was quietly growing, but there were few local outlets to support this enthusiasm. “It’s hard to explain how barren the local terrain was in terms of dance when I came in,” Wagner acknowledges.

She frequently found herself pulled in to help. A handful of drama students, interested in fine-tuning their physical movements to hone their craft, for example, invited Wagner to lead them in modern dance classes. She also joined a group of faculty wives who were fostering modern dance performance through the Northfield Arts Guild.

At the same time, the culture well beyond Northfield had begun to change — and Wagner was ready to capitalize on the shift. In 1965, the National Endowment for the Arts was established by Congress. Not long after that, related statewide organizations, such as the Minnesota State Arts Council (now Board) began expanding their focus.

Within a year or two, Wagner was collaborating with Carleton College faculty members to secure grants from these organizations to introduce a more vibrant dance scene to Northfield. “Before then, there had been no performances, nothing,” she says. “And suddenly, we could have a professional company from New York come on campus to perform, teach classes, and visit students.”

Students soaked it all up — and soon, with the help of Wagner, they were helping push the boundaries of dance at St. Olaf even further.

### ACCELERATING CHANGE

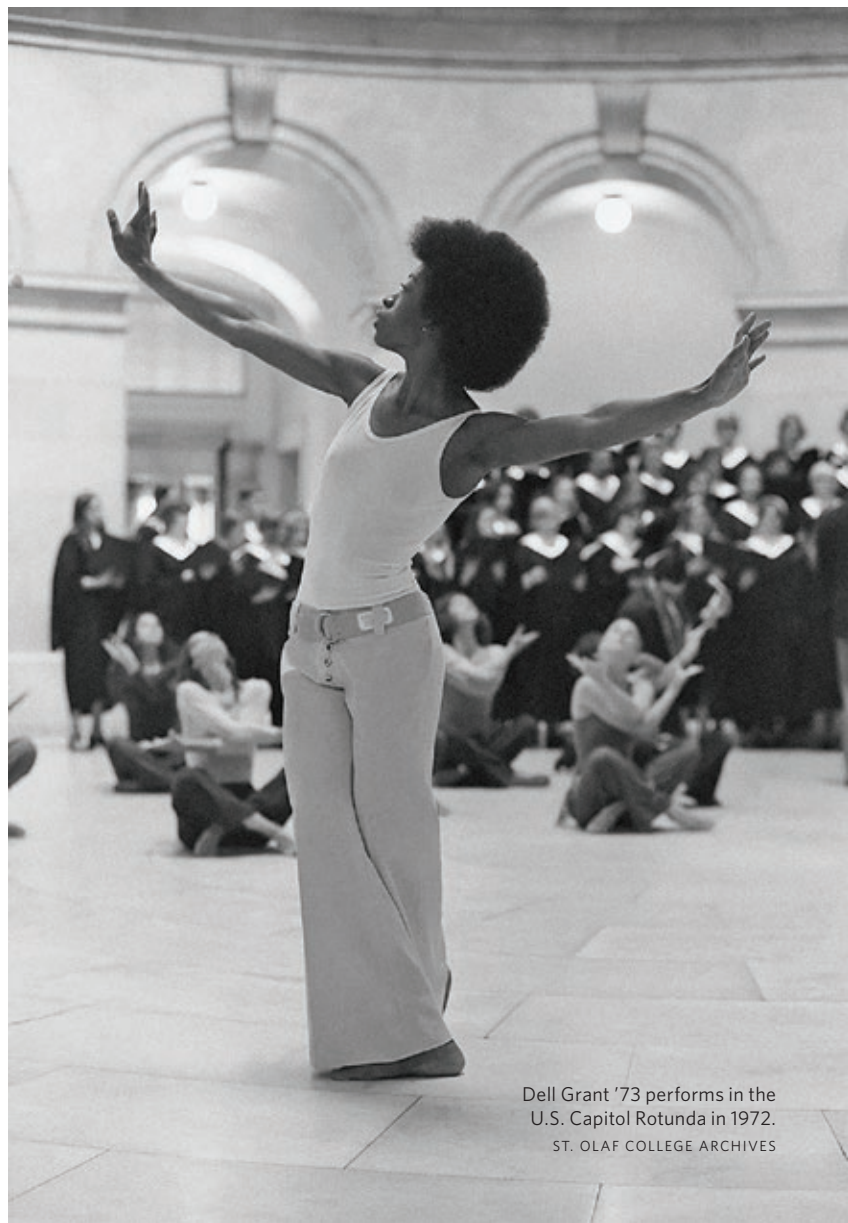
In 1969 Wagner founded the Modern Dance Group. Students began performing regularly at the college’s homecoming concerts, in spring concerts, and even — at the invitation of then-St. Olaf Choir Conductor Kenneth Jennings ’50 — in the Christmas Festival. Wagner shakes her head at the memory. “To have women up on the stage in black leotards showing their body — at the Christmas concert? How dare we?” she asks rhetorically.

The results were not necessarily beloved. “I am sure Ken Jennings received some letters of protest,” she says. But Wagner didn’t let up.

In 1972, as the Vietnam War raged, she played an instrumental role in helping bring the Modern Dance Group to Washington, D.C. — alongside the St. Olaf Chapel Choir and a student brass-percussion ensemble — to perform an expression for peace in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda. Dell Grant ’73 choreographed the dance sequence to accompany *De Profundis*, a musical “prayer for peace” composed by Kurt Westerberg ’72.

A year later, Wagner supported the senior performance of student choreographer and art major Grant, who created the first campus dance recital with all Black students. At the same time, as a result of a student petition, academic dean William Nelsen gave Wagner permission to hire Toni Sostek, who taught ballet at Carleton, to teach ballet, tap, and jazz at St. Olaf.

Dance was earning increasing recognition and respect internally. Wagner was granted a leave to pursue a Ph.D., and Susan Bauer (now associate professor emerita of fine arts) was hired as her leave replacement. Bauer continued to push the college’s work forward by expanding the Modern Dance Group to become the St. Olaf Dance Company, and developing a second performing group, the Apprentice Company. In addition, classes in ballroom dance, taught by Axel Bundgaard in the Physical Education Department, were enormously popular. Renaissance Dance, taught by Marian Walker of the Music Department, added a unique dimension to the program.



Dell Grant '73 performs in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda in 1972.  
ST. OLAF COLLEGE ARCHIVES





Dancers perform in the 1979 St. Olaf Christmas Festival.  
ST. OLAF COLLEGE ARCHIVES

By 1978, interest in dance at St. Olaf was at an all-time high. Wagner and Bauer had brought new expertise and energy to the program, and Nelsen came to the pair with a question: What should dance be at St. Olaf? Wagner and Bauer didn't hesitate to say that it should be a department and a major.

The work to develop a major and a department would be enormous, and faculty interest in supporting a new major and department was anything but certain. At least one member of the Religion Department had stopped talking with Wagner after a single dance performance in the chapel.

During the December 1978 faculty meeting, the proposal for a new dance major and department unexpectedly won endorsement from Harold Ditmanson, a respected and long-time religion professor. "He stood and said, in his quiet way, 'Well, I think this program has proved itself,' and then sat down," Wagner says, still moved by the moment. The vote was called for. The motion to create the new department and major was passed with a voice vote.

The Dance Department at St. Olaf officially began in September of 1979.

#### FROM INSTITUTIONAL TO NATIONAL RECOGNITION

Nationally, more change was afoot. The development of the National Association of Schools of Dance (NASD), an accreditation body for dance, was just getting off the ground. Wagner was invited to Washington, D.C., to help develop standards for the rigorous process of accreditation.

It was an eye-opening experience. Through her work with NASD, Wagner gained insight on what was happening in dance programs around the nation, from college programs to professional studio schools like the Joffrey Ballet.

By the time the fledgling association was ready to evaluate the first group of schools for accreditation, Wagner had made up her mind that St. Olaf would try to earn its place in the inaugural group of accredited institutions. It would cement the department's reputation, even as Wagner sometimes second-guessed it herself. "I was always asking, *What should we be doing? Are we good enough?*" she recalls.

The accreditation process answered the question definitively: Yes, they were. In 1983 St. Olaf became one of just three institutions nationwide, and the first in Minnesota, to have a Dance Department with a major accredited by NASD.

It was a crowning achievement in a remarkable two-decade transformation for dance at St. Olaf, but Wagner, Bauer, and their colleagues weren't done yet. They would spend the next two decades building, strengthening, and broadening the department's scope and depth.

Before she retired in 1999, Wagner had one final goal: to leave the department thriving under capable successors. She did that in part by hiring Professor of Dance Janice Roberts in 1994. Roberts soon proved that she could and should be leading the department. "She was a good administrator, teacher, performer — and she was good with the students," says Wagner. "She made improvements in the

curriculum and the major. Not least, she actively helped to plan the transformation of the former student center into the current Center for Art and Dance. I'm really proud to have hired people who could move the program forward."

Since 2016, the department has been chaired by Heather Klopchin, the Oscar and Gertrude Boe Overby Distinguished Professor of Dance, who continues to expand the ambitions of the department.

As Wagner looks back at the arc of her career, and the dance program at St. Olaf, she is both proud of what that trajectory looked like — and mindful of all of the people and factors that contributed to that success. "There were so many people supporting it, and it started modestly. There were struggles, but there was never a point where I thought 'Oh heck, this isn't worth it.' I just took the next step, and the next step."

### RHYTHM AND MOVES

Today's Dance Department at St. Olaf maintains the ambitious DNA that marked its initial founding and growth. This includes a vibrant range of styles, teaching approaches, and opportunities, says Klopchin.

Offerings include movement-intensive classes in contemporary modern, West African, hip hop, ballroom, and many other types of dance. Students can also take language-intensive classes that concentrate on dance

history, anatomy, and choreography. Klopchin notes that St. Olaf's commitment to dance both as an artistic practice and a community practice sets it apart from other dance programs.

Klopchin adds that students particularly appreciate the opportunity to forge their own path. Because of St. Olaf's liberal arts philosophy, many students pair their dance major with expertise that they develop in majors such as biology and kinesiology. "We're really able to tailor-make the experience for each student," Klopchin says.

Students also can take advantage of a wide array of dance opportunities beyond the classroom, no matter what their major. The college often brings in working artists and companies to teach classes and to work with the two faculty-directed companies within the Dance Department: Companydance and the international dance ensemble Veselica. Both companies are open by audition to all students, and Veselica has showcased dances from more than 30 countries.

As the program moves forward, Klopchin is eager to expand its programming in African and African Diasporic dance while also preparing students for a range of dance-related careers, including performing and choreography, dance administration, and related fields such as medicine and massage therapy. "There's so much that's possible," she says. 🌟



Heather Klopchin leads a Spring 2014 class in the Center for Art and Dance.





INTRODUCING



A new barbershop in Buntrock Commons provides haircuts, braiding, and styling services for the campus community, especially meeting the needs of Oles with textured hair. It's also an important space for connection and conversation.

By Ruben Duffie





Yolanda Pauly '25 (left) gets her hair braided during the grand opening of The Shop 1500, while Ole alumnus Richard Taylor '95 (far right) gets a fresh fade from barber Dennis Gutierrez. PHOTO BY STEVEN GARCIA '20



When Vince Omni '96 was a student at St. Olaf College, there wasn't a local barbershop that provided specialized hair care for students of color. Instead, he remembers how BIPOC students would give each other haircuts and do braiding right in their dorm rooms. For professional hair care needs, then-Director of Multicultural Services Leona Collins would drive students to Minneapolis.

Three decades later, Omni is thrilled to see that St. Olaf has opened a permanent barbershop space on campus that provides haircuts, braiding, and styling services. It serves all students, faculty, and staff, especially meeting the needs of Oles of color with textured hair.

"It's going to build a communal space on the St. Olaf College campus — not just through the services, but the community that will come with it," Omni says.

That's exactly what Aidan Lloyd '24 and Giovanni Green '23 set out to accomplish when they first worked to bring a pop-up barbershop to St. Olaf three years ago. Both student-athletes and members of the Oles Against Inequality student organization, Lloyd and Green understood both the practical need for BIPOC hair care services and the deeper need for a truly inclusive space for conversation and connection.

"In the Black community, barbershops aren't merely a place to get a haircut, and your barber isn't just someone who cuts your hair," Lloyd says. "Historically, barbershops have been a hearth for the civil rights movement, a safe place for people to communicate ideas, a place for community."

The bi-weekly pop-up barbershop that started in the fall of 2021 attracted not only students seeking hair care and community, but also the attention of film producer Sarah Kazadi-Ndoye and her crew at CBS. As the crew began work on a new documentary detailing the history of Black hair in America, the role that sports and athletes have played in that history, and efforts to pass legislation that prohibits racial discrimination based on hair style or texture, they came to campus to film the St. Olaf barbershop.

The resulting Emmy-nominated documentary, titled *CROWN*, featured interviews with sports icons like NBA Hall of Famer Julius "Dr. J" Erving, three-time Olympic gold medalist Jackie Joyner-Kersey, and 10-time NBA All-Star Carmelo Anthony — as well as commentary from Lloyd and footage of the St. Olaf pop-up barbershop in action.

The impact and importance of having a barbershop on campus became clearer than ever. Lloyd began making his case for a permanent space to college leaders, and teamed up with Green and Zari Irving '25 to create and pitch a business plan for a permanent barbershop shop — dubbed The Shop 1500 — as part of the annual Ole Cup student entrepreneurial competition. They won a \$5,000 prize — and the support of college leadership.

**"In the Black community, barbershops aren't merely a place to get a haircut, and your barber isn't just someone who cuts your hair. Historically, barbershops have been a hearth for the civil rights movement, a safe place for people to communicate ideas, a place for community."**

— AIDAN LLOYD '24





Aidan Lloyd's mother and grandfather proudly take photos in the space their Ole worked to make happen.  
PHOTO BY STEVEN GARCIA '20



Aidan Lloyd '24 and Bryan Bass '95 chat at the grand opening for The Shop 1500 during Homecoming and Family Weekend. "It's everything to see the college be thoughtful about the acknowledgement of this space," Bass says. PHOTO BY EVAN PAK '19



Shortly after her inauguration in the fall of 2023, St. Olaf President Susan Rundell Singer approved plans for the construction of a permanent barbershop space in Buntrock Commons. Lloyd spent much of his senior year in meetings with architects, contractors, and campus leaders to help create the vision for The Shop 1500.

LSE Architects, the largest Black-owned architecture and interior design firm in the upper Midwest, designed the plans for the shop. Architects there worked closely with Lloyd on his vision and design, and introduced him to Houston White, a Minneapolis-based entrepreneur, community leader, author, and designer whose work focuses on creating a more intercultural world. LSE designer Sam Ero-Philips says it was rewarding to work with Lloyd.

“As a Black-owned firm, we value the experience of having a client who is young, Black, and focused on a clear vision,” he says.

#### A PRACTICAL AND POWERFUL RESOURCE

The Shop 1500 opened this fall in its new space in Buntrock Commons 112, located in the heart of the college’s student union and across the hall from the Taylor Center for Equity and Inclusion. It is the only barbershop in the City of Northfield that provides specialized services to meet the needs of people with textured hair. Students, faculty, and staff quickly began making appointments, and the campus community celebrated at a grand opening during Homecoming and Family Weekend.

The St. Olaf Jazz Collective, conducted by Associate Professor of Music Joseph Jefferson, provided music to open the celebration in the Buntrock Commons Crossroads. Lloyd returned to campus to speak at the opening, and he shared an emotional reflection of what it meant to step into the space he had worked so hard to make a reality.



Aidan Lloyd '24 speaks at the grand opening celebration of The Shop 1500 held in the Buntrock Commons Crossroads. PHOTO BY STEVEN GARCIA '20



“This has been a project I’ve been dreaming of and working on since my literal first month at St. Olaf, so to see it coming to life is everything,” he says. “I take so much joy in knowing that it will be carried forward by a new generation of Oles and is something for them to make their own and use as a place to incubate their own ideas.”

Kazadi-Ndoye also traveled to campus to provide remarks at the celebration. She noted that her interest was first piqued when she heard about “this little bootleg barbershop at St. Olaf,” but it was conversations with Lloyd and Green that made her want to highlight the shop in *CROWN*. Their understanding of how critical the space would be to the St. Olaf community was inspiring, she says.

“Getting a shop on this campus is an act of love,” Kazadi-Ndoye told those gathered for the grand opening kickoff.

It’s also a tangible sign that St. Olaf sees all of its students, Lloyd says. “Dignity comes in the physical form. This space accomplishes what the pop-up barbershop never could,” he told the *Sahan Journal* reporter who attended the grand opening.

As the crowd made their way upstairs to The Shop 1500 to see the space, several alumni swapped stories about cutting hair in dorm rooms and the fellow students who served as stand-in barbers. Some even remembered advocating for an on-campus barbershop decades ago.

Bryan Bass ’95 says that while he felt welcomed and supported while a student at St. Olaf, he struggled to explain privilege and the Black lens he saw things through to his white classmates. Students of color had to work hard to create community and space on campus where they felt like they belonged, he adds. That’s what makes The Shop 1500 both a practical and powerful resource on campus.



Speakers at The Shop 1500 grand opening included (left) Jerome Covington '25, who manages the shop alongside Maroova Elkemary '26, and (above) Sarah Kazadi-Ndoye, the producer of the EMMY-nominated documentary *CROWN*. PHOTOS BY STEVEN GARCIA '20

Dominique Jones '27 braids Yolanda Pauly's hair at the grand opening of The Shop 1500. PHOTO BY STEVEN GARCIA '20



Scores of Oles visited The Shop 1500 during its opening and the dedication of the space to Bill Green, including (from left) Jerome Covington '25, Vince Omni '96 (née Vince Brydon), Joy Quaidoo '97, Professor of English Joseph Mbele, Richard Taylor '95, and Aidan Lloyd '24. PHOTO BY EVAN PAK '19



“Beyond its obvious purpose as a place for hair care, I hope that the shop holds its symbolic value. I want all students to remember that they are what makes St. Olaf what it is — and they should make it suit their needs, make it the perfect place for themselves.”

— AIDAN LLOYD '24

“The Shop 1500 is an instant affinity space. You walk in, you’re in community,” Bass says. “It conveys a powerful and symbolic message from the college: You belong here. It’s everything for current students and alumni of color to see the college and its leadership walk the talk of one of its core values — inclusion.”

Part of that acknowledgement of the space includes dedicating it in honor of the late Bill Green '77, the longtime director of multicultural affairs at St. Olaf who made a deep impact on scores of students. Lloyd says it’s important to him to recognize the people whose shoulders he stood

on while building a vision for this space. Now he hopes that current and future students continue to advance the work he started.

“I hope they use the space as a location of true community and innovation,” Lloyd says. “Beyond its obvious purpose as a place for hair care, I hope that the shop holds its symbolic value. I want all students to remember that they are what makes St. Olaf what it is — and they should make it suit their needs, make it the perfect place for themselves.”

#### CLAIMING SPACE IN THE CENTER OF CAMPUS

The Shop 1500 has four chairs, with professional barbers and stylists coming from the Twin Cities to work in the space. It also features chairs and tables for Oles of all backgrounds to chat, play games, listen to music, or just hang out between classes.

The shop is led by student managers Maroova Elkemary '26 and Jerome Covington '25. Together they oversee The Shop 1500’s scheduling and promotions, care for the physical space, and manage the relationship between the barbers and St. Olaf.

Elkemary became interested in working at the shop while pitching a natural hair care product at the Ole Cup student entrepreneurial competition. She wanted to support the new space, and she’s looking forward to leading the barbershop through its inaugural year on



Gigi Bassekle '26 works on braids for Kelijah McElroy '26 in The Shop 1500. PHOTO BY EVAN PAK '19



Nann Green takes a moment to get photos in front of a pillar in The Shop 1500 that pays tribute to her husband, the late Bill Green. PHOTO BY EVAN PAK '19



campus. “It’s a great initiative, first of its kind, and I’m very excited to see what it will lead to,” she says. “St. Olaf is trying its best to have diverse initiatives.”

Covington agrees, noting that The Shop 1500 is essential for St. Olaf as it moves into the future. Students of color now comprise about 23 percent of St. Olaf’s student body, with international students making up an additional 11 percent. “The campus is continuing to get more diverse, and it’s important to be inclusive to all incoming students,” he says.

As a student who used the pop-up barbershop, Covington says the convenience of The Shop 1500, along with the quality of the barbers and stylists hired, will bring a different energy to campus for BIPOC students. Having a permanent space for the shop also demonstrates a commitment to inclusion for all students. “It shows that I’m recognized, and I don’t have to be someone else coming to Northfield, Minnesota,” he says.

Covington says in addition to barbers, the shop will have braiders and stylists to provide hair care for a wide range of students. “This is a place for community, and we want to take advantage of this space,” he says. Rundell Singer told the *Minnesota Star Tribune* that the shop meets an important community need that’s tied deeply with belonging.

“It’s about change, it’s about a healing act,” she says, “that allows people that had been marginalized to claim their space in the middle of campus.” 🏡

## In Honor of Bill Green '77

The Shop 1500 was dedicated in honor of William “Bill” Green Sr. '77 during a ceremony on campus that was attended by his family and friends. Green was a passionate educator and minister, deeply committed to community restoration and educational equality. His life was marked by advocacy, mentorship, and an unwavering faith.

Green majored in political science and sociology while a student at St. Olaf, where he was also a member of the track and field and football teams. He returned to the Hill in 1986 to join the Admissions team and eventually retired in 2012 as the Director of Multicultural Affairs and Community Outreach (MACO) and an Assistant Dean of Community Life and Diversity.

As someone who knew the importance of building community, Green showed a deep passion for breaking barriers for those who felt like they didn’t belong on the Hill. He was known for bringing barbers to campus for Oles of color to have access to their services, and he helped lay the foundation for the creation of a space like The Shop 1500.

The location of the shop also sits in the exact same space where Green’s original office in Buntrock Commons was located — making it the perfect place to honor his legacy.



At a ceremony in The Shop 1500 to dedicate the space in Bill Green's honor, members of his family see for the first time a pillar in the space that pays tribute to his legacy on campus. PHOTO BY EVAN PAK '19

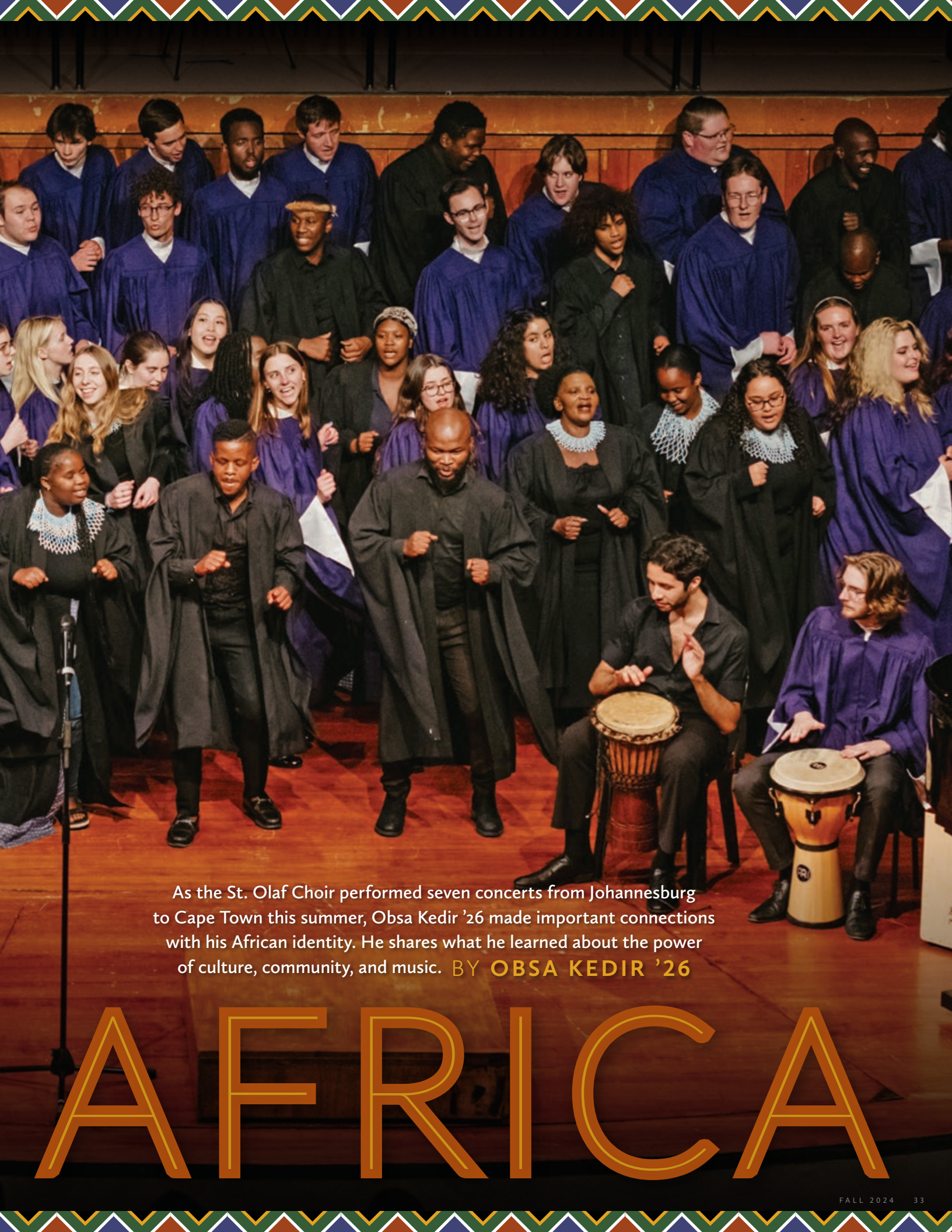


The St. Olaf Choir  
performs with the  
University of Cape Town  
Choir at Baxter Theatre.  
PHOTO BY LAIKIN ADAMS



# THE SONGS OF SOUTH





As the St. Olaf Choir performed seven concerts from Johannesburg to Cape Town this summer, Obsa Kedir '26 made important connections with his African identity. He shares what he learned about the power of culture, community, and music. **BY OBSA KEDIR '26**

# AFRICA



The St. Olaf Choir's tour to South Africa was a life-changing experience. I think everyone on the tour can say that. However, this tour was especially meaningful for me when it came to my identity.

As many first-generation Americans know, understanding identity in this country is a complex process. My parents are from the East African country of Ethiopia, proudly from the Oromo ethnic group, and immigrated to the United States in the late 1990s. Growing up in the U.S., I developed a dual identity — one reflecting my family's African values and the other my American upbringing. As a child, it was difficult to express my true self. Going to a predominantly white school, I felt like my roots and my heritage were not as important. Like most teenagers, I was desperate to fit in — and that desperation made me feel like the only place where I could express being Oromo was in my home.

The St. Olaf Choir tour to South Africa presented me with an opportunity to explore that identity more fully. Months before the tour, I began preparing myself for this incredible opportunity because I wanted to make sure I made the most of it. I had enlightening conversations with my parents about the experiences I would have in

South Africa. We discussed a connection that Oromos have with Nelson Mandela, something that I had no idea about. General Tadesse Birru was an Oromo-Ethiopian military officer who was assigned to lead the training of secret guerrilla warfare tactics for “David Motsamayi,” an alias that Mandela went by to escape South African persecution. The three months of training helped strengthen Mandela's skills. After a farewell dinner hosted by Birru, the general awarded Mandela the “liberation handgun,” a symbol of liberation that has been passed down. I could tell that my parents felt a sense of pride about not just General Birru, but the fact that we could say that “one of our own” was instrumental in the liberation of South Africa, which inspired many movements across Africa and the world. My parents have always wanted to take our family back to Ethiopia — or “back home,” as we call it — but this opportunity to visit South Africa, doing what I love with amazing people, was special.

Although I'm not from South Africa, there are a lot of cultural nuances that are incredibly similar to my experiences as a kid. Celebrations in South Africa remind me of birthdays at home or gatherings at church or weddings. One thing that was ingrained during my childhood was that you celebrate everything. In my family, we celebrated each of our birthdays like it was our last. Age was not a factor! The summer after I graduated, I went to many graduation parties for my friends. Typically these would be in someone's





backyard, and there would be some light food, drinks, and a few people standing around to talk to — and then after a half-hour, I would leave. My graduation party? Whole different story. My family rented out an entire pavilion, we catered food from an Oromo restaurant, and then we had a celebration! Family, cousins, and friends all danced in a circle while the worship team from my church sang Oromo gospel. It wasn't something you could just walk in and out of. I had friends who'd never seen that side of me who were amazed by the depth of joy my graduation party had. So when I saw the audience in Johannesburg light up during our concert, it was a familiar feeling — but to feel it in a choral setting with high-level music making was a cathartic experience.

**“This tour has invigorated my desire to visit my homeland of Oromia and continue to learn more about my heritage. It has also helped me realize that our differences are what make us unique — and being true to myself and my heritage makes our connections with each other that much stronger.”**

— OBSA KEDIR '26



### Creating Cost-Free Opportunities to Experience the World

The St. Olaf Choir performed seven concerts from Johannesburg to Cape Town during its two-week tour of South Africa last summer.

The tour featured collaborations with some of South Africa's most renowned choirs and musicians, including the TUKS Camerata, conducted by Michael Barrett; Quava Vocal Group, conducted by Sabelo Mthembu; and the Drakensberg Boys Choir.

It was the St. Olaf Choir's first international tour since 2019 and the first time any of the college's touring ensembles have performed on the continent of Africa.

“Traveling internationally provides us with an opportunity to hold a mirror to ourselves — to learn from others, see different aspects of ourselves and how we view our own experience in the world,” says St. Olaf Choir Conductor Anton Armstrong '78.

The St. Olaf Choir tour of South Africa was completely cost-free for St. Olaf musicians thanks to a newly established endowment. In 2019 St. Olaf received a \$4.2 million gift from Louis and Mary Kay Smith to create an endowed fund to support student travel costs for international music ensemble tours, and the college provided matching funds. Their gift built on an endowed need-based scholarship established by anonymous donors, and together these funds are providing St. Olaf musicians with incredible opportunities to perform around the world. Already the fund is having a significant impact. Students in the St. Olaf Band toured Japan cost-free in the summer of 2023, and members of the St. Olaf Orchestra will embark on a tour of Norway in 2025.

In Soweto, the views outside were quite different from what we were seeing in Johannesburg and Pretoria. In fact, my view from the bus as we saw cattle crossing the street and more township-style homes reminded me of the photos my mom had of where she grew up in Shashamane, Ethiopia. I tried to imagine myself in Oromia, and what my mom would have felt if she was here with me. Even though it was a rainy afternoon, it could not have been a more enjoyable day. I gave a St. Olaf Choir devotion that day, and it was inspiring to be able to tell my fellow choir members how unique this tour was for me and speak a little bit about my journey. The concert was even better. I felt like I was at my church, and the level of joy in the audience, from the youngest kids to the elderly, was so fun!

After the concert, we were not finished yet. We were able to do a dance workshop that included many dancers from the various tribes in South Africa. When the instructor asked for volunteers, my hand shot up so quickly. I told myself before departing for this tour that if I wanted to have the most fulfilling experience, I needed to try everything, even if it meant breaking out of my shell a bit. I had no regrets. I was fully immersed in the moment, which was what I needed. Seeing Dr. Armstrong take out his phone and start recording our dance was pretty cool! For having no background in dance, I thought I did pretty well.

Top left: Darby Wilson '24 with Obsa Kedir at Nelson Mandela's home in Soweto. Right: Kedir and fellow St. Olaf Choir members participate in a dance workshop after a concert at Soweto's Holy Cross Anglican Church. PHOTOS BY FERNANDO SEVILLA





The St. Olaf Choir performs *Modimo* alongside the TUKS Camerata, with Jake Olson '24 on djembe.



Members of the University of Cape Town Choir rehearse with the St. Olaf Choir for their concert at Baxter Theatre.



Members of the St. Olaf Choir pose for a photo at Greenmarket Square in Cape Town.



Obsa Kedir records an elephant during an early morning tour at Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park while Ella Yarris '26 looks on.



St. Olaf Choir Conductor Anton Armstrong '78 introduces the ensemble to the audience in Drakensberg.



Obsa Kedir and members of the St. Olaf Choir perform in South Africa.



Members of the St. Olaf Choir take a photo with the Drakensberg Boys Choir on the campus of their school, which is located at the foot of the Central Drakensberg mountain range.



“I have had the privilege of hearing choirs and music from South Africa, especially through the World Choral Symposium. This country has a rich choral tradition grounded in their folk and native cultures, and I knew this was a place we could take the choir to both learn and share our own music.”

— ST. OLAF CHOIR CONDUCTOR ANTON ARMSTRONG '78

As a potential music educator, having the opportunity to speak with Sabelo Mthembu, director of Quava Vocal Group — an award-winning classical, jazz, and African choir based in Johannesburg — and members of the University of Pretoria’s TUKS Camerata was unreal. Talking to them and collaborating with them as artists gave me more perspective. They showed me that I don’t need to choose one identity over the other. Songs like *Isondo* and *Modimo*, alongside *I Sing Because I’m Happy*, reflect how both sides of me can coexist and share the stage of my life. *Isondo* and *Modimo* are two of the pieces that we learned that had origins in South Africa with traditional Xhosa and Zulu roots. Both of these pieces challenged the St. Olaf Choir on not only the text, but also in movement, a huge part of expression in our African culture. *I Sing Because I’m Happy* represents my Black American side, with the gospel-style arrangement and roots in hymns.

Identity is something we all wrestle with in some way. I’m grateful for this experience to travel to Africa, and for the love within the St. Olaf Choir. It’s why I decided to go to St. Olaf. The fact that I’m able to be a part of a world-class choral experience and still be able to travel the world and be involved on campus has been so gratifying for me. Besides my role as assistant manager of the St. Olaf Choir, I’m also the artistic director of a student-led choral ensemble, Spiritus Novus, and a member of The BonaFide Four, a barbershop I co-founded with three of my friends. In addition to majoring in music, I am also an economics major. St. Olaf has allowed me to explore all of my interests and passions, and this tour was no different. It has invigorated my desire to visit my homeland of Oromia and continue to learn more about my heritage. It has also helped me realize that our differences are what make us unique — and being true to myself and my heritage makes our connections with each other that much stronger. I’m eternally grateful for this experience. 🇳🇵



Obsa Kedir takes it all in during a visit to Freedom Park, which is situated on Salvokop and offers stunning views of Pretoria’s skyline.



Visit [stolaf.edu/magazine](http://stolaf.edu/magazine) or scan the QR codes above to hear more from Obsa Kedir about his experience and to watch the St. Olaf Choir perform *I Sing Because I’m Happy* in cities across South Africa.





The St. Olaf College Sesqui Mittens that Professor of Norwegian Kari Lie Dorer has designed feature the St. Olaf shield with the year 1874, as well as the interconnected 1-5-0 that the college is using to celebrate its 150th anniversary. Dorer has created patterns in sizes ranging from baby to adult — and she hasn't stopped with mittens. She also created a pattern to knit a Sesqui Cowl (shown beneath the mittens in the photo on the right), as well as patterns for a knitted holiday ornament and gift card holder.



# A Cozy Way to Commemorate the St. Olaf Sesquicentennial

Professor of Norwegian Kari Lie Dorer is celebrating 150 years of the college's tight-knit community with special St. Olaf Sesquicentennial knitting patterns for mittens and a cowl. She shares the traditions that inspired her to launch this project.

By Kari Lie Dorer

**T**HE STRONG CONNECTION that Norwegians have to knitting is something I first experienced while studying in Norway nearly 30 years ago. I have a vivid memory of the moment my roommate's mother learned that her daughter had helped me buy a machine-produced sweater. "How un-Norwegian!" she declared with dismay.

After that, I was eager to learn how to knit. My Norwegian friends — who had all learned to knit in school at a young age and continued to do so in their free time — took on the challenge of teaching me. Their lessons have lasted a lifetime.

In Norway, it has become common to use knitting as a way to commemorate important life events. One of my favorite wedding presents, knitted by a good friend, is a special set of mittens called *kjærlighetsvotter* (love mittens). During the 1994 Winter Olympics hosted in Lillehammer, there was a series of patterns that everyone was knitting and wearing to mark the festive occasion. This tradition even continues at St. Olaf, where many Oles commemorate the college's Norwegian roots by wearing a Norwegian sweater each year to the Christmas Festival.

So as St. Olaf began planning for its 150th anniversary this year, it seemed only natural that one way to commemorate it would be

by designing a knitting pattern — which quickly evolved into multiple knitting patterns.

The first three are called the St. Olaf College Sesqui Mittens. One features the St. Olaf shield, one features the sesquicentennial logo, and one features a design inspired by the beams in Boe Memorial Chapel. Each has elements that Oles can customize to indicate their graduation year, majors or areas of study, year of retirement, and more.

Because mittens aren't the most novice-friendly project, I developed another pattern that I ended up liking just as much: the St. Olaf College Sesqui Cowl. Its 150 interconnected Os result in one complex design.

All the patterns feature St. Olaf colors and Norwegian knitting techniques using a popular Norwegian yarn called Rauma. The pattern itself is available at [kariliedorer.com](http://kariliedorer.com) or (for knitting enthusiasts) [ravelry.com](http://ravelry.com). The materials are available at Northfield Yarn, which will also be organizing a knit-along after the new year.

My hope is that this unique commemorative project will connect the many individuals who share my enthusiasm in fiber arts — and give us a fun, cozy way to commemorate the St. Olaf Sesquicentennial. 🧶





Oles, submit your class news online!

[stolaf.edu/alumni/share-your-news](http://stolaf.edu/alumni/share-your-news)

It's easier than ever to share your latest news, photos, and updated contact information! Questions? Email [alum-office@stolaf.edu](mailto:alum-office@stolaf.edu) or call 507-786-3028 or 888-865-6537.

1960s

Roger Aus '62 had an article published in the Spring 2024 issue of *South Dakota History*. ■ Sharon Ufer Lavell '69 reports that she and her college roommates enjoyed an early reunion last March in Tucson, Ariz. ❶ "We came from Illinois, Minnesota, and Washington to celebrate the transformation of our 55 years of Round Robin letters to Zoom calls." Pictured (L-R): Naomi Nelson Colburn, Jean Husby Milton, Karen Everingham Andersen, Gwen Newhouse Jones, and Sharon Ufer Lavell, all from the Class of 1969. ■ Perry Kruse '69 received the Don Clark Award, which is presented by Minnesota Hockey to an individual who over a period of many years has been dedicated to the grassroots growth and development of youth hockey in Minnesota. Kruse has coached in the Northfield Youth Hockey Association for 38 years at all levels, but spent the majority of his time at the Mite Level (beginning skaters).

1970s

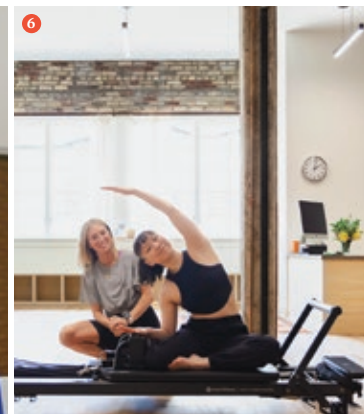
Hollis Thoms '70 ❷ recently had the premiere of his new opera "Transfiguration at Grinder's Stand: the Mysterious Death of Captain Meriwether Lewis" performed by Dakota Pro Musica — an ensemble founded and led by Jason Thoms '96, who also sang the leading role in the opera. His daughter Aleksandra Thoms '20, a visual artist,

designed the concert program. Hollis Thoms has written more than 190 works for a variety of ensembles and published 50 articles in education and music journals. ■ Phil Docken '71 writes, "My 16-minute black and white film [titled] *you thRill me* won Best of Fest in February 2024 at the annual U.S. Super 8mm Film + Digital Video Festival at Rutgers University. The Festival has a long history of celebrating small format film making. *you thRill me* is a film montage that reveals a very oblique narrative which the viewer may or may not choose to inhabit." ■ Tom Duncan '73, a retired health care executive and dedicated civic leader, has joined the Board of Trustees at Carthage College. Duncan retired last year as vice president and chief marketing officer of the Froedtert South system in Kenosha, which closed the book on his nearly 50-year career in hospital administration. ■ Tom Boldt '74 is transitioning to Chairman of the Board for The Boldt Group, after previously serving as President and CEO. ■ Mark Hansen Bach '76, who graduated from the Paracollege in 1976, is in the middle of his term as director of Holden Village. ❸ Holden Village has enjoyed many Oles on staff and continues to host St. Olaf students each January Interim. ■ Patty McCauley Franson '78 writes, "I released two original songs worldwide in June 2024: "Wide Open" and "Stronger Than I Think." These songs were created in the Songwriter's Journey with Isaac and Thorald Koren, a magical, heart-opening adventure." ■ Paul McCray '76 received the 2024 Distinguished Alumni Award for Achievement from the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine. ❹ McCray is a pediatric pulmonologist with interests in airway innate immunity, epithelial cell biology, and the applications of genetic therapies for lung diseases. He has spent nearly 40 years researching gene therapies for

cystic fibrosis, and he also performed fundamental research that furthered medical understanding of coronaviruses including SARS, MERS, and COVID-19. A mouse model of coronavirus infection that McCray had developed during his work with SARS became one of the most scientifically useful vehicles for studying COVID-19 and testing vaccines and treatments. His knowledge of host defenses and virus entry mechanisms have also been employed to advance basic science on airway epithelia, especially a class of antimicrobial peptides called defensins. McCray discovered and characterized the human and mouse beta-defensin gene clusters that protect the lung, a body of work that has formed a foundation for better understanding innate immunity in the lungs and in diseases of the kidney, gastrointestinal tract, and skin. "The projects I've worked on have involved many iterations of trial and error," McCray says. "But one of the reasons I've stuck with research is that it's ever-changing. You can't investigate the same thing forever; there's always a need to learn new things." ■ Jeff Cook '76 writes to share that when Hurricane Helene hit Asheville, N.C., in September 2024, he found himself rolling up his sleeves to help the community alongside fellow Oles Kevin Seal '11 and Elizabeth Simmons Seal '02. ❺ All three had just started new professional roles in the state — Cook as the head of operations for Trinity Episcopal Church, where Kevin Seal had been hired to serve as the organist and director of music, and Elizabeth Seal as a choir teacher at Charles D. Owen High School in Black Mountain. They spent their first month reveling in the fortuitous fact that three Oles had found themselves working together so far from Minnesota, reminiscing about the choir conductors and professors they had all worked with on the Hill. Then Hurricane Helene tore







through Asheville, causing significant damage to the community and church. "But when the going gets rough, Oles get going," Cook says. Together they worked on clean-up and repair efforts. Cook says they're "in it for the long haul and exemplify St. Olaf students' commitment to helping others wherever and whenever assistance is needed." ■ **John Stratton '78** 1 was inducted into the National Junior College Athletic Association Baseball Hall of Fame in May 2024 at the National D1 Baseball Tournament in Grand Junction, Colo. Previously, he had been inducted into the Arizona Western College Hall of Fame and the Arizona Community College Athletic Conference Hall of Fame. Stratton was head baseball coach at Arizona Western College for 27 years, played for Jim Dimick at St. Olaf, and then was a graduate assistant coach at the University of Arizona. After retiring, he umpired, coached high school softball, served on several boards, and currently is a volunteer coach with Special Olympics.

## 1980s

**Jeffrey Wilkinson '80**, a distinguished engineer at Medtronic, was inducted into the Bakken Society at its annual induction ceremony in August. This is the highest technical honor bestowed at Medtronic, and just 202 individuals have received it since it was established in 1979. To merit inclusion, candidates must have made multiple outstanding contributions to Medtronic's technical and scientific progress, maintaining the highest standards in originality and integrity. ■ **Brian Ohm '80** recently retired from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he was a professor of urban and regional planning. His teaching and research focused on land use and planning law. ■ **Kerrith Lyndahl Kasel '83** met classmates **Susan Hagstrom '83** and **Terry Ytterboe Carlson '83** in Charleston, S.C., for a mini reunion in April 2024. 2 She writes,

"We had a wonderful, educational, fun, and fulfilling weekend celebrating our 40 years of friendship!" ■ **David LaRochelle '83** has had his 23rd children's book, *100 Mighty Dragons All Named Broccoli*, 3 illustrated by Lian Cho, chosen as one of *Smithsonian* magazine's "Top Ten Children's Books of 2023." ■ **Ruth Pechauer '84** writes, "In April 2024 I was voted by the board of the Twin Cities Slovenians as its 2023 Member of the Year and featured in the national Slovenian Union of America's *Zarja - The Dawn* magazine's Summer 2024 issue." ■ **Beth Van de Ven Knuths '84** and **Jon Knuths '84** recently gathered Oles together in Rio Verde, Ariz., for the first annual "St. Olaf Alumni Happy Hour of the Verdes." 4 Seventeen area residents and one first-year student visitor represented five decades of Oles from the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and the Class of 2027. ■ **Michael Reagan '85** writes, "After 27 years as professor of biology at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University, I retired after spring semester 2024. We're looking forward to golf, travel, and whatever adventures life throws at us." ■ **Timothy Frerichs '88**, a faculty member in the Department of Visual Arts and New Media at State University of New York at Fredonia, has been promoted to the rank of SUNY Distinguished Professor. Frerichs is an internationally recognized expert in printmaking, artist books, and paper arts who has received more than 20 honors and grants in recognition of his work. His artist books and installations have been displayed in exhibitions and permanent collections throughout the world. ■ **William "Bill" Tenney '89** was named the CEO of ASIS International, the leading organization for security management professionals worldwide. He brings nearly 35 years of security leadership experience from both public and private sectors to his new role, which he assumed in June 2024.

## 1990s

**Jeff Wehling '90** has been elected vice chair of the Board of Directors and a member of the Executive Committee for CROSS Services, a nonprofit social service agency dedicated to providing supplemental food, financial programming, and children's programming to people in need in the Twin Cities northwest metro area. "I am excited to contribute further in fulfilling our mission and driving our transformation to support the ever-growing needs in our local communities," he writes. ■ **Joel Dixon '94** writes, "I recently retired as a colonel from the U.S. Air Force after a successful 25-year career. 5 After taking some time off and then networking to discover my next chapter, I am excited to report I have started a new position at TriWest Healthcare Alliance as the vice president of Military and Veteran Services, Midwest Operations."

## 2000s

**David Sorkin '00** is the new president of Academy of Holy Angels in Richfield, Minn. He has significant leadership experience in private education, including serving as a teacher and dean of students at Providence Academy in Plymouth, a national adjunct faculty member at the University of Notre Dame, a research fellow at Boston College, and most recently as the head of school at Saint Hubert Catholic School in Chanhassen, Minn. ■ **Alissa Nelson Struble '02** recently completed her doctor of nursing practice-family nurse practitioner degree from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. She will be working as a nurse practitioner in an emergency room in southern Illinois. ■ **Berit Ahlgren '05** opened Sunna, a wellness studio committed to Movement of Mind + Body, in April 2024. 6 Located in Northeast Minneapolis in the historic Switch House building, Sunna offers classes in yoga, pilates mat and reformer, barre, dance



# On the Shelf



## BOOKS BY ST. OLAF COLLEGE ALUMNI, FACULTY, AND STAFF

**The Only Woman in the Room: My life as a pioneer businesswoman, daughter, wife, mother, and grandmother** (Independently published, 2024), by **Audrey Aronson Johnson '59**



**Through Pine Shadows** (Moon Path Press, 2024), by **Carol R. Sunde '60**



**House of 49 Doors: Entries in a Life** (Poieima Poetry Series) (Wipf and Stock, 2024), by **Laurie Brendemuehl Klein '72**



**Holding the Lines: Horses, Hard Work, Love, and Potatoes** (Acres U.S.A., 2023), by **Maureen Ash '80**



**Mathilde Möhring** (Women and Gender in German Studies) (Camden House, 2023), by Theodor Fontane, translated by **Rachael Huener '80**



**The Most Amazing Museum of Los Angeles** (BookBaby, 2024), by **Eric Margerum '81**



**French Westerns: On the Frontier of Film Genre and French Cinema** (Edinburgh University Press, 2024), by **Timothy Scheie '85**

**Listening to the Spirit: The Radical Social Gospel, Sacred Value, and Broad-Based Community Organizing** (AAR Academy Series) (Oxford University Press, 2024), by **Aaron Stauffer '10**

**Heaven's Match: A Bachelor-Inspired Thriller** (Self-published, 2024), by **Caroline Ponessa '15**



fitness, meditation, and more. ■ **Mary Sotos '07** helped coordinate the solar panels being put on the Pentagon. She currently is director of the Federal Energy Management Program at the U.S. Department of Energy. ■ **Elizabeth Manning '07** was awarded a Distinguished Service Award from the Minnesota Structural Engineers Association (MNSEA) for her leadership as the organization's president last year. She continues to serve on the executive committee as past president, and her prior roles at MNSEA have included vice president and secretary/treasurer, and her roles in MNSEA's Young Member Group Committee have included chair and communication coordinator. ■ **Jana Larson '08** writes, "I am now the artistic director of the Milwaukee Handbell Ensemble. I was a member of the group for 10 years and moved into the director role at the beginning of the 2023–24 season. ❶ In December 2023 we took handbells to a new level, playing during halftime in front of 17,000 fans at a Milwaukee Bucks NBA game!" ■ **Sara Thatcher Swenson '09**, a top Minnesota communication strategist, has become a principal of Goff Public, a full-service communications firm headquartered in St. Paul. Swenson, a vice president of public relations, has worked at Goff Public since 2009, starting as an entry-level writer and growing her responsibilities rapidly over the years. She manages the agency's community engagement practice and has vast experience working with state, tribal, and local governments, nonprofits, and higher education institutions. ■ **Timothy Kraack '09**, director of St. Paul Academy Choral Activities, has written a musical titled *The Logic Pit*. The play provides an inside look at artificial intelligence developer Logic Pittman and Bray, where its employees are subjected to a series of tests that must be won in order for them to hold onto their jobs. It soon becomes clear that not everything

at the company is what it seems. The musical made its debut last May at St. Paul Academy and Summit School's Upper School.

## 2010S

**Kevin Seal '11** was recently appointed director of music and organist at Trinity Episcopal Church in Asheville, N.C. Seal is excited to continue his work in music ministry at Trinity, the premier Episcopal church in western North Carolina. ■ **Emmett Larsen '13** writes, "I graduated with my Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Stony Brook University and am now starting a postdoctoral research fellowship in the Psychiatry Department at Columbia University, focusing on the cognitive neuroscience of delusions in schizophrenia." ■ **Spencer Scarth '14**, the head men's and women's swimming coach at Milligan University in Johnson City, Tenn., was named the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics and College Swimming Coaches Association of America Men's Coach of the Year. He also coached two national champions at the national meet, and was named the Appalachian Athletic Conference Men's and Women's Coach of the Year for the second year in a row, along with his teams sweeping conference titles. ■ **Samantha Rude '15** and **Lindsay Dolan '15** met up in Kansas City for the 2024 American Physical Therapy Association House of Delegates where they served as elected chapter delegates for Wisconsin and Minnesota, respectively. ■ **Nicole Newell '15** graduated with a master of divinity degree from Harvard Divinity School, where she also sang in the Harvard University Choir. Newell began a residency this fall as a hospital chaplain at Stanford Hospital in Palo Alto, Calif., and she also is discerning a ministry in the Episcopal Church. Oles **Johnna Purchase '14** and **Sarah Langer '15** joined her for the graduation festivities. ❷



## Muus vs. Muus: The Scandal that Shook Norwegian America

By Bodil Stenseth. Edited by **St. Olaf Professor of Norwegian Kari Lie Dorer**, the King Olav V Chair of Scandinavian-American Studies. Translated by Kari Lie Dorer and **Torild Tweet Homstad '71**. Co-Published by the Minnesota Historical Society Press and the Norwegian-American Historical Association, September 2024

As St. Olaf commemorates its 150th anniversary, Professor of Norwegian Kari Lie Dorer brings a riveting story about one of the college's founders to an American audience.

*Muus vs. Muus: The Scandal that Shook Norwegian America* is an English edition of a book originally published in Norway. It tells the story of Oline Muus, who gained notoriety throughout Norwegian America and beyond when she sued her husband — St. Olaf founder Pastor Bernt Muus — to recoup her inheritance. The remarkable 1880s lawsuit posed questions about cultural practices in an immigrant community and the rights of its members as Americans, inspiring a wide-reaching debate about faith and family.

Dorer notes that the book looks beyond the case of *Muus vs. Muus* to contextualize the arrival of Norwegians in Minnesota, conflicts among various Lutheran conferences, and questions of Americanization — introducing readers to compelling characters and the challenges that come from intertwined lives and conflicting worldviews. "It really sets the stage for some of the issues that the Norwegian American community was grappling with at the time of St. Olaf's founding: questions about religion, gender, and what it means to be an American," she says.

Students in a class that Dorer taught last fall interviewed scholars about the Norwegian American church and women's rights in the 19th century, and they developed a *Muus vs. Muus* reading guide, podcasts, and story map. Engage with their work at [kariliedorer.com/muus-vs-muus](http://kariliedorer.com/muus-vs-muus).





■ Calvin Lehn '16 shares that after several years of working in Minneapolis, continuing to run competitively, and completing a master's degree in Leadership at Augsburg University while coaching cross country and track, he is charting a new path in Colorado. He recently earned another master's degree at the University of Colorado Boulder in secondary science curriculum and instruction. As part of that program, he did his practicum and student teaching at a middle school in Longmont while studying coursework through an equity and justice lens. Outside his career, he has embraced the passionate outdoor culture in Colorado. "I won the Steamboat Marathon in June and have been in the mountains almost every weekend," he says, noting that he's taken advantage of trail running, climbing, rafting, and hiking

opportunities. The highlight, he says, was backpacking the four pass loop in the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness Area with his partner. "I'm happy to call Colorado home and look forward to new adventures in teaching and the mountains," he says. ■ Scott Johnson '18 and David Johnson '77 visited the Orkney Islands north of Scotland in October 2023. The Orkney Islands were a possession of Norway until offered as a dowry to the Scottish king in 1468. They visited St. Magnus Cathedral on the main island, the most northerly cathedral in the United Kingdom, named after martyred Norwegian Jarl of Orkney. Scott Johnson graduated from Duke University School of Law in May 2024, and began working for the law firm A&O Shearman in New York City this fall.

2020S

Anna Janning '20 writes that she got to share the wonderful experience of traveling Norway with her mom, Nancy Bragg Janning '89. "Our ancestors are from Norway, so this was already a special trip. Then we found out we'd be visiting sites linked to the namesake of the college we both went to — how cool is that!? Two of those included the final battle (and death) of Saint Olaf at Stiklestad and his final resting place at Nidaros Cathedral."

Oles with the Minnesota Orchestra

When the Minnesota Orchestra invited music teachers from across the state to perform with the ensemble in April, it was no surprise that Oles were well-represented.

Nine of the 54 educators who performed were St. Olaf alumni: Mark Gitch '88, Wayzata High School (Violin); Michael Legvold '91, Cannon Falls Middle and High Schools (Tuba); Reid Wixson '03, Minneapolis Southwest High School (Clarinet); Stacy Griffin '07 [not pictured], Andover High School (Violin); Olivia Krueger Moraczewski '12, Prairie Creek Community School (Viola); Nahal Afshar Javan '20, Northfield High School, (French Horn); Jack Reynertson '20, Edina High School (Percussion); Maxwell Voda '21, Edina Elementary Schools (Violin); and Max Clifford '22, Wayzata High School (Violin).

After the concert, they attended a reception alongside retired St. Olaf Orchestra Conductor Steven Amundson and new Minnesota Orchestra Music Director Thomas Søndergård.

Watch a Minnesota Orchestra video about their experience by visiting https://www.minnesotaorchestra.org/community-education/educators-families/music-educator-side-by-side or by scanning this QR code.



ALUMNI & FAMILY TRAVEL

St. Olaf Alumni and Family Travel helps you explore the world through active learning adventures alongside like-minded travelers. A few upcoming programs are listed below. Learn more at stolaf.edu/travel

The Best of Norway during St. Olaf's 150th Anniversary Year | May 26-June 8, 2025 Led by Jane Becker Nelson and Peter Nelson

Tanzania: On Safari with the Ethics of Travel June 9-21, 2025 | Led by Kaethe Schwehn and Peder Jothen

Lost in Ireland: Enchanting Walking Journey Across the Emerald Isle | July 19-27, 2025 Hosted by Kirsten Cahoon

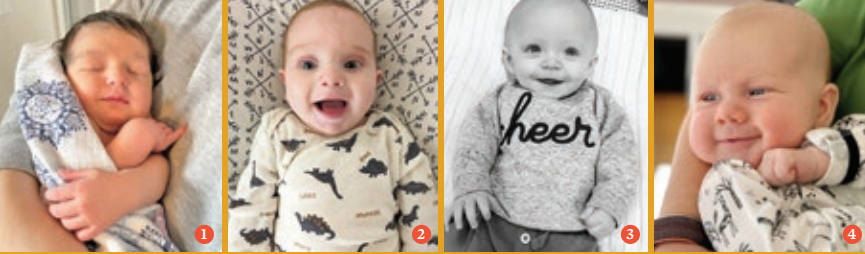
Fall Tableau of Canada and New England September 24-October 5, 2025 | Hosted by Megan Larrabee Nelson '86, 50th Reunion Lead

Village Life in France: Bordeaux and Dordogne September 4-12, 2025 | Led by Sharon and Betsy Lane-Getaz

Thailand: Imperial Cities Past and Present January 6-17, 2026 | Led by Michon and David Weeks

Southern India: Experiencing Kerala's Nature and Culture | February 7-24, 2026 Led by L. DeAne Lagerquist and Anne Walter





## Future Oles

- Elizabeth Lund '02, a son, Sebastian <sup>1</sup>
- Kate Bennett Farnum '04 and T.J. Farnum, a son, Ian <sup>2</sup>
- Britta Schroeter Phillips '06 and Ben Phillips, a son, Gustafson
- Calli Benson Burgemeister '08 and Dustin Burgemeister '09, a son, Brody <sup>3</sup>
- Emily Heninger Wirtz '10 and Luther Wirtz, a daughter, Flora <sup>4</sup>
- Summer DeNaples Gaasedelen '11 and Owen Gaasedelen '11, a daughter, Lilja <sup>5</sup>
- Sara Zieglmeier Hall '11 and Matthew Hall, a son, Martin <sup>6</sup>
- TaKeyah Dominique Grove '13 and Matt Grove '13, a daughter, Somer <sup>7</sup>
- Kari Nelson Kohrs '13 and Aaron Kohrs '16, a daughter, Hallie <sup>8</sup>
- James Leavell '13 and Megan Leavell, a daughter, Eleanor
- April Xiong Saydee '14 and Shadrach Saydee '14, twins, Silas and Zion <sup>9</sup>
- Melissa Lowen Yanckello '14 and Michael Yanckello '14, a son, Anthony <sup>10</sup>
- Amy Jeppesen Johnson '15 and Adam Johnson '13, a daughter, Ingrid
- Karen Van Acker Meyer '15 and Phil Meyer '15, twins, Otto and Thaddeus <sup>11</sup>
- Claire Pitstick Sanchez '15 and Armando Sanchez, a son, Benito <sup>12</sup>
- Hannah Besonen Rolfs '16 and Zach Rolfs '15, a daughter, Annie <sup>13</sup>
- Brenna Peterson '17 and Cristóbal Millán Ruiz, a daughter, Julia
- Kailee Wells Ievlev '19 and Vitaly Ievlev '18, a son, Andrei <sup>14</sup>

## Weddings

- Karen Iverson Lovell '72 and John Lovell '72, Nov. 25, 2023 <sup>1</sup>
- Jenny Brown Mammana '01 and Richard Mammana, Aug. 19, 2023
- Jana Larson Bau '08 and Brian Bau, Feb. 29, 2024 <sup>2</sup>
- Rachel Kafader Ohlmacher '09 and Justin Ohlmacher, Jan. 14, 2024
- Paula Skaggs '12 and David Liebenson '12, July 27, 2024
- James Leavell '13 and Megan Leavell, Oct. 8, 2020
- Claire Drevets Duckett '14 and Sum Duckett, Jan. 7, 2023 <sup>3</sup>
- Payne McMillian Vermillion '15 and Quinn Vermillion, April 6, 2024 <sup>4</sup>
- Emma Keiski '16 and Luke Jacobsen '17, June 15, 2024 <sup>5</sup>
- Claire Belisle Ellenberger '17 and David Ellenberger '18, May 4, 2024 <sup>6</sup>
- Charlotte Elwell '17 and Mark Haley, June 20, 2024
- Brenna Peterson '17 and Cristóbal Millán Ruiz, July 29, 2023
- Simon Zhao '17 and Sun Yuchen, June 7, 2021
- Sarah Hindman Koziel '18 and Chris Koziel '19, May 18, 2024 <sup>7</sup>
- Spencer Whitely Standen '18 and Emma Standen '18, Aug. 25, 2023 <sup>8</sup>
- Lexi Wall '21 and Robert Tobroxen '18, Sept. 29, 2023 <sup>9</sup>
- Marissa Wolff '21 and Leif Jorgensen Duus '19, Sept. 3, 2023 <sup>10</sup>
- Paige Woldt Leach '21 and Jack Leach '21, July 8, 2023 <sup>11</sup>

## Deaths

- Guri "Corrine" Jordal Armstrong '40, Richland, Wash., April 8, 2024
- Dorothy "Dot" Viren Morter '44, Barberton, Ohio, Aug. 12, 2024
- Marian Sattre Kark '45, Blue Earth, Minn., March 22, 2024
- Doris "Vonnie" Ekholm Norum '45, Mound, Minn., March 12, 2024
- Margaret Molberg Pederson '45, Glenwood, Minn., April 19, 2024
- Lois "Lois Ann" Swanberg Smith '45, Kalispell, Mont., April 30, 2024
- Arlene Tande Stolen '45, Steamboat Springs, Colo., July 27, 2024
- Muriel "Winnifred" Greene Alberg '48, Northfield, Minn., June 10, 2024
- \*David Felland '48, Colfax, Wis., Dec. 30, 2023
- Eleanor Jensen Petersen '48, Waupaca, Wis., March 29, 2024
- Genevieve Holland Roark '48, North Richland Hills, Texas, June 1, 2024
- Betty "Dee" Olson Abrahamson '49, Story City, Iowa, March 10, 2024
- Astrid Cartford Blackwell '49, Bend, Ore., March 4, 2024
- Marilyn Groff Zielke '50, Bruce, Wis., April 18, 2024
- Carl Fredricksen '51, Greenbrae, Calif., June 7, 2024



- Mary Ann Schlichting Meyer '51, The Dalles, Ore., July 20, 2024
- \*Harold Moe '51, Minneapolis, Feb. 7, 2024
- Georgia Grinager Adams '52, Hudson, Wis., March 3, 2024
- \*Marvin Christianson '52, West Allis, Wis., June 15, 2024
- Beverly "Bev" Hagen Dorsey '52, Bloomington, Minn., April 23, 2024
- Lillian Weaver Smith '52, Carol Stream, Ill., Nov. 8, 2023
- Joanne "Jo" Elton Dahlin '53, Northfield, Minn., Aug. 15, 2024
- \*Gaylord Fagerland '53, Moorhead, Minn., April 26, 2024
- \*Stanley Graven '53, Dallas, Ore., July 8, 2024
- Marilyn Boraas Larson '53, Montevideo, Minn., March 6, 2024
- Corinne Nilsen Peterson '53, Excelsior, Minn., May 6, 2024
- Shirley "Marti" Martinson Wilson '53, Tucson, Ariz., Feb. 23, 2024
- De Ella Juel Aamot '54, Willmar, Minn., April 10, 2024
- Elsa Jacobson Charlston '54, Chicago, June 5, 2024
- Jane Jacobson Gelle '54, Northfield, Minn., March 14, 2024
- \*Jerry Hanson '54, Sioux Falls, S.D., May 5, 2024
- Richard Haugen '54, Eugene, Ore., May 23, 2024
- Glenn Legler '54, Bethesda, Md., April 8, 2024
- Kathleen "Kathy" Jacobson Olson '54, St. Cloud, Minn., June 29, 2024
- Ralph Olson '54, Woodbury, Minn., March 15, 2024
- Carol Nordlie Trelstad '54, Minneapolis, March 29, 2024
- Sandra "Sandy" Skaar Huegel '55, Allentown, Pa., April 30, 2024
- Albert "Al" Johnson '55, East Gull Lake, Minn., May 27, 2024
- David "Dave" Siewert '55, Bozeman, Mont., March 13, 2024
- Beatrice "Bea" Leines Devereaux '56, Litchfield, Minn., Aug. 8, 2024
- \*Alan Matzke '56, Bloomington, Minn., July 9, 2024
- Sigrid Christiansen Ostrem '56, Alexandria, Va., Jan. 22, 2023
- \*Orlo Quame '56, Benson, Minn., Sept. 30, 2023
- Odean Severseike '56, Edina, Minn., April 4, 2024
- \*John Shier '56, Green Bay, Wis., May 16, 2024
- Norman "Norm" Sollie '56, Seattle, May 8, 2024
- \*Jerry Fossum '57, Montgomery, Ala., March 25, 2024
- Paul Anderson '58, Minneapolis, June 21, 2024
- Gene Bratsch '58, Minnetonka, Minn., June 24, 2024
- Norman Bystol '58, Green Valley, Ariz., May 4, 2024
- Patricia "Pat" Snyder Halsor '58, Northfield, Minn., July 8, 2024
- Patricia "Patti" Barsness Joannes '58, Tampa, Fla., June 22, 2024
- \*Julian Taylor '58, Roanoke, Va., May 4, 2024
- \*James "Jim" Urnes '58, Bridgeton, Mo., June 13, 2024
- Alton "Al" Ask '59, Sparta, Wis., March 16, 2024
- \*Norman Fonss '59, Lambertton, Minn., March 27, 2024
- Linda Ruberg Kavanagh '59, San Antonio, Sept. 20, 2023
- Shelby Stafsholt Kostman '59, Solvang, Calif., April 23, 2024
- Karen Grans Schulz '59, Malvern, Pa., Dec. 18, 2023
- \*Allan Simpson '59, Astoria, N.Y., April 7, 2024
- Nancy Lindquist Teclaw '59, Forest Park, Ill., April 1, 2024
- Donald "Don" Zibell '59, Northfield, Minn., March 29, 2024
- Judith "Judy" Asp Gilje '60, Apple Valley, Minn., April 9, 2024
- H. "Dean" Johnson '60, Skaneateles, N.Y., March 8, 2024
- \*John Meslow '60, Mendota Heights, Minn., April 28, 2024
- Ronald "Ron" Ree '60, Minnetonka, Minn., June 30, 2024
- Lois Rud Rubino '60, Barnegat, N.J., Jan. 21, 2024
- Roger Schwarze '60, White Bear Lake, Minn., May 23, 2024
- Eileen Johnson Eckberg '61, Eden Prairie, Minn., Aug. 16, 2024
- Donald Knecht '61, Minneapolis, July 11, 2024
- \*John Loe '61, Cottonwood, Minn., April 15, 2024
- \*Dennis "Denny" Stenhaus '61, Casper, Wyo., April 25, 2024
- William "Bill" Walker '61, Park Rapids, Minn., May 2, 2024
- Peggy "Pegi" Gendrich Drays '62, Watertown, Wis., April 30, 2024
- Curtis "Curt" Karl '62, Somerset, N.J., June 28, 2024
- William "Bill" Richert '62, Walla Walla, Wash., April 23, 2024
- Arlene Carlsen Dahl '63, Minneapolis, June 3, 2024
- Joanne Espe Lillo '63, St. Paul, Minn., June 11, 2024
- David "Dave" Sawyer '63, Bloomington, Minn., April 21, 2024
- Cynthia "Cindy" Yates '63, Tucson, Ariz., April 24, 2024
- \*Donald Clauson '64, Rollins, Mont., June 1, 2024
- Signe Holland Cone '64, Rushford, Minn., July 29, 2024
- Janet "Jan" Schultz Panger '64, St. Cloud, Minn., July 31, 2024
- Barbara Dzubay Weisman '64, San Leandro, Calif., March 20, 2024
- Michael "Mick" Aafedt '65, Minneapolis, May 19, 2024
- Barbara "Barb" Edwardson Bren '65, Minnetonka, Minn., July 3, 2024
- John Gunderson '65, Detroit Lakes, Minn., April 14, 2024
- Patricia Johnson Lind '65, Eden Prairie, Minn., Dec. 27, 2023
- Roger Noer '65, Sioux Falls, S.D., May 27, 2024
- Kristi Peterson Marshall '66, Reynoldsburg, Ohio, April 1, 2024
- James "Mac" McKanna '66, Green Bay, Wis., April 6, 2024
- Cheryl Brown '67, Topeka, Kan., May 18, 2024
- Michael Christian '67, Shoreview, Minn., June 14, 2024
- Owen Heiserman '67, Tulsa, Okla., July 26, 2024
- James Mees '67, Springfield, Ill., March 25, 2024
- Richard "Rick" Poss '67, Marco Island, Fla., April 8, 2024
- \*Douglas "Doug" Brown '68, St. Charles, Ill., July 21, 2024
- Barbara Dahl '68, San Jose, Calif., May 17, 2023
- Howard Monroe '68, Bernard, Maine, April 3, 2024
- \*Donald "Don" Olson '68, Colton, S.D., March 26, 2024
- Daniel Heiman '69, Libertyville, Ill., June 29, 2024
- Ardis Jansen Macaulay '69, Yellow Springs, Ohio, March 28, 2024
- Edward "Ed" Matchett '69, Bisbee, Ariz., June 25, 2024
- Mary Gjeremo '70, Cambridge, Wis., Nov. 21, 2023
- Barbara Henriksen Andrews '71, Mccordsville, Ind., Aug. 1, 2024
- Douglas "Doug" Johnson '71, Woodbury, Minn., June 16, 2024
- Barbara "Barbi" Seipp Seibert '71, Crosslake, Minn., April 29, 2024
- Patricia "Pat" Swanson '71, Edina, Minn., July 8, 2024
- Karl Thoreson '71, Bradenton, Fla., May 29, 2024
- \*Ralph Wasik '71, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, April 22, 2024
- Lawrence "Bill" Daily '72, Burnsville, Minn., June 11, 2024
- Daniel "Dan" Geslin '72, Minneapolis, March 31, 2024
- Douglas Hanson '72, Rochester, Minn., April 24, 2024
- Barbara "Lane" Smith Woodard '72, Bossier City, La., March 21, 2024
- Michael Chang '74, Sacramento, Calif., March 19, 2024
- Nancy Roach Schaus '75, Iron River, Wis., July 8, 2024
- Susan Roe Ramsey '78, Silverdale, Wash., April 30, 2024
- Dawn Jensen Ferrell '79, Yankton, S.D., May 7, 2024
- Renee Gregoire Davis '79, Parker, Colo., April 15, 2024
- Lynn Johnson '80, Boston, March 30, 2024
- Karin Nymo Norgaard '83, Northfield, Minn., May 23, 2024
- Molly Dorsey Huyber '86, Burnsville, Minn., April 21, 2024
- Timothy "Tim" Odegard '86, St. Paul, Minn., July 25, 2024
- Barbara Morgan Balias '87, Houston, Feb. 25, 2024
- Alisa Lange Poehler '88, Excelsior, Minn., July 3, 2024
- Steven "Steve" Quast '88, Minneapolis, May 23, 2024
- Amy Juhala '91, Bismarck, N.D., June 5, 2024
- David Wendt '92, Framingham, Ma., April 22, 2024
- Jennifer Farnham '94, St. Paul, Minn., Feb. 2, 2024
- Alyssa Kleven Morrison '07, Seattle, April 2, 2024
- Elizabeth "Liz" Lampman '11, Portland, Ore., April 7, 2024
- Noelle Olson '17, St. Paul, Minn., March 6, 2024

\*VETERAN



## Remembering Jerrol (Jerry) Tostrud '60

Jerrol "Jerry" Tostrud '60, a longtime member of the St. Olaf Board of Regents who made a significant impact on the campus experience for Oles by funding the construction of a modern recreation center and supporting the development of a state-of-the-art science complex, passed away on October 3, 2024. He was 86.

Tostrud was born in La Crosse, Wisconsin, and grew up in Albert Lea, Minnesota. As a student at St. Olaf, he played on the golf team and was a staff member of the student newspaper. He met his wife, Alleen Christian Tostrud '61, on campus and married her a year after graduating. After spending two years in the U.S. Army, he enjoyed a 36-year career with West Publishing Company.



Tostrud was deeply committed to civic engagement, serving on the boards of a number of schools, colleges, and foundations. He was a member of the St. Olaf Board of Regents from 1995 to 2011, serving for four years as chair, and was elected a senior regent in 2011.

In addition to his leadership with the St. Olaf Board of Regents, Tostrud was a firm believer in investing in St. Olaf students. In 2001 the Tostruds provided a generous gift to fully fund the construction of the 95,000-square-foot recreation center that Oles now know and enjoy as the Tostrud Center. They also provided an additional gift to the endowment to help fund the long-term operations of the facility.

"Recreation, physical education, and athletics are an important part of the liberal arts educational experience, and it is our hope that this new recreation center will serve as one of the cornerstones to fulfilling the St. Olaf mission of developing the whole person in mind, body, and spirit," Tostrud said in announcing the gift. His vision endures today, as thousands of students, faculty, and staff utilize the Tostrud Center each year for a wide range of recreational and athletic activities.

During his tenure on the Board of Regents, Tostrud chaired the search committee that selected Christopher Thomforde to serve as the 10th president of St. Olaf. He and Alleen Tostrud also served as co-chairs of *Fram! Fram! Forward St. Olaf*, a highly successful capital campaign that ultimately raised \$145 million for the college. The Tostruds were strong financial supporters of the college's Annual Fund, and their leadership encouraged other alumni to make yearly gifts to ensure the long-term health and vitality of the college. They also led a challenge to current and former members of the St. Olaf Board of Regents to provide funding for the construction of a state-of-the-art science complex, which opened in 2008 as Regents Hall of Natural and Mathematical Sciences.

During his time on the Board of Regents, Tostrud was an advocate of supporting arts and sciences in higher education. The Tostruds were guests at the White House in 2005 when the St. Olaf Choir performed for President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush in the East Room as part of the National Day of Prayer. The Tostruds also were long-standing class reunion volunteers, believing strongly in the importance of investing their time and talent in the St. Olaf community.

In between these commitments, Tostrud remained active in his church, deeply committed to philanthropy, and constantly present for anyone in need, his friends, and his family.

He is survived by his wife of 62 years, **Alleen Christian Tostrud '61**; his children, **Eric Tostrud '87 (Laurie Sagedahl Tostrud '89)**, **Karen Tostrud Hoffmann '89**, and **Jon Tostrud '91** (Amy Tostrud); grandchildren **Elsa Tostrud Swanson '17** (Gunnar Swanson), **Ty Tostrud '19**, **Hayley Hoffmann '22**, Bridget Hoffmann, Nick Hoffmann, and **Luther Tostrud '28**; one great-granddaughter; extended family; and a great many friends.

## Remembering John Meslow '60

John Meslow '60, a retired Medtronic executive who provided scores of St. Olaf students with the opportunity to gain hands-on career experience through the Mayo Innovation Scholars Program and the Innovation Partners Program, passed away on April 28, 2024.

Meslow was born Dec. 18, 1938, graduated in 1956 from Chippewa Falls High School, and from St. Olaf College in 1960. He married Karen Bangsund and they spent 58 years together building a loving and connected community of family and friends.

After serving briefly in the Air Force, Meslow began his career at International Multifoods and 3M, before being recruited in 1968 to become the employment manager at Medtronic. He spent 31 years with the company, helping Medtronic grow and providing leadership to the Neurological and Spinal Business. It was a fulfilling career devoted to championing life-giving technologies, while building many meaningful relationships, and ultimately friendships.

St. Olaf honored Meslow with the 1999 St. Olaf Distinguished Alumni Award in recognition of these accomplishments.

An entrepreneur at heart, Meslow and a friend started Arrowood Girls Basketball Camp in 1978, the first of its kind in Minnesota. And in "retirement," Meslow founded the successful



Mayo Innovation Scholars Program in 2006, an intensive interdisciplinary program that provided experiential learning opportunities for students to assess new products and innovations in development at Mayo Clinic. When the Covid pandemic started, Mayo put the program on hold, leading Meslow to partner with medical start-ups in Minnesota to launch the interdisciplinary Innovation Partners Program in 2021. The program included students from St. Olaf as well as 11 other Minnesota private colleges. The programs have provided St. Olaf students with myriad experiential learning opportunities and the ability to work with professionals at organizations ranging from Mayo Clinic to NASA to Medtronic.

"It's just a real win-win-win," Meslow said in an interview with St. Olaf about the program in 2022. "The student wins, the colleges win, and companies win."

The Innovation Scholars Program and Innovation Partners Program brought great satisfaction and student mentorship opportunities to Meslow over the past 18 years, and his creative leadership profoundly impacted St. Olaf College and the students whose lives he touched.

He is survived by his wife, Karen, with whom he established the John and Karen Meslow Endowed Fund at St. Olaf College; their children, Julie (Jeff) Michael and Sara (Paul Vahle) Meslow; grandchildren, Sam, Charlie, Henry, Paige, and Sadie (Casey); his brother **Robert Meslow '57 (Karen Von Wald Meslow '60)**; and many nieces, nephews, lifelong friends, and colleagues.





## Remembering Ryan Bowles

St. Olaf Athletic Director Ryan Bowles died on June 19, 2024, following a long and courageous battle with cancer. He was 45.

Bowles was hired as St. Olaf's athletic director in July 2015, and in that role he oversaw the college's 26 varsity sports teams, as well as sports medicine, athletic performance, event management, facility management, and sports information.

"Ryan was a special person and leader who was a champion for Ole student-athletes, strongly supported his coaches, and had a competitive love for each and every contest. He was respected by all he came in touch with at St. Olaf and within the MIAC community," says St. Olaf Head Men's Basketball Coach Dan Kosmoski. "Ryan walked the

talk. It was remarkable to witness his love for his family and greater Ole family, and how he lived his life and battled each and every day. He will be forever loved and missed."

During the nine years that Bowles led St. Olaf Athletics, 17 of St. Olaf's 26 sports appeared in or scored in their respective national championship events, including five NCAA or U.S. Collegiate Ski and Snowboard Association (USCSA) team national championships, 13 NCAA or USCSA individual national titles, 15 Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) championships, and 41 NCAA Championships, highlighted by men's soccer winning its first national championship this past December.

Bowles was also instrumental in a number of upgrades to St. Olaf's athletic facilities, including the installation of synthetic turf at Klein Field at Manitou, the renovation of the athletic performance facility in Porter Hall, the creation of the golf training facility, the renovation of Rolf Mellby Field, and the addition of the on-campus St. Olaf Ice Arena.

He is survived by his wife, Sarah, and son, Tom.

## Remembering Eric Nelson

Professor Emeritus of English Jon Eric Nelson passed away on June 7, 2024. He was 81.

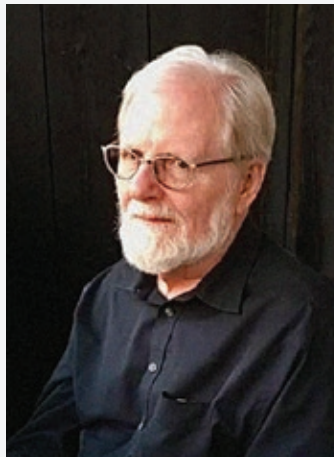
Born in Washington, D.C., and raised in Cleveland, Ohio, Nelson earned his undergraduate degree in English at Wittenberg College and his master's and doctorate degrees in English at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. On June 1, 1968, he married Friederike "Riki" Kölbl in Falls Church, Virginia, and shortly after they had their wedding ceremony in Salzburg, Austria. That same year, Nelson joined the English Department faculty at St. Olaf.

Nelson's 40-year career on the Hill began with teaching modern British and American literature and expanded into opportunities such as teaching courses in the Great Conversation program and film studies. He studied several areas of pop culture and wrote a book titled *Mall of America: Reflections of a Virtual Community*. He also wrote 55 sonnets, a novella, and a screenplay, and — most recently — published a coming-of-age story titled "Rick's Adventures in Paris" in collaboration with his son and granddaughter; his wife added collage illustrations.

Near the end of his career, Nelson took classes in screenwriting and started learning the technical side of filmmaking as he prepared to collaborate on a project with his son, Benno, who works in the film industry. He brought that knowledge to his classrooms at St. Olaf, where he taught students how to think critically about what they were watching in his film studies courses.

Nelson and his wife, **Friederike "Riki" Kölbl Nelson '87**, led several St. Olaf study-abroad programs, and together they traveled to more than 30 countries. After retirement, he taught in the Cannon Valley Elder Collegium for more than a decade and was a popular instructor.

He is survived by his wife of 56 years, Riki; his son, Benno; his grandchild, Else Bird; his brother Doug (Diana) Nelson; nephew, Nathan; and nieces, Amy and Brianna.

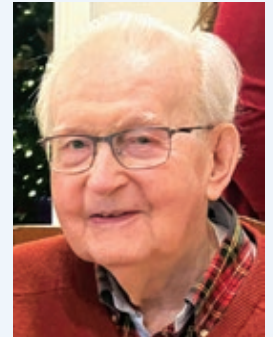


## Remembering Richard (Dick) Kleber '55

Professor Emeritus of Mathematics Richard (Dick) Kleber '55 passed away on September 8, 2024. He was 91.

Kleber grew up in Cold Spring, Minnesota, and graduated *magna cum laude* from St. Olaf College in 1955. He earned an M.S. and a Ph.D. in mathematics from the University of Iowa, where he met JoAnn (Jo) Jordahl. The two were married in 1958 and subsequently moved to Northfield, where they raised their family.

Kleber joined the St. Olaf mathematics faculty in 1960, where he spent his entire career until retiring in 1996. He



served as chair of the Mathematics Department from 1968–75, as chair of the Natural Sciences and Mathematics Division from 1983–89, and as acting chair from 1991–92. During his tenure, Kleber was a member of numerous faculty committees, including the founding committee of the Paracollege. He founded the Statistics Program at St. Olaf and served as director of the Statistics Concentration from its inception in 1978 until his retirement. Over the years, Kleber advised hundreds of St. Olaf statistics and mathematics majors, and guided more than 50 advisees toward graduate studies in statistics at Iowa State University. In his honor, those students endowed the Richard Kleber — St. Olaf Scholarship at Iowa State.

In addition to his academic work, Kleber coached men's tennis from 1962–66 at St. Olaf. In 2013 he became an unofficial emeritus coach of the men's and women's teams.

Kleber is survived by his wife of 66 years, Jo; children Karen Kleber-Diggs (Michael Kleber-Diggs), **Kay Kleber Doughty '85 (Brian Doughty '86)**, and **Richard Kleber '87** (Elizabeth Kleber); and grandchildren Patrick Doughty (Rachel); **Robyn Doughty '18 (Erik Kuehl '18)**; **Brynja Kleber '14**; **Richard "Jett" Kleber '15** and Tiffany "Treva" Meret Kleber; and Elinor Kleber-Diggs.



# Together in Tucson

Following a successful 50th reunion on campus, the Class of 1972 couldn't wait another five years to get together — so they organized their own gathering in Arizona.

When members of the Class of 1972 gathered on campus for their 50th reunion several years ago, they had a blast.

“It was fabulous and memorable,” says Grethe Larson '72. She notes that even Oles who hadn't been close while students on campus clicked during the reunion. “It was hard to say goodbye, not knowing when or if our paths would cross again.”

By the next spring, the committee members who had helped organize the reunion missed each other. They gathered on Zoom and, after an hour and a half of catching up, decided that the class couldn't wait for their 55th reunion to get together again.

So they began planning. By chance, five members of the class lived in Tucson, Arizona. This small group — which dubbed themselves the “no-host hosts” — decided to invite their classmates to a mini reunion in the warmth of the Arizona sun the following winter. Larson, along with classmates Camilla Madson and Deb Hagman-Shannon, led the charge in organizing what they called “March to the Saguaros.” The other “no-host hosts” included Class of 1972 members Mark Aggerbeck, Tony Aldwell, Margie Goergen-Rood, Deborah Kearnes, Roger Ring, and Steve Watson.

They weren't sure how many of their classmates would be interested. More than 50 people signed up to attend.

The Tucson Oles opened up their homes and developed an itinerary filled with time for connection, conversation, and sight-seeing. They led optional activities that included hiking, golfing, pickleball, and visits to the Desert Museum, Pima Air and Space Museum, Titan Missile Silo, and Tucson Museum of Art. They held a happy hour at the home of Madson and her husband, Steve Obaid; dinner at a restaurant; and a banquet on the last night of the mini reunion. The college's Alumni and Parent Relations Office provided hors d'oeuvres, and Megan Larrabee Nelson '86, the St. Olaf staff member who helps organize 50th reunions for the college, attended and provided an update from the Hill.

“The highlights for me were the opportunity to be together and relish not just the college memories, but also the renewal of old friendships, the chance to make new friends, and hear about the meaningful, interesting, and colorful lives of our classmates,” Larson says. “We are a close-knit, harmonious group. And what this says about Oles — and the Class of 1972 — is that we are an accomplished, caring, interesting, intelligent, dynamic, engaged, kind, charitable, humor-filled group of very special people.”

The Class of 1972's experience illustrates the impact that reunions — and, in particular, the milestone 50th reunions — can have for Oles. It also inspired Nelson and her St. Olaf colleagues to organize an Alumni and Family Travel program that will bring Oles who have recently had their 50th class reunion together next fall for a cruise along the coast of Canada and New England. Like the Tucson mini-reunion, the goal will be to create a space where Oles can continue to connect long after their class reunion ends.

That, Nelson notes, is the power of the St. Olaf community. 🦁

Learn more at [STOLAF.EDU/TRAVEL](http://STOLAF.EDU/TRAVEL)



Event organizers (from left) Megan Larrabee Nelson '86, Grethe Larson '72, and Steve Obaid (the husband of Camilla Madson '72) on the opening night of the Tucson mini reunion.



Members of the Class of 1972 mingle at the Tucson home of Grethe Larson '72 and her husband, Jim.



The “no-host hosts” offer remarks at the banquet on the last night.



Mini reunion attendees enjoy the banquet held on the last night.



Most of the Class of 1972 mini reunion attendees joined a group photo with the St. Olaf flag.





“It’s just smart money management. It’s good for St. Olaf and it’s good for me. My education at St. Olaf was broad enough that I was prepared to handle whatever kind of case I dealt with as a lawyer. It just makes sense that I would give back to St. Olaf in appreciation for that.”

— DON JOHNSON '71

 ST. OLAF COLLEGE

# SMART IMPACT

Study abroad was life-changing for Don Johnson '71. It's an opportunity he wants more Oles to have. By establishing a charitable gift annuity, Johnson secured guaranteed income for himself while supporting students engaged in semester-long study-abroad programs.



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PARTING SHOT



**TWO CHEERS FOR 150 YEARS** | Students walk across a beautiful, sunny campus on the first day of the 2024 fall semester — which also marked the beginning of the St. Olaf Sesquicentennial. PHOTO BY STEVEN GARCIA '20