

SPRING-SUMMER 2026

# STOLAF

M A G Z I N E



FROM CAMPUS TO COURTSIDE  
A Team of Oles Provides Performance Data  
for the Minnesota Timberwolves

## ON THE COVER

Calvin Keesler '27, Assistant Professor of Kinesiology Jenny Miller, Ashlyn Jore '26, and Claire Keech '26 outside the Target Center in Minneapolis. Miller and her student researchers have been working with the Minnesota Timberwolves to measure the physical performance of the team's players. Read more about their work on page 24.  
PHOTO BY STEVEN GARCIA '20

## ST. OLAF MAGAZINE

Spring-Summer 2026  
Volume 73 · No. 2

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St. Olaf Magazine is published three times a year by the St. Olaf College Marketing and Communications team; email: [magazine@stolaf.edu](mailto:magazine@stolaf.edu)

  
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St. Olaf faculty members line up outside Boe Memorial Chapel ahead of the Honors Day celebration that was held May 1.

PHOTO BY VICTORIA CAMPBELL

Old Main strikes a beautiful pose at dusk on an early spring day.  
PHOTO BY CALLISTA ROBERTSON '26





# ST. OLAF

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The campus comes to life with beautiful blooms between Boe Memorial Chapel and Buntrock Commons. PHOTO BY VICTORIA CAMPBELL



Dear Oles,

The most enduring aspect of a liberal arts education is that we teach students not *what* to think, but *how* to think. That was true when you were a student on the Hill, and it remains just as true today. In classes on campus and study-abroad programs around the world, our talented faculty members and devoted staff colleagues are encouraging our students to ask questions, grapple with challenging problems, and think about issues from multiple perspectives.

In many ways, this approach to education is rooted in our founding by Norwegian Lutheran immigrants more than 150 years ago. The Lutheran Reformation encouraged people to question, create, and serve the common good. Those qualities remain the foundation of a St. Olaf education, which pairs curiosity and critical thinking with responsibility. At St. Olaf, innovation isn't just about new ideas — it's about making a meaningful impact on the world.

A few cases in point:

Branden Moriarity '07 looked at the standard set of tools long used to treat cancer — surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation — and asked if the key to a cure could be found in a completely new approach. He has pioneered a genome-engineered immunotherapy that has had astonishing success. Read more about his work on page 20.

A team of St. Olaf students, led by Darin Oenning '96, partnered with NASA this January to explore the terrestrial applications of an extraterrestrial device. Their work is part of the Innovation Scholars Program, which was founded 20 years ago by our very own St. Olaf alum John Meslow '60. Read more about the program and its impact on page 13.

St. Olaf Assistant Professor of Kinesiology Jenny Miller and her student researchers are using cutting-edge technology to measure the physical performance of some of the NBA's most talented players. Read more about their partnership with the Minnesota Timberwolves on page 24.

Ahmed Sajidan Jarjis Rafsan '27 was part of a team that won the \$25,000 first prize at the Fowler Global Social Innovation Challenge this spring. Their company, ApexStride Mobility Systems, develops 3D printed prosthetics designed to work in difficult climates and be manufactured for lower costs in order to improve accessibility. The funding will help them expand production to help more people in need.

This, of course, is just a small sample of the ways Oles are approaching important work in innovative ways. As part of our strategic plan, we are expanding opportunities for our students to develop the skills that foster this type of creative thinking.

One way we're doing this is through the newly launched Beckman Scholars Program, which pairs St. Olaf students with some of the college's top research-active science faculty members for a 15-month project. During my career as a student and as a biology professor, I experienced firsthand the powerful ways that hands-on research opportunities inspire and energize students. I'm excited to see the ideas that emerge through his program, which you can read more about on page 3.

Another way we're expanding opportunities for our students is by increasing access to study-abroad experiences. Data show that employers are more likely to hire students who have studied abroad because of the adaptability, cultural awareness, and problem-solving skills they develop. Thanks to an incredible \$20 million gift from Louis and Mary Kay Smith, every St. Olaf student accepted into a semester-long study-abroad program will now be able to participate for the same cost as attending class on campus. Read more about this transformative investment in the student experience at St. Olaf on page 6.

Ole innovators are everywhere, and many of them are supported in powerful ways by other Oles both on and off campus. Their work is sometimes simple — and sometimes as complicated as the Vigenère cipher. Thank you for supporting, challenging, and encouraging our current students and each other. You are playing an important role in developing the Ole innovators the world needs.

Sincerely,

*Susan Rundell Singer*



## ANNOUNCING THE BECKMAN SCHOLARS

The importance of hands-on research opportunities for future career paths is backed by data: 95 percent of employers say it's important that graduates be able to apply their knowledge to career settings, and 73 percent of employers say they're more likely to hire a candidate who has had a mentored research experience.

This is why a key part of St. Olaf College's new strategic plan is focused on expanding faculty-mentored and course-based research. An important step in helping the college meet that goal came with the recent news that St. Olaf received a three-year, \$156,000 grant to establish the Beckman Scholars Program on campus. The program pairs St. Olaf students with some of the college's top research-active science faculty members, and provides them with funding to conduct a 15-month research project.

The first two Beckman Scholars are Roan Wood '28, who will be mentored by Professor of Chemistry Doug Beussman '92, and Adrian Kakehashi '28, who will be mentored by Associate Professor of Biology and Director of Neuroscience Norman Lee.

# HIGH-IMPACT, HANDS-ON Research

BY OLIVIA SCHMIDT

PHOTOGRAPHED BY SAMUEL GWIN '25

**I**n a Regents Hall of Natural and Mathematical Sciences laboratory, where precision and patience shape discovery, Roan Wood '28 is preparing to do something unexpected: make a mistake.

Over the coming months, the chemistry major will run and rerun experiments, intentionally pushing them off course to understand where they break down — and how future students might learn from those missteps.

“I have to go through and try to mess up the experiment in ways that I think students would likely do in the lab, so that the professors who may be teaching that lab in the future know what to look for in case mistakes are made, so they know how to correct it,” Wood says.

Wood is part of St. Olaf College's inaugural cohort of Beckman Scholars, a program supported by a three-year, \$156,000 grant from the Arnold and Mabel Beckman Foundation. Each year, two students are selected to conduct sustained research across two summers and an intervening academic year — an extended timeline that sets the program apart from traditional undergraduate research experiences.



Beckman Scholar Roan Wood '28 works on an experiment with St. Olaf Professor of Chemistry Doug Beussman '92.

That structure, faculty say, is what makes the opportunity transformative.

“Research takes time,” says Associate Professor of Biology and Director of Neuroscience Norman Lee. “Students need time to learn the techniques, collect data, analyze it, and communicate their results. That full process is really only possible over an extended period. They will get to see in reality what a scientist does, from start to finish.”

The Beckman Scholars program also reflects a broader institutional priority. St. Olaf’s strategic plan, *Solution Seekers*, emphasizes expanding access to high-impact experiences like undergraduate research and equipping students with the skills to explore meaningful vocations.

For Wood, that journey begins with her first research experience — and a growing sense of confidence.

“Sometimes, I have the tendency to underestimate myself,” she says. “So being one of two students chosen as a Beckman Scholar was really meaningful, definitely boosted my confidence in my own abilities, and affirmed that there is a place for me in this academic arena.”

Working alongside Professor of Chemistry Doug Beussman ’92, Wood will help develop new laboratory protocols for St. Olaf’s isotope ratio mass spectrometer. Over time, she’ll move from learning the fundamentals to shaping the project itself — a transition Beussman sees as central to the program’s philosophy.

“In the beginning, students are following a process,” he says. “But over time, they really understand their project, really take more ownership — they go from following a recipe to thinking like a researcher.”

That sense of ownership is already familiar to fellow Beckman Scholar Adrian Kakehashi ’28, a biology major studying neuroethology — the neural basis of animal behavior — in the Lee Lab of Neural Systems and Behavior. His research focuses on a parasitic fly that locates crickets by sound, raising broader questions about how organisms process complex signals.



Beckman Scholar Adrian Kakehashi '28 and Associate Professor of Biology Norman Lee work together in the Lee Lab in Regents Hall.

“Research takes time. Students need time to learn the techniques, collect data, analyze it, and communicate their results. That full process is really only possible over an extended period. They will get to see in reality what a scientist does, from start to finish.”

— Associate Professor of Biology Norman Lee

“I’m fascinated by learning how things work,” Kakehashi says. “In this case, why do animals act the way they do? There are millions of animals, and yet even similar animals can have wildly different features, different ways of living. I really appreciate that I have the opportunity to conduct a sort of investigation of this one specific species and its very specific adaptations.”

Through the Beckman Scholars Program, Kakehashi will build on research he began earlier this year, diving

deeper into how the fly's auditory system responds to different patterns of sound.

“It feels like I am making almost more of a professional decision,” he says, describing his commitment to a multi-year project. “Up to now, I’ve had a lot of advisors helping guide me through the different decisions I’ve had to make, but I feel like this decision especially was one I made independently, and while I will be working directly with [Lee], a lot of the work will be conducted on my own — it’s a little intimidating, but also very rewarding.”

For both students, the opportunity extends beyond the lab. Beckman Scholars receive funding for travel and professional development, including the chance to attend and present research at national conferences — experiences that connect their work to the broader scientific community.

While the program supports a limited number of students each year, its impact runs deep.

“It’s not about volume, but depth — quality over quantity,” Beussman says. “This format will allow students

to move beyond the initial training and into independent thinking, resilience, and problem-solving — skills that define scientific work.”

“In the beginning, students are following a process. But over time, they really understand their project, really take more ownership — they go from following a recipe to thinking like a researcher.”

— Professor of Chemistry Doug Beussman '92

By the end of the program, faculty hope students will not only contribute to ongoing research, but begin to see themselves as researchers in their own right. For the sophomores, that transformation is already taking shape as they embark on a journey of discovery: of learning how breakthroughs actually happen, and, perhaps, finding where it might lead next. 🦋



Beckman Scholars Roan Wood '28 and Adrian Kakehashi '28 with St. Olaf Professors Doug Beussman '92 and Norman Lee

# AN INCREDIBLE INVESTMENT IN GLOBAL EDUCATION



A \$20 MILLION GIFT FROM LOUIS AND MARY KAY SMITH WILL  
ENABLE OLES TO PARTICIPATE IN A SEMESTER-LONG STUDY-ABROAD  
PROGRAM FOR THE SAME COST AS ATTENDING CLASS ON CAMPUS.

By Kari VanDerVeen

When he was a student at St. Olaf, Chris George '94 was selected to participate in a study-abroad program. He was eager to explore the world — but ultimately turned it down because he couldn't afford to go.

More than three decades later, he's now the associate vice president for enrollment at St. Olaf. He frequently talks to prospective students about the powerful impact of a global experience, and he sees the way that St. Olaf's strength in study abroad sets the college apart among the nation's best liberal arts colleges. He also knows that for some students — like him — cost is still a barrier.

So that's why when he received the news earlier this year that Louis and Mary Kay Smith had provided St. Olaf with a \$20 million gift that will enable students to participate in a semester-long study-abroad program for the same cost as attending class on campus, he screamed in excitement.

"I've long dreamed about being in a position where cost isn't a factor in a student's decision to study abroad," George says. "Thanks to the remarkable generosity of the Smiths, that dream is now a reality."

The incredible gift from the Smiths will also provide funding to expand and innovate short-term study abroad and away programs, as well as support the faculty expertise at the heart of creating meaningful experiences for students around the world.

"International education has long been a cornerstone of the St. Olaf experience, and it's more important now than ever before. We need leaders with a global perspective who can bring people together to solve challenges and shape a better world. The best way to prepare our students to become those leaders is to provide them with opportunities to live and learn abroad," St. Olaf President Susan Rundell Singer says. "Thanks to the generosity of the Smiths, we will be able to increase our ability to do just that."

This is the largest gift that St. Olaf has ever received for academic programming, and it is the second-largest gift in the college's history. It follows several other significant gifts from the Smiths, including one that enables St. Olaf students to participate in international music tours at no cost and another that increased financial aid for Oles studying off campus and created the new Smith Center for Global Engagement that was named in their honor. With this latest gift, they are truly transforming the student experience at St. Olaf College.

**“Thousands of Oles will get to see the world because of this gift. It will have a lasting impact.”**

— ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR ENROLLMENT CHRIS GEORGE '94

St. Olaf is a national leader in study abroad and away. The college's music ensembles first toured internationally in 1906, and St. Olaf began offering academic study-abroad programs in 1947. In the most recent *Open Doors Report*, St. Olaf ranks No. 2 among baccalaureate colleges across the country in the number of students who studied abroad. The college offers programs in more than 40 countries, including faculty-led semester programs that include Global Semester, a wide range of January Term programs, and institutional partnerships around the world. It's an opportunity that most St. Olaf students take advantage of, with 70 percent of the Class of 2025 participating in at least one study abroad/away program.

Paired with this longstanding strength in study abroad, the gift from the Smiths enables the college to offer a transformative experience that is distinctive to St. Olaf.



“This generous gift expands access for study-abroad programs, encouraging accepted students to explore topics related to their academic and vocational interests while cultivating a globally engaged perspective,” Smith Center Director Theresa Heath says. “It will also enable St. Olaf and the Smith Center to expand study-abroad opportunities to new locations, addressing important questions and themes that reflect the expertise of our talented faculty. Each year, St. Olaf students are eager to participate in these experiences, and I'm thrilled we will continue to build innovative opportunities.”

Studying abroad enables Oles to develop as global contributors who are knowledgeable about other places, to interact effectively with people who have viewpoints and backgrounds different from their own, and to understand how their lives and choices connect with the broader world. Data show that employers are more likely to hire students who have studied abroad because of the adaptability, cultural awareness, and problem-solving skills they develop.

As part of the college's deep commitment to global engagement, St. Olaf has increased efforts in recent years to ensure that cost is not a barrier to participation in study abroad/away. In the fall of 2025, St. Olaf launched a pilot program that enabled every student with a family income below \$300,000 who was accepted into a semester- or year-long study abroad/away program to participate for the same cost as studying on campus. The result was a 30 percent overall increase in the number of students participating in semester-long study abroad and away programs, and a 70 percent increase in the number of students from middle-income families participating. Seeing the impact that this pilot had on the student experience inspired the Smiths to provide a foundation for lasting support.

The new gift from the Smiths will now make this opportunity available to current and future Oles. Every student accepted into a semester-long study-abroad program beginning in 2027 will be able to participate for the same cost as studying on campus once during their time at St. Olaf. Knowing that this will lead to increased demand from students, the gift from the Smiths will also support the expansion and innovation of programs. The college will explore new offerings, including summer abroad opportunities and programs that include internships and research. The gift will also support an increased number of January Term study abroad/away programs, which are popular with students.

“Thousands of Oles will get to see the world because of this gift,” George says. “It will have a lasting impact.”

◀ The new gift from Louis and Mary Kay Smith follows other significant gifts they have made to St. Olaf, including one that created the Smith Center for Global Engagement that was named in their honor.

# Reflections from Oles Abroad



**Kim Tran '28**  
LONDON, U.K.

Five Oles share how their academic journeys at St. Olaf have been impacted by their experiences studying in locations scattered across the globe.



**Angela Jessa Hifume '27**  
CUERNAVACA, MEXICO



Approximately two-thirds of all St. Olaf students participate in study-abroad or study-away programs, many of them led by St. Olaf faculty members. Of the participants, about 80-85 percent study abroad internationally in one of more than 40 countries, while around 15-20 percent participate in study-away programs within the United States. And a number of students find study abroad/away so valuable that they seek additional off-campus opportunities, or even graduate school programs and careers abroad.



**Quinn Clark '28**  
COPENHAGEN, DENMARK



**Mikayla Franke '27**  
MILAN, ITALY



**Lee Christianson '27**  
DUNEDIN, NEW ZEALAND



"My primary goal while attending St. Olaf was to actively learn about other cultures while sharing my own as an Asian American. I chose to study abroad in London because it is a cultural hub with nearly half of its population as ethnic minority groups. The most impactful experience abroad was the Lunar New Year in central London. This has been a holiday that is extremely important and personal to me. London held an incredibly large parade that spread throughout the city, and Chinatown was at the heart of this celebration. It was heartwarming to experience this cultural holiday with so much appreciation and joy. London is the best place I could have chosen to study."

**Kim Tran '28**  
LONDON, U.K.



"As someone from the Philippines, I've always been curious about how different cultures navigate community, resilience, and care. Mexico has always been on my list, and this felt like the right place to grow both personally and professionally. The most impactful part of this experience has been learning directly from people, their stories, their resilience, and their truth. We've visited organizations, met with social workers and policymakers, and spent time in communities deeply impacted by migration. Hearing from migrants, deportees, and families separated by borders has been incredibly powerful. It reminded me how important storytelling is; stories move people, and they create space for empathy and action. Another highlight has been the homestays. Living with families, both in rural and urban settings, allowed me to fully immerse myself in the culture in a way that no classroom could offer. It taught me what it means to truly listen, adapt, and connect across differences. On a more personal note, one of my favorite experiences was during spring break when I solo hiked and summited Iztaccíhuatl, the third-highest mountain in Mexico. That moment felt symbolic; it pushed me physically, mentally, and emotionally. It gave me space to reflect on everything I've been learning about migration, resistance, and identity. It reminded me how much growth comes from stepping into the unknown."

**Angela Jessa Hifume '27**  
CUERNAVACA, MEXICO





"I chose Copenhagen because I wanted to experience daily life in Scandinavia as well as learn more about Denmark's sustainability culture, as it is considered one of the most environmentally conscious countries in the world. Besides that, Copenhagen is filled with Nordic history and has amazing public transportation and biking culture. The most impactful part of my time abroad has been the friendships I've made. My housing style is a mixture of American and Danish university students, so it's been a blast connecting with the Danes and exploring Copenhagen with them through a local lens. My experience has been deeply shaped by the friends I've made, and it feels really cool to know that I now have connections with people from all over the world!"

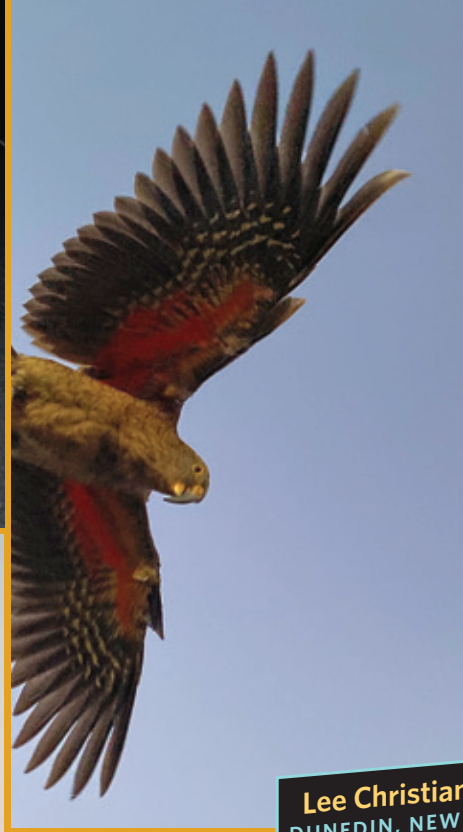
**Quinn Clark '28**  
COPENHAGEN, DENMARK



"When I discovered a study-abroad opportunity aligned with my academic and personal interests, it felt like the perfect fit. I was especially eager to experience the city more deeply and gain a better understanding of Italian culture. I was able to attend the Winter Olympics Opening Ceremony, which was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The performances were incredible — and as someone who is passionate about music and takes voice lessons back at St. Olaf, it was especially inspiring to hear Andrea Bocelli perform live. The most impactful aspect of studying abroad has been the people I've met along the way, some of whom I'll even stay connected with after this experience. The most surprising thing has been realizing that learning Italian is more challenging than I initially expected. This experience has gone by incredibly quickly, and I've truly cherished every moment."

**Mikayla Franke '27**  
MILAN, ITALY





**Lee Christianson '27**  
DUNEDIN, NEW ZEALAND



"I decided to come to New Zealand because of the advanced technology and study in kinesiology, the vibrant Maori culture, which I am interested in as a dancer and performer, and the protections that the country offers to transgender individuals.

On a weekend away from studying, a group of friends and I traveled to Isthmus Peak to climb the summit on a sunrise hike (or a 'tramp,' as the locals call it). We woke up at 3 a.m., traveled to the trailhead, and put on our hiking boots. Bundled up and tired, I chugged an energy drink and thought 'How did I end up here?' With the determined friends I met a couple weeks prior, we set out, scrambling up rocks, sighting deer in the distance, and navigating for hours up steep inclines in pitch black darkness. As we grew closer to the

peak, the sun started to show itself on the horizon. After we made the summit, it rose ever

gently. The cold wind surrounded us and we stared at the view in awe: mountains, lakes, clouds of all colors of orange, pink, green, and gray.

Then, a squawk caught our attention as three of the endangered mountain parrots joined us in taking in our surroundings. These birds were playful, curious, and sweet. I was informed they are called kea (pronounced kee-uh), and I was struck by how they flitted around each other and inspected us. Creatures so intricate lived on this chilly peak. I'd never been an incredibly outdoorsy type of person. However, the vastness of the landscape and interaction with these birds made me realize how precious our world is. They reminded me of my dear sibling's never-ending chatter, education's endless possibilities, and the cyclicity of life. In the state of our land, our people, and our government, this memory is something I've been clinging to.

Doing something as difficult as climbing for three hours and being surprised by what was there has been integral to my experience abroad so far. I've taken this experience and translated it to being present in my everyday life. Watching other people interact, seeing slivers of sunlight on the floors of classrooms, and making cozy meals for myself in my flat. The most beautiful things to appreciate are right where we are at the moment." 🌿

# SPACE FOR INNOVATION

Through the Innovation Scholars Program, a team of St. Olaf students partnered with NASA to analyze new ways that space technology can be used on Earth. The program, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, has provided a powerful hands-on learning experience for scores of Oles – and helped many shape their careers.

BY JAKEB HUNTER '26

The mention of NASA likely brings to mind images of rocket ships, astronauts, and deep space exploration like the recent Artemis II mission to the moon. But for a team of St. Olaf College students this year, the work was grounded much closer to home – in the classroom, evaluating the terrestrial applications of an extraterrestrial device.

Through the Innovation Scholars Program, St. Olaf students partnered with NASA over the month of January to explore how an early stage nanosensor to detect toxic gases and UV radiation might be used beyond its original intent. Over the course of several weeks, the team analyzed the technology, researched potential applications, and developed recommendations for how it could be implemented in professional settings.

The team of St. Olaf students – Mariam Adamyan '26, Kieran Haaland '27, Cole Kehrberg '26, and Aubrey Mattson '26 – was advised by Darin Oenning '96, an alumnus who has deep expertise in business development and product planning and also teaches in the college's Biology Department.

This photo of Earth was taken on April 2, 2026, by an Artemis II crew member through a window of the Orion spacecraft on its journey to the Moon and back. IMAGE COURTESY OF NASA

“This project is unique in that it has a combination of technology and business — it kind of brings both together,” Oenning notes. “Every Innovation Scholars project has a technology basis. Most of the students are trying to figure out what to do with the technology or a patent, and how to apply it to the real world. Perhaps most importantly, they’re working on a real project. They’re challenged with trying to present and offer something that’s going to be meaningful in the end for the customer or the client, in this case NASA, and for our students. The companies are always very interested in the outcome and the input from the students.”

After a rigorous application and acceptance process, the team received their assigned patents and were charged with understanding them by January Term. They then embarked on an intensive month of research and idea

*“We were all constantly learning from one another, collaborating closely, and recognizing each other’s strengths and weaknesses. It’s a great experience to meet people from different fields, come together around one project, feel really strong about the work you’re doing, and present it. You’re constantly learning from each other and figuring out how to bring those perspectives together into something cohesive.”* — AUBREY MATTSON ’26

could detect gaseous species and UV radiation,” Kehrberg explains.

“With an understanding of the technology, we were able to transition into broader market research. After looking into new and existing applications, we developed a screening method for our list of 46 potential applications, enabling us to determine which ideas to develop. We ended up selecting three recommendations to detail in our final deliverables, but the remaining 43 applications were included in the final report to NASA.”

someone who thrives in environments where I know exactly what I need to do and when I need to do it, and then I deliver on that. By contrast, this was a project where we didn’t know what we needed to do, we didn’t have a clear end goal, we didn’t even know what exactly we were starting with. Being able to take that through a whole project obviously has the difficulties of you questioning yourself, and whether you’re going down the wrong path. Ultimately, sticking to the strengths of the group and taking advantage of the value that each member can bring was the best approach.”

For Mattson, that ambiguity became one of the most rewarding aspects of the experience.

“Our technology was pretty vague in terms of its potential uses,” she notes. “We had to really brainstorm and be creative with new ideas, finding places where the technology best fit. At the same time, that freedom — to explore and bring together different perspectives — was what I enjoyed most.”

For Adamyan, the opportunity carried additional weight.

“For me specifically, coming from a foreign country and being an international student in the U.S., it would be very hard to land a NASA internship, because they cannot even accept international students — I wouldn’t have even dreamt of it,” Adamyan says. “When I saw that the position was available and that they were accepting students from my country, I was extremely happy. I never ever expected to do anything of this sort, so it was very exciting.”

While the technical work is central, the program’s impact extends far beyond the project itself. For many students, it offers early exposure to the realities of

development, culminating in their final presentation to NASA and other Innovation Scholars students and partner organizations in February.

“We began with a tech review to understand the patent claims from NASA, which detailed an early stage, sensitive, and durable diode sensor that

Throughout the project, the students faced a number of challenges, including understanding the technology, handling a fast-paced work environment, connecting differing perspectives, and defining criteria for their technical applications.

“I’d say the biggest challenge was just the ambiguity,” Haaland says. “I’m



St. Olaf Innovation Scholars (L-R) Kieran Haaland '27, Aubrey Mattson '26, Cole Kehrberg '26, and Mariam Adamyan '26

collaborative, integrative work — where progress depends on navigating different perspectives, skill sets, and areas of expertise.

“It was a really cool interdisciplinary team effort, where we were all constantly learning from one another, collaborating closely, and recognizing each other’s strengths and weaknesses,” Mattson notes. “It’s a great experience to meet people from different fields, come together around one project, feel really strong about the work you’re doing, and present it. You’re constantly learning from each other and figuring out how to bring those perspectives together into something cohesive.”

That collaborative model reflects the world students will encounter in their professional lives beyond the Hill. Several St. Olaf alumni note that the experience they gained through the Innovation Scholars Program has served them well in their careers.

“This specific program was one of the most valuable experiences for the real-life application of projects and how people bring different perspectives, especially in healthcare,” says Abby Liberkowski ’22, an intensive care unit registered nurse for Allina Hospital in Minneapolis. “Teamwork — where everyone has a different role or niche, and how they all come together to work on something — is very interesting to experience as a student because you’re used to being in classes where everyone’s learning the exact same thing, and you all have the same major. It gave me a very real perspective on the real-life application of health care innovation.”

Leon Clark ’12, now a dermatology division chief at Alameda Health System in Oakland, California, recalls a similar lesson.

“In our group, I stayed in my lane and really tried to understand the science behind the machine that we were studying, and I relied on my other group members to have a deep knowledge of the part that they were focused on,” he says. “When you’re

in undergrad, you’re not really an expert in anything — you’re really listening and leaning on professors and experts to guide you. This experience, leaning on colleagues who are attaining very specific knowledge, we do this all the time in medicine. As a dermatologist, I’m asking colleagues in cardiology, GI, and hematology to help me with some cases — appreciating and respecting others’ expertise and guidance is a big experience that a lot of people don’t get early access to.”

For some students, the experience helps clarify future career paths. For others, it opens doors they hadn’t previously considered.

“It was a very positive experience and one that accelerated — if not started — my interest in consulting,” says Soren Schwendeman ’20, now a project leader at Boston Consulting Group in Seattle, Washington. “I knew I was interested in health care as an industry, and I knew I was interested in business strategy, but I didn’t know what the careers at the intersection of those two things looked like — the Innovation Scholars Program showed it to me. Experiential learning programs are where you can get that real-world experience, employers can get a sense of the students and students the employers.

The Innovation Scholars Program is one of the best examples at St. Olaf where they’re putting that in practice.”

For Haaland, the connection between the work and his long-term goals was immediate.

“The project was very much related to what I want to do in life — management consulting,” he says. “Seeing what that looks like day-to-day and diving into the specifics really heightened my love for this field. The program was a good opportunity to zero in on it and make the path feel more tangible.”

Two decades after its founding, the Innovation Scholars Program continues to offer students a rare bridge between classroom learning and real-world application. Whether working with health-care systems, emerging technologies, or even NASA, participants are asked to do more than understand ideas — they are challenged to shape them.

While the technologies may vary from year to year, the core experience remains the same: navigating uncertainty, collaborating across disciplines, and turning possibility into something actionable. For this year’s team, that meant looking beyond the stars — and discovering what innovation can look like here on Earth. 🌟

## The Impact of INNOVATION

For 20 years, St. Olaf has been a key player in the Innovation Scholars Program, which brings together undergraduate liberal arts students from 15 Minnesota private colleges and universities to conduct impactful interdisciplinary research. Spanning fields including health care, medicine, science, business, entrepreneurship, and economics, the program challenges student teams to evaluate innovative technologies from leading institutions — including Mayo Clinic, emerging biomedical and health care companies, and NASA — and research the technology in order to find spaces for it in the marketplace and determine the viability of its potential applications.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Innovation Scholars Program. St. Olaf alumnus John Meslow ’60 designed the program and launched its inaugural internship in partnership with Mayo Clinic in 2006. In 2021, following COVID-19-related challenges, he expanded the enterprise to involve additional collaborators, including NASA and emerging biomedical and health care companies. Meslow wanted to provide students with the opportunity to learn at the intersection of medicine, science, and business by working on real-life biomedical projects and inventions. Over the course of nearly two decades before his passing in 2024, Meslow saw the Innovation Scholars Program do just that. More than 1,035 students — including 95 Oles — have benefited from the instructive and enriching experience the program provides, continuing a legacy rooted in experiential learning and cross-disciplinary collaboration.

# The Science That Saves Lives

AS VACCINE HESITANCY AND MISINFORMATION GROWS, KRIS EHRESMANN '84 IS USING HER DECADES OF EXPERIENCE AS A PUBLIC HEALTH LEADER TO TEACH A NEW GENERATION OF OLES WHY FOLLOWING THE SCIENCE MATTERS.

By Kari VanDerVeen



Kris Ehresmann '84 in her classroom in Regents Hall of Natural and Mathematical Sciences. PHOTO BY JULIA POMERLEAU '26

## KRIS EHRESMANN '84 remembers the exact moment she decided to teach a course on vaccines at St. Olaf College.

It was December 2024, and she had just finished reading a story in the *New York Times* about how the lawyer helping Robert F. Kennedy Jr. pick federal health officials for the incoming Trump administration had petitioned the government to revoke its approval of the polio vaccine.

Ehresmann, an epidemiologist with decades of experience as a public health leader, was stunned. The polio vaccine is widely considered one of the greatest public health successes in history, preventing an estimated 20 million cases of paralysis in children over the last four decades and nearly eradicating the virus worldwide. And while the petition to revoke the polio vaccine garnered the most headlines, the lawyer working with Kennedy had also filed a petition seeking to pause the distribution of 13 other vaccines.

“I’ve dealt with the anti-vaccine movement and vaccine misinformation throughout my career, and it has certainly accelerated over time,” Ehresmann says. “But the mere idea that the incoming leaders of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services might not support vaccines was unthinkable.”

So she turned to what she has long believed is the best way to combat challenges to public health policy: ensuring the next generation of leaders understand the science that serves as its foundation. She put together a proposal for a January Term course on vaccines at St. Olaf, where she has been teaching in the Public Health Studies Program since retiring from her role as the director of the Infectious Disease Division of the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) in 2022.

“Our students really need to be grounded in the science of vaccines because it’s so foundational to public health,” Ehresmann says. “Aside from clean water, vaccines have saved and changed more lives than any other public health measure.”

To accomplish this, she designed a course that begins with an overview of the history and development of vaccines, and then delves into the basics of vaccinology, how vaccines are licensed and recommended, the vaccine safety system in the U.S., the way vaccines are used to prevent and control disease around the world, and the factors influencing vaccine hesitancy.

Ehresmann’s depth of expertise makes her uniquely qualified to teach such a course. She oversaw the State of Minnesota’s Immunization Program for 22 years and served as the president of the Association of Immunization Managers, a national organization that brings together

state immunization program leaders to strategize ways to improve vaccine coverage. She also served as a voting member of the federal Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), an expert group that advises the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on its vaccine recommendations, and most recently as a voting member of the National Vaccine Advisory Committee (NVAC), which provides peer reviews and guidance to the assistant secretary for health, who serves as the director of the National Vaccine Program.

In addition to her own expertise, Ehresmann drew on the relationships she’s developed throughout her career to provide students with additional perspectives and insights on the impact vaccines have on public health. Paul Offit, a pediatrician who co-invented the rotavirus vaccine, joined the class virtually from Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, where he directs the Vaccine Education Center. Mike Osterholm, an epidemiologist who leads the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy (CIDRAP) at the University of Minnesota — and who rose to national prominence for the knowledge and guidance he provided during the COVID-19 pandemic — spoke to students about the Vaccine Integrity Project that he helped launch. Several MDH staff members also visited to share insight into state and federal immunization programs, as well as public health emergency preparedness.

“I love public health, and I really believe in it. And so it’s an honor to get to teach the next generation. I tell my students, ‘You are going to change the world.’”

—KRIS EHRESMANN '84

Henry Floyd '28, one of the 32 Oles who managed to get a seat in the filled-to-capacity class, says the opportunity to hear directly from these experts was incredibly impactful.

“They really elevated the information from being something learned in a textbook to something tangible, run by real people,” says Floyd, a statistics and data science major who plans to work in public health or for a private health care company.

While Floyd came into the course with a unique level of experience gained from working as a pharmacy technician, he wanted to better understand the science behind vaccines.

“I knew a lot about vaccine history and immunology, but I knew very little about vaccine policy,” he says. “This class educated me on the specific policies a lot more, and how much effort is put into quality control and studying these vaccines.”

Johnny Jelatis '27, a biology and chemistry major with a concentration in public health studies, agrees. "An important realization we shared was coming to appreciate the many, many steps that are taken to ensure a vaccine is safe and effective before it ever hits markets," says Jelatis, who plans to attend medical school. He notes that because public health is as much about policy and regulation as it is about science, this course provided a crucial understanding of both when it comes to vaccines.

Several other Oles say the class will help them better care for their future patients. Salah Abdulkarim '26 will start medical school in the weeks after graduation. A biology major with a concentration in public health studies, he has been involved in the St. Olaf Emergency Medical Technicians since his first year on campus. For the past several years he has interned at the Dana Farber Cancer Institute in the Medical Oncology Laboratory of Mark Murakami '02, where he worked to visualize clinical data for a preliminary immunotherapy trial targeting a rare lymphoma. He knew this class would complement his coursework and already deep range of experiences in health care — and he felt Ehresmann's expertise would provide a valuable learning experience.

"Though I do not know what medical specialty I plan to pursue, this class has reinforced my understanding of what it means to be a physician and the role they play beyond direct patient care," he says. "Health literacy is a largely overlooked issue within the U.S., and physicians need to spark conversation that helps communities and policymakers make informed decisions based on objective data."

As a nursing major planning to pursue a career in pediatric nursing, Julia Pomerleau '26 wanted to learn more about

vaccine-preventable diseases and childhood immunization schedules. The course really underscored for her that vaccines don't just benefit individuals — they boost global economies, reduce the overall use of treatments like antibiotics, and provide important layers of protection for the most vulnerable.

"Staying up-to-date on your vaccines contributes to herd immunity — that is, population immunity," she says. "This protects the most vulnerable of populations, including babies, pregnant women, immunocompromised folk, and older adults. We can continue to protect these individuals and save lives by receiving vaccines."

Ella Romans '29 took a similar lesson away from the course. "The most important thing I learned is the honestly inconceivable number of lives that have been saved by vaccines — about 150 million in the past 50 years," she says.

The course also helped illuminate a paradox this has created. "Vaccines are so effective at preventing disease and saving lives that it's astounding — but their success is also the reason why many people see them as unnecessary now," she says. "Because we've eliminated or reduced so many deadly diseases, they're not a common occurrence anymore and people don't realize how catastrophic they are."

She points to the very disease that spurred Ehresmann to create the course: polio.

"This disease paralyzed thousands of children, and now we don't see it, save for a case in 2022," Romans says. "Misinformation can spread like wildfire, especially in the age of social media, and it's very difficult to overcome this knowledge gap with accurate information when many people have trouble discerning the difference between what's truthful and what's not. This is the greatest danger to vaccines."



Kris Ehresmann '84 introduces world-renowned epidemiologist Mike Osterholm, who joined the class virtually to discuss his work and the Vaccine Integrity Project that he helped launch.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL TURNER '24



◀ Students in the class play a game that requires them to simulate the steps of establishing a point of dispensing for mass vaccination clinics.  
PHOTO BY KRIS EHRESMANN '84

Like Ehresmann, he believes the best hope lies with the next generation of health care leaders.

“I hope all of you decide to go into public health — we will need you,” he told students in the class. “Whatever I can do, it will pale in comparison to what you can do.”

And, he notes, they are lucky to have the opportunity to learn from Ehresmann.

“One of the very, very best decisions that I have ever made is hiring Kris at the Minnesota Department of Health. She has been an absolute gift to the state of Minnesota. You are lucky to have her.”

Ehresmann feels she’s really the lucky one.

“I love public health, and I really believe in it,” she says. “And so it’s an honor to get to teach the next generation. I tell my students, ‘You are going to change the world.’”

As students arrived for their last day of class on a cold January day, a brightly colored card was at each of their seats. In addition to a personal note of encouragement for each student, Ehresmann had included a quote on each card from scientific pioneer Sir Geoffrey Vickers that reads “I believe that the history of public health might well be written as a record of successful redefinings of the unacceptable.”

She hopes students use that as inspiration to answer the question it begs.

“I ask them: ‘How are you going to go out there and redefine the unacceptable in the world?’” she says. “Because I know that’s what they will do.” 🦋

On their last day of the class, Osterholm told students that this is precisely why the information they had learned throughout the month-long course was so important.

“Right around the time I was born, we had 55,000 cases of polio in the United States,” he told the class. “A boy who sat across from me in first grade died from measles.”

For decades, those experiences provided regular Americans with a firsthand understanding of the role that vaccines play in protecting people from serious illness and death. But in recent years, anti-vaccine philosophies and behaviors have spiked, Osterholm says, and vaccination rates have dropped. The U.S. is currently on the brink of losing its measles elimination status due to record surges in cases and sustained, linked outbreaks — closely on the heels of Canada, which officially lost its measles elimination status last year.

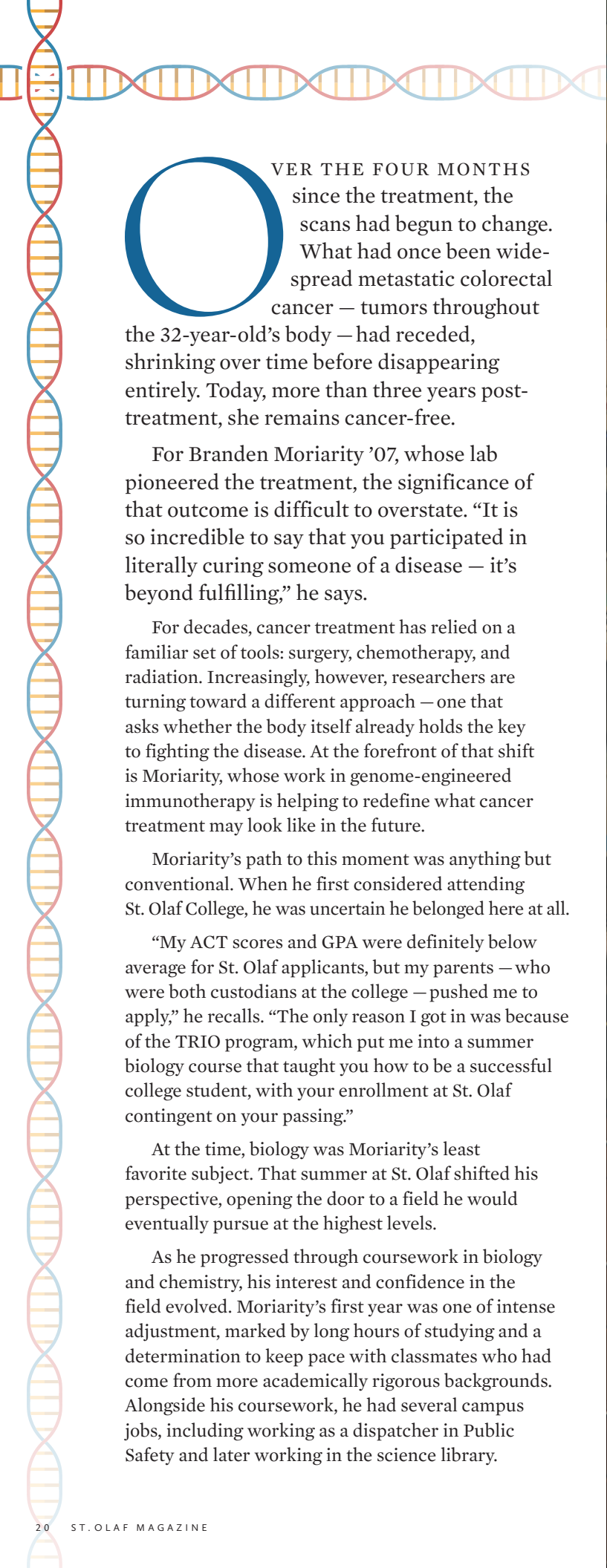
All of this comes amid shifting federal health recommendations as agencies like the CDC and National Institutes of Health experience widespread staffing turnovers, and the work of the ACIP has been frozen.

Against this backdrop, Osterholm has pulled together a team of experts, including former CDC leaders, to create the Vaccine Integrity Project. Their work is focused on providing trusted, independent, science-based information to support vaccine safety, effectiveness, and policy in the U.S.

“I refuse to accept the fact that there’s nothing we can do in the face of the challenges we are experiencing to public health policy,” he says.

“Aside from clean water, vaccines have saved and changed more lives than any other public health measure.”

—KRIS EHRESMANN '84



**O**VER THE FOUR MONTHS since the treatment, the scans had begun to change. What had once been widespread metastatic colorectal cancer — tumors throughout the 32-year-old's body — had receded, shrinking over time before disappearing entirely. Today, more than three years post-treatment, she remains cancer-free.

For Branden Moriarity '07, whose lab pioneered the treatment, the significance of that outcome is difficult to overstate. "It is so incredible to say that you participated in literally curing someone of a disease — it's beyond fulfilling," he says.

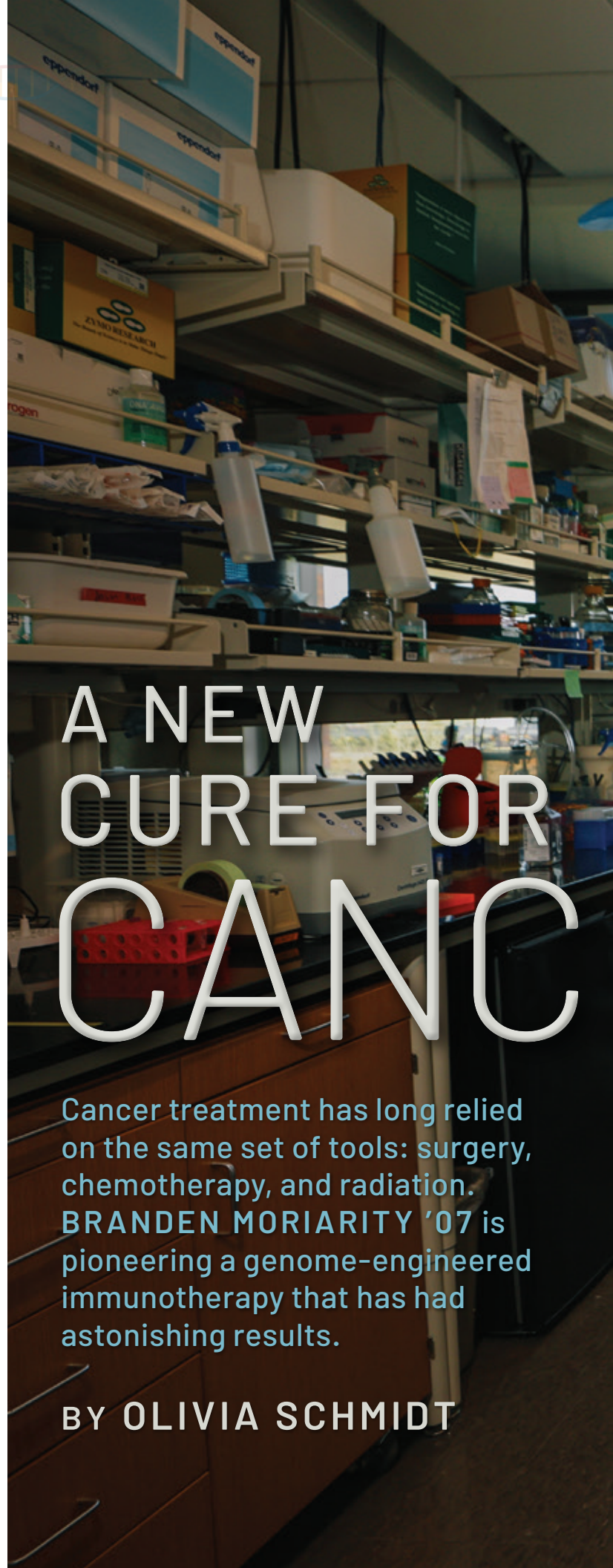
For decades, cancer treatment has relied on a familiar set of tools: surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. Increasingly, however, researchers are turning toward a different approach — one that asks whether the body itself already holds the key to fighting the disease. At the forefront of that shift is Moriarity, whose work in genome-engineered immunotherapy is helping to redefine what cancer treatment may look like in the future.

Moriarity's path to this moment was anything but conventional. When he first considered attending St. Olaf College, he was uncertain he belonged here at all.

"My ACT scores and GPA were definitely below average for St. Olaf applicants, but my parents — who were both custodians at the college — pushed me to apply," he recalls. "The only reason I got in was because of the TRIO program, which put me into a summer biology course that taught you how to be a successful college student, with your enrollment at St. Olaf contingent on your passing."

At the time, biology was Moriarity's least favorite subject. That summer at St. Olaf shifted his perspective, opening the door to a field he would eventually pursue at the highest levels.

As he progressed through coursework in biology and chemistry, his interest and confidence in the field evolved. Moriarity's first year was one of intense adjustment, marked by long hours of studying and a determination to keep pace with classmates who had come from more academically rigorous backgrounds. Alongside his coursework, he had several campus jobs, including working as a dispatcher in Public Safety and later working in the science library.



# A NEW CURE FOR CANCER

Cancer treatment has long relied on the same set of tools: surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. **BRANDEN MORIARITY '07** is pioneering a genome-engineered immunotherapy that has had astonishing results.

**BY OLIVIA SCHMIDT**



ER

Branden Moriarity '07 in his research lab at the University of Minnesota in the Twin Cities.  
PHOTO BY STEVEN GARCIA '20

His efforts were encouraged by faculty members, particularly Professor Emerita of Biology Anne Walter, who supported him in pursuing research opportunities.

“I was fortunate enough to garner a Howard Hughes Medical Institute Summer Research Scholar Award, and so I got to perform research in the Czech Republic for three months during the summer before my senior year,” Moriarity says. “At that time, I had really narrowed my focus to cancer research, and I was thinking about a future in which I went on to an M.D. or Ph.D. program. Once I got back to the states, I was home for three days before I took the MCAT, and once that was done I immediately left again to participate in St. Olaf’s Biology in South India semester program. Those experiences really solidified what I wanted to do going forward, and also gave me my first real taste of what true research was.”

After graduating with majors in chemistry and biology and a concentration in biomolecular sciences in 2007, Moriarity continued his education at the University of Minnesota, where he pursued a Ph.D. at a moment when cancer research was undergoing significant transformation. Traditional approaches had long focused on directly targeting cancer cells through chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery. Increasingly, however, researchers were exploring ways to

harness the body’s own immune system to fight cancer.

“I think that immunotherapy is the cure for cancer — we just have to figure out the optimal way to actually leverage it,” Moriarity says. “Our immune system is our best defense against developing cancer, and so it makes logical sense to redeploy something that evolved over billions of years to prevent cancer to fight it once it is in existence.”

This idea has become central to his work at the University of Minnesota, particularly through a form of treatment known as tumor-infiltrating lymphocyte — or TIL — therapy.

TIL therapy is based on the observation that immune cells are often already present within tumors, attempting to attack the cancer, but ultimately failing. The approach involves removing a portion of a patient’s tumor, extracting those immune cells, expanding and potentially enhancing them in the lab, and reinfusing them into the patient in much larger numbers. While this method has proven successful in certain cancer treatments, particularly in the fight against melanoma, it has been far less effective in others, including gastrointestinal cancers. Moriarity saw an opportunity to improve upon the existing approach by integrating genome engineering technologies. Using tools such as Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (CRISPR), his team developed methods

to alter the genetic programming of these immune cells, enhancing their ability to recognize and destroy cancer.

One of the key discoveries in this work involved a gene known as CISH. In preclinical studies, Moriarity and his colleagues found that disabling this gene made TIL more effective at detecting cancer, even when tumors attempted to evade recognition. It also improved the cells’ ability to kill cancer and recruit additional immune responses. Building on these findings, the team launched a first-in-human clinical trial to test genome-engineered TIL therapy in patients with end-stage gastrointestinal cancers. The process was complex and highly personalized: for each patient, TIL were extracted from a tumor, edited with CRISPR to disable the CISH gene, expanded to billions in number, and then reinfused into the same patient.

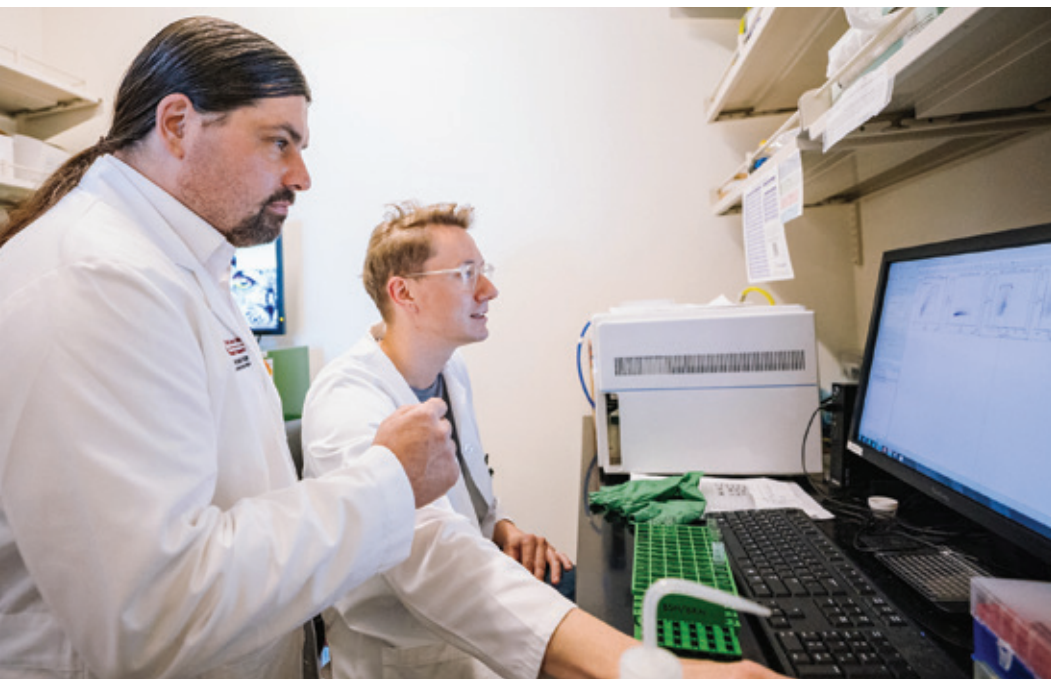
The results were significant. In many patients, tumors that had previously been progressing rapidly stopped growing. In one case, the outcome went even further. A patient who had been living with metastatic colorectal cancer for 10 years experienced a complete response, with all detectable cancer disappearing following treatment.

“We watched the CT scans over months, and the tumor and metastatic disease started shrinking and resolving,” Moriarity recounts. “About six months after the therapy, she was completely cancer free, and now she’s going on three and a half years with no sign of cancer whatsoever, and she’ll be able to live a full life.”

While this outcome was achieved in one of 12 treated patients, it represented a milestone.

“This was the first time in history that someone has used genome engineered TIL as a therapy,” Moriarity says. “The outcomes that we saw were quite extraordinary, and

◀ Branden Moriarity '07 and graduate student research assistant Jacob Jensen in the genome engineering lab at the University of Minnesota. PHOTO BY STEVEN GARCIA '20



I am very optimistic about the efficacy of this treatment in the future.”

At the same time, the trial highlighted substantial challenges.

“One of the challenges is that this is a very expensive, personalized therapy — each patient represented over a half a million dollars, just to get their product and treat them,” Moriarity explains.

“The other challenge was it took too long to make their therapy. On average, it was about four months from surgery to infusion of their TIL product. We treated 12 patients in the trial, but we actually enrolled 22, and a number of them died while we were making their TIL product.”

Addressing those barriers to treatment access has become a central focus of Moriarity’s current work. His team is working to reduce both the time and cost required to produce these therapies, with the goal of bringing manufacturing down to approximately 30 days and significantly lowering expenses. At the same time, they are exploring additional genetic modifications to improve effectiveness, with the aim of increasing the number of patients who experience complete responses.

“One out of 12 had a complete response,” Moriarity says. “Now the question is: How do we make that six out of 12?”

Following the conclusion of the initial trial, industry funding for the project came to an end. Rather than allowing the work to stall, Moriarity and his collaborators established a new model to continue their efforts. The Minnesota TIL Alliance brings together researchers at the University of Minnesota, clinicians at the Mayo Clinic, and a network of philanthropic partners across the state. Through an initiative called *Un-TIL It’s Cured*, the group is working to fund the next phase of research and a broader clinical trial that will expand treatment to additional cancer types. In less than a year, the effort has raised \$1.5 million

## “I think that immunotherapy is the cure for cancer — we just have to figure out the optimal way to actually leverage it.”

— BRANDEN MORIARITY ’07

of its \$5 million goal, reflecting both the promise of the research and the strength of local support.

“None of this works without all these partnerships,” Moriarity says. “Right now we are seeing fewer and fewer National Institutes of Health (NIH) grants, so we have turned to something called venture philanthropy, where an individual or organization donates money to your laboratory, you do the research, and hope that it will generate new intellectual property that brings in revenue, with a portion going back to the parties that invested in the research to fund other philanthropic ventures. So not only does your own research advance, but you also help to move other developments forward.”

For Moriarity, the impact of this work is measured not only in scientific progress, but in the lives it touches. In addition to leading a research lab of more than 30 scientists, he spends much of his time mentoring students and early career researchers, helping to prepare the next generation of problem solvers.

“Training the next generation of scientists, seeing them succeed and go on to do big things themselves, allows me to have a broader impact of positivity in the world,” Moriarity says. “That is one of the most fulfilling elements of my life.”

His experience at St. Olaf, he notes, continues to shape his work in unexpected ways. Beyond its scientific rigor, the college’s liberal arts foundation helped prepare him for the writing, communication, and critical thinking

that are central to his career.

“A huge part of my job is writing — grants, manuscripts — lots of reading and revising,” Moriarity says. “Having a liberal arts education was a boon to that. I think I was better prepared and had more advanced skills in that area than someone who went to a school and just studied science the whole way through. I’m also more well-rounded — I had to take courses in things that I had no interest in whatsoever, and grew in directions I wouldn’t have for it.”

Moriarity’s connection to St. Olaf also extends beyond his own experience. His wife, Erin Hoffman Moriarity ’06, whom he met during their time at college, was likewise a double major in biology and chemistry. Together, they share not only a common academic foundation but also a life shaped in part by those formative years on the Hill — a connection that now carries forward into their family life with their two children, Victor and Xavier.

Looking back, Moriarity’s journey from a student uncertain about attending college to a researcher leading first-in-human clinical trials reflects both the unpredictability of individual paths and the potential for innovation to emerge from them. His work now continues at the intersection of science, collaboration, and possibility, driven by a goal that remains as compelling as it is simple: to bring effective, accessible treatments to more patients — and, when possible, to turn moments like that first complete response into something less extraordinary and more common. 🦋





Assistant Professor of Kinesiology Jenny Miller, Calvin Keesler '27 (wearing a University of Georgia jersey to honor the alma mater of Timberwolves star Anthony Edwards), Ashlyn Jore '26, and Claire Keech '26 watch the Timberwolves players in action at the Target Center in Minneapolis during the the first-round playoff series they won against the Denver Nuggets. PHOTO BY STEVEN GARCIA '20

# THE POWER OF PERFORMANCE DATA

WHEN THE MINNESOTA TIMBERWOLVES WERE LOOKING AT NEW WAYS TO MEASURE THE PHYSICAL PERFORMANCE OF SOME OF THE NBA'S MOST TALENTED PLAYERS, THEY TURNED TO THE EXPERTISE OF ST. OLAF ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF KINESIOLOGY JENNY MILLER AND HER TEAM OF STUDENT RESEARCHERS. THE PARTNERSHIP HAS PROVEN INVALUABLE.

**BY KARI VANDERVEEN**

Javair Gillett has spent decades overseeing the physical performance of some of the world's best athletes.

He served as the head strength and conditioning coach of the Detroit Tigers during a decade in which the Major League Baseball team rebuilt from years of struggle — including a near-record number of losses in 2003 — to become an American League powerhouse with four consecutive division titles.

He then spent six years as the director of athletic performance for the Houston Rockets during an era when National Basketball Association (NBA) superstar James Harden led the franchise to multiple playoff runs, including the 2015 and 2018 Western Conference Finals.

And for the last five years, Gillett has served as the vice president of sport science and performance for the Minnesota Timberwolves — a team that has evolved into a top Western Conference contender driven by a core of rising stars and All-NBA talents.

Across his career, Gillett's work has focused on a deceptively simple question: How can he use science and data to help unlock the maximum potential of elite athletes?

He has found much of the answer in continually seeking out new tools and learning from other experts in his field. And that's exactly why last year, he reached out to St. Olaf College Assistant Professor of Kinesiology Jenny Miller.

Miller not only has an impressive depth of expertise in performance physiology, but her lab at St. Olaf has equipment that almost no other college or university in the region has — including a high-tech system to analyze athlete biomechanics similar to one that Gillett knew the Minnesota Timberwolves would soon be installing.

"He wanted to see the equipment we have and learn how we run our assessments," Miller says.

So she invited him to campus for a tour that highlighted why St. Olaf's kinesiology program ranks among the best in the state. Impressed with what he saw, Gillett asked Miller if she would be willing to run tests on all of the Timberwolves players. She agreed, with one condition: she wanted her team of St. Olaf student researchers to perform the work alongside her.

For Gillett, it was a no-brainer.

"We shared the same vision. I've always had a passion for education, so I wanted to figure out ways to get students involved while at the same time getting us the information we need to better our program for our players," he says.

**"DR. MILLER IS GREAT AT JUST COMING IN AND COMMUNICATING REALLY WELL WITH THE PLAYERS, DESPITE NOT KNOWING THEM AS WELL AS WE DO AND WORKING WITH THEM EVERY DAY. SHE REALLY HAS A KNACK FOR GETTING THEM TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WE'RE DOING AND WHY WE'RE DOING IT. SHE'S MADE MY JOB A HECK OF A LOT EASIER AND HAS ALLOWED ME TO BE ON THE FLOOR COACHING THE PLAYERS MORE."**

— Minnesota Timberwolves Vice President of Sport Science and Performance Javair Gillett



Minnesota Timberwolves Vice President of Sport Science and Performance Javair Gillett (center) with (from left) Calvin Keesler '27, Heidi Deuel '27, Assistant Professor of Kinesiology Jenny Miller, Sarah Oppenheim '26, Ashlyn Jore '26, and Claire Keech '26 at the NBA team's practice facility.



For student researchers Ashlyn Jore '26, Claire Keech '26, and Calvin Keesler '27, it was an incredible opportunity to gain hands-on experience while measuring the physical health and endurance of some of the NBA's top players.

"Getting this experience as undergrads is not something many people have the opportunity to do," says Jore, a kinesiology and biology major who plans to attend graduate school for exercise physiology and pursue a career in research. "We were all in."

As part of Miller's team, the three student researchers had learned how to conduct two types of tests that would be central to their work with the Timberwolves players.

The first measures how much oxygen a person's body consumes while exercising. Miller's lab at St. Olaf is unique in that it has two clinical-grade metabolic carts that can be used to run these assessments.

"When we conduct this assessment, an individual steps onto a treadmill, a sleek mask strapped over their face, tubes snaking away to a machine that tracks every breath. Then the real work begins. The treadmill speeds up, minute by minute, pushing the individual until their lungs and legs are firing at full capacity. What the machine is capturing in that moment is the body's raw ability to use oxygen and turn it into energy," Miller says. "It also shows how quickly they recover. As soon as the treadmill slows, the data reveals how fast their breathing steadies, how quickly their system clears carbon dioxide, how ready they are to go again."

The second test is done using a system of high-speed infrared motion capture cameras and markers that analyze athlete biomechanics in 3D. Miller has an eight-camera system set up in a large, warehouse-style space in the lower level of Skoglund Center — one of just two such setups in the state and the only one close to Minneapolis. It captures data at high frame rates to measure joint angles, acceleration, and force, which coaches can then use to develop plans to optimize technique and prevent injuries.

Gillett, who holds a doctorate in health sciences, says that kind of information is invaluable in a professional sports setting where keeping athletes in peak form during a long and physically demanding season is critical. He visited St. Olaf several times to learn how to run the athletes through the assessments that Miller's team uses. He wanted to use the tests to understand where each of the Minnesota Timberwolves players was at, how far he could push them, and what kind of personalized plan they would each need to get there. After a few meetings with Miller, he knew she could play an important role in helping him do that. He asked the St. Olaf team to run assessments on Timberwolves players, and they got to work last summer.

"When we're looking at individuals with higher work capacities, we want to know how hard they can push, how long they can sustain it, and how fast they bounce back," Miller says. These individuals operate on a different physiological playing field, she notes. "They're typically able to take in and use oxygen at much higher rates than



the average person. Their bodies are incredibly efficient at delivering that oxygen to the muscles and converting it into usable energy.”

That efficiency pays off in more ways than one. Because their systems produce fewer metabolic byproducts, there’s less waste to clear and less strain on the body. “They only take in what they need, and they don’t overwork to get it,” Miller says. “That’s what allows them to hit those extreme levels of intensity.”

And perhaps most impressively, they don’t stay fatigued for long. “Their recovery is usually very fast, which is essential in a sport where your only break might be a quick stint on the bench before you’re expected to be back going at full throttle,” she says.

But even professional athletes have room for improvement — and that’s how this data helps the Timberwolves staff understand what to work on with each player.

“We’re trying to personalize their performance, strength, and conditioning program. So this data is used to create better exercise programs for each one of the athletes that fits their specific needs,” Gillett says.

In his work with the Timberwolves, Gillett oversees a staff that includes experts in strength and conditioning, nutrition, mental performance, and sports science. They work closely with the team’s medical staff and coaches.

“One of the things I’m really committed to is integrating the work we’re all doing to provide the best information possible to our players,” Gillett says. “I interpret the data we collect to make sure it’s easy to understand for multiple departments, whether it’s a report to the coaches or something that I share directly with the players.”

The most important task, he notes, is getting each player to understand and value the data. That, he says, is where Miller excels.

“Dr. Miller is great at just coming in and communicating really well with the players, despite not knowing them as well as we do and working with them every day. She really has a knack for getting them to understand what we’re doing and why we’re doing it,” Gillett says. “She’s made my job a heck of a lot easier and has allowed me to be on the floor coaching the players more.”

The importance of translating data in a way that is meaningful is a lesson all three St. Olaf students say will stick with them as they develop their future careers.

“All three of us find it really interesting to look at the raw data and get into the nitty gritty, but that’s not always

going to appeal to the athletes. It can sometimes be difficult to see the direct applications of that. So we had to learn how to present the purpose of this assessment in a way that was relevant to each of them,” Jore says.

Keech agrees, adding that she also took away the importance of building relationships.

“One thing that Javair told us is that you really need a lot of trust with your athletes,” she says.

Watching both Gillett and Miller interact with the players provided a great example of what earning that trust looks like, Keesler says.

“These are athletes who are used to being the best of the best, from high school to college to the pros, so it takes a very high level of communication to make it clear to them how these tests can help them,” he adds.

**“WHEN YOU’RE AT THE PROFESSIONAL SPORTS LEVEL, YOU HAVE TO REALLY HONE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF YOUR TRAINING TO BRING YOU FROM AN ALREADY ELITE PERFORMANCE LEVEL TO SOMETHING EVEN HIGHER. THAT DIFFERENCE CAN BE DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE IF YOU DON’T HAVE ACCESS TO TESTING LIKE THIS.”**

— Ashlyn Jore ’26

Another factor that proved helpful is that all three student researchers are Division III athletes. Keesler, a kinesiology major who plans to enroll in dental school, is a member of the St. Olaf baseball team. Keech, a kinesiology and biology major who will begin a doctoral program for physical therapy this fall, is a member of the St. Olaf track and field team. And Jore is a talented track and field athlete who broke school records this spring for her performances in the long jump and 60m dash.

Their familiarity with the world of competitive sports not only helped them understand what drives the Timberwolves players, but also led them to appreciate even more the physical prowess of the athletes.

“While all of the tests we are performing are interesting for college athletes like us who are trying to find an edge, advanced techniques like these are non-negotiable if Javair is going to be able to help his players reach their full athletic potential,” Keesler says.

Small differences in the data can be very important, Jore adds. “When you’re at the professional sports level, you have to really hone different aspects of your training to bring you from an already elite performance level to something even

◀ Calvin Keesler ’27, Claire Keech ’26, and Assistant Professor of Kinesiology Jenny Miller run Savannah Forrest ’27 through a test that measures how much oxygen a person’s body consumes while exercising. Miller’s lab at St. Olaf is unique in that it has two clinical-grade metabolic carts that can be used to run these assessments. PHOTO BY SAMUEL GWIN ’25

higher,” she says. “That difference can be difficult to achieve if you don’t have access to testing like this.”

Providing St. Olaf students with an opportunity to apply their knowledge in a professional sports setting is exciting, Miller says.

“Knowing that we are contributing to the success of these athletes is really awesome,” she says.

Keesler says the opportunity to pair his passion for sports with a hands-on learning experience like this is an experience he never dreamed of having at St. Olaf.

“I love innovation and learning new things, especially in something I’m passionate about,” he says. “These are skills and experiences you can’t replicate or get anywhere else. Putting your feet in the fire and meeting the high standards of working with some of the greatest athletes in the world really challenges you. I’ve really grown as a person in addition to developing incredible skills for my career path.”

Having this opportunity is proof of the power of the liberal arts, Keech says.

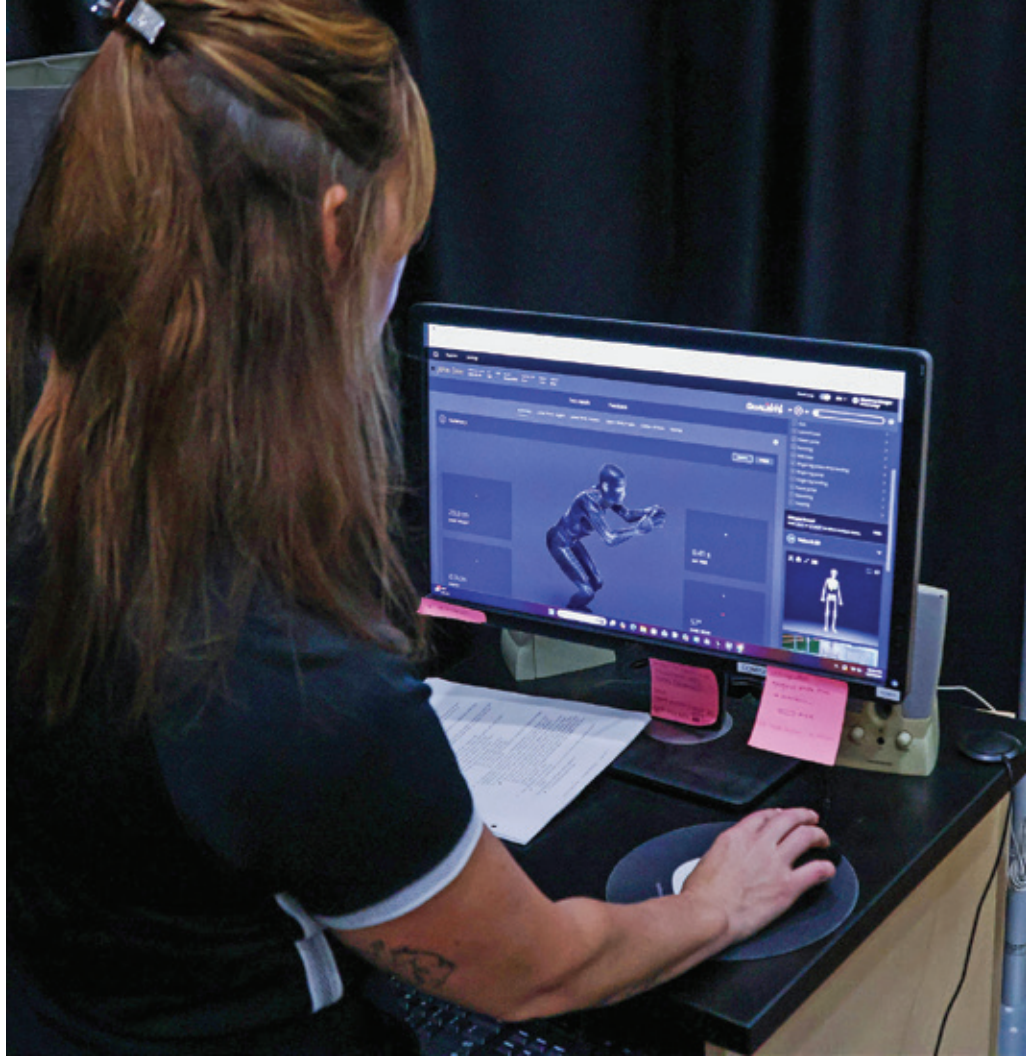
“A liberal arts education is a great way to blend what you’re passionate about and what you’re going to pursue for your future career. I can participate in sports, I can pursue a degree in biology and kinesiology, and I can take a dance class for fun on the side? Sign me up,” Keech says. Being a member of a research team working with the Minnesota Timberwolves is icing on the cake.

And so is having a faculty member like Miller.

“She’s so committed to pursuing these extraordinary experiences for us,” Keesler says. “It just goes to show her dedication to her students, and that has allowed us to work with a professional team in a way that very few other students at other colleges are able to.”

For Gillett, working with St. Olaf students is a way to pay forward the opportunities he got in college.

“If I didn’t have the opportunities that I was offered as an undergraduate student, I wouldn’t have been able to get into the pro setting literally right after I graduated,” he says. “These students are great, and it’s fun to be able to share my experiences with them. I’m sure they enjoy being around the athletes, but I’m putting them to work and they



**“I LOVE INNOVATION AND LEARNING NEW THINGS, ESPECIALLY IN SOMETHING I’M PASSIONATE ABOUT. THESE ARE SKILLS AND EXPERIENCES YOU CAN’T REPLICATE OR GET ANYWHERE ELSE. MEETING THE HIGH STANDARDS OF WORKING WITH SOME OF THE GREATEST ATHLETES IN THE WORLD REALLY CHALLENGES YOU.”**

— Calvin Keesler '27

are getting a very hands-on learning experience. They have a wonderful mentor in Dr. Miller, and they are willing to really put in the work. That’s going to take them far.”

Gillett adds that his collaboration with Miller has exceeded all of his expectations.

“I’ve learned way more from her than she has from me,” he says. “I would consider her a mentor to me and someone who helps keep me sharp in the field. She’s helping me a lot and keeping me at the top of my game. This partnership is exactly what I was hoping for.” 🦁

Assistant Professor of Kinesiology Jenny Miller (left) reviews data gathered from an assessment that Calvin Keesler '27 demonstrates (below) that uses a system of high-speed infrared motion capture cameras and markers that analyze athlete biomechanics in 3D. PHOTOS BY SAMUEL GWIN '25



What Makes St. Olaf a  
*Dream School?*



IN A MOMENT OF RAPID CHANGE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE, STUDENTS ARE BEING ASKED TO NAVIGATE INCREASING UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THEIR FUTURES. A RECENT CONVERSATION WITH BEST-SELLING AUTHOR JEFFREY SELINGO ABOUT HIS NEW BOOK HIGHLIGHTS HOW A ST. OLAF EDUCATION — GROUNDED IN RESEARCH, MENTORSHIP, AND OFF-CAMPUS EXPERIENCES — CAN MEET THAT MOMENT.

By Olivia Schmidt

**B**ENEATH THE VAULTED CEILINGS of the Washington National Cathedral, members of St. Olaf College's Board of Regents, alumni, and college leaders gathered this February for a discussion with a *New York Times* best-selling author who specializes in higher education. But instead of exploring admissions statistics or rankings, the conversation focused on something more fundamental: what do students actually need from their college experience — and how can St. Olaf prepare them for a rapidly changing world?

The cost of higher education continues to rise. The job market is shifting, in part due to the rapid development of artificial intelligence. Entry-level roles, the traditional starting points for many graduates, are becoming less stable, even as employers place greater emphasis on experience and adaptability.

“For decades, the American Dream has been inextricably linked to a college degree, but as costs climb and the cultural rhetoric around education shifts, many families are left wondering if the system still works — or if they are just left to work the system,” Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Tarshia Stanley, who moderated the dialogue, said in opening. “Our guest tonight has spent more than two decades investigating those very questions.”

Jeffrey Selingo, journalist and author of the new book *Dream School: Finding the College That's Right for You*, joined Professor of English and Associate Dean for the First-Year Experience and Sophomore Thriving Diane LeBlanc to explore how the education landscape is in a moment of unprecedented uncertainty — but also of profound opportunity.

In the environment graduates are entering, the skills most needed are not narrowly technical, but broadly human: the ability to think critically, communicate effectively, work collaboratively, and navigate ambiguity. These are, notably, the very skills at the heart of a liberal arts education.

What matters most, Selingo argues, is how those skills are paired with experience.

“If you combine the tenets of a liberal arts education with the proven ability to get work done, and you build in hands-on experiences, particularly research, internships, short-term projects, or campus jobs, I think these are the students that are going to thrive in the next couple of years,” he says.

At St. Olaf, this pairing is increasingly intentional. Opportunities for undergraduate research, internships, campus employment, and community engagement are not treated as add-ons, but as extensions of the classroom. They are ways for students to test ideas, build confidence, and begin to imagine themselves in the world beyond college.

It is these very elements that prompted Selingo to feature St. Olaf in his book.

In *Dream School*, Selingo shifts the focus from how colleges admit students to how students can better pick colleges. He encourages students and families to think more broadly about the traits that define excellent colleges, and he provides tools to help students discover their dream school. At the end of the book, Selingo includes a list of 75 colleges and universities that he calls the “New Dream Schools” — including St. Olaf College.

“This list highlights institutions with strong outcomes, accessible admissions, and dynamic student experiences,” Selingo writes. “Among the factors I considered when creating the list: affordability, financial health, student engagement, geographic diversity, and career outcomes.”

The book notes that student engagement and satisfaction scores are high at St. Olaf, where incoming students take several courses in small cohorts and participate in a year-long orientation program that fosters a sense of belonging. The college is known for having a great classroom experience and excellent lab facilities, as well as strong on-campus research experiences and a robust team of career coaches. St. Olaf offers more than 5,000 experiential learning opportunities every year for students to test out career paths and learn new skills, and 88 percent of graduates participate in an internship, research, or other hands-on learning opportunities during their time on the Hill.

That commitment to supporting students and providing access to a transformative education is exactly what defines a dream school, Selingo adds.

“A dream school is not about a single name or even a specific group of schools,” Selingo writes. “It’s about a place where students thrive, where they build confidence, find belonging, and launch into meaningful work and life.”

St. Olaf, he notes, “stood out because of how it delivers on that promise.”

Selingo’s work often begins with the assumptions families carry into the college search process — chief among them is the belief that distinction will unlock opportunity.

“There is this idea that if you go to one of these highly selective, highly ranked schools, that that magically will get you a job and open up doors that you didn’t know were there before,” Selingo says. “But if you’re just looking for selectivity, you might end up with a bad fit.”

It is a message grounded in both data and experience. In a survey of more than 3,000 parents, Selingo found that families consistently say they value student success, belonging, and meaningful work after graduation. Prestige, in contrast, ranks far lower. And yet, it continues to shape decisions — less because of personal conviction than due to the expectations of others.

That tension, between what families say they want and what they feel pressured to pursue, framed much of the conversation at the National Cathedral. Yet LeBlanc noted that at St. Olaf, the same pressure point has become a source of strength, innovation, and enterprise.

Campus leaders are increasingly focused on how students are supported from the moment they arrive — and how that support evolves over time.

LeBlanc describes advising as a kind of connective tissue, “a thread” that runs through all four years of a student’s time on the Hill. It is not a single conversation or checkpoint, but an ongoing process — one designed to help students make sense of both where they are and where they are headed.

At the center of that work is a refined and layered framework, four questions that unfold across a student’s four-year college journey: Where am I? Who am I? Where am I going? How do I get there?

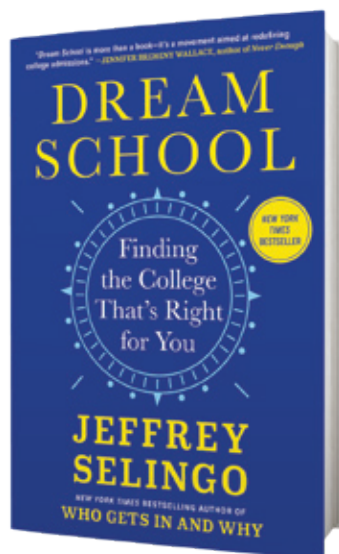
Each question meets Oles at a different moment — beginning with the disorientation of arrival and extending through the discovery of choosing a path forward.

“Advising extends scaffolding to deepen belonging,” LeBlanc says. “In terms of a supportive start, during the first year, students connect with faculty and peers through courses like *Writing and Rhetoric* and *First-Year Seminar*, and a bi-weekly meeting with their St. Olaf Orientation to Academics and Resources (SOAR) group. Each student has a designated team of advisors, including an academic advisor, a Success Coach, and SOAR peer leader, to support their academic, social, and personal growth. Measures of success differ, but if students make friends, get to know one or more of their professors, develop academic skills and knowledge, and get involved in a few activities on campus, they are likely to thrive.”

If the first year at St. Olaf is about finding connection, the second year is often about finding direction — and welcoming the uncertainty that search might invite.

Students are no longer new, but not yet settled. The structures that once held them have loosened, and the pressure to define a future begins to intensify. What they once saw as their destiny may no longer fit with their interests, or their future may be totally unwritten.

“During our development of the questions model, we found that some sophomores were leaping to the ‘Where am I going?’ before they really wrestled with the identity and purpose question, the ‘Who am I?’” LeBlanc explains. “In response to that, we’ve worked toward giving them the time, space, connections, and community to develop their pathway in a way that takes into consideration the person they have become and are becoming.”



“A dream school is not about a single name or even a specific group of schools. It’s about a place where students thrive, where they build confidence, find belonging, and launch into meaningful work and life.”

— JEFFREY SELINGO

Oles move into the sophomore year with their same academic advisor and success coach from their first year to focus on declaring a major by spring semester. Sophomore Experience activities such as the Soph-Prof Dinner, the Half-Way Soirée, and the Sophomore Symposium hold space for students to connect with faculty and staff and to meet new peers.

“As sophomores live with the question ‘Who Am I?’, they thrive when they build academic confidence, deepen connections, reflect on their purpose, and begin to shape career-related experiences,” LeBlanc says.

For Selingo, that work is direct preparation for life post-graduation.

“One of the things that I see in talking to a number of people who hire early career graduates is that they are looking for candidates who have experience in discernment, in problem-solving, in writing, and working in teams, the ability to complete a project, meet a deadline, and get stuff done right, and the desire to keep learning,” he says. “A liberal arts college experience is very focused on this particular skill set.”

As Stanley notes, these tenets are built into St. Olaf’s promise to its students: to not define a single path for success, but to make many paths visible — and to make them feel possible.

“A liberal arts education leads you to a return on your investment as long as you have moved deliberately through the experience,” she says. “If you have made the connections between your coursework, the content, your skill sets, and you have incorporated work-world learning opportunities and things such as study-away and directed research, and you can translate this to an employer or a graduate program — your return on your career investment is exponential.”

In *Dream School*, Selingo describes colleges like St. Olaf as places that deliver strong outcomes, meaningful experiences, and environments where students can grow. What defines a “dream school” is not prestige, but possibility. As the evening at the National Cathedral drew to a close, the panelists invited attendees to linger on several ideas:

To rethink what college is for. To reconsider what success looks like. And to imagine a “dream school” not as a name — but as an experience. 🦋



St. Olaf Professor of English and Associate Dean for the First-Year Experience and Sophomore Thriving Diane LeBlanc (left), author Jeffrey Selingo, and St. Olaf Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Tarshia Stanley discussed Selingo’s new book at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. in February. PHOTO BY CHRISTOPH HODEL '20

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**1940s**

**Joseph Shaw '49**, St. Olaf historian and professor emeritus of religion who extensively researched, wrote, and published a series of historical books about St. Olaf, its leaders, and campus heritage, has celebrated his 100th birthday. ❶ Family, friends, and classmates **Bobbie Maakestad '49** (pictured with Shaw) and **Jeanette Stolee Nelson '49** joined him for this milestone birthday in April 2025, and he also celebrated St. Olaf's Sesquicentennial. Shaw, along with longtime archivist Joan Olson, is recognized as a founder of the college's institutional history and historic preservation. In 1992 Shaw



published *Dear Old Hill*, filled with dozens of historical anecdotes about campus buildings, faculty and staff members, as well as St. Olaf myths and legends. His work also includes *History of St. Olaf College 1874-1974*, *The St. Olaf Choir: A Narrative*, and the biography of *Bernt Julius Muus, Founder of St. Olaf College*. In 2000 the St. Olaf Archives was renamed the Shaw-Olson Center for College History, in honor of Shaw and Olson.

**1950s**

**Margaret Froiland Skibbe '53**, a longtime educator and retired high school English teacher, has died

at age 94. A devoted mother and wife to the late Augsburg University religion professor **Eugene Skibbe '52**, the couple met as students at St. Olaf and credited an art history course taught by **Arnold Flaten 1922** with having "changed our lives" as they learned about the world of art. The couple went on to collect modern Japanese art for 25 years, and in 2012 they gifted St. Olaf's Flaten Art Museum with their collection of 180 prints by contemporary Japanese artist Yoshida Hodaka (1926-95), making St. Olaf the world's premier holder of Hodaka's work. She is survived by her sons, Stephen Skibbe and **Jonathan Skibbe '86**; grandchildren **James Checco '10**, **Kayla Skibbe '16**, Hannah Skibbe, and Ava Skibbe; and brother **Don Froiland '57**. She was preceded in death by her husband, Eugene Skibbe; daughters, **Susan Skibbe '83** and Katharine Skibbe; and brother, **Rudolf Froiland '56**.



**The Rock 'n' Roll Legacy of The Reveres**

BY OLIVIA SCHMIDT

When the class of first-year students arrived at St. Olaf College in the fall of 1963, they were humming the songs of Bobby Vinton, Andy Williams, and Trini Lopez. A year later, that sound had shifted to The Beatles, The Animals, and The Dave Clark Five. Among the new class was Don Hoover '68 of St. Paul, a blind guitarist who brought with him an idea: to start a rock 'n' roll band.

It began simply. Hoover and Roger Christians '67 gathered in Ytterboe with guitars, playing with the windows open. Soon they needed a bassist — David Nelson '68 — and another guitarist, David Erdman '68. A drummer followed: David Hersrud '68. With that, the band was born. They called themselves The Reveres.

Their early success came quickly. Two songs were enough for an audition at the annual talent contest — where the band made an impression. While their fellow students enjoyed their performance, the dean of men soon informed them they could no longer practice their "devil music" on campus. Some band members were even urged to quit.



Instead, they adapted. The Green Army offered them rehearsal space in the local power plant, and the band leaned into a louder sound, joking later they had invented "heavy metal." With Bob Anderson '67 joining as lead singer, the group found its footing.

In the late-1960s, Minneapolis was a musical hotbed, but few rock bands existed outside of the Twin Cities. As such, The Reveres found plenty of local gigs, from Northfield's "battle of the bands" competition to high school dances, off-campus parties, and shows across southern Minnesota. They played weekly at Ma's Cafe downtown, earning free food and beverages as "Ma's Boys."

On one break they toured small towns across the Dakotas, announcing shows over loudspeakers from the car. Along the way, they faced their share of mishaps, including a late-night vehicle lockout that required the assistance of a local sheriff and his prisoner (a known car thief), a trailer fire sparked by a passing driver's cigarette, and countless improvisations that became a part of the band's mythology.

By 1967, the band began to wind down as members graduated or moved on. Their final performance in 1968 marked the end of St. Olaf's inaugural rock band. Decades later, the living members of The Reveres remain close — Hoover passed away in 1978. The band reunited in August 2024, bringing with them the stories, music, and friendships that began in those first few rehearsals — and the legacy of a band that refused to go quietly.

Read more about *The Reveres* and other St. Olaf student bands from throughout the decades at [stolaf.edu/news/ole-rock-stars-six-decades-of-student-artists-at-st-olaf](http://stolaf.edu/news/ole-rock-stars-six-decades-of-student-artists-at-st-olaf) or by scanning this QR code.



## Remembering Dean Buntrock '55

Dean Buntrock '55, a business leader and visionary philanthropist whose steadfast support of St. Olaf College has transformed access, belonging, campus life, financial aid, and learning opportunities on the Hill, died on April 17 at the age of 94.

Buntrock was a senior member of the St. Olaf Board of Regents, and he served as board chair from 1986 to 1995. Together with his family, Buntrock gave more than \$66.7 million to St. Olaf over the course of his life, starting with a \$100 gift in 1958. The \$26 million gift that the family provided in 1995 to build Buntrock Commons was, at the time, the largest single gift ever made to any Lutheran college in the United States. The Buntrocks were ardent supporters of many St. Olaf initiatives, including the Institute for Freedom and Community; Regents Hall of Natural and Mathematical Sciences; and academic programs, financial aid, and operations.

"Dean leaves an indelible mark on St. Olaf. As a regent since 1972, he challenged us to be bold and future-oriented," St. Olaf President Susan Rundell Singer says. "My heart is heavy with loss and filled with gratitude for the remarkable and transformative life of Dean Buntrock."

The college awarded Buntrock the first-ever Founders Medal last fall in honor of his role as a "modern founder" whose support will have a lasting impact on generations of Oles.

"The Founders Medal recognizes individuals whose extraordinary contributions have significantly advanced the college's mission and improved the lives and outcomes of St. Olaf students today and for centuries to come," Rundell Singer told the students, faculty, staff, alumni, regents, and community members who gathered for a special Founders Day chapel service on November 6 where the award was presented.

As she bestowed Buntrock with the medal, Rundell Singer announced that the college renamed the Institute for Freedom and Community in his honor. Established at St. Olaf in 2014, the Buntrock Institute for Freedom and Community encourages free inquiry and meaningful debate of important political and social issues among students, faculty, and the general public. The Buntrock Institute sponsors a range of programming opportunities each year to further cultivate civil discourse within the context of the liberal arts.

Professor of Political Science Chris Chapp, the Morrison Family Director of the Buntrock Institute for Freedom and Community, notes that it's a valuable campus resource for students, faculty, and staff.

"One of the most rewarding things about serving as director is seeing the different ways the Buntrock Institute helps students grow into civic leaders," Chapp says. "From students inspired to take a more active civic role in their community to students learning to engage and collaborate across political differences, the work of the Buntrock Institute clearly leaves a positive imprint on our student community. They leave St. Olaf more civically prepared, more nuanced in their political thought, and better equipped to be leaders in a complex world."

Buntrock was born on June 6, 1931, to Rudy Buntrock and Lillian Hustad Buntrock. He grew up in a small South Dakota farm town, where he learned about business and community working in his father's implement dealership and hauling grain. He attended St. Olaf with his two siblings, taking a break to serve in the Korean War and to manage the family business when his father was ill. After his service, he came back to St. Olaf to finish his degree and graduate in 1955. Upon graduation, he married his first wife, **Elizabeth Joanne "B.J." Huizenga '55**, and took over his in-laws' small garbage disposal business. He developed it in the decades that followed, co-founding what became North America's largest waste disposal company, Waste Management, Inc., and leading it as chair and CEO until 1997.

Buntrock was the recipient of the Horatio Alger Award, an honor given to those who overcome significant adversity to achieve success through perseverance and hard work. Upon receiving the award in 1996, he noted that "Education is the greatest gift we can give our youth. It gives them the tools they need to carve out and direct their careers and achieve whatever



Dean Buntrock '55 was awarded the inaugural St. Olaf Founders Medal at a special Founders Day chapel service in November 2025. Buntrock and his wife, Rosemarie, are pictured above with the medal, flanked by President Susan Rundell Singer and members of the St. Olaf Board of Regents. PHOTOS BY STEVEN GARCIA '20

goals they set for themselves. I was fortunate to have parents who valued education and made it central to my life. I hope that I can encourage today's youth to value their education as well."

He is survived by his wife of more than 40 years, Rosemarie Nuzzo Buntrock; daughters Dana Buntrock (Leroy Howard), Margot Buntrock Weinstein (Gary Weinstein), and Charley Buntrock Zeches (Robert Zeches); granddaughters Emily Aronson Weinstein (Jason Aronson), Amanda Kirsten (Jason), Kate Weinstein, Aster Zeches, Devon Zeches, and Genevieve Zeches; and great-grandchildren Nina Aronson and Dean Aronson. He was preceded in death by his siblings, **Clayton Buntrock '57** and **Joyce Buntrock '54**. 🦁

**Karen Buchwald Wright '74**, a business leader and philanthropist, has died at age 71. Born on the Fourth of July, Wright embraced a deep affinity for America's founding — and especially for George Washington, becoming a major supporter of his historic Virginia home, Mount Vernon. By happy coincidence, she was born in the Ohio town of the same name. After completing her St. Olaf education in 1974, Wright worked for several firms before joining the company her father founded, Ariel Corporation, a world leader in the design and manufacturing of natural gas compressors. Rising through its ranks while raising her children, Wright became its CEO and president in 2001.



In 2009 Wright founded The Ariel Foundation, an organization that focused its philanthropy on enhancing the quality of life in Mount Vernon by supporting education, parks, and the arts. With an outpouring of generosity and leadership, Wright set about revitalizing her beloved hometown.

"I've been really lucky," Wright said at the time. "I'm the second generation to lead a successful business, and I've been able to take it to the next level. It's the right thing to do to give back and make it possible for other people to have these opportunities."

As a student of St. Olaf's Paracollege (forerunner to the Center for Integrative Studies), Wright explored a wide range of interests and created her own ethology (animal behavior) major. Taking biology, psychology, and self-designed courses, as well as spending a semester in Asia, she graduated in just two-and-a-half years hoping to become "a Jane Goodall." While she ultimately went into the family business, Wright noted that ethology remained a lifelong interest.

Her passion and commitment to St. Olaf College led Wright to make two impactful gifts that reflected her desire to ensure that future generations of Oles had a solid understanding of the events and philosophies that embraced civil discourse and shaped Western civilization. In 2011 she provided a \$1 million gift to support the college's Great Conversation Program (now known as the Enduring Questions Program), and in 2015 she provided a second \$1 million gift to support the college's newly established cross-disciplinary Institute for Freedom and Community. Wright was particularly taken with the institute's goal of promoting civil discourse in a democracy, noting at the time, "Civil discourse is one of the most important aspects of a civil society." Wright was also a contributing member of the St. Olaf Fund Leadership Circle.

Her philanthropy also extended across the nation: she supported many institutions that embraced the principles of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and free markets. She was a respected voice on energy issues, and served on numerous national and local boards, including Kenyon College and Knox County Foundation, among others.

She is survived by her husband, Tom Rastin; sons Alex (Libby), Andy (Jenn), and Sam (Tate); her mother, Maureen Buchwald; daughter-in-law, Katie; grandchildren, Evie, Lark, Annabelle, Frances, Sloane, Capri, and Remi; and a brother, Kurt (Heide). She was preceded in death by her son Hunter; her father, James; and in youth by her brother, Philip.



**Kristine Meyers McTaggart '76** is retired, and has written *A Window in the Wall: Devotional Musings for Believers and Those Who Want to Be*. Last fall she was interviewed on the podcast *Outlaw Radio with Zach Adams* about her book, her faith, and her life story (including her time at St. Olaf). ■ **James Egdahl Loken '77** writes, "Fifty years after a life-shaping experience on the Middle East Semester, members of the 1975-76 trip gathered for a grace-filled, meaningful reunion hosted by **Steven Fox '77**. ① Attending in person were **Blake Grangaard '76**, Sonya Forseth (Luther College), **Steve Anderson-Hermann '77**, **Jean Aaro '76**, **Maggie Fischer Isaacson '76**, **Elizabeth Loken '77**, **Harry Kampert '78**, **Jim Egdahl Loken**, **Paul McIntyre '78**, **Steven Fox**, and Associate Professor Emeritus of Religion **William Poehlmann**, the faculty advisor for the original group of 20 students. The group shared slides, stories, and vivid recollections of their semester and January Term abroad, and dined on classic Middle Eastern food. The conversations revealed just how profoundly that transformative experience has shaped our lives — deepening faith, broadening worldviews, forging lifelong friendships, and re-affirming the enduring impact of cross-cultural learning half a century later. Those who were unable to attend in person

## 1970s

**Charles Billington '70** was a featured presenter and speaker at the Professional Football Researchers Association annual convention in St. Paul last July, where he spoke about his book, *The 1963 Chicago Bears: George Halas & The Road to the NFL Championship*. ■ **Richard Ferguson '74**, a now-retired civil engineer, was selected for the City of Pepper Pike's Road, Infrastructure, and Safety Committee in the Cleveland metro area. ■ **Gary Briggle '75** writes, "Since our unforgettable 50th Reunion last spring, I've been busy with a variety of projects that call upon my fields of expertise. [This includes] directing *Chosen As Mine* at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in LaCrosse; teaching in the Wesley Balk Institute for singer-actor training; performing in *Glensheen, the Musical* at the History Theater, and in the title role of Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* for Frank Theatre; and producing various concerts and the premiere of *All in Time* for Raison d'Etre Opera as executive director. I'm about to open my production of *The Yeomen of the Guard* for the Gilbert & Sullivan Very Light Opera Company, and then will be preparing to have my right hip replaced! It's been a deeply traumatic and sorrowful time in our Whittier neighborhood of South Minneapolis, but we are persevering, peacefully protesting the activities of ICE in our community, and doing our best to take care of our neighbors." ■



**Nancy Gelle '77** has passed away at age 70. The daughter of **Jane Jacobson Gelle '54** and Robert "Bob" Gelle, the longtime St. Olaf men's basketball coach and athletic director, Nancy Gelle grew up with her two brothers and sister in Northfield and enrolled in the St. Olaf nursing program after graduating from Northfield High School. She said that growing up as a coach's daughter made her comfortable with uncertainty and leading teams, and she credited her mother, a teacher, with teaching her to have patience and acceptance.

After graduating, Gelle immediately took a job in oncology at Park Nicollet Methodist Hospital, in St. Louis Park, Minn. There she established her legacy as a leader in hospice and palliative care during her 44-year career. Gelle was beloved by her nurses, social workers, and staff as a mentor whose door was always open and who provided reliably calm leadership. She was proud of her work with the Park Nicollet Foundation, starting the Growing through Grief program that offered in-school support to K-12 students coping with the death of a loved one. She joined the Park Nicollet Foundation Board in 2022 and served as its chair from 2024 to her passing.

Gelle was interviewed for *St. Olaf Magazine's* 2006 cover story "On the Front Lines: The 50th anniversary of the St. Olaf Nursing Department," where she reflected on the spirit of caring she learned in her college religion courses, which were key in preparing her for her life's work. "We had wonderful, thought-provoking conversations about spirituality in these religion classes. [In hospice and palliative care], the two most important questions we ask individuals are: 'What do you hope for?' and 'What do you fear?' The process of dying is frightening. When we have a difficult patient situation [or] an ethical dilemma, I feel prepared," noted Gelle, who exemplified the holistic and thoughtful approach to health care for which St. Olaf nurses are known. During her tenure at Park Nicollet and HealthPartners, Gelle was repeatedly recognized for her impact with patients and leadership of the caregivers of these programs, receiving numerous excellence awards. The Nancy Gelle Room is dedicated in her honor in the Methodist Hospital Oncology Unit.

Gelle was preceded in death by her parents. She is survived by her siblings **Mark Gelle '76** (**Claudia Miller '80**), **Fredric Gelle '81** (Debra Gelle), and **Susan Gelle Nelson '83** (**Scott Nelson '83**); nine nieces and nephews, **Andrea Gelle '07** (**Moriah Novacinski '14**), **Matthew Nelson '09** (**Jessica Levin Nelson '09**), **Maren Gelle Henderson '10** (**Paul Henderson '11**), **Jessica Nelson Burns '11** (Jacob Burns), **Elizabeth Gelle Huppertz '12** (Mike Huppertz), **Nathan Gelle '15**, **Molly Nelson Britton '15** (**Jared Britton '15**), **Hannah Gelle Biedscheid '15** (Luke Biedscheid), and Amy Gelle Heraly (Thomas Heraly); and 14 grand nieces and nephews.

were **Marcia Fastenau Imse '76** and **Bucky Beach '78**, who joined [the reunion] via Zoom, while **Linda Svitak '77** and **Claire Jenkins '77** were part of the email conversation and catch-up. **Maggie Bucka Bauer '76** and **Joanne Kuemmerlin-McLean '76** were dealing with health issues and could not attend, and four members have passed away — **Caroljean Pint Coventree '78**, **Ernie Pallme '77**, **Vicki Bailey '77**, and **Scott Massie '78**. They were missed.” ■ **Mark Brauer '79** writes, “After retiring and moving to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, for two years, my wife and I have moved to Buenos Aires. We plan to spend the next two years here, then off to Spain.” ■ **Vivian Raits Solomon '79** writes, “Nine St. Olaf alums from several classes met for an awe-inspiring week of helicopter skiing in the Canadian Rockies.” ❶ **Oles Margit Donhowe '79**, **Mitch Long '77**, **David Matson '12**, **Paul Matson '76**, **Tim Matson '88**, **Doug Otapalik '79**, and **Doug Soderberg '76** joined Solomon on the adventure.

## 1980s

**Kari Bjorhus '80** shares that “24 participants out of the 32 in the 1979–80 Global Semester gathered together in St. Paul on October 16 to renew friendships and share photos and memories of our life-changing experiences in Egypt, India, Taiwan, and Japan, with adventures in between.” ❷ Candles were lit for our leaders **Fred Stoutland '54** and **Judy Anderson Stoutland '54**, and our classmates **Tim Dockry '82**, **Tim Guth '80**, and **Dan Rostollan '79**, who had since passed away. For many, it was the first time we’d seen each other since that incredible journey.” ■ **Pamela Cooper Thompson '80** writes, “In December 1976, our Kildahl freshman corridor had a progressive Christmas dinner, with a different course in each room. We had Christmas dinners the next three years while on campus. After graduation, six of us continued the annual tradition. This photo is from the 50th dinner held in December 2025.” ❸ Pictured (L–R): **Tom Vick '80**, **David Jorstad '77**, **Janis Clay '80**, **DeDe Hokanson Jorstad '78**, **Pam Cooper Thompson '80**, **Jeff Thompson '80**, **Paul and Margy Sather Peterson '80**, **Annie**

## Navy Researcher Kathryn Wahl '87 Receives Award for Breakthroughs in Interfacial Science

**Kathryn Anderson Wahl '87**, a senior researcher at the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory (NRL), has been awarded the 2025 E.O. Hulburt Annual Science Award for pioneering research that has advanced the scientific understanding of adhesion, lubrication, and nanoscale contact mechanics.

The Hulburt Award is one of NRL’s highest honors and recognizes significant scientific contributions by a civilian researcher at the laboratory. Wahl received the award for her groundbreaking work investigating interfacial contacts and processes associated with tribology, nano mechanics, and biofouling, which has improved understanding of how materials interact, degrade, and adhere under real-world conditions.

Her research integrated optical spectroscopy with tribological instrumentation, enabling scientists to directly observe chemical and structural changes occurring at sliding interfaces. This capability helped clarify how layered lubricants behave and degrade under stress.

“These techniques allowed us to see what was happening inside sliding contacts in ways that hadn’t been possible before,” Wahl says. “Much of the progress we’ve made came from collaborations with extremely talented colleagues across the Laboratory and the broader scientific community.”

Wahl’s work also helped establish new experimental methods for studying nanoscale adhesion and contact mechanics, including the development of a nanoscale Johnson-Kendall-Roberts (JKR) adhesion method that is now widely used to introduce students and researchers to nanoscale contact stiffness phenomena. Beyond tribology, Wahl’s interdisciplinary research has significantly advanced the understanding of biofouling and barnacle adhesion, an area critical to naval operations. By combining chemical, biological, and materials science approaches, her team helped reveal the chemical and mechanical mechanisms that enable barnacles to attach to surfaces underwater.

The work has informed the design of next-generation underwater adhesives and environmentally friendly antifouling technologies, with potential applications for naval platforms. Over more than a decade, Wahl led collaborative research programs bringing together scientists from multiple NRL divisions to investigate barnacle adhesion chemistry, biomechanics, and surface interactions.

“Underwater adhesion has always been a challenge, and it’s been overcome because of Dr. Wahl’s work,” says Capt. Randy Cruz, the commanding officer of NRL. “This is a very distinguished and well-deserved award.”



**Bonus Kuntze '78**, **Lora Blood Edwards '80**, **Dori Petersen '80**, and **Cheryl Wolff Wuthrich '80**. ■ **Stephen Hage '80** was among the eight Oles who were involved in the Gilbert & Sullivan Very Light Opera Company’s fall 2025 production of *Iolanthe*. ❹ Pictured (L–R): **Maya Trujillo Gitch '21**,

**Alexander Gaya '12**, **Lara Trujillo '91**, **Carl Schoenborn '97**, **Timothy Kelly '19**, **Charlotte Smith '18**, **Jean Orbison Van Heel '80**, and **Stephen Hage '80**. ■ **Diane Maas Crockett '82** has been named National Distinguished Principal for the state of Alaska by the National Association of Elementary School Principals. For

the past 12 years, Crockett has served as principal of Brevig Mission School, a rural pre-K–12 institution in the Bering Strait School District, serving the local, majority-Indigenous Iñupiaq community. Crockett previously taught middle and high school for seven years and was an elementary school teacher at Brevig Mission for nine years. She and her husband, a Lutheran pastor, have lived in the Arctic for more than 30 years. ■ **Anne Garrett '84** is excited to join the advancement team at the University of Utah Spencer Fox Eccles School of Medicine, raising funds for research, education, and programs in the Departments of Obstetrics and Gynecology and Pediatrics. ■



# On the Shelf



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

*Torgar, Santa, and the Marshmallow King* (Beaver's Pond Press, July 2025) by Merrill Morse '70

*Smoke and Tailings: An Environmental History of Butte and Anaconda, Montana, 1880-1930 (Mining & Society Series)* (University of Nevada Press, Oct. 2025) by Fredric Quivik '71

*A Window in the Wall: Devotional Musings for Believers and Those Who Want to Be* (Whitehall Books, July 2025) by Kristine Meyers McTaggart '76

*Before the Fed: JP Morgan, America's Lender of Last Resort* (Cambridge University Press, Oct. 2025) by Jon Moen '79

*Hush: True Stories of Pregnancy-Related Death and Near-Miss in the U.S.A.* (Kokanee Creek Press, Oct. 2024) by Anne Garrett '84

*Mutt and Jack's Extraordinary Adventure* (Authorhouse, Nov. 2022) by Jodi Dickey '86

*The Professional's Guide to Strength and Conditioning, Second Edition* (BYU Books, 2025) by Thomas Nesser '93

*Fostering School-Family Relationships in Multicultural Communities (Multicultural Education Series)* (Teachers College Press, Sept. 2025) by Matthew Knoester '96

*Powerful Consequences: Enhanced Wars, Book One and Book Two* (Independently Published, Dec. 2025) by Jim Struble '02

*Manga's First Century: How Creators and Fans Made Japanese Comics, 1905-1989* (University of California Press, Oct. 2025) by Andrea Horbinski '07

*How Russia Got That Way: Russian History and Why It Matters* (Russian Life Books, 2025) by Griffin Edwards '17

*Women Therapists on Healing: 11 Personal Essays about Overcoming Trauma* (Acorn Publishing, Jan. 2026) by Larissa Miranda '19



Le Ann Hiddleson Finger '85 has been promoted to assistant tournament director at the Desert Mountain Club in Scottsdale, Ariz., where she manages more than 30 member tournaments and championships. ❶ In June 2025, Finger was elected president of the Southwest Section PGA, the first female president in its 67-year history. ■ Kari Hartwig '85 writes, "We recently had a two-day gathering of some of the women from the 1983-84 Intercultural Honor House who were also active participants in the Zebra Patch, a multicultural performance group on campus. We were also connected via video with Amber Stime '85 in California and Saholy Razafinarivo-Schoreisz '85 in Switzerland." ❷ Pictured (L-R) are faculty advisor Charlotte (Shoonie) Donhowe Hartwig '57, Marilyn McClain '85, Yvette Turner '84, Lisa Ellis '84, Jill Schwendeman '84, Brenda Adams '84, Lisa Larges '85, and Kari Hartwig '85. ■ Linnea Visness Bradshaw '86 writes, "Five Oles are celebrating 40 years of Christmas parties and more than 40 years of friendship! It all started with a white elephant party in a Mellby dorm room in 1984, and we have never stopped getting together regularly and exchanging 'precious' gifts. Pictured (L-R) at a recent gathering in Delano, Minn. are Dan Christian '87, Julie Meyer '85, Jane Murray Hemingway '86, Linnea Visness Bradshaw '86, and Mark Hemingway '85. ❸ There have been many others in the group throughout the years, but despite moves and job changes, the five of us are still going strong." ■ Tim Peterson '87 is in a new position as the Ann and Irving Norry Curator of Contemporary Art at Memorial Art Gallery, an encyclopedic art museum affiliated with the University of Rochester (New York). ■ Arne Flaten '89 ❹ currently is dean of the Louisiana State University College of Art and Design, and the President's Distinguished Professor of Art History. Before joining LSU in 2025, Flaten was head of the Rueff School of Design, Art, and Performance and professor of Art History at Purdue University.

He holds a Ph.D. in Italian Renaissance Art History and publishes on a wide range of topics. More importantly, he has been married to Rebecca Rhodes Flaten '89 since 1992, and they have three daughters: Erika, Natasha, and Lara. ■ Brenda Alexander McCormick '89 ❺ was named one of the Top Women Chief Financial Officers of 2026 by the Women We Admire professional organization. McCormick is the senior vice president and chief financial officer at Children's Minnesota, one of the largest pediatric health systems in the U.S. and the only health system in Minnesota to provide care exclusively to children. McCormick has nearly 30 years of experience in finance leadership roles across public corporations and not-for-profits. At Children's Minnesota, she has led several significant initiatives and helped guide the organization's recent strategic plan. She is also a member of the St. Olaf Board of Regents. McCormick majored in economics and Asian studies at St. Olaf, and earned an MBA in finance from the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management. ■ Eric Rohren '89 has recently been appointed dean of the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center. In this new role, he will be leading the medical school, graduate medical education, and the Texas Tech Physicians practice throughout the El Paso region.

## 1990s

Kara Wagner Sherer '91, who was elected bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester, New York, on February 24, 2024, was ordained and consecrated five months later. ❻ In attendance was her "Quad," all 1991 Oles (pictured, L-R): Loretta Kenney '91, Louise Lystig Fritchie '91, and Kari Urberg-Carlson '91. ■ Erika Kroetch Campbell '93 has joined Faegre Drinker's Private Client Group, bringing her experience as a former financial advisor and managing partner at a boutique estate-planning law firm. Experienced in administering matters relating to seniors and people with





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disabilities, Campbell assists clients with powers of attorney, living wills, long-term care, wills, estate planning, probate, and administering trusts and estates. ■ **Randi Wing Arnar '93** has launched R. Wing Travel, a boutique agency specializing in luxury river cruises and immersive land adventures. While she designs journeys for everyone, she's particularly passionate about empowering women to step out of their comfort zones and connect deeply across cultures and borders. ❶ Based in St. Paul, Arnar is ready to help clients navigate the globe with intention, curiosity, and a hearty Um! Yah! Yah! ■ **Kristen Anderson '94** gathered recently with friends in DeKalb, Ill., for fellowship and friendship. Pictured with Kristen (at right) ❷ are **Rick Rexroth '94**, **Solveig Erickson '94**, and **Kristen Ware Walter '94**. ■ **Timothy Cotts '94** has been promoted to clinical professor of internal medicine and pediatrics at the University of Michigan Medical School after serving as director of the University's Adult Congenital Heart Disease program since 2007. ❸ Cotts is also the team cardiologist for University of Michigan athletics. ■ **Daniel Donovan '95** was promoted to partner at Faegre Drinker, an international law firm providing litigation, regulatory, and business services to clients ranging from Fortune 100 companies to start-ups. Donovan works for private clients out of the firm's Minneapolis office. ■ **Jeff 'Cisco' Rau '96** was named as lead inventor on a patent granted by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and issued in September 2025 to The Walt Disney Company. Rau led design and development of a technology change confidence rating system used by Disney's IT shared services department to help identify changes that need more scrutiny and awareness, and lead to fewer issues for the guests, fans, and customers of the Disney brand portfolio. ■ **Amy Weisgram Engstrom '96** has joined the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community's legal team as deputy general legal counsel. ■

**Alison Wood '96**, a science teacher at Denfeld High School in Duluth, ❹ was chosen for the Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching Research Fellowship. She is one of only 14 U.S. K-12 educators selected for this highly competitive award during the 2026 school year. The Fulbright award enabled Wood to conduct her research in Greece for four months during spring semester 2026. For her Fulbright Inquiry Project, she studied how schools in Athens and throughout Greece incorporate citizen science and outdoor data collection into their curriculum. Citizen science experiences have been proven to encourage critical thinking, foster a connection to the outdoors, and increase student agency regarding local environmental actions. Wood worked with teachers who have used citizen science projects in their classrooms, observing and learning alongside the students. After testing out the lessons in Minnesota and Greek classrooms, she plans to run professional development sessions introducing the newly developed tools and sample lessons to teachers in Duluth, as well as sharing the materials with phenology education networks in the U.S. Wood began her teaching career in environmental education, exploring and teaching in diverse locations such as Catalina Island Marine Institute in California and Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center on the North Shore of Lake Superior. Since 2001, she has taught a variety of science courses for the Duluth Public Schools, including biology, human anatomy and physiology, earth science, and plant science. ■ **Calvin Vui-Leong Chong '97** has been appointed as the new principal of Sabah Theological Seminary in Malaysia. ❺ "As I begin this new chapter, I remain thankful for the formation,

support, and experiences I received during my time at St. Olaf," he says. "The values and education I gained there have significantly shaped my journey and continue to guide me in my responsibilities. May God's blessings be upon the college and its community." ■ **Jill Armstrong Courtney '97** graduated with her doctorate in instructional design leadership from Franklin University on January 11, 2026. She also contributed a chapter titled "AI-Driven Decision Support Systems for Transforming Employee Engagement and Training in Business" in the book *AI-Driven Knowledge Management Assets: Strategies for the Modern Business Landscape*. ■ **Siri Hansen Kabrick '97** ❻ earned a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) from the University of Minnesota in May 2025. ■ **Andrew Peters '98** is the associate director of music at Trinity English Lutheran Church in Fort Wayne, Indiana. ❼ He directs two children's choirs, one handbell choir, and shares service playing and chancel choir conducting responsibilities with Director of Music Robert Hobby. He also teaches organ at Purdue University. ■ **Ryan Connolly '99** has founded Ephemeral Love, a new chamber choir based in London. Singing primarily contemporary choral music, the ensemble has already performed pieces from the St. Olaf choral tradition at recent concerts in central London. Four concerts are prepared for 2026.

## 2000S

**Sarah Taylor Peck '04** 1 recently was named lead pastor to serve at Broadway Christian Church in Columbia, Missouri. She comes to Broadway from Community Christian Church in Canton, Ohio. ■

**Stephanie Nevilles Henry '06** is featured in Park Square Theatre's LAB Series, an initiative that supports artists in the development of new theatrical work. The Minneapolis-based LAB Series provides time, space, and collaborative resources for artists to explore works in progress and experiment with form, structure, and storytelling. 2 A composer, pianist, and musical theater artist, Henry's work centers on original music-driven theater that blends piano, voice, and narrative, often exploring themes of identity, belonging, and transformation.



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## 2010S

**Alexandra Garrett '12** writes, "For 2025 to 2027, Vermont Governor Phil Scott appointed me the Revolutionary War Historian for Vermont's 250th Anniversary Commission. My roles include promoting commemorative events around the state, connecting researchers and organizations with funding opportunities, and serving as an academic resource to the public regarding the 250th anniversary of our nation's founding." ■

**Nick Stumolanger '15** was appointed an assistant mayor in the City of St. Paul by newly elected Mayor Kaohly Her. 3 In this role he will oversee housing, economic vibrancy, and infrastructure, and comes most recently from running Mayor Her's successful campaign and the Minnesota House of Representatives DFL Caucus. ■

**Megan Jekot '16** was appointed legislative aide to St. Paul City Council President Rebecca Noecker. 4 Jekot supports the council president and serves Ward 2 constituents, from the West Side to Downtown, Summit Hill, and West 7th Street, as well as residents across St. Paul. Her work also supports Noecker's priorities of building accessible and effective government, fighting for fairness, expanding housing options, investing in youth, creating safe and welcoming neighborhoods, and fostering a thriving local economy. ■

**Katie Maxwell '17** 5 received a master of environmental management degree with dual concentrations in economics and policy and energy and environment from Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment in May 2025. Maxwell demonstrated her ability to research and deliver clear policy insights, co-authoring "WOTUS Over Time: An Examination of Potential Impacts on Wetlands/Streams over Different Definitions of Waters of the United States (WOTUS)" for the Environmental Policy Innovation Center. She also provided technical assistance on an environmental justice case through the Duke Environmental Law and Policy Clinic, and attended COP28 in Dubai as part of Duke University's U.N. Climate Change Negotiations Practicum. Maxwell recently started a new position as a policy associate on the clean electricity team at Fresh Energy, which has brought her back to the Twin Cities.



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table book of the many landscapes and stories from our travels. This book has been crafted to represent exactly what Global was: an incredible adventure of 20 lucky, privileged, and eternally grateful Oles — all through the lens of the landscapes I captured on my camera and accompanied by a handful of unfiltered stories that I think show the reality of what a program like Global Semester is. And in doing so I think I've landed with a photo book that is as human as anything I've ever made. It's called *Their Still Hear & So Our You* (the misspelling is intentional — the title otherwise would feel far too earnest)." ■

**Aerin O'Malley '22** writes, "My podcast, *Classically Training*, has officially launched with YourClassical MPR and American Public Media Group. 6 The podcast is for people who are new to classical music and need a place to start. I was able to produce this podcast after winning a Kling Innovation Grant in 2023 that allowed me to produce the pilot episode. After winning another round of funding, I was able to finish an entire season, which can now be found anywhere you get your podcasts, on the YourClassical MPR site, or watched on YouTube." ■

**Cees Postema '22** 7 writes, "I recently had the joy of working on the field for the Orange Bowl College Football playoff game, for which I sold tickets and suites to Miami fans and businesses." Postema also went on to work the College Football Playoff National Championship. 🐾



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# Ole Cryptography Revisited

Congratulations to the more than 150 Oles who successfully solved the final cryptography puzzle in the fall issue of the *St. Olaf Magazine*! Your ingenuity and determination made quick work of a tough challenge — we're hard-pressed to think of a better way to embody the spirit of "Oles Can, Oles Will." We were particularly impressed by some of our youngest puzzle solvers (see their work below)!

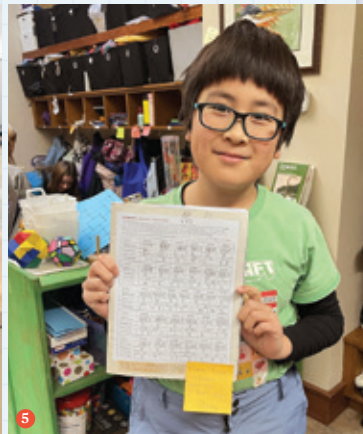
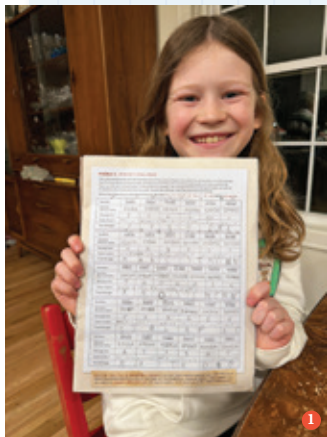
And for those who didn't quite crack the code, here is the decoded message:  
**Fram, Fram, Kristmenn, Krossmenn, St. Olaf stay strong.**

For this issue, we have asked **Jessica Schmidt '26** to return once more before graduation to create a new puzzle. Here are the instructions for her latest challenge:

You will first need to find and assemble the letters that form a key word. Each of the eight letters you will need for the word are hidden in a very golden way on pages throughout the magazine. After you unscramble this key word, you will use it to decipher the message below from President Susan Rundell Singer, using a clue that can be found in her letter on page 2.

**"MEX MEOCYMHVJ CSKGG GSK XWXF TGWNFFW,  
ZNM AZUV XFX VLSOKC MH EJL EYCLMMFOG."**

Once you have the answer, email it to us at [magazine@stolaf.edu](mailto:magazine@stolaf.edu). If your answer is correct, you will be entered into a drawing to receive a St. Olaf-themed prize. Submissions are due by August 1 — good luck to all!



Some of the younger cryptographers who correctly solved our previous puzzle challenge include: ① Freyja Dobie (daughter of Kevin Dobie '04), ② Abdallah Yahyaoui (son of Leslie Taylor '01), ③ Nora Beron (daughter of Sarah Steingas Beron '04), ④ Francis Steffens (son of Andrea Giorgi Steffens '08), and ⑤ Leo Yang (student at Prairie Creek Community School in Northfield).



St. Olaf Alumni and Family Travel helps you be a culturally competent, global learner through adventures alongside like-minded travelers. A few upcoming programs are listed below.

**GERMANY: MARKETS, MUSIC, AND MERRIMENT**  
November 24–Dec. 4, 2026

Led by Jerry and Teresa Elsbernd

**GALÁPAGOS ENCOUNTER**  
Aboard *National Geographic Endeavour II*

February 19–28, 2027

Hosted by Heidi Quiram

**GREECE**

April 12–28, 2027

Led by Jim and Donna May

**THEATER IN LONDON**

April 9–18, 2027

Led by Dona Werner Freeman '80 and Marty Freeman

**ALASKA'S INSIDE PASSAGE**

Aboard *National Geographic Quest*

June 26–July 3, 2027

Hosted by Megan Larrabee Nelson '86

**JAPAN: DYNASTIES AND DIAMONDS**

October 12–25, 2027

Led by Kelly Mahlum

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[stolaf.edu/travel](http://stolaf.edu/travel)



**Future Oles**

Jeremy Gustafson '08 and Alissa Carsten, a daughter, Shirley Ruth **1**  
 Rachel Pierce Landsteiner '08 and Benjamin Landsteiner '07, a son, Warren **2**  
 Greta Fure '09 and Charlie Werdin, a daughter, Annika **3**  
 Chee Lee '09 and Jonathan Lasfargeas, a son, Lucien **4**  
 Lou Fish-Sadin '12 and Chris Cornelius '12, a son, Wilke Brian  
 Ellen Hawley '13 and Anton Hesse '15, a daughter, Evelynnn **5**  
 Catherine Haines Paro '13 and Ben Paro '13, a son, Ember Lumi **6**  
 Katie Burk Webb '13 and Dan Webb, a son, Adam  
 Shannon Zappa '13 and Sam Daly '14, a daughter, Molly **7**  
 Joel Jaeger '14 and Julie Kubelka, a son, Aaron **8**  
 Aubrey Tyler '14 and Dan Malecha '13, a daughter, Lillian  
 Alyssa Hare Bentsen '15 and Geoff Bentsen '15, a son, Everett Jack **9**  
 Anisha Chada '15 and Steven Wett '15, a daughter, Sonali **10**  
 Payne McMillan Vermillion '15 and Quinn Vermillion, a son, Solaris **11**  
 Alex Lebens Carlson '16 and Nate Carlson '15, a daughter, Joanna **12**  
 Sarah DeVries Alexander '17 and Addison Alexander, a daughter, Miriam **13**  
 Sarah Bauer Edwards '17 and Griffin Edwards '17, a son, Gideon David





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### Weddings

- Kari Bottin Hughes '04 and Justin Hughes, July 26, 2025 1
- Shannon Zappa '13 and Samuel Daly '14, Aug. 8, 2024 2
- Nancy Vang '14 and Ian Tsang '14, Sept. 14, 2024 3
- Natalia Romero Arbeláez '15 and Josh Januschka, July 26, 2025 4
- Annika Awad Draper '18 and Garrett Draper, June 14, 2025 5
- Annaleah Magnuson McGlasson '18 and Rowan McGlasson, Sept. 27, 2025 6
- Alison Curry Miller '19 and Alex Miller, Jan. 3, 2026 7
- Meredith Moore Hogan '20 and Daniel Hogan '18, May 31, 2025 8
- Sofia Reed van Dover '20 and Chris van Dover '20, Aug. 23, 2025 9
- Abby Sonnek Johnson '21 and Kris Johnson '21, Oct. 4, 2025 10
- Kavya Devgun Maier '21 and Daniel Maier, Sept. 27, 2025 11
- Maria Peterson '21 and Rebecca Crail Peterson '21, Aug. 16, 2025 12
- Emily Helstrom Ravoire '21 and Vincent Ravoire, Aug. 8, 2025 13
- Dani Palmen Rueda '21 and Raul Reuda, May 25, 2025 14
- Maria Tischer Rubin '21 and Maxwell Rubin '21, Aug. 9, 2025 15
- Lauryn Robberstad Salz '22 and Sean Salz '23, Sept. 6, 2025
- Sandra Gabel Malenke '23 and Robbie Malenke, Aug. 2, 2025 16
- Sophie Kushner Krupp '24 and Fenton Krupp '24, July 11, 2025 17



13



12



14



15



16



17

## Deaths

- Helen "Dorothy" Houg Schweigert '45, Grand Rapids, Minn., June 25, 2025  
 Barbara Benson Taft '46, Eden Prairie, Minn., Jan. 27, 2026  
 Inez Gunem Abraham '47, Houston, Minn., Sept. 18, 2025  
 Shirley Erickson Barkuloo '48, Worthington, Minn., May 7, 2025  
 Kathleen Cordes Drew '49, Osage, Iowa, Jan. 1, 2026  
 Andean Lowe Elvert '49, Bloomington, Minn., Jan. 9, 2026  
 Donna Brye Erdman '49, Wykoff, Minn., Jan. 22, 2026  
 Joan Nelson Bell '50, Plymouth, Minn., Oct. 26, 2025  
 Joan "Jo" Skouge Knutson '50, Mahtomedi, Minn., Jan. 15, 2026  
 Rosella "Rosie" Suby Nerem '50, Worthington, Minn., Dec. 4, 2025  
 Helen Marvick Ruohoniemi '50, St. Paul, Minn., Jan. 9, 2026  
 Robert "Bob" Dalen '51, Detroit Lakes, Minn., Dec. 12, 2025  
 \*Richard "Dick" Hilleren '51, Crosslake, Minn., Sept. 17, 2025  
 \*George Nelson '51, Fort Myers, Fla., Sept. 17, 2025  
 \*James "Jim" Bergum '52, Eden Prairie, Minn., Nov. 25, 2025  
 Mabel Larson Lokken '52, Sheldon, Iowa, Jan. 2, 2026  
 Shirley Lillehaugen Santoro '52, Maplewood, Minn., Oct. 2, 2025  
 \*Robert "Bob" Tengdin '52, Minneapolis, Nov. 9, 2025  
 James "Jim" Bjorge '53, Moorhead, Minn., Sept. 29, 2025  
 Carol Johnson de Castro '53, Eden Prairie, Minn., April 3, 2024  
 Solveig Anderson Halbakken '53, Fergus Falls, Minn., Nov. 25, 2025  
 James Hanson '53, Zumbrota, Minn., Jan. 14, 2026  
 Barbara Jansen Kittinger '53, Inver Grove Heights, Minn., May 10, 2025  
 Margaret Froiland Skibbe '53, Edina, Minn., Dec. 5, 2025  
 Sandra Berge Beckering '54, Edgerton, Minn., Sept. 14, 2025  
 \*Martin Bunge '54, Phoenix, July 16, 2025  
 Audrey Stolen Gilmore '54, Princeton, Minn., July 26, 2025  
 Lois Morken Houge '54, Burnsville, Minn., Dec. 4, 2025  
 Elaine Christopherson Pribble '54, Burnsville, Minn., Sept. 11, 2025  
 Marie Skramstad de Forest '55, Pierrefonds, Quebec, Canada, Aug. 8, 2025  
 Wendell "Wendy" Miller '55, Lake Bluff, Ill., Jan. 8, 2026  
 \*Karl "Dick" Olsen '55, Eden Prairie, Minn., Oct. 12, 2025  
 \*Lee Simso '55, Edina, Minn., Dec. 16, 2025  
 Barbara Bloomer '56, Sartell, Minn., Oct. 8, 2025  
 Robert "Bob" Flaten '56, Oak Park Heights, Minn., Dec. 21, 2025  
 Curtis Nordaune '56, Montevideo, Minn., Aug. 27, 2025  
 Bernard Von Wald '56, Forest Lake, Minn., Oct. 10, 2025  
 Angelyn "Ange" Albertson Akins '57, Arlington, Texas, Aug. 24, 2025  
 Grace Hendrickson Burggraf '57, Fosston, Minn., Jan. 1, 2026  
 Laurence "Larry" Graham '57, Anchorage, Alaska, Dec. 8, 2025  
 Carol Lauffs Gustason '57, Eden Prairie, Minn., Dec. 19, 2025  
 Audrey Redwing Holman '57, Camas, Wash., Oct. 15, 2025  
 Marjean Whitson Lenert '57, Springfield, Va., Aug. 3, 2025  
 Stanton Linden '57, Pullman, Wash., Jan. 13, 2026  
 Richard "Dick" Norman '57, Rochester, Minn., Nov. 21, 2025  
 Kathryn Skrukud Wright '57, Burlington, N.C., Oct. 28, 2025  
 \*Paul Engstrom '58, Blue Bell, Pa., Dec. 26, 2025  
 Catherine Sawatzky Erickson '58, St. Paul, Minn., Sept. 21, 2025  
 Rollen Halvorson '58, Alexandria, Minn., Dec. 22, 2025  
 Lon Helgen '58, St. Paul, Minn., Dec. 16, 2025  
 Cecilia Midthun Horner '58, Ames, Iowa, Jan. 22, 2026  
 George Jacobsen '58, Minneapolis, June 9, 2025  
 Jacquelyn "Jackie" Fink Sorenson '58, Anoka, Minn., Dec. 24, 2025  
 Harry "Oliver" Stoutland '58, Oak Ridge, Tenn., Jan. 3, 2026  
 Elwood Waters '58, Rockland, Maine, Oct. 1, 2025  
 Patrick "Pat" Corcoran '59, Oconomowoc, Wis., Feb. 9, 2026  
 Lois Nesseth '59, Minneapolis, Sept. 24, 2025  
 \*Clark Olsen '59, Minneapolis, Oct. 25, 2025  
 \*Jerome "Jerry" Rice '59, Taos, N.M., Oct. 22, 2025  
 Nina Christian Runck '59, Mankato, Minn., Sept. 1, 2025  
 \*Roy Bohrer '60, Austin, Texas, Oct. 2, 2025  
 Janet "Jan" Pederson Olson '60, Brewster, Mass., Sept. 18, 2025  
 \*Russell "Russ" Siegel '60, Lewisburg, W.Va., Sept. 15, 2025  
 Eleanor Marien Weyer '60, Hamilton, N.Y., Nov. 8, 2025  
 Gail Zinschlag Wold '60, West St. Paul, Minn., Dec. 14, 2025  
 Maren Hetland Brown '61, Syracuse, N.Y., Sept. 11, 2025  
 Orrin "Nick" Hegg '61, Brea, Calif., April 22, 2025  
 Joan "Joni" Hegstad Henning '61, River Falls, Wis., Jan. 12, 2026  
 Constance "Connie" Hochstein Johnson '61, Pequot Lakes, Minn., Oct. 17, 2025  
 Darlene Kripps Newton '61, Blandford, Mass., Nov. 8, 2025  
 \*Gerald "Jerry" Siverson '61, Maplewood, Minn., Dec. 4, 2025  
 \*Dennis Tollefson '61, Minnetonka, Minn., Aug. 22, 2025  
 Naomi "Dollie" Reppe Dickrell '62, Sheboygan, Wis., Dec. 10, 2025  
 Paul Eide '62, Scottsdale, Ariz., Jan. 29, 2026  
 Gerald Erickson '62, The Villages, Fla., Nov. 10, 2025  
 Sanford "Sandy" Freud '62, Brea, Calif., Jan. 13, 2026  
 Geraldine "Gerry" Throlson Haug '62, St. Cloud, Minn., Nov. 30, 2025  
 Virginia "Ginny" Schoenoff Jatnieks '62, Rothschild, Wis., Oct. 6, 2025  
 Mary Anderson Kingsley '62, Minneapolis, Sept. 12, 2025  
 Stanley "Stan" Kleven '62, Athens, Ga., Jan. 20, 2026  
 \*Ronald "Ron" Kuehl '62, Walnut Grove, Minn., Jan. 10, 2026  
 Stanley "Stan" Oppegard '62, Roseville, Calif., Oct. 22, 2025  
 Gerald "Jerry" Weiss '62, Santa Fe, N.M., Sept. 21, 2025  
 Judith Nyquist '63, King Ferry, N.Y., Feb. 2, 2026  
 Donald Simonson '63, Eaton, Colo., Sept. 17, 2025  
 Sandra "Sandy" Schjeldahl Starr '63, Minot, N.D., Dec. 10, 2025  
 Judith "Judy" Thompson '63, Anchorage, Alaska, July 25, 2025  
 Henry "Bill" Helgen '64, Marshalltown, Iowa, May 11, 2025  
 Karen "Kari" Lilleberg Goettsche '64, Arlington Heights, Ill., Jan. 2, 2026  
 \*Howard "Rolf" Hong '64, Rockport, Texas, Aug. 12, 2024  
 Jerold Johnstone '64, Huntington Beach, Calif., March 27, 2025  
 Melvin "Mel" Stone '64, Las Cruces, N.M., Oct. 2, 2025  
 \*David Taylor '64, Portland, Ore., Dec. 19, 2025  
 DeWayne Townsend '64, Minneapolis, July 2, 2024  
 \*David Bartsch '65, Rapid City, S.D., Aug. 29, 2025  
 Ann Kieffer Bragg '65, Osprey, Fla., Jan. 8, 2026  
 Bruce Fredrickson '65, Bigfork, Mont., Aug. 30, 2025  
 Nancy Bodach Hanson '65, Granger, Ind., Dec. 5, 2025  
 Karen Schultz Pyle '66, Brier, Wash., Nov. 6, 2025  
 Robert "Bob" Adams '67, Chippewa Falls, Wis., Dec. 9, 2025  
 Daniel "Dan" Johns '68, Kalispell, Mont., Sept. 3, 2025  
 \*Jeffrey "Jeff" Knupp '68, Madison, Wis., Oct. 19, 2025  
 Stanley "Stan" Olson '68, Minneapolis, Sept. 12, 2025  
 Frederick "Fred" Townsend '68, Alexandria, Minn., Oct. 19, 2025  
 James "Jim" Geistfeld '69, Spring Branch, Texas, Sept. 9, 2025  
 Owen Sorenson '69, St. Paul, Minn., July 8, 2025  
 \*James "Jim" Stensvaag '69, Estes Park, Colo., Dec. 29, 2025  
 Joan Horstmann Truax '69, Faribault, Minn., Nov. 1, 2025  
 Michael Young '69, Nisswa, Minn., Sept. 9, 2025  
 Jennifer Heikes Collins '70, Cloquet, Minn., Nov. 21, 2025  
 Lois Grandstrand Luedtke '70, Freeport, Ill., Sept. 18, 2025  
 Candace "Candy" McKanna '70, Portland, Ore., Feb. 7, 2026  
 Karen Soli '70, Sioux Falls, S.D., Sept. 6, 2025  
 Dale Buegel '72, Glendale, Wis., Oct. 21, 2025  
 \*Karl "Skip" Moe '72, Redlands, Calif., Aug. 28, 2025  
 \*Richard "Rick" Trinrud '72, Rock Island, Ill., Aug. 9, 2025  
 Ronald "Rosy" Bygness '73, Minneapolis, Nov. 13, 2025  
 Bonnie Grunde Hawk '73, Kirkwood, Mo., Sept. 17, 2025  
 LeRoy Sorenson '73, St. Paul, Minn., Dec. 4, 2025  
 Elaine Stowe Ingham '74, Fort Mill, S.C., Feb. 16, 2026  
 Karen Buchwald Wright '74, Mount Vernon, Ohio, Oct. 15, 2025  
 Paul Meberg '75, Pleasantville, N.Y., Dec. 27, 2025  
 Nikoline "Nika" Cleveland '76, Madrid, Spain, Nov. 26, 2025  
 Melinda Sandberg Zajac '76, Ontario, N.Y., Jan. 18, 2026  
 Nancy Gelle '77, Woodbury, Minn., Sept. 3, 2025  
 Edwin Wells '78, Rockford, Ill., Oct. 2, 2025  
 Richard O'Neill '79, Florissant, Mo., Dec. 26, 2025  
 David Potter '79, Round Rock, Texas, July 1, 2025  
 Stephen "Steve" Bauernfeind '80, Rosemount, Minn., Dec. 17, 2025  
 Thomas "Tom" Gunderson '82, Stillwater, Minn., Oct. 9, 2025  
 Paul Rohricht '84, Kutztown, Pa., Jan. 18, 2026  
 Elizabeth "Jane" Veldey '86, Bloomington, Minn., Oct. 26, 2025  
 David Devine '89, Baxter, Minn., Dec. 25, 2025  
 Kimberly Nagle Kusters '90, Leavenworth, Wash., Oct. 23, 2025  
 Anders Oftelie '96, St. Paul, Minn., Dec. 20, 2025  
 Peter Torstenson '05, Madison, Wis., Dec. 11, 2025

\*VETERAN

## Remembering Robert (Bob) Flaten '56

**Robert A. Flaten '56**, a retired United States Ambassador and recipient of the 2001 St. Olaf Distinguished Alumni Award, has died at the age of 91.

He was born on May 21, 1934, to Evelyn and **Arnold Wangensten Flaten '1922**. He grew up in Northfield and enrolled at St. Olaf in 1952, where he majored in mathematics, was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, and participated in athletics and the ROTC program. In 1954 he attended the University of Oslo's International Summer School and then motorcycled through Europe with a friend, witnessing the devastation left by World War II. It was a life-changing experience. In December 1956, he married **Carroll Johnson '57**. After concluding his service in the U.S. Air Force, he earned an M.A. in international relations from George Washington University and began work at the Brookings Institute. As a result of meeting with Foreign Service Officer **Brynhild Rowberg '39**, he decided to apply to the Foreign Service.



During the 1960s, Flaten and his growing family served throughout the world. After several years in Strasbourg, France, they moved to Peshawar, Pakistan, where following the 1965 bombing by the Indian Air Force, Flaten organized the safe evacuation of dozens of U.S. women and children to Kabul, Afghanistan, via a caravan of school buses through the Khyber Pass. They then moved to Tel Aviv, Israel, before the Six-Day War necessitated an evacuation. He spent a year studying toward a Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania before returning to work at the Department of State, where he worked in a variety of positions from 1970–82 and became acquainted with **Bruce Laingen '44**. Flaten accepted a second posting to Israel and served there as Deputy Chief of Mission from 1982–86. He then returned to the State Department in Washington, D.C., and became a senior fellow at the Center for the Study of Foreign Affairs. In 1990 he was appointed U.S. Ambassador to Rwanda. He was actively engaged in addressing the political climate in Rwanda, particularly concerning escalating tensions among Hutus and Tutsis, culminating in the Arusha Peace Accords in 1993. Before his departure from Rwanda at the end of 1993, he was awarded the Order of the Mille Collines, the highest civilian commendation, by the Rwandan government for his skillful work. In early 1994, as genocide erupted in Rwanda, he facilitated the safe evacuation of U.S. citizens from his post in the U.S.

He retired to Northfield in 1994 with his wife, and they spent several months each year visiting the cabin the family had built themselves in the mountains of Virginia. Flaten continued to speak and teach about international relations and Rwanda. He testified to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Tanzania, and he testified to the Senate in Paris concerning conditions preceding the Rwandan genocide. He served as chair of the Nobel Peace Prize Forum; distinguished lecturer in political science at St. Olaf; vice president of the United Nations Association (Minnesota); and a member of the Foreign Service Association (Minnesota). In 2000, as the Minnesota representative of the Immortal Chaplains Foundation, he joined with Rev. Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow PUSH Coalition to honor Paul Rusesabagina, the Rwandan hotelier who sheltered Hutus and Tutsis during the 1994 genocide.

"Ambassador Robert Flaten was an extraordinary gentleman, a man of peace and a valued friend," Rusesabagina wrote after learning of Flaten's death. "He was a true diplomat representing both the strength and kindness of the United States. He worked hard to mediate a peace settlement while he served in Rwanda and continued his commitment to peace in Rwanda even when he left the country. I appreciated his friendship and wisdom. He will always remain in our memories."

Flaten is survived by his wife, Sharon Sherman-Akre Flaten, who he married in 2014; his siblings, **Anne Flaten Pixley '53**, **Mary Flaten '62**, and **David Flaten '64**; his children, **Kris Flaten '80**, Karen Flaten (Denny Jarosch), Sonia Flaten Mathew (Paul), and **Arne Flaten '89 (Rebecca Rhodes Flaten '89)**; stepchildren Kim Akre (Markus), Jeffery Akre, and Kari Akre; grandchildren Tasha and Lara Flaten and Anjali Mathew; step-grandchildren Sarah Tillotson (Jake), Brigid Halberg (Josh), Rochelle, Caelan, and Sebastian, Trisha, Kim, and Ryan Akre; and many great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his wife Carroll in 2010 and his granddaughter Erika Flaten in 2024.

## Remembering Robert (Bob) Tengdin '52

**Robert Charles Tengdin '52**, a talented athlete and longtime supporter of the St. Olaf College skiing programs, has died at the age of 95.

He was born June 25, 1930, in Kansas City, Mo., where he learned to ski as a young man. He was encouraged to attend St. Olaf by his uncle **Nels Minne, who graduated with the Class of 1924**. During his first year at St. Olaf, Tengdin immediately fell in love with downhill skiing. After taking a year off to serve in the U.S. Air Force from 1949 to 1950, he returned to St. Olaf and graduated in 1952. During his student years, Tengdin — known to friends as "Kansas" — was very involved in athletics, as a reserve quarterback on the football team, a star tennis player, and captain of the ski team. He loved to sing *Um! Yah! Yah!* and remained an active Ole throughout his life, supporting the college, St. Olaf Athletics, and the Nordic and Alpine ski teams. In 1955 Tengdin met Fern Anderson while on a ski trip. They married in September 1955, and together they raised three sons, each of them a nationally competitive ski racer: Dave, who skied for the University of Colorado Boulder and with the U.S. Ski team; Doug, who skied for Dartmouth College; and **Daniel John (DJ) Tengdin '88**, who was named All-American on the 1988 St. Olaf Men's Alpine NCSA National Championship team.



Tengdin worked at the Allison-Williams Company, a Minneapolis-based investment bank, for 70 years until he retired in 2022. He pioneered (and helped create) the secondary (institutional) market for private placement corporate bonds and became instrumental in putting together many significant financial projects, including the Canterbury Downs racetrack financing. Tengdin was also very active in Minnesota's growing ski industry. In 1965 he helped start the Buck Hill Ski Racing Team, and was a longtime Ski Challenge racer at Buck Hill.

Doug Nordmeyer, who coached the St. Olaf Alpine ski team from 2019–25, was a young rookie skier when he met Tengdin and his son Dave while signing up for his first ski race at Buck Hill. Nordmeyer had no idea that some 50 years later he would be the head alpine ski coach at St. Olaf, noting that its existence "was primarily due to the patronage of the Tengdin family over many years." Bob Tengdin was always very engaged in and supportive of the college's ski teams, says Nordmeyer. "Whether it was fundraising, advocating for area sportswriters to increase coverage of team successes, or providing insights for improvement, he was always driven to succeed, and he did it with humor and always a smile," he says. Tengdin and his family also provided financial support by way of scholarships for young athletes to train, travel, compete, and achieve their dreams, says Nordmeyer. When Tengdin's youngest son, DJ, died in a 2011 accident, Tengdin established the DJ Tengdin Memorial Endowment in his honor to support the St. Olaf Men's and Women's Alpine and Nordic Ski teams, and he later established an endowment specifically to help pay for the Alpine Ski coach.

Tengdin competed in Masters Alpine Ski Racing, winning national titles in the U.S., Canada, Norway, and Sweden, as well as placing second in the Masters World Championship in Andorra, Spain. He was also a competitive tennis player, winning 11 singles and eight doubles club championships at the Interlachen Country Club. He was inducted into the Minnesota Senior Sports Hall of Fame in 2021 and continued to play tennis competitively and ski raced until he was 92. St. Olaf honored Tengdin with a Distinguished Alumni Award in 2003.

Preceded in death by his parents, siblings, Fern, and DJ, Tengdin is survived by his second wife, **Dorothy Halvorson Hanson Tengdin '51**; sons David (Sonja) and Doug (Pam); eight grandchildren (Rolf, Peter, **David Tengdin Norris '11**, Phoebe, Priscilla, Andrew, Daniel, Dean); and three great-grandchildren. He also is survived by four stepchildren: Mark, Kari (Bernie), Gregg (Maureen), Susan; their eight grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. Memorials are preferred to the DJ Tengdin Memorial Endowment at St. Olaf College.

# A Community Connected Across Seas

By Olivia Schmidt

**I**N THE ATLANTIC OCEAN HALL of the Norwegian Embassy in Washington, D.C., the story of St. Olaf College felt especially close to home.

Clusters of people gathered in the vaguely ships-galley inspired space, greeting one another with the easy familiarity of shared experience — class years exchanged between handshakes, memories of Northfield resurfacing in shared stories. As they enjoyed a Scandinavian smörgåsbord, Oles reminisced about their time on the Hill, sharing where life had taken them since graduation and reflecting on what it meant to once more gather in a place tied so closely to Norwegian history.

“It was actually the Atlantic Ocean that brought so many Norwegians to this beautiful land,” Anniken Huitfeldt, the Norwegian ambassador, said in welcoming alumni, leaders, and friends of the college. “So we are so grateful to host you in this space tonight.”

That history, of migration, connection, and enduring partnership, framed an evening hosted by the St. Olaf Office of Alumni and Parent Relations that brought together members of the St. Olaf community from across generations. Held in a space symbolic of Norway’s ties to the United States, the gathering highlighted a relationship a century in the making.

“The bonds between countries are based on the bonds between its people, and St. Olaf has built and kept those bonds for more than 150 years,” Huitfeldt noted. “I cannot think of many places where American-Norwegian cooperation has brought more results than St. Olaf College. St. Olaf holds a very special place in very many Norwegian hearts, and so many Americans have come to know the beauty of our countries’ relationship because of St. Olaf.”

Huitfeldt reflected on recent milestones shared between the college and Norway, including the 200th anniversary of organized Norwegian migration to the United States — a bicentennial St. Olaf helped commemorate both on campus and abroad, through the St. Olaf Orchestra’s tour of Norway in the summer of 2025 and the visit of Crown Prince Haakon Magnus in the fall.

“Last October, Crown Prince Haakon visited St. Olaf, and he deeply appreciated the warmth shown to him by the students, faculty, and staff,” the ambassador remarked. “We so look forward to continuing to nurture our relationship with St. Olaf.”

For St. Olaf President Susan Rundell Singer, the evening was both a celebration of recent collegiate accomplishments and a commemoration of the ongoing legacy of institutional excellence. In honor of both the 200th anniversary of organized Norwegian migration and the 150th anniversary of St. Olaf College, Rundell Singer presented a small gift to Huitfeldt: a St. Olaf fleece.

“It is such an honor to be here tonight, and we are so grateful for the relationship between our school and your nation, which has endured since our founding,” she said.

That sense of shared history and destiny was echoed by Susan Gunderson ’79, chair of the St. Olaf College Board of Regents.

“The partnership between St. Olaf College, your nation, and our peoples is deep and rich and strong,” she said. “It will continue to be so.”

Surrounded by alumni, family members, and friends, the evening served as both reunion and reaffirmation — of the Oles whose identities, heritage, and communities continue to cross oceans. 🌿



From top (L-R): Board of Regents Chair Susan Gunderson ’79, President Susan Rundell Singer, and Norwegian Ambassador Anniken Huitfeldt; Monika Chapman, John Chapman ’03, Anders Hansen ’18, and Hoda Al-Haddad ’18 were among the many Oles and friends who gathered at the Norwegian Embassy in February. PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPH HODEL ’20

## REED WAHLBERG '76 AND DIANE MEIER '78, P'09

believe that education is one of the most enduring investments a person can make. It led Diane to a career as a physician and Reed to a role as a quality engineer at Boston Scientific. In gratitude to St. Olaf, they established an endowed scholarship for current nursing students and a charitable remainder unitrust to support future Oles. Their planned gift will impact Oles studying pre-health and environmental studies for generations to come.



ST. OLAF  
COLLEGE

*“We initially established an endowed scholarship for Ole nursing students in honor of Diane’s mom. Then we thought, ‘What about our legacy?’ Through discussions with the St. Olaf Development team, we learned of a creative solution: a charitable remainder unitrust. We were able to donate a larger amount to St. Olaf, receive income throughout our lives, and inspire future Oles in environmental and pre-health studies.”*

— DIANE MEIER '78 AND REED WAHLBERG '76, P'09

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PARTING SHOT

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**A CONNOISSEUR OF THE CLASSICS** | Professor of Classics Anne Groton plays the piano as her students rehearse their production of Plautus' *Vidularia* ("The Lost Bag"). The Society for Classical Studies recently awarded Groton the national Mary-Kay Gamel Outreach Prize in recognition of her popular student productions of ancient Greek and Latin plays, which she has been directing since 1982. PHOTO BY CALLISTA ROBERTSON '26