

# CARLSON

SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

SPRING 2024



## Connecting Carlson

Introducing a building project that will transform school spaces and name the flagship building for Marilyn Carlson Nelson



THE MAGAZINE  
FOR ALUMNI  
AND FRIENDS



## Connecting Through Song

The warm sounds of the acoustic guitar fill the air as Finance Professor Andy Whitman guides the room at the senior living facility into a chorus of “You Are My Sunshine.” Hands clap and feet tap along with the beat.

“Music is magic, so it brings them right back,” Whitman says.

Several times a week, Whitman and his wife, Carol, perform tunes from the Great American Songbook to residents at Presbyterian Homes senior living facilities throughout the Twin Cities area. Through music, they connect with residents in memory care, military veterans, and more.

“We get to know the people and we see them move and it is just so fun and satisfying to see them get right into it,” he says. “Same songs that we like.”

Whitman started volunteering at the care facilities in 1991. Since then, he’s received the Presbyterian Homes’ Volunteer of the Year award. But it isn’t the awards that keep him coming back—it’s the people. Whitman even met his wife during one of his performances about a decade ago. She had been visiting her father at the care center and couldn’t help but sing along. Noticing her enthusiasm, he called her up to join him. She’s been his singing partner ever since.

At 85 years old, Whitman, one of the Carlson School’s longest-serving faculty members, shows no signs of stopping. On top of his weekly volunteer work, he is also an attorney, serves as a certified tax counselor and certified financial planner for Prepare & Prosper, runs finance and legal seminars for the UMN Retiree Association, and still teaches multiple risk management and insurance classes each semester.

“You keep moving,” Whitman says, smiling. “That’s the key. I believe that what keeps me moving is taking what I can do best and keeping it going.”

FOCUS

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THE CARLSON SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT  
 MAGAZINE FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS

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# DISCOVER

START-UP NEWS

## MSBA Offers New Curriculum Focusing on Generative AI



“Employers want their new hires to be well-versed in generative AI and to be able to contribute to the company’s journey of figuring out how best to leverage such a technology.”

PROFESSOR DE LIU

BY GENE REBECK

*Above right: Students in the MSBA program compete in the Analytics for Good Hackathon, a 24-hour challenge in which students can use AI and machine learning to analyze a real-world business problem.*

Ever since ChatGPT exploded onto the scene in November 2022, businesses of all kinds have been forced to consider how generative artificial intelligence (AI) might disrupt and enhance their operations and their industries.

“Industry reports and ongoing discussions with our advisory board of industry leaders suggest that generative AI will significantly impact various sectors,” says Professor De Liu, academic director of Carlson School’s Master of Science in Business Analytics (MSBA) program. This expected impact is “creating a demand for analytics professionals who possess a deep understanding of these technologies and can harness

them responsibly and effectively to drive productivity and innovation.”

While AI has been part of the MSBA curriculum for many years, the program has created a new AI curriculum designed to prepare students to help their companies determine how to make use of this rapidly evolving technology. The MSBA program developed the curriculum, scheduled to launch in the 2024-25 academic year, after reviewing changing industry standards and gathering input from stakeholders in the Carlson School and throughout the business community.

Among the program’s enhanced AI offerings is the inclusion of AI language models into its Exploratory Data Analytics course. “We want to continue to be on the forefront when

it comes to analytics,” notes MSBA Associate Professor Mochen Yang. The curriculum also will introduce a Responsible AI course covering ethical considerations relating to the technology, such as algorithmic bias, privacy issues, and security. In addition, the new curriculum will include an AI for Business track.

“Employers want their new hires to be well-versed in generative AI and to be able to contribute to the company’s journey of figuring out how best to leverage such a technology,” says Liu, who is also the Xian Dong Eric Jing Professor for Business Teaching. “Our recent curriculum update reflects such a need, among other demands, and continues to give students the traditional analytics skills and business acumen that companies still value.” **C**

## Alum, Current Students Part of Viral UMN Dance Team



The University of Minnesota Dance Team extended its dynasty by capturing its 22nd national championship at the Universal Dance Association (UDA) Nationals in January.

The team, led by head coach Amanda Gaines, '09 BSB, took home the title in the D1A Pom division, but it was their runner-up performance in D1A Jazz that set the internet on fire, with videos racking up millions of views online.

Set to Aerosmith's "Dream On," the routine featured a dizzying display of athleticism, including a move involving spins into an aerial flip followed by more turns—all in perfect sync. The iconic rock band even gave the team a shoutout on social media.

"The coolest thing is the whole world, my dad's coworker, random people on the street—all know about [the performance]," reflects dance team member Morgan "Pinch" Peterson, a senior in the Undergraduate Program. "I think people realized just how hard it is and it's really cool that everybody's getting to see that we are athletes too."



"The coolest thing is the whole world ... all know about [the performance]."

MORGAN PETERSON

The self-choreographed routine was a love letter to the team's performance to the song 20 years ago, which helped cement the program as a powerhouse in the dance world. Mia Tassani, a first-year Carlson School undergraduate student and dance team member, says she's excited to further the squad's legacy.

"It's just been so surreal and I've learned a lot about myself and the team," Tassani says. "I've definitely pushed myself harder than I've ever pushed myself and I'm just really excited for what's to come."

## Student Veterans Aid TEL Manufacturing and Engineering of America with Inventory Efficiency

Insights from a team of Carlson School graduate students are helping optimize the inventory management of a company on the front lines of the semiconductor industry.

Tokyo Electron Limited (TEL) Manufacturing and Engineering of America, Inc., based in Chaska, Minn., builds the manufacturing machines used to create semiconductors, which power devices ranging from vehicles to cell phones.

Last summer, five Master of Science in Supply Chain Management (MS SCM) students worked with the company for their capstone project. The team, consisting entirely of military veterans, designed a dashboard to improve tracking both current and ideal inventory levels for the production and service of product portfolio.

"It was using all the theory, all the applications that we used, but then taking it beyond that ... Our job wasn't to make the client fit the application, it was to make the application fit their need," says Lt. Col. Mark Gile, '23 MS SCM, of the Minnesota Army National Guard.

Following the students' presentation, TEL Manufacturing and Engineering of America adapted the dashboard from a pilot instance on one platform to deliver broader supply chain insights across the company's other platforms. Fletcher Wanless, '11 MBA, director of supply chain, applauds the team's high-quality work.

"With greater visibility, we're able to look at certain areas to make financial gains and also identify opportunities for improvement in delivery, by detecting where our inventory could be stronger to support our growth curve," says Wanless.

This project marked the second partnership between the MS SCM program and TEL Manufacturing and Engineering of America.

## Foodie Friday Highlights Diverse Cuisines Near the Carlson School

Community outreach has never tasted so good. Through the new Foodie Friday social media initiative, students are encouraging others to explore the local food scene.

Once a month, the Carlson Outreach Ambassadors take over the school's Instagram to highlight a different restaurant and review its dishes. Stops at the Lucky Dragon, Oasis Mediterranean Grill, and Hard Times Cafe have featured the wide range of cuisines available on the campus' West Bank.

"We want to highlight the community and the Cedar-Riverside area is super diverse and big, and we want to make sure that the places we are going showcase the people here," says Jeff Williams, the school's coordinator for diversity pathway initiatives and community partnerships and the staff coordinator for the Carlson Outreach Ambassadors.

Christina Zheng, a junior in the Undergraduate Program, visited the Lucky Dragon on her Foodie Friday.

"During our visit, we got to meet the owner and she was super sweet," Zheng says. "It's family owned and she's run it for many decades now. Just a very colorful and fun environment."

This engagement is just one way the Carlson Outreach Ambassadors build ties with the wider community. They also work with area public schools and groups to encourage students from underrepresented backgrounds to pursue business education and careers. When it comes to outreach, Zheng says it's all about connection.

"I encourage students to get curious and learn about what's around them, not just within the Carlson School, but also within the university and the different communities around us."

CHRISTINA ZHENG



Members of the Carlson Outreach Ambassadors visit Hard Times Cafe during a Foodie Friday visit.

## 3 Thoughts from Dean Prenkert



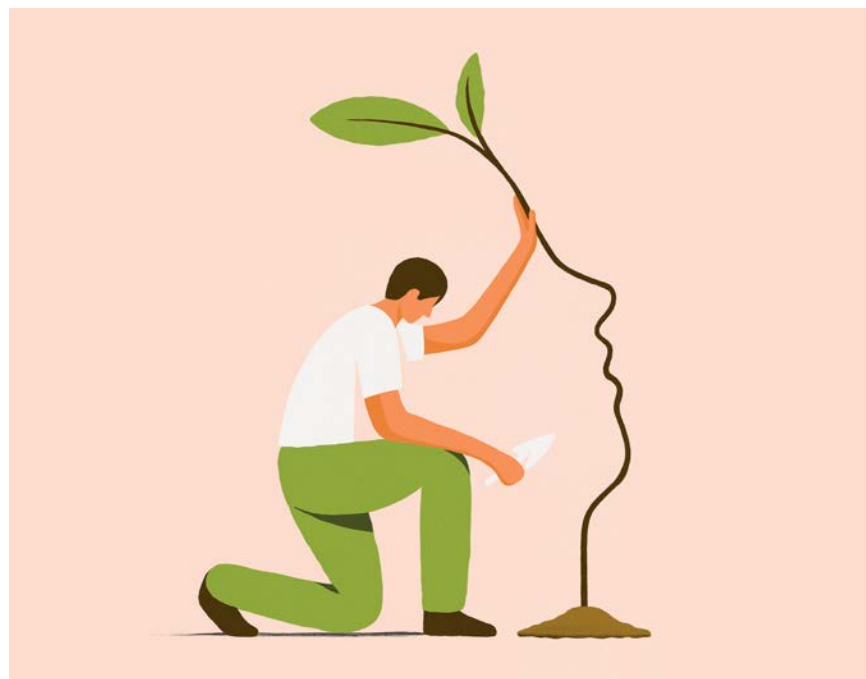
**Warm welcome.** These first nine months on the job have been informative, inspiring, and fun. That's thanks to so many of you

in our community who have made me—and my family—feel genuinely welcome, both in Minnesota and in my travels across the U.S., Asia, and Europe. It's deeply meaningful to us, and I truly appreciate your commitment to the Carlson School.

**Connecting Carlson.** That strong support is reflected in this transformative building project, which you can learn more about on pages 26–29. The vision to modernize core spaces and meet the business needs of today will maintain a competitive edge. We're grateful for the generous support from alumni and friends, led by Marilyn Carlson Nelson, for whom the flagship building will be named upon project completion.

**Looking ahead.** Our future is bright. With the school's strategic plan coming to an end in 2025, we are in the midst of putting together the next one. That means thinking boldly about new and innovative approaches that will allow us to create a meaningful next chapter in this school's 105-year legacy of transformative business education.

Courses at the Carlson School cover a wide range of topics. Here's a 60-second breakdown of one of the many classes leaving an impact on students.



## MGMT 6465 Leadership & Personal Development

BY GENE REBECK

Experts and books can be vague about what “leadership” means. For Associate Professor of Work and Organizations and organizational psychologist Beth Campbell, leadership development can benefit from a data-driven approach. “I want to help students shape, improve, and expand the scope and quality of their influence,” she says. “I center the course around the measurable, observable behaviors they’re demonstrating to the world—and how those behaviors could be more intentional and goal-oriented.”

The course is currently taught in two compressed formats—three Fridays or Saturdays, and a week-long residency. “A compressed format enables students to get into a reflective headspace, where they can get data about themselves and better absorb the information,” Campbell says. Students can focus on who they are as people and how they lead, without distractions or interruptions.

### TAKEAWAYS

The course uses several measurement tools, including self-assessments and anonymous 360 feedback from colleagues and others with whom a student regularly interacts. “We give students a large amount of data to help them understand where they are right now and to serve as an evidence-based launch point to where they want to go,” Campbell says. Leadership doesn’t require having direct reports: “Leadership really happens in everyday moments of interaction with others.”

Campbell says strong leaders recognize that continuous personal development and leadership development go hand in hand. “How you impact and lead others can’t be separated from your own personal growth,” she adds.

“The class taught me a lot about how to navigate different situations in the workplace and how to stand out as a leader. [I learned it’s] about how you want to lead.”

*Henneh Kota, current MBA student*

“Beth provided a dynamic working environment where everyone felt comfortable and engaged to ask questions, to be vulnerable, and to learn from each other as well as from her.”

*Jack Grignano, '20 MBA*

## 3 PEOPLE, 3 QUESTIONS



**Helen Moser**  
Senior Lecturer, Finance

### 1. What are you reading?

I am drawn to biographies and autobiographies. I recently finished reading *Born a Crime* by Trevor Noah. It is a humorous take on his difficult life in South Africa during apartheid, where being mixed race meant not belonging. It is also about the strength of a mother’s love. I am now reading *Confidence Man*, a book about Donald Trump by Maggie Haberman. She had intimate access to some key moments during his run for office and time as president.



**Deborah Roedder John**  
Professor, Curtis L. Carlson Chair in Marketing

I recently re-read *Mrs. Kennedy and Me*, written by Clint Hill, who was Jackie Kennedy’s personal Secret Service agent during her time as first lady. Although originally dismayed he was not assigned to President Kennedy’s Secret Service detail, Hill developed a close and trusted relationship with the first lady. His poignant stories about life with Jackie Kennedy provide a close-up view of one of the most famous women of the 20th century.



**Salman Arif**  
Associate Professor, Accounting

I’m “reading” (OK, listening) to the autobiographies of Trevor Noah, *Born a Crime*, and Michelle Obama, *Becoming*. These audiobooks are magical. Both are narrated by the authors and it feels as if I’m sitting across from these trailblazing stars in my home as they tell me the story of their lives. I can’t recommend these books enough—they are by turns hilarious, inspiring, and touching!

### 2. What is your favorite website?

I probably spend the most time on [finviz.com](https://finviz.com). It is a finance site that allows you to screen the stock universe for key metrics. You can then analyze key financial information for the subset of companies (discounted cash flow analysis). Finally, you can analyze the technical stock movement for key entry and exit points.

My favorite website is [bogleheads.com](https://bogleheads.com), a personal finance site. The website provides information and advice on investing based on the principles of John Bogle, founder of the Vanguard Group and creator of the first index mutual fund. The site promotes passive investing using index funds as opposed to active trading of individual stocks.

**Audible.com.** Several years ago, I discovered the joy of audiobooks and now I’m a devotee of the format. Thanks to audiobooks, I’ve traveled to new countries and planets while doing laundry and taking out the trash. I’m always on the lookout for new titles!

### 3. What is your dream job?

I will start out by saying that I do love what I do now. The autonomy of the job and joy of meeting so many new people each year make this such a great career. However, if we are talking about the ultimate dream job, I think traveling the world as a **travel vlogger** would be a great way to marry my love of travel with my desire to still connect with people wanting to learn.

Starting college as a business major, I wanted to be the **first female CEO** of a major company. At the time, there were very few women in business schools and even fewer in top business positions. Then, I got a job as a teaching assistant and my dream changed to getting into a top PhD program and becoming a **business professor**. Looking back, I’m sure I picked the right dream, although I wouldn’t mind having access to a corporate jet!

**Astronaut.** I haven’t given up on my dream, so if the Carlson School of Management ever establishes a space campus, I’ll be first in line!

“With Minnesota changing, communities of color are becoming an integral part of our economy, culture, politics, and everything in between. They need these stories to be prioritized.”

MUKHTAR IBRAHIM



## All the News Fit to Print

After building one of the largest, most diverse newsrooms in the state, CEO of *Sahan Journal* and current MBA student Mukhtar Ibrahim is making headlines of his own.

BY KATIE DOHMAN

The Victory Ramp in downtown St. Paul is a gritty concrete spiral, bookended with tollbooths to monitor comings and goings. In the early 2000s, Mukhtar Ibrahim was often the gatekeeper.

Located behind the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*' former headquarters on Cedar St., he saw staffers buzzing in and out every day. It meant a newspaper was always available, and he read to pass the time.

“The paper was so thick then,” Ibrahim says, his voice tinged with nostalgia. Ramps weren’t yet equipped with self-serve tech, so Ibrahim interacted with drivers as they came and went. Journalism by proxy.

Those experiences ignited a passion for the profession. Now, Ibrahim is among the most influential media people in the region. He built the *Sahan Journal* from nothing to a 22-person—majority people of color—newsroom with a multimillion-dollar operating budget. Now, arguably at the top of his game, he announced he’s walking away, using his nearly complete MBA to undertake a new chapter. The obvious question is: Why? To answer that, you need context, something Ibrahim’s coverage offers in spades.

### NOTICING A GAP

Ibrahim and his family fled the civil war in Somalia and moved around East Africa before arriving stateside in 2005, when he was 17. After a year at St. Paul Central High School, he enrolled at Inver Hills Community College. The plan was to attend medical school. But, in part thanks to the toll-booth, his real passion was journalism.

As thrilling as seeing stories about his community in the newspaper was—and it really was, he says, noting *The New York Times* had a reporter stationed in Somalia—he noticed the vast majority of stories about Somalis, Somalia, and the diaspora covered only tragedy, violence, big events. Nothing about the daily successes, business, or culture of being Somali, here or abroad.

“It was a crazy moment if you were interested in journalism and consumed by it,” he says. He transferred to the University of Minnesota’s Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication, earning a BA in 2011.

Laura Yuen, now a features columnist with the *Star Tribune*, was Ibrahim’s mentor when he was in J-school. “When I first met him, he was all over social media, when Twitter was in its infancy,” she recalls. “He found a way to harness his following and make smart media commentary. It was from a viewpoint that hadn’t been heard from before ... Mukhtar was this young guy in college with a unique background, calling things as he saw them.”

After graduation, the young upstart found himself working alongside Yuen, who was then at Minnesota Public Radio (MPR). “Now, I’m no longer a news consumer,” he says. “I’m a journalist reporting. I’m part of the system.”

### LEARNING THE SYSTEM

Ibrahim spent seven years at MPR, including as a general assignment reporter covering communities of color, learning from Yuen and others.



Top: Mukhtar Ibrahim. Photo by Dan Gunderson.

Bottom left: Ibrahim interviews community members while reporting for the Sahan Journal. Photo provided by Mukhtar Ibrahim.

Bottom right: Ibrahim addresses the Sahan Journal staff during a newsroom meeting. Photo provided by Mukhtar Ibrahim.



“If he sees a gap or opening or opportunity, he’s cornered it in the blink of an eye,” Yuen says. This well-honed instinct casts a sharp relief against his thoughtful, mellow energy, his relaxed body language, and his easy smile.

“I’ve been so impressed with his vision,” she continues. “He is a problem-solver. If no one’s filling that space, he’s going to take a stab at it. Everything about his life has been about incremental changes to give himself more knowledge, more understanding of a situation. ... He’s always set his eye on higher and higher heights.”

Ibrahim built his name, byline by byline. Then, in 2016, he received a Bush Fellowship, which comes with an award of \$100,000. Most journalists are counseled away from pursuing a master’s degree, but Ibrahim was undeterred. He struck out for Columbia University to study investigative and data reporting. “As someone who’s interested in exposing systemic failures and wrongdoing and journalism that shines a light on issues that go unnoticed or unreported, it was the perfect program,” he wrote in a Bush Fellowship reflection. After graduation, he returned to cover Minneapolis City Hall at the *Star Tribune*. But it wasn’t enough.

“With Minnesota changing, communities of color are becoming an integral part of our economy, culture, politics, and everything in between,” he says. “They need these stories to be prioritized.” It became clear: This holistic, comprehensive coverage had to happen another way. He decided to start *Sahan Journal*, a nonprofit news organization focused on communities of color.

#### THE BUSINESS OF WORDS

His former colleagues at MPR believed in his vision so much that they gave him 18 months of salaried runway to launch. And they saved him a seat in the newsroom, should *Sahan* not become a “viable product.” They also provided people power:

Yuen, plus other newsroom notables, contributed some of the first stories to the burgeoning organization.

Ibrahim says local foundations began investing, which meant he could hire freelancers and staffers and build infrastructure. Then came the one-two punch of 2020: The pandemic and the murder of George Floyd.

“That was a pivotal moment for us,” he says. It was the proving ground for the pitch. “Journalism contributes to the systemic problems we have been facing for centuries,” he says. “When the police release a statement, [and journalists take it] at face value ... that’s a big part of the problem. That’s what happens when you don’t hold people accountable.”

So like many working parents in the pandemic, he held a kid on his lap while tapping on a keyboard, balancing proving *Sahan’s* worth with parenting. He was also cramming books on business.

“No one taught me how to do this,” he says. “I took it upon myself to figure out those skills that I was never exposed to: Managing people. Creating financial statements. If you are an editor and editing copy, that’s different than managing humans and figuring that out in a healthy way.” In 2022, he enrolled in the Carlson School’s Part-Time MBA program, ready to learn business fundamentals.

#### NEEDING MORE

*Sahan Journal* was becoming something of a juggernaut: Publishing solid coverage, building cred from communities of color (and sometimes drawing criticism), convening the most diverse newsroom around, turning media heads, raising big fundraising dollars. By 2022, the GHR Foundation was considering its second gift—they are *Sahan Journal’s* biggest funder at more than \$1.5 million.

“I immediately was drawn to [Mukhtar’s] brilliant mind and entrepreneurial spirit,” GHR program director Kevin Bennett says. “He was very deliberate with his words and

expressed deep care for his family, his colleagues, and community that *Sahan* aims to serve. He also had a clear bias towards action.” Bennett says that people like Ibrahim and the impact of his leadership “reflects the potential that often remains unrealized without the capital to shift new ventures from surviving to thriving. We invested in the transformative change that he and *Sahan* represent.”

He was hitting his stride, from the outside. But, after the birth of his fourth child in June of 2023, he looked around and realized: Things are stable and good. The MBA is almost done. Life with kids is moving pretty fast. Maybe now’s the time to pass the torch.

There was something else, too. “We need more leaders of color capable of building and leading organizations,” he says. “I’m really interested in leadership development, so we’re not just rotating across newsrooms. What if we have more of us in this space? That requires us to make space for those people if they are not getting those opportunities in other places.” He also didn’t want *Sahan Journal* and Mukhtar Ibrahim to be synonymous terms. So, he announced his departure on October 30, 2023.

Since then, he’s helping lead the search for the right, next leader. The details for his future are materializing by the day. He wants to coach people to have healthy, thriving organizations where all feel safe to do their best work. He wants people of color to have the profiles and reputations they deserve. He wants corporations to do right by their social responsibility axioms. Consulting and coaching seem like the next best step.

“Given his incredible vision and success with *Sahan*, I have no doubt that we have only seen a glimpse of what Mukhtar is capable of,” Bennett says.

Though he can’t directly name it, Ibrahim carries the quiet confidence that *something* is simmering. “I want to take another risk, you know?” **C**

# Into the Drink

BY ADAM OVERLAND  
PORTRAITS BY DREW ANTHONY SMITH

**How one class project became a growing business with a storied past and a bright future.**

Starting a business is a lot like planning for an outdoor adventure in the Boundary Waters, explains David O'Neill, '15 BSB, cofounder of Minneapolis Cider Company (MCC) and an avid backpacker.

Gather supplies, plan your journey, and imagine the beauty and serenity in the vast, watery wilderness...and then the mosquitos get you, the rain never stops, and your canoe tips over. And that, in a nutshell, is entrepreneurship.





Prior page: (L to R): Minneapolis Cider Company's Rob Fisk, David O'Neill, and Jason Dayton balance business savvy and a sense of adventure, resulting in a growing portfolio of popular beverages and a destination hangout.

"The thing that actually happens is not going to be what you imagined, but at least for me, there's this very romantic sense of independence, and a kind of test," says O'Neill. "Starting a business is like the ultimate game."

Before Minneapolis Cider Company became what is today—a multimillion-dollar business recently named by *Inc. Magazine* as among the fastest-growing private companies in America—it was a class project by cofounders O'Neill and Jason Dayton, '15 College of Continuing and Professional Studies.

That Carlson School class—Entrepreneurship in Action—is where undergraduates form small teams to launch and operate a real business using start-up funds across two semesters.

The pair found themselves together not long after they both returned from a semester studying abroad in London. There, each gained a taste for hard cider, one of the city's most popular alcoholic drinks. In the course, it served as a business idea: Lionheart Cider.

"So I came in and pitched cider, and [O'Neill] will give me quite a bit of crap about this, but I had a slide in my deck that said 'Cider is easy.' And it was going to cost \$2,500 to launch Lionheart Cider and we'd be in stores by Christmas."

"There was literally a slide titled 'Cider is easy,'" O'Neill confirms.

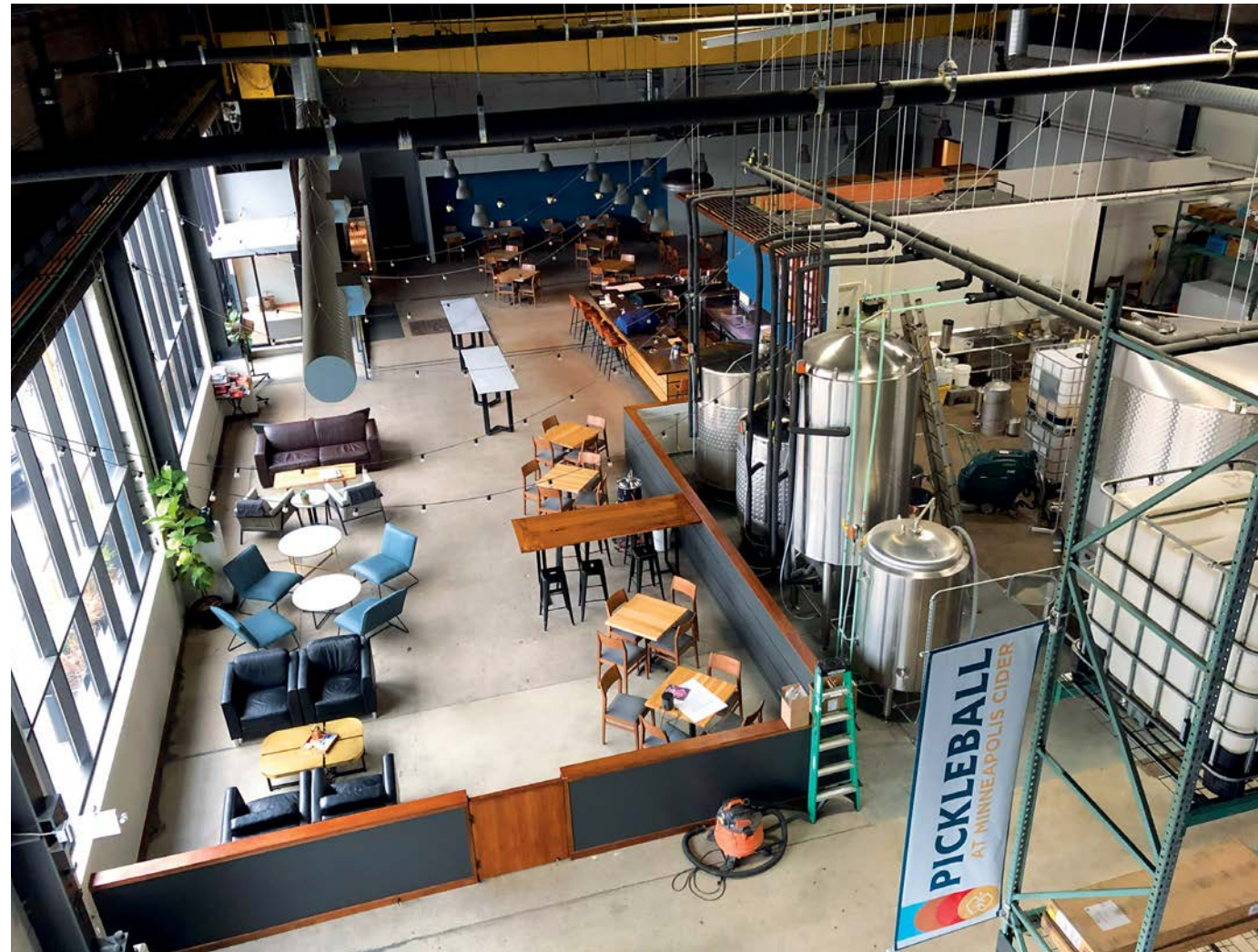
### URNS OUT, CIDER IS NOT EASY

**T**he tinkering began. Dayton started working with his then-girlfriend, Holly—she later became his wife—whose family makes cider and wine as a hobby. Soon, they landed on a winning recipe for Lionheart Original. Through instructor John Stavig, '86 BSB, also professional director of the Gary S. Holmes Center for Entrepreneurship, they raised \$55,000 for a first production run. Now they just needed a manufacturer and a distributor.

After not finding a Minnesota-based option, Stavig connected them with Joe Heron, a University alum and founder of multiple beverage companies, including Crispin Hard Cider Company—once among the largest in the U.S. Heron brought in Bruce Nissen, Crispin's former head cidemaker, based in Washington state.

With a manufacturer at the ready, they needed a distributor. That became Todd Johnson, a member of the Entrepreneurship in Action course advisory board and co-owner of Johnson Brothers, one of the largest liquor distributors in Minnesota.

"Cider was growing at the time, and I think Johnson Brothers saw something there," Dayton says. "And so they told us, 'We'll buy anything you make for the first run and then see how it goes.'"



"We wanted a space where we could host people, bring people together, use our cider to do that and have a place where we can try different styles."

DAVID O'NEILL, '15 BSB

"The whole brand premise was 'We're seniors in college trying to make our way in the world. We're lionhearted, we're bold,'" says O'Neill. "We wanted to empower others to feel that way and drink our products."

It was 2015, and looking back now, the MCC founders—who were all of 21—chuckle at their naivete.

"At the beginning of the course, everybody pitches the first iteration of their business," recalls Dayton.

Everything was coming together. Then the canoe tipped over.

"The manufacturer in Washington sent us samples," says Dayton. "We get them back in Minnesota, and we're so excited that we drop them off at our distributor without even trying them."

"It's 3:30 [p.m. the next day]. I'm sitting with my wife doing homework at Starbucks, and we get a call from the brand manager at Johnson Brothers, and he says, 'Guys, I just tried the samples. These are terrible. We're not buying this.'"

It turns out that when they scaled up from homebrewing equipment to commercial cider, the recipe didn't translate.

"I booked the next flight to Washington, and thankfully, they hadn't packaged it all, so it was all still sitting in tanks," says Dayton.



Understanding the predicament and sensing Dayton's panic, Nissen invited him to stay at his house for the weekend and figure out a plan.

"We made some tweaks and adjustments—basically the acidity level was off—and [Nissen] helped us work through that," says Dayton. "We sent it to Johnson Brothers again, and they said, 'This is great. Package it up and send us the rest.' So, the company almost died before we ever made the product."

"The company almost died an infinite amount of times," agrees O'Neill.

### RIGHTING THE SHIP

**T**hat first production run sold out. They raised more capital and produced and sold more Lionheart. For a few years, both Dayton and



O'Neill worked full-time jobs and kept selling cider through liquor stores. With everything they made going into the business, and thin to non-existent margins, something had to change.

"It got to a point where we realized this isn't sustainable," says O'Neill. "Every decision we were making, we were betting the farm. We needed something where we could have a little bit of room to innovate and make mistakes and take risks."

They needed to change their business model.

"We wanted a space where we could host people, bring people together, use our cider to do that and have a place where we can try different styles," says O'Neill. "And frankly, the business model of a taproom; this is a real business. And that affords us the ability to scale, to buy equipment, and expand the production facility."

They started planning. In 2017, O'Neill and Dayton connected with Rob Fisk, a 2011 U of M graduate with a master's in horticulture. Fisk had worked with, and managed, orchards that brewed cider on the side for years—but he wanted something bigger.

"I had told myself that cider was going to be my retirement plan," says Fisk. "Over the course of my career, I'd save up money and buy land and plant trees. But the further I got into it, I was meeting people in the industry."

### Competing in MN Cup

Part of MCC's success comes from participating in the Minnesota Cup. Founded by the Carlson School in 2005, MN Cup is the country's largest statewide startup competition.

More than 20,000 Minnesota entrepreneurs, including U of M students and faculty, have participated over the years—many of them receiving a share of more than \$5 million in cash prizes.

"I think the experience of going through that and trying to compete and the connections that we made... it was just a fantastic way to bring our business idea and get rocks thrown at it from a whole set of other people," says O'Neill.

Top left: The Minneapolis Cider Company taproom offers space to enjoy food, cider, and a game of pickleball.

Above: The cider now comes in a variety of flavors, including Mango Habanero.

Left: The outdoor patio is a popular spot for guests in the summer.

It was at a cider festival that Dayton pitched Fisk: Join the team as head cidemaker, with plans to build out a taproom. The three set about searching for the right facility and found it in the Marcy-Holmes neighborhood of Minneapolis, just blocks from where Crispin got its start in 2007.

In May of 2019, the Minneapolis Cider Company taproom opened.

Like all businesses, they muscled through the pandemic. O'Neill and Dayton kept their day jobs for a time. When business picked up, O'Neill settled into a full-time finance and operations role. Dayton would soon follow, leaving his position with Target to work in MCC's brand development, sales, and marketing.

And then on July 1, 2022, they were ready to stake a new claim: Minnesota legalized the possession and use of marijuana for residents 21 and older. Beverage companies were free to make and sell drinks infused with cannabis (sans alcohol).

*Below and Right: The founders launched the Trail Magic brand of cannabis-infused drinks shortly after the state legalized marijuana use. The THC drink now comes in a variety of flavors.*



### TRAIL MAGIC MANIA

Seeing an opportunity, and with no pre-planning, the team moved quickly. "Jason basically came to us and said, 'Guys, this law just changed. How do you feel about jumping off a cliff and building our wings on the way down?'" recalls O'Neill.

"We dropped everything and 19 days later we had created a brand and had liquid in a package," says O'Neill. "We were the first to market. And that's been really driving a lot of gross for us in the last six or so months."

In fact, that brand—Trail Magic—has grown so quickly (more than 1 million cans sold already) that new dreams began to unfold.



"Guys, this law just changed. How do you feel about jumping off a cliff and building our wings on the way down?"

JASON DAYTON

"Trail Magic has really helped us break into a larger production model and start to expand our production facility," Dayton says about MCC's new products.

The challenge, though, is the highly regional nature of craft beer and cider. "It's really hard, if not impossible, to take Minneapolis cider to Texas or Massachusetts or Washington," says Dayton.

### FULL-CIRCLE CIDER

Turns out, the trio's solution was already part of their story.

Remember that first production run, led by the Crispin founders? Well, by 2022, beverage giant Molson Coors, who acquired it 10 years earlier, had shuttered it—despite selling about 700,000 cases in 2019, the last time it was sold.

MCC saw the potential of two recognizable brands. It'd be a one-two punch to break into markets around the country.

"So, I texted Joe Heron," says Dayton. "And I said, 'Do you think Molson Coors would have any interest in selling the brand?' We ended up with a long-term licensing agreement without having to write a seven-figure check upfront."

With MCC now at the helm, Crispin returned to shelves in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and North and South Dakota in November 2023 with three ciders—Crispin Original and two new imperial flavors—all brewed by original Crispin cidemaker (and MCC hero) Bruce Nissen. The rollout will continue until it's available nationwide, with plans to launch in the United Kingdom.

Today, Minneapolis Cider Company operates one of the largest cider taprooms in the country—27,000 square feet, which includes three pickleball courts and a private event space in addition to the taproom and outdoor seating.



And with Crispin distribution expanding rapidly, it's likely that Minneapolis Cider Company will soon be the most widely distributed cidery in Minnesota.

"It's been a crazy journey," O'Neill says. "We seem to reinvent our business every six months. So we really do see ourselves as entrepreneurs, where we just kind of look for different things that are happening, and we try and make it possible."

And all this from a couple of lionhearted college students just trying to make their way in the world.

"The core of that Lionheart story, and the business that exists today, is that it's built on the kindness of alumni who were willing to give their time to a couple of students who really didn't know any better and provide whatever support they were able to," says Dayton.

"There's a lot of smarts and grit that go into this," agrees O'Neill, "but that doesn't push the needle past 'Go.' All of that is predicated on John Stavig and the Entrepreneurship in Action class. It's predicated on the alumni that we were connected with." **C**



### On brewing cider, from MCC head cidemaker Rob Fisk:

"The best way to describe it for me is if you think about table grapes and wine grapes, it's about the same thing. Table grapes are bred to be sweet, more about texture and sweetness. And then a wine grape has a lot of tannins in it. That's what gives it body. So there's apples that are exactly the same way. Most U.S. apples are table apples, like Honeycrisp—it's bred to be crunchy and have a good balance of acid and sugar. Cider apples are mostly bred in Europe, where they were breeding those apples for hundreds of years to make alcohol. So they have a lot of tannin, a lot of sugar to make the alcohol. But they're not crunchy."

So when you're breeding things, you're selecting for something. And if you're selecting for the crunch, that means you're deselecting or selecting against something else. With table apples, you lose some of the more interesting aromatics because you don't really care about aromatics as much when you're eating an apple. But that's all you care about when you're drinking cider."



Top left: The taproom is a destination for pickleball players across the Twin Cities metro area.

Top: MCC cofounders juggle business and fun behind the bar and in the taproom.

Above: Guests gather for snacks and drinks at the MCC taproom.



The Gobi Desert is a large, cold desert and grassland region in northern China and southern Mongolia and is the sixth-largest desert in the world.

## THE CHINA EXECUTIVE MBA COMMUNITY COMPLETES LIFE-ALTERING EXPERIENCES IN THE GOBI DESERT, A LIFE- ALTERING TERRAIN.

BY BRIDGET BURNHAM

*Right: An aerial view of the rugged terrain of the Gobi Desert in northern China. Photo courtesy John Du.*



# TRAIL OF TRANSFORMATION



Competitors in the Gobi Desert Challenge gather to start, bracing against the wind and elements.

Standing on a barren stretch of the Gobi Desert in May 2023, John Du, '19 MBA, felt small and lost. Four days of continuous running through the vast expanse of the world's sixth-largest desert humbled him.

"All the training in the world can't prepare you for the extremes," says Du. From daily 30-degree temperature swings to scathing sand storms, the 121-kilometer (75-mile) Gobi Desert Challenge pushes the limits of human endurance. "It's more than just a physical challenge; it's a mental one," says Du.

His family and colleagues questioned his choice when he began training for the grueling race. But it wasn't until day four in the desert, just 10 kilometers from the finish, that Du wondered for himself if he was losing touch with reality, especially when he heard someone calling his name. "I didn't expect anyone to recognize me out there," says Du, who, in this moment, was separated from his team and covered head-to-toe in protective outerwear. But he heard his name.

The figure behind the voice approached, unwinding a tightly wrapped scarf to reveal Professor Gu Zhaoyang, an instructor from Du's China Executive MBA (CHEMBA) days. "I felt Professor Gu's encouragement as soon as I saw the familiar smile," says Du. The two ran together for a few kilometers, holding the energy of the encounter together for as long as they could before Du broke away to complete his race.

Meeting his professor in the expanse of the Gobi was pivotal for Du—a vivid reminder that life's unexpected connections can enliven even the most desolate places. "That encounter was a turning point," says Du. "It reminded me that no matter how alone we feel, our journeys are intertwined."

#### WOVEN WITH RESILIENCE

Du was neither an extreme sports athlete nor necessarily an ace student growing up, but his route to the Gobi mirrors the desert's diverse terrain.

His family's history of migration from China to Vietnam and his

personal peripatetic global journey, from Vietnam to Australia to Europe—and eventually to China—instilled in Du an inherent resilience that he used to propel himself toward new opportunities and experiences.

After graduating as an exchange student in Sweden from Western Sydney University, Du worked as a production development engineer for a Swedish automotive manufacturer before transforming copper manufacturing plants across Europe as a global Lean expert and plant manager. In 2012, Du relocated to Zhongshan, China, to head Luvata Superconductors. Six years later, he says he felt his professional growth stagnate. At that time, he found out about the unique learning opportunity the CHEMBA program provides through the Carlson School of Management and Lingnan College, Sun Yat-Sen University. The unique partnership compelled Du to explore a challenge he never thought he'd consider: returning to school.

#### TRANSFORMATION THROUGH EDUCATION

Enrolling in the CHEMBA program forced Du to tackle deep-seated doubt in his academic abilities. "I wasn't the most studious kid back in Australia, but pursuing my MBA helped me prove to myself that I could overcome my fears," says Du.

Finding fresh confidence and a new community opened doors for Du's personal and professional growth. A friend from the program convinced Du, who hated running, to sign up for the Gobi Desert Challenge at an alumni event in 2021. The four-day challenge is open to all students and alumni of Chinese business schools and their affiliated universities from other countries. "He said, 'If you do it, I'll do it,'" recalls Du, who decided to train for the extreme endurance race as the next leg in his endeavor for self-improvement.

Preparing for the Gobi Desert Challenge required ruthless prioritization and self-management, balancing early

"I have confidence in the power of my persistence. If I set out to reach a goal, I know I can achieve it."

JOHN DU, '19 MBA

morning runs with his demanding schedule managing and growing a manufacturing organization, and in his newest role as father to his daughter, Evelyn. Through miles and months of training (the race was postponed twice, from May 2022 to October 2022, then eventually was held in May of 2023), Du leaned into the consistency and camaraderie that got him through his studies to persist toward his goal.

"There were days it was hard to get out of bed for those morning runs. But the discipline I learned and practiced in the CHEMBA program helped me stay the course," says Du. Tracking his progress on a spreadsheet gave him visible motivation to lace up his running shoes daily, but his teammates sparked a new level of transformation.

#### COMMUNITY IN THE GOBI

Du trained with MBA and CHEMBA students and alumni from Lingnan College, Sun Yat-Sen University. The Carlson School's CHEMBA program was one of the first joint programs approved by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic



PHOTOS: COURTESY JOHN DU

of China in 1999. But it wasn't until 2018 that CHEMBA students participated in the challenge.

Veronica Zeng, former CHEMBA marketing director, recruited and ran with the first CHEMBA alumni team in the Gobi Desert Challenge in 2018 and 2019. Though she no longer works for the program, Zeng still promotes the race as an unmatched opportunity for Chinese business students and alumni, and expats, like Du, to connect. "There are so many business schools in China," says Zeng, "But the Gobiers get familiar very quickly."

Du welcomed new connections with open arms, running three days a week, rain or shine, in matching uniforms, with people he now describes as a "close-knit family. We all look out for each other," says Du. "You become cohesive as a team as you struggle together."

Bright memories, like running into his professor in the desolate desert valley, or spotting fellow Gobiers at races and business meetings, color Du's Gobi experience. But so do the difficult conditions and dark moments, like when his classmate and training partner missed his goal time on the fourth day of the race. "We saw each other, exhausted and covered in dust in the middle of the desert, and were on the verge of tears," says Du. "It was a really hard moment, but we shared it."

Crossing the finish line of the Gobi Desert Challenge completely reshaped Du's outlook. "I approach challenges in my personal life and work differently now," Du says. "I have confidence in the power of my persistence. If I set out to reach a goal, I know I can achieve it."

Du and his training partner are now both preparing for the 2024 Gobi Desert Challenge. Their goal is to finish faster than they did in 2023. "Running is a reminder that you get out of life what you put in," says Du. He hopes to pass that lesson of perseverance and passion on to his daughter and colleagues. "I'm 47, I've never been a long-distance runner, and I'm out here training. If I can do it, you can too." **C**



#### Veronica Zeng: Resilience, Recovery, and Transformation

In the shadows of the Gobi Desert, Veronica Zeng, a former CHEMBA staff member, found her life's calling when the 2018 Gobi Desert Challenge reshaped her perspective and career. She recruited and ran with the first CHEMBA participants to improve her marathon time, which she did. Zeng then went on to compete at the highest level in the 2019 race. "The Gobi tested my physical limits and redefined my understanding of what I'm capable of," says Zeng.

In the unforgiving desert's harsh conditions and vast, relentless terrain, Zeng's training struggles and her road to recovery from injury unearthed a new passion for physical therapy. "I learned the importance of not just enduring, but healing and growing through training," she says.

Post-Gobi, Zeng decided to help bring physical therapy education to China, working to close the gap in sports, injury, and recovery training. "The Gobi taught me how to use what I learned about resilience to help others live healthier lives," she says.

Top: John Du smiles as he takes on a leg of the Gobi Desert Challenge.

Above: Veronica Zeng, a former CHEMBA staff member

Left: The soft glow of the tents lights the campground at night. Competitors face 30-degree temperature swings during the challenge.



# A *Masterful Combination*

Three arts-focused  
Carlson School alumni and  
students demonstrate how  
understanding business  
makes dollars—and sense.

At first blush, business and the arts don't necessarily seem like a natural pair. However, Carlson School community members combining business smarts with a career in the arts have carved their paths to success, whether winning a Tony, discovering the importance of arts to a city, or representing a culture through murals. Discover how their melding of arts and business is making a meaningful impact.

BY AMY CARLSON GUSTAFSON





Kyle Burkhardt '20 MBA

**WINNING A TONY**

**Kyle Burkhardt, '20 MBA**

Kyle Burkhardt wasn't expecting to become a Tony winner. But when the COVID-19 pandemic shut theater doors nationwide in 2020, it opened another: Burkhardt's chance to explore a career as a Broadway producer.

Burkhardt, now the senior vice president of strategy for the NBA's Dallas Mavericks, had already had his arena doors shut: At the time, he was working for the MLS' New York City Football Club (NYCFC), so he found himself with plenty of free time when the soccer season was canceled in March 2020. Like the rest of us on lockdown, he and his wife, Morgan Jones, started binging TV shows. Their first choice? *Smash*, a drama about the making of a Broadway musical.

"I was mostly joking when I turned to my wife and said, 'This can't be that difficult,'" says Burkhardt about producing

a musical. "Turns out, it is both very difficult and also not that hard."

*Smash* inspired them to read books on the subject, network with significant theater players, and eventually create Burkhardt Jones Productions. With a mission statement to uplift underrepresented stories, they started investing in, and producing, Broadway shows, including *Parade*. The musical features a story about anti-Semitism, and its opening last year drew neo-Nazi protestors. Months later, it won a Tony for Best Revival of a Musical.

"I'm on stage trying to listen to the speeches, but I couldn't tell you a word that was said," he recalls. "In my mind, these memories are flashing: The first time I saw theater, listening to cast albums, wanting to become involved, bringing my parents and friends to opening night, knowing this was something I helped make happen. It was truly incredible. A moment I will never forget."

With the upcoming debut of their latest Broadway work, *Suffs*, based on the women's suffrage movement, balancing his theater and basketball duties might sound overwhelming. Fortunately, Burkhardt's a pro at juggling multiple endeavors. While earning his MBA at the Carlson School, he was flying back and forth from his job at the time with the LA Clippers to Minneapolis. Having his MBA helps in both lines of work, whether it's working on business strategy for the Mavericks or making financial decisions for theater productions.

"There's something about seeing the best people in the world do what they do live," says Burkhardt, whose ultimate goal is to run a sports franchise. "For me, that's the intersection of sports and the theater. I can be effective by using my talents in a meaningful way on the business side of things. I've found a way to be involved in the things I love."



**HONORING HMONG CULTURE THROUGH ART**

**Mia Vue Jennings, sophomore in the Undergraduate Program**



Mia Vue Jennings

The Minnesota State Fair draws hundreds of thousands of visitors annually during its 12-day run.

While it's usually a packed house, there are peaceful pockets, such as the Joyful World Mural Park, where artists create murals onsite. In 2023, muralist Mia Vue Jennings created a large-scale artwork there inspired by the "paj ntaub," a traditional Hmong story cloth. The colorful piece featured scenes of family, spirituality, farming, cooking, play, and education.

"Instead of imagining something unattainable, I wanted to show appreciation for what we already have in America and also highlight the traditional values that we still carry with us in our daily lives," says Jennings, a Hmong American from Minneapolis. "It's great to dream, but you have to remember there are so many things to be grateful for."

Jennings' art primarily draws from her Hmong identity. Along with murals she's worked in a variety of mediums, including digital art, paintings, illustrations, and street

art. Her pieces have been displayed at libraries, childcare centers, art festivals, and Minnesota Public Radio's "YourClassical Storytime."

Jennings recalls her first drawing as a toddler—a picture of her family featuring siblings, parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles—and she continues to draw inspiration from her family, culture, and experiences. It's about honoring her roots while connecting with people, she says. Along the way, her parents have supported and encouraged her art and education, helping her build a career and portfolio.

"I wouldn't have decided to pursue an art career alongside going to college without them," she says. "I'm glad they encouraged me to keep on going for bigger and better. I just need to be myself and to be confident. I'm not going to get any of these opportunities unless I try."

When she thinks about her dream career, Jennings sees herself as a successful artist creating murals or animating films that tell traditional Hmong stories. She'd also love working in marketing or design at a creative agency. Overall, she wants to lead a creative career. And if she ever starts her own business in relation to her art, she says her business degrees in Marketing and Management Information Systems will help. Right now, she finds pursuing art while going to the Carlson School is the best of both worlds.

"As a business student, I have to remind myself why I'm here and in business—because it also helps me in my art and creative pursuits," Jennings says. "I'm not just in it to get into a corporate job. I have my own path, and it's OK that I'm not like everyone else."

**PLAYING A VITAL ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY**

**Tom Lindow, '05 MBA**

As a kid growing up in Sheboygan, Wisc., Tom Lindow remembers seeing the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra (MSO) on a school field trip. There was the controlled chaos of hundreds of students finding their seats, and then the absolute silence and anticipation that filled the room as the music began.

It's a childhood memory Lindow wasn't expecting to relive. However, that early experience played a crucial part in him accepting his position as MSO's CFO last year.

"Had that experience not happened when I was in sixth grade, I don't know whether I'd be sitting in this seat today," he says. "Whether it's inspiring young people to enjoy the arts or pursue a career in the arts, it's just important to get in there when they're young. It's one of those experiences kids need to be well-rounded."

Lindow worked in the corporate world for years before taking his first nonprofit job with the Milwaukee Jewish Federation, then eventually landing at the MSO, one of Wisconsin's largest cultural organizations.

"It's not that different than a for-profit entity," he says. "We have a board of directors, a mission, and services that we have to provide and need to be funded on a recurring basis. The big difference is there's more joy in it for me. You get the rewarding feeling of being able to provide a service for the city."

Lindow appreciates the vital role MSO plays in the Milwaukee arts community and its partnerships with fellow arts organizations. He said it can be challenging because MSO relies heavily on fundraising and private donations to fund its operations and build a healthy endowment.

"I want to be a business partner—I want to understand all the jobs here," he says. "If there's a place I didn't know a lot about, it would be the symphonic world. That gives me a lot of opportunities to learn. It's the joy of expanding my knowledge of an industry I haven't been involved in before."

Not only has he developed an appreciation for all the programming the MSO does, from classical music concerts to family-friendly movies with a live score, it's compelling, he says, to be part of the "greater good" of the community.

"Even if I have a bad day, I still know that we provide something beautiful for the city to enjoy. That brings me a lot of satisfaction," he says. **C**



Tom Lindow '05 MBA



**"You get the rewarding feeling of being able to provide a service for the city."**

TOM LINDOW, '05 MBA



**"There's something about seeing the best people in the world do what they do live. For me, that's the intersection of sports and the theater."**

KYLE BURKHARDT, '20 MBA

# CONNECTING CARLSON



**\$40M donor-funded project launches, with prominent business leader Marilyn Carlson Nelson's lead gift earning a historic naming on the Carlson School building**

BY STEVE HENNEBERRY

Thanks to visionary leadership, excellent faculty, and generous donors, the University of Minnesota's business school has provided transformational education and experiences for future business leaders for more than 100 years. For a good chunk of those years, that impact has been accelerated by one family: the Carlsons. Such a transformation reflects the work of entrepreneur and family patriarch Curt Carlson, who turned his stamps business into a multinational, \$8 billion travel, hospitality, and marketing conglomerate. His \$25 million gift in 1986 established the Carlson School of Management, pushing the school forward in innumerable ways.

His descendants have carried on his generous commitment through the continuous support of the Carlson Family Foundation and the Carlson Company itself. And now his daughter, Marilyn Carlson Nelson, retired CEO, has chosen to make the *Connecting Carlson* building project her legacy. She is looking forward to partnering with others to make the transformative dream a new reality. Across a career that stacks up against any business leader in state history, Carlson Nelson has stood up for herself, other women, and underserved populations. That's what makes the *Connecting Carlson* building project much more than a reimagination. Inspired by the past, responsive to the present, and oriented toward the future, it will modernize core spaces within the school, bolstering world-class education and providing a competitive edge for students. The building will be named Marilyn Carlson Nelson Hall, becoming the first building on the University's Twin Cities campus named for a female philanthropist—and one of the only flagship business school buildings in the country named solely for a female industry leader.

ILLUSTRATION BY RYAN OLBRYSH



Successful business people can envision the future. They see a blank canvas and know how to fill it. Or, as Carlson School Professor Myles Shaver puts it, they can “get up on the balcony,” gaining perspective that defines the next move.

Marilyn Carlson Nelson was the CEO of Carlson Companies when she heard that last idea, as her executive team was earning a customized MBA in the early 2000s. She applied the concept throughout her career, leading not only the company but also many civic causes.

On a cold December evening in 2023, that history and Shaver’s apt description were front and center as Carlson Nelson stood on the second-floor balcony in the school’s flagship building. Overlooking an atrium filled with nearly 200 people, she described her vision of the future: “I see this space alive with activity and energy. ... This will no longer be a pass-through space; I see a destination space, a happening place where memories are made, and allegiance inspired.”

Carlson Nelson resonated with the vision of school leaders and her personal gift was the catalyst for launching the *Connecting Carlson*



project that promises to remake the school, literally and figuratively. Joining her are 11 other individual, family, and foundation gifts that, combined, provide a strong foundation for this project.

**TARGETING CORE SPACES**

Blueprints for the Carlson School building were drawn in 1995. The world, and the school, have changed since then. The building, while well maintained, still faces challenges in meeting the business needs of today. “We simply can’t expect our

Thank you to these generous donors for their leadership commitments to the *Connecting Carlson* project.

**Marilyn Carlson Nelson**  
**John & Annette Whaley**  
**The Glaser Family Foundation**  
**Norm & Conni Bjornnes**  
**Brian Gerhardson & John Shade**  
**Doug & Peg Schmalz**  
**George Reiling**  
**David & Shirley Hubers Family**  
**Craig & Jessica Schmidt**  
**Jody Gunderson**  
**John W. Mooty Foundation**

Far left: Marilyn Carlson Nelson speaks at the Connecting Carlson launch event in December 2023.

Left: Faculty, staff, alumni, and friends filled the Carlson School atrium for the launch of the building project.

Below: Goldy Gopher (from left) strikes a pose with Interim University President Jeff Ettinger, Marilyn Carlson Nelson, Dean Jamie Prenkert, Professor and Dean Emerita Sri Zaheer, and Board of Advisors Chair Catherine Mathis at the launch event.

**Interested in making a gift?** Contact Jess Kowal, assistant dean for Institutional Advancement, at [jkowal@umn.edu](mailto:jkowal@umn.edu).

renowned faculty to do the job of teaching and innovating for tomorrow’s connected world in yesterday’s 27-year-old spaces; an analog space in an AI world,” says Carlson Nelson.

The project targets core spaces to promote greater student collaboration, elevate experiential learning opportunities, strengthen a sense of belonging, and enhance connections with the greater business community.

“Learning, collaboration, and community spaces matter. A lot. And we’re adding many more of them with this project,” shares Dean Jamie Prenkert. “*Connecting Carlson* ensures that we remain competitive as a top business school by elevating and enhancing those critical connections.”

Prenkert is completing a project that began during Professor and Dean Emerita Sri Zaheer’s tenure. It was sidelined when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. After updating its scope to reflect current needs, there was one element missing: a lead donor. Carlson Nelson stepped up.

**‘A BEACON FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS’**

One of the most prominent and accomplished business executives in Minnesota history, Carlson Nelson joined the family business in 1968, beginning a run of success that continues today. That included doubling the company’s systemwide revenues while CEO, navigating a host of industry changes, and helping bring two Super Bowls to Minnesota.

Considering when she made her mark, her achievements are all the more impressive. “I discovered the challenge of being the only woman on corporate boards and trying to contribute and succeed as part of a marginalized community,” she explained. “That was nearly 60 years ago, but I remember it as if it were yesterday, and that experience informs my work here at Carlson to attract more women to see business as a positive way to make a difference.”



Left: A view of the atrium, from the ground floor, looking east, showing new collaboration spaces, large media wall, and the staircase moved for even more room.

Below: A renovated auditorium has more capacity, better lighting, and new technology.

*“I see a destination space, a happening place where memories are made, and allegiance inspired.”*

MARILYN CARLSON NELSON

That meaning isn’t lost on current Carlson School faculty and staff. In a LinkedIn post, Professor Pinar Karaca-Mandic said, “As a woman academic, a professor in business, economics, and finance, how happy, how proud, and how welcome it makes me to be walking to my workplace, especially now that our building will be named the Marilyn Carlson Nelson Hall!”

It’s the first time in the 160-year history of the University of Minnesota that a female name will grace a campus building because of an individual philanthropic gift. That history-making aspect isn’t lost on its benefactor: “It is my fervent hope that seeing my name on this flagship Carlson School building will attract and inspire more young women to seek business leadership as their opportunity to be a force for good.” **C**

**BY THE NUMBERS**

**70,000**

sq. ft. being transformed

**3,600**

sq. ft. of new student collaboration space

**15**

new breakout and single study rooms

**1**

integrated suite for experiential learning

**Read about the Glaser family’s support of the Experiential Learning Suite on p. 38–39.**



Right: A brave bunch embrace the cold rush of a polar plunge, one of Special Olympics Minnesota's largest fundraisers. Photo courtesy Special Olympics Minnesota.



Middle: A Special Olympics athlete takes the court for a Unified basketball game. Photo courtesy Special Olympics Minnesota.



Below: Gophers football players Justin Walley (left) and Aireontae Ersey (center) attend a clinic as part of their NIL work with Dinkytown Athletes. Photo courtesy Dinkytown Athletes.



**PUSHING BOUNDARIES**

How new experiential learning opportunities enhance the undergraduate experience and empower local organizations.



# BEYOND *the* GRADE

BY ROSE SEMENOV

Above: Gophers basketball player Amaya Battle appears at an event for Dinkytown Athletes as part of her NIL work. Photo courtesy Dinkytown Athletes.



Left: The Blazing Stars Special Olympics basketball team huddles up. Photo courtesy Special Olympics Minnesota.

Sticky notes fill the whiteboard. Voices across the room overlap. One student types furiously into a laptop while another refers to a spreadsheet.

Questions hang in the air. The project deadline is just weeks away.

This is the “messy middle” of the Carlson Impact Lab, where more than just a passing grade is at stake. The students are working with Special Olympics Minnesota to identify ways to increase engagement ahead of the 2026 Special Olympics USA Games, which will be hosted at the University of Minnesota. With the national spotlight, the organization wants to supercharge the movement of inclusion statewide, leaving a legacy beyond the Games.

“There’s an actual purpose on what we’re researching and doing, so it definitely created motivation and drive to do our best,” says Rachel Secrist, a sophomore in the Undergraduate Program.

#### LEARNING WITH PURPOSE

This year marks the first cohort of students enrolling in the Impact Lab, a required, two-course experience that’s part of the school’s award-winning undergraduate curriculum. In year one, students learn how to problem-solve. In year two, they apply these lessons

via Impact Lab in Action. Throughout the semester, students work with an organization to assess a business problem, provide recommendations, and create implementable deliverables.

Amee McDonald, the Impact Lab’s managing director, says the goal is to empower students early in their undergraduate careers with more experiential learning opportunities to grow and learn.

“This is a space where we’re giving them the boundaries and then they have to take the initiative to really make this experience what it’s supposed to be for their learning,” explains McDonald. “And then if they experience that failure, this is a safe space to fail.”

Throughout the semester, student teams work closely with their instructors and mentors to explore possible solutions for their client. In Special Olympics Minnesota’s case, the organization is on a campaign to attract the next generation of volunteer coaches, targeting young adults and tapping into networks beyond athletes’ family members.

Trenton Knutson, a sophomore in the Undergraduate Program, says his group focused on improving Special Olympics Minnesota’s TikTok strategy to better connect with young adults.

After analyzing the historical volunteer data, they outlined several strategies, such as developing videos that highlight powerful volunteer experiences and capitalizing on social media trends, to create more engaging content.

“We presented them a plan that they could reuse and that was reliable. They ended up really loving it.”  
TRENTON KNUTSON

“If we can make something Special Olympics could easily replicate and get consistency with, that would be best for them,” explains Knutson. “So we presented them a plan that they could reuse and that was reliable. They ended up really loving it, saying that they wanted to implement it right away.”

Other teams looked at building long-term partnerships with National Honor Societies across the state to build volunteer pipelines, tapping into young adult sports leagues, and enhancing recruitment strategies on the University’s Twin Cities campus, home to nearly 55,000 students. Dave Dorn, the president and CEO of Special Olympics Minnesota, applauded the thoroughness of the students’ insights, which he says the organization plans to incorporate when building its strategic plan for the Games.

“It’s good to get young people’s perspective on issues that you’re tackling,” says Dorn. “It does open your eyes to questions you should consider, especially when these are the people that we want to take the movement to that next level.”

Left: Impact Lab students, including Trent Knutson (middle), present their findings to Special Olympics Minnesota.

Opposite: Students in the Leadership Lab present growth opportunities for Dinkytown Athletes.



#### LEADING THROUGH AMBIGUITY

After completing the Impact Lab, undergraduates can expand their résumé with additional experiential learning opportunities by applying to the Leadership Lab. The Leadership Lab provides Carlson School undergraduate leaders a community to work together on real-world problems while continuing to hone their leadership and teamwork skills. Students accepted to the program can earn up to a \$3,500 stipend, thanks to generous financial support.

With cohorts consisting of high achievers, the biggest challenge may be learning leadership isn’t as straightforward as it seems.

“You’re bringing in people who are often seen as leaders in past projects in other classes to work together. So how do you navigate roles and responsibilities,” asks Sarah Wojnicki Smith, the Leadership Lab program director. “How do they navigate those teamwork dynamics while working on ambiguous problems? And because they are working with a community client, they need to navigate external relationships, too. Students have had really interesting and challenging experiences when they are put into a position they aren’t normally put into.”

“The data they got is just gold because as a startup we couldn’t have done that ourselves.”  
DEREK BURNS, '00 BSB

Last semester, students partnered with Dinkytown Athletes. The new collective serves as the resource for Gophers student-athletes as they navigate opportunities to monetize their name, image, and likeness (NIL) under the new NCAA rules. Derek Burns, '00 BSB, and former Gophers football player, cofounded the startup as a way to help give back to the community that once supported him.

“The generational difference is when I was a student-athlete, my coaches helped me get part-time jobs in the summer or off-season,” says Burns. “NIL is the new version of that because now with their schedules, they can’t have a part-time job. They just don’t have the time. So for them to be able to do some promotional and mainly social media work and get paid for it is their part-time job.”

With the NIL industry being so new, the Leadership Lab students were initially unsure which direction to take.

“There was a lot of ambiguity that we had to sift through to figure out what we were really trying to focus on and what we were trying to learn,” says Brenna McClarey, a senior in the Undergraduate Program.

After navigating through this “messy middle,” the team decided to conduct a survey to identify a target audience for NIL promotions and also complete outreach to determine which Twin Cities businesses were interested in working with Dinkytown Athletes to create NIL partnerships with student-athletes.

“The data they got is just gold because as a startup we couldn’t have done that ourselves,” says Burns. “We would’ve had to go to a market research agency to just even get that information. So that was huge. We almost have a blueprint now on what we can take on and where to efficiently use our time and resources to grow.”



Jenna Vilter, a junior in the Undergraduate Program, says her experience in the Leadership Lab cemented her decision to pursue business.

“It’s so hands-on, you feel like you are part of the progress that the companies are making and I never would have expected to be doing that before I got my degree,” says Vilter. “It’s supercool as a junior in college to be able to say that.”

#### ‘A BEAUTIFUL COLLABORATION’

As more students complete the Impact Lab, the enhanced hands-on learning opportunities will enrich the academic experience at the Carlson School.

“It’s this beautiful collaboration of how we are teaching students these problem-solving skills early in their career so that they’re using them not only in the Impact Lab or Leadership Lab, but throughout their classes in the curriculum,” says Wojnicki Smith. “I think we’re going to see a really big change in how students are approaching problems in all of our classes and beyond.”

Secrist, who worked on the Special Olympics Minnesota project, says she’s already applying her Impact Lab skills to her next career steps.

“I’ve had a few internship interviews and I’ve been able to talk about this class on how I’m meeting with real people. I’m working with others, I’m able to lead and it’s a huge quality that a lot of companies like to hear,” she says.

It’s an experience students are hungry for.

“The best experience is real-world experience,” says Knutson. “Getting into the nitty-gritty of it. Because when you work with real people, it has real impact, and you do feel that.” **C**

## Celebrating Transformational Giving



As you read earlier in these pages, we continue to feel incredibly honored to recognize the enduring and powerful leadership of Marilyn Carlson Nelson with the naming of our flagship building. This marks yet

another milestone achieved by Marilyn, as the Carlson School will now have the only building on campus named solely for a female philanthropist.

The full scope of Marilyn's imprint on the University and the Carlson School is too extensive to list here, but I would be remiss if I did not take the opportunity to acknowledge her longstanding commitment to the school in lending her strategic mindset to several deans, driving innovative new initiatives, and championing the development of women leaders. With her remarkable support for the school over the past several decades, it was no surprise that Marilyn stepped up and led our community once again with her gift to support the transformation to modernize our building.

We are awed by, and grateful to, the many leadership donors who have contributed to the *Connecting Carlson* project already. These gifts demonstrate the remarkable nature of our wonderful alumni and donors who have engaged with this vision. As we look to continue our progress and meet the full funding needs of the project, we ask for your continued commitment to the Carlson School and philanthropic support to enhance and modernize the world-class business education our faculty deliver.

The advancement team and I welcome the opportunity to share more about *Connecting Carlson* with you, and are eager to discuss how you can join the visionaries supporting this critical initiative.

Sincerely,

Jess Kowal  
Assistant Dean, Institutional Advancement

### One Big Number

5,600+  
square feet

In the new Glaser Family Experiential Learning Suite to support real-world, project-based learning that is a hallmark of a Carlson School education

### MORE NUMBERS

100%

Philanthropy will cover the full cost of the *Connecting Carlson* project

350 seats

New capacity of the auditorium, which will also feature state-of-the-art technology for classroom learning and events

# ENGAGE

## Carlson School Alumni Earn Universitywide Awards



Learn about alumni engagement and volunteer opportunities at [carlsonschool.umn.edu/alumni/volunteer](https://carlsonschool.umn.edu/alumni/volunteer)



Shannon Peloquin, '06 BSB



Scott Wallace, '80 BSB

The University of Minnesota Alumni Association (UMAA) honored several Carlson School alumni for their dedication and leadership as representatives of their alma mater.

### Shannon Peloquin, '06 BSB U40 Alumni Leader Award

Peloquin was honored for her service to Carlson School students and advisory boards. A longtime volunteer, Peloquin is active in the San Francisco Bay area alumni community where she calls home, mentors students interested in consulting, and is a current member of the Carlson School Alumni Board. Peloquin is a partner at McKinsey and Co., and board member of the San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban Research Association.

### Scott Wallace, '80 BSB Alumni Service Award

Using his business training and career expertise, Wallace has a long list of accomplishments during his tenure on the UMAA Board of Directors. He chaired UMAA's Revenue Growth Task Force, and

served as treasurer and finance and audit committee chair, making important impacts on the organization's financial growth and stability. Wallace's work also includes spearheading the Inclusion and Belonging Committee, while advocating for diversity conversations and equitable alumni engagement.

### Carlson Women Global Connect Outstanding Alumni Society

CWGC was honored for their commitment to building and strengthening connections between alumni of the Carlson School. This volunteer-run organization provides opportunities for engagement, resources, and networking to female alumni of the school. **Lindsay Amundson, '07 BSB, '12 MBA**, chair, and **Julie Gilbert, '93 BSB, '99 MBA**, former co-chair, along with their CWGC Board and a Senior Executive Advisory Board, have grown the network in just a few years into what the award committee called a "model volunteer-run organization."

## Alumna Gives Back to Life-Changing MBA Program Ahead of Graduation Milestone



Jenna Theisen, '14 MBA (left), was working at a company in a role she enjoyed when she

started the Part-Time MBA program at the Carlson School, not intending to make a change. However, she says, "After three years of grinding away at full-time work and part-time school it seemed like I owed it to myself to try to leverage my degree for a career opportunity I would not otherwise have had access to."

She decided to pursue consulting, ultimately accepting a new role that took her from Minneapolis to New York City, London, and San Francisco, in roles she hadn't considered in her reach before enrolling at the Carlson School.

"My degree changed the trajectory of my career and life," says Theisen. "The past ten years since graduation have been a marvelous adventure personally and professionally and I'm thankful for my MBA for launching it."

This milestone year marks a decade since graduation, and Theisen has consistently given back to the program she credits with her career success as a member of the Investors Circle giving society. "I'm very thankful for the opportunities I had during and since the program, and I want to pay it forward by supporting the program and its current and future students."

# Putting People First

As a leader in retail, Mark Schindele, '92 BSB, takes a people-centered approach to business. That ethos also extends to his personal endeavors and how he has strived to make a difference in his community and at the Carlson School. Schindele shares his reflections on his career path and helping others:



**How did your education from the Carlson School help shape your career?**

The Carlson School opened career paths I never dreamed of growing up. I got my start right out of college in a management training program at Macy's headquarters and never looked back. The Carlson School was a springboard for my career, giving me the foundation I needed to explore a variety of roles in retail that ultimately led me to merchandising.

**Mark Schindele  
'92 BSB**

**TITLE**  
Executive Vice President and Chief Stores Officer at Target

**HOMETOWN**  
Maple Grove, Minn.

**HOBBIES**  
Anything outdoors... boating, fishing, pickleball, golf, biking, snowmobiling.

**You have been involved in several projects and initiatives involving diversity, equity, and inclusion. Why do you find these issues important to you personally?**

I am a firm believer that we need diversity of thought and lived experiences in every aspect of society. My mother taught English as a Second Language courses and she taught us the importance of respecting and valuing differences. My wife is Filipino and we have two children, so I have a vested interest in ensuring the world is a place that offers them belonging and celebrates different cultures and backgrounds.

At Target, it is important to me that our team reflects the communities we serve and that each team member feels they can bring their whole selves and their unique perspectives to work. I am really proud that I can extend my passion for this work at the Carlson School by serving on the [Board of Advisors] DEI subcommittee that helped stand up the Center for Inclusive Excellence and the hiring of Angela Spranger, the school's first senior diversity officer.

**What leadership principles do you live by?**

Setting a vision and aligning the work of the team is essential for any leader. But, to me, a leader's greatest impact is on the individuals you lead. You must listen and learn from your team, so you can figure out how to unlock greatness in each individual and remove roadblocks that might be getting in the way of them accomplishing their goals. **C**

Scholarships help provide opportunities for students to pursue a world-class business education while engaging in meaningful activities outside the classroom, gaining leadership and management experiences that enhance and are strengthened by their classroom learning. Philanthropy from alumni and friends of the Carlson School makes a positive impact, extending far beyond the campus.



**Jonathan Norling**

Current MBA student

Following a challenging deployment in Afghanistan and Iraq, my transition back to civilian life was marked by a demanding phase of physical and mental recovery, ultimately leading to my medical retirement from the military. In this critical period, training my service dog, Athena—and experiencing the profound bond and support she provided—became a cornerstone in my healing process. She was not just a pet but a lifeline, guiding me through the most difficult times and aiding in my rehabilitation.

**“Athena was not just a pet but a lifeline, guiding me through the most difficult times and aiding in my rehabilitation.”**

JONATHAN NORLING

I chose to pursue an MBA to combine my diverse civilian and military skills and experiences under a unified framework. This journey is driven by a deep-seated desire to give back to the community of transitioning and disabled veterans. The scholarship I have received is invaluable, as it not only furthers my academic and professional goals, but also empowers me to assist other veterans on their paths to success, much like Athena assisted me on mine.



**Makayla Hillukka**

Junior in the Undergraduate Program

I grew up in northern Minnesota in a low-income community, and my academic endeavors are of my own ambition and responsibility. I have worked multiple part-time jobs over the past two years, all while balancing heavy academic course loads within the Honors College, majoring in Management Information Systems at the Carlson School of Management and Human Resource Development at the College for Education and Human Development, while minoring in Communication Studies. I also partake in many extracurriculars on campus.

Additional scholarship funding changes the trajectory of my upcoming year, allowing me to further my dedication to academics while serving as the University's Speech team's vice president, the Communication Studies Association's co-president, and a delegation member of the University's Institute on the Environment's partnership with Germany.

# Celebrating Three Generations of Carlson Connections

The Glaser family enhances their focus on student support and experiences with *Connecting Carlson* gift.

BY GENE REBECK

When the *Connecting Carlson* project is completed in 2026, it will include the remarkable suite for experiential learning. There, four Enterprise programs—Brand, Consulting, Funds, and Ventures—will share more than 5,600 square feet in a prominent location on the first floor. The programs will bring together small teams of MBA and undergraduate students who will work on client businesses’ real-world challenges. While each Enterprise program will have its own dedicated space, the suite will provide collaborative work environments and research focus group rooms.

As distinctive as the suite will be, the supporters behind it are just as noteworthy: A family with three generations of graduates from the University of Minnesota’s business school. In recognition of their financial support of the project and their long commitment to the business school and to the University, the Carlson School will name the space the Glaser Family Experiential Learning Suite.

“If you look back at our three generations of involvement, it’s pretty extensive,” Chip Glaser, ’75 BSB, says. “Our roots are very deep with the University. That’s why it was meaningful for us to make this kind of commitment to the *Connecting Carlson* project.”

The family’s roots were planted by Chip Glaser’s father, Ken, who graduated from the business school in 1942. A certified public accountant, Ken went on to have a varied and successful entrepreneurial career, primarily in the automobile industry. He became board chair of National Car Rental, moving the company’s headquarters to Minnesota, and later owned a car dealership. Throughout,

he maintained his connection with his alma mater, becoming a member of the business school’s Alumni Board and later serving as president of the University’s Alumni Association.

Ken Glaser died just as his son, Chip, matriculated with a degree in accounting. After receiving his degree in 1975, Chip Glaser joined Deloitte, specializing in construction and real estate. In 1983, he started his own development company, which he continues to operate.

Like his father, Chip has served as national president of the University of Minnesota Alumni Association, a position he took on when he was just 36. He remains involved with the Minnesota Capital Campaign Steering Committee and the Intercollegiate Athletics Leadership Council. In 2014, he received the Regents Award for his extensive service and philanthropic contributions to the University. Two years later, he was given the Director’s Award from the Intercollegiate Athletics Department. In April 2023, after serving for 18 years, he left the Carlson School Board of Advisors to focus on his work for the University of Minnesota Foundation, which he will chair starting this year.

Not surprisingly, all five of Chip’s children have been awarded UMN degrees. His son, KC, earned his undergraduate degree from the Carlson School in 2005. He then began a career in marketing, primarily in the restaurant space, for companies including Dairy Queen, Buffalo Wild Wings, and Famous Dave’s. A few years ago, he shifted to consumer packaged goods, joining General Mills as senior manager for brand experience. He also earned an MBA in 2016 from the Carlson School.

A rendering of the Glaser Family Experiential Learning Suite, which will branch off of the ground floor of the atrium.



**“Our roots are very deep with the University. That’s why it was meaningful for us to make this kind of commitment to the *Connecting Carlson* project.”**

CHIP GLASER, ’75 BSB

Like his father and grandfather, KC has also given back to his alma mater, serving six years on the Carlson School Alumni Board. In 2020, he co-launched the Carlson School Alumni Pride Network, which offers professional connections, development, and advocacy to the school’s LGBTQ+ graduates in the Twin Cities.

The Glasers have been longstanding supporters of Carlson School students. That includes a scholarship that awards \$20,000 over four years to scholars. Since 2017, it’s supported eight students. Additionally, the Glaser-Mooty Undergraduate Lounge in Hanson Hall provides a place to relax, study, and recharge.



Members of the Glaser family, including Chip, second from left, pose for a photo during the *Connecting Carlson* launch event in December 2023.



**“Our family owes a lot of what we have and who we are to the University. And we want to give back.”**

KC GLASER, ’05 BSB, ’16 MBA

Chip is delighted to have his family’s name connected to the suite. “It will be something a lot of the students will be able to use,” he says. “It was our idea that funding the Experiential Learning Suite would be very beneficial.”

Having the family name attached to the suite “is super-meaningful,” KC adds. “It was instilled in me at a young age how important the University is not only to our family but also to the state of Minnesota—as a provider of talent to the businesses of the state as well as being a large employer itself. Our family owes a lot of what we have and who we are to the University. And we want to give back.” **C**

## A New Way to Gather Together

The Maroon Lobby in Hanson Hall offers students space to be themselves.

BY GENE REBECK

This fall, Hanson Hall has made more room for students looking for a comfortable, inclusive atmosphere within the Carlson School.

It's named the Equity, Belonging, and Inclusion Hub, and it's part of the new Maroon Lobby. The open, more than 1,100-square-foot space—which is shared with the Student Life and Career Design team as well as the new Center for Inclusive Excellence—is intended for Carlson School students of all ethnic backgrounds, both undergraduate and graduate, “to be their authentic self, whatever that might look like,” says Geida Cleveland, the Undergraduate Program's director of diversity, equity, inclusion, and enrollment.

Cleveland says research shows “students from marginalized communities are more likely to experience bias and discrimination in their classrooms.” This can cause students to feel isolated, creating negative effects on academic performance. The Equity, Belonging, and Inclusion Hub “allows students to relax,” she adds. Though most currently use it as a study space (usually in groups), they can also do puzzles, play games, or just chill.

The Maroon Lobby concept began to take shape a few years ago. In the spring of 2021, Cleveland and other Carlson School diversity and inclusion team members convened focus groups with students from various backgrounds to learn about their experiences and challenges. The diversity and inclusion team began to offer programming and events to help create a sense of community within the school based on student feedback. Though the programming was well received, they were offered only a couple of hours a week. Cleveland and her colleagues wanted to do more, so they made the case to school leadership for what would become the Maroon Lobby.



**The Equity, Belonging, and Inclusion Hub “allows students to relax,” says Geida Cleveland. Though most currently use it as a study space (usually in groups), they can also do puzzles, play games, or just chill.**

A significant part of the project was funded through the Dean's Excellence Fund. This fund “allows us to be flexible to support needs across the school as they arise,” says Megan Tenenbaum, the Carlson School's director of annual giving. “The generosity of alumni and friends of the school directly impacts that overall experience of students and enhances our campus climate.” The Maroon Lobby fits that mission because, she says, it “has such a huge impact on students.”

Tenenbaum adds, “[The Equity, Belonging, and Inclusion Hub] is an

identity-conscious space, but it's open to any student with any identity.” Cleveland says it is intended to provide everyone, regardless of background, “the opportunity to learn from each other's cultures and lived experiences,” which are exchanges that can help make them “better business leaders.”

The space, Cleveland adds, is still evolving: “As students use the space more and more, we'll know what their needs might be and how we can accommodate them.” **C**

## Leading Together

The partnership of Schwan's Co. and the Carlson School is helping future business leaders fulfill their dreams.

BY GENE REBECK

Jade Moreno, a junior in the Undergraduate Program who is pursuing a degree focusing on Finance and on Public & Nonprofit Management, has high hopes for her future. “I want to be able to use my knowledge and personal background to make a difference in people's lives that will be long-lasting and legacy-driven,” she says.

However, it hasn't been easy to pursue that dream. “I have not been able to get a lot of past scholarships only due to my family's middle-class status, but I am the sole person paying for my college,” Moreno says.

This school year, she received some welcome help: A scholarship from Minnesota-based Schwan's Company. The scholarship program, which started in 2018, has so far helped 24 students continue their Carlson School education.

“We've always been committed to promoting education and leadership development in all the communities where we have operations,” says Scott Peterson, '83 MHRIR, executive vice president and chief human resource officer at Schwan's. The strategic relationship between Schwan's and the University began in 2015. Since then, Schwan's has supported numerous programs “not only in terms of dollars, but also in terms of minutes,” Peterson says.

In addition to the scholarship program, Schwan's is involved in the Carlson Brand Enterprise (CBE) program, which provides students the opportunity to act as marketing strategy consultants for a partner organization. As a CBE participant, Mike Herauf, '22 MKTG, was tasked to help provide marketing direction for Schwan's Global Food Project. Since Korea-based CJ CheilJedang Corporation acquired Schwan's in 2019, the two

companies have been building global brands that cross different cuisines. Herauf's work included developing a definition for Premium Frozen Global (PFG) food products, analyzing the competitive landscape, and identifying a market strategy for PFG items.

Besides “learning from some of the best [marketers] in the industry,” Herauf says that the CBE experience allowed him to learn more about Schwan's and its culture. “I knew the company had large goals for the future, and I wanted to be a part of that growth,” he adds. Herauf joined Schwan's in July 2022 and is now a senior marketing associate helping manage the company's food service pizza brands.

Though Peterson graduated four decades ago, he says he still uses content and learning from his Carlson School experiences today. A course in compensation theory and practice, for instance, instilled in him the importance not only of pay but also “factors outside of compensation—such as leadership and development—that influence the employee experience.”

Schwan's partners with the Carlson School in large part because of the school's focus on “not just business acumen, but also leadership,” Peterson says. He adds that it's a value that's so important to them that the company continues to provide scholarships to Carlson School students whether they join Schwan's or not.

Moreno's career may not lead to a position at Schwan's, but she is very grateful that the company has “relieved a significant portion of my financial burden,” allowing her to focus on her education and her future career. “Being a recipient lets me know that my endeavors and my work ethic do not go unnoticed,” she says. **C**



**Mike Herauf,**  
'22 MKTG



**Jade Moreno,** junior in  
Undergraduate Program



**Scott Peterson,**  
'83 MHRIR

**“We've always been committed to promoting education and leadership development in all the communities where we have operations.”**

SCOTT PETERSON, '83 MHRIR

Every event brings new insights, experiences, and connections for alumni and friends of the Carlson School. Here are some highlights:

## Carlson School Around the World

Dean Jamie Prenkert and representatives from the Carlson School have traveled across the country and around the world this school year. Alumni and friends have enthusiastically welcomed the school's new dean, and have enjoyed coming together for networking, socializing, and learning about new and exciting things happening and planned

at the Carlson School. In the fall, stops included Chicago, New York, San Francisco, Seattle, Shanghai and Guangzhou in China, and Seoul, South Korea. This spring, they visited in Naples, Fla.; Phoenix; Warsaw, Poland; Vienna, Austria; and Dallas, Texas. Travel isn't done yet, so watch your inbox to see when the group is coming to a city near you!



Prenkert met with alumni and friends in New York City (top), San Francisco (middle), and Shanghai (bottom).



## Carlson School in Minnesota

It's been busy in the Twin Cities as well, with socializing, networking, and introducing our new dean to local alumni and friends. First, Prenkert marched alongside students, alumni, and school representatives in the Homecoming parade. Then alumni turned out for a football tailgate, cheering the Gophers to victory against the Louisiana Ragin' Cajuns. The fall semester rounded out with Prenkert sitting down for a wide-ranging 1st Tuesday discussion with Allison Kaplan, editor-in-chief of *Twin Cities Business*.

View Prenkert's 1st Tuesday conversation, and other past 1st Tuesday events, at [z.umn.edu/1stTuesday](https://z.umn.edu/1stTuesday)



## Save the Date: All-Alumni Weekend

It's been so much fun hosting MBA Reunion Weekend the last few years that the fun is now open to all! The first-ever All-Alumni Weekend is September 20-21, 2024. The weekend will include milestone reunion

events and activities, a tailgate before the Gophers football game vs. Iowa, and other family-friendly activities. Mark your calendars, make your travel plans, and visit [z.umn.edu/CarlsonSchoolReunion](https://z.umn.edu/CarlsonSchoolReunion) to see what's planned.

## CWGC Launches Senior Executives Series



Carlson Women Global Connect (CWGC) launched a new Senior Executive Women's Series and hosted three events at local companies: 3M, Best Buy, and Donaldson. Volunteers within each organization hosted panel discussions on topics ranging from managing global teams to wellness at work. Thanks to Debarati Sen, Heather Green, '04 MBA, Sheila Kramer, '03 MHRIR, and Carla Haugen, '99 MBA, for hosting us at your organizations! Learn more about CWGC at [z.umn.edu/CWGC](https://z.umn.edu/CWGC)

## New Securian Alumni Chapter


Alumni at Securian launched a new alumni chapter this fall with the support of Carlson School Board of Advisors member Sid Gandhi, '05 MBA. The kickoff event was open to all University of Minnesota alumni and featured a visit from Goldy Gopher and remarks from Prenkert.

**Connect With Us!**

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*Note: While we welcome alumni news, the Carlson School does not verify Class Note submissions and is not responsible for the accuracy of the information contained in Class Notes.*

**MINNEAPOLIS/  
ST. PAUL  
BUSINESS  
JOURNAL CFO  
OF THE YEAR**

Congratulations to these Carlson School of Management alumni for being recognized by the *Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal* as CFO of the Year honorees!

**Tom Cronin,** '05 MBT, Roers Companies

**Brian Peterson,** '07 BSB, Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans

**Christine Sagstetter,** '84 BSB, Ordway Center for the Performing Arts

**Darran Spence,** '92 MBA, Apothecary Products

Let your classmates know what you've been up to since graduation. Submit a Class Note for publication in the alumni magazine: [carlsonschool.umn.edu/share](https://carlsonschool.umn.edu/share)

**1980s**

**Dan Groskreutz,** '83 MBA, started a new role as chief financial officer at Bluum.

**Dan Hagen,** '83 BSB, was appointed to the board of directors at Kratos Defense and Security Solutions.

**David Ring,** '83 BSB, started a new role as president and CEO at Sherman + Reilly, Inc.

**1990s**

**Bruce Beckman,** '90 BSB, '99 MBA, was appointed chief financial officer at Malibu Boats, Inc.

**Steve Weber,** '91 MBA, was appointed chief financial officer at FICO.

**Darran Spence,** '92 MBA, is now CEO at Apothecary Products, a promotion from chief financial officer.

**Charles Kummeth,** '93 MBA, was appointed as a director at Orthofix International.

**David Brandmire,** '95 MBA, was elected to a three-year term as board director for the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) Society Minnesota, one of the oldest chapters of the prestigious CFA Institute, the issuer of the Chartered Financial Analyst designation. Brandmire is co-chair of the board's Strategic Planning Committee and works as lead investment research analyst for Wells Fargo Investment Institute.

**Chris Hasslinger,** '95 BSB, started a new role as partner at Vesey Street Capital Partners.

**Lynn Blake,** '97 MBA, was appointed to the board of directors and chair of the board's audit committee at Mama's Creations, Inc.

**Shawn Curti,** '98 MHRIR, started a new role as chief client success officer at SMC Squared.

**Kevin Kwok Wei Ng,** '99 BSB, '04 MBT, started a new role as senior group manager for global tax operations at US Tax Operations.

**Neil Mumm,** '99 BSB, is now senior vice president, general manager, and head of Visa Debit Processing Services, Inc. at Visa.

**2000s**

**Mark Lorenzen,** '00 MBA, started a new role as vice president of finance at Interrad Medical.

**Peter Gastreich,** '01 MBA, started a new role as managing director of natural resources at Water Tower Research.

**Andrew Miller,** '01 BSB, '04 MBA, is now vice president of finance at Otter Tail Power Company.

**Gita Vellanki,** '01 BSB, is the founder of Neeshi, a menstruation-support treat brand, which was recently recognized as a Top Brand at the Expo East Mic Drop Showcase.

**Jennifer Barta,** '02 MBA, started a new role as fractional chief executive officer at FINNOVATION Lab.

**Rob Scott,** '02 BSB, is now chief financial officer at Nuwellis, a promotion from senior director of financial planning and analysis.

**Dan O'Connor,** '03 BSB, is now vice president and general counsel of the transportation and electronics group at 3M.



**Brock Christianson,** '00 MHRIR, was appointed senior vice president and chief human resources officer of Tennant Company. A new premier sponsor of the 1st Tuesday Speaker Series, Tennant Company, founded in 1870 and headquartered in Eden Prairie, Minn., is a world leader in the design, manufacture, and marketing of solutions that help create a cleaner, safer, and healthier world.

**Teal Perrine,** '03 BSB, started a new role as sales profitability and insights manager at Sabrosura Foods.

**David Roach,** '03 BSB, '04 MBA, started a new role as vice president of the employee benefits group at Alliant Insurance Services.

**Jen Wilson,** '04 MBA, started a new role on the investment advisory council at the Minnesota State Board of Investment.

**Charlie Schaller,** '05 BSB, is now vice president of planning and analytics—medical policy at UnitedHealth Group.

**Andrew Shafer,** '05 MBA, started a new role as chief marketing customer and brand officer at Gevo, Inc.

**Matt Wille,** '05 MHA, started a new role as chief operating officer at ThedaCare.

**Brendan Connelly,** '06 MBA, is now director of treasury capital markets at Target, a promotion from director, finance (financial planning and analysis) and human resources.

**Paula LaBine,** '06 MBA, was appointed vice president of the board at the Home Baking Association for 2024.

**Katie Youtsos,** '07 BSB, started a new role as senior sales marketing consultant at Carba, Inc.

**Shay Curry,** '08 MHRIR, was appointed senior director of human resources for footwear at Nike.

**Nate Dahmer,** '09 MBA, started a new role as vice president of direct to consumer marketing at Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC.



**Katherine Ellison,** '06 BSB, cofounder of Bright Planet Pet, a Minneapolis-based maker of vegan dog treats, has landed a nationwide spot at Petco. Her 100 percent vegan dog treats are a game-changer, aligning with eco-conscious pet owners' values. Ellison's expertise and dedication are driving Bright Planet Pet's success in revolutionizing sustainable pet treats.

**William J. Schumacher,** '09 BSB, started a new role as counsel at Winthrop and Weinstine, P.A.

**2010s**

**Zack Geistfeld,** '11 BSB, '18 MBA, started a new role as senior finance manager—North America food service at General Mills.

**Ana Hawkins,** '11 MBA, is now head of strategy and upstream marketing for digital technologies at Medtronic.



**Sam Tashima,** '09 BSB, '17 MBA, was honored as one of 12 recipients with a Rising Actuary Award from the American Academy of Actuaries. The award was presented in November at the Academy's 2023 Annual Meeting: Envision Tomorrow in Washington, D.C.

**Ryan Kaeding,** '11 MBA, started a new role as managing director at Trinity Capital, Inc.

**Emilie Knox,** '11 MBA, is now vice president North America retail capabilities activation at General Mills.

**Mitch Krautkramer,** '11 BSB, is now chief financial officer of Care Solutions, Risk & Growth at Optum.

**Lacee Reynolds,** '11 BSB, is now program manager of capital planning and fixed assets at Allina Health, a promotion from lead financial analyst of fixed assets.

**Casey Schannauer,** '11 BSB, started a new role as a senior mortgage underwriter at Navy Federal Credit Union.

**Heidi Aherns,** '12 BSB, is now mergers and acquisitions IT manager at 3M.

**Inge Groth,** '12 BSB, started a new role as senior manager, commerce and growth strategist at General Mills.

**Michael Orlando,** '12 BSB, started a new role as senior vice president of strategy and operational excellence at Emcara Health.

**Joe Meyer,** '13 MBA, is now an administrative law judge at the State of Minnesota Office of Administrative Hearings.

**Brandon Palmen,** '13 MBA, was named to the *Daily Journal's* 2023 Top 40 Under 40 list, a recognition of the top lawyers under the age of 40 in California.

**Erin Rech,** '13 MBA, started a new role as vice president of employee benefits consulting at CBIZ.

**Chakra Sankaraih,** '13 MBA, started a new role as global chief technology officer at RiceTec Inc.

**Brandon Bigelbach,** '14 BSB, '21 MS SCM, is now supply chain data and reporting manager at 3M.

**Adam Katz,** '14 MBA, is now chief commercial officer at Badger Mining Group.

**Ally Braun,** '15 BSB, is now director of change management at C&W Services.

**Martin Caride,** '15 BSB, is now senior director, guest data and marketing technology at Subway.

**Aaron Grossman,** '15 BSB, is now senior software developer at EBM Software.

**Whitney Heber,** '15 MBA, is now senior marketing manager—top commercial accounts at Schwan's Company.

**Taylor Mohr,** '16 BSB, is now senior manager, social strategy lead at Target.

**Amanda Renneke,** '16 MBA, is now associate director of media and strategy planning at Best Buy.

**Christopher Scholl,** '16 MBA, is now executive director at the White Bear Center for the Arts.

**Jake Shoultz,** '17 BSB, is now a finance manager at Optum.

**Andrew Walker,** '17 MBA, started a new role as executive vice president of customer strategy and operations at Emtelligent.

**Andrew Walko,** '17 MBA, started a new role as president at SANUWAVE.

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE**

**Into the Drink** (pp. 12–17)  
David O'Neill, '15 BSB

**Trail of Transformation** (pp. 18–21)  
John Du, '19 MBA

**A Masterful Combination** (pp. 22–25)  
Kyle Burkhardt, '20 MBA  
Tom Lindow, '05 MBA

**Beyond the Grade** (pp. 30–33)  
Derek Burns, '00 BSB



**Cozy (Haugen) Morton,** '16 BSB, was a TEDx Takeda Kendall speaker on the topic of harnessing anxiety to thrive in ambiguity. In her professional life, Morton, the associate director of cross-cultural engagement at Takeda Pharmacy, helps teams identify opportunities to address health inequities. Building on her early career work in change management and her experiences with her own mental health influencing her personal and professional life, Morton shared how others can utilize the same methods she uses to manage anxiety to excel in ambiguity within the workplace, industry, and lives beyond the office.





**Grace Zumwinkle**, '21 BSB, (at right) is making her mark in the new Professional Women's Hockey League (PWHL), which opened its inaugural season this January. Among a roster chock full of homegrown Minnesota talent—including fellow Carlson School alumni Kelly Pannek, '19 BSB, and Lee Stecklein, '17 BSB—Zumwinkle's sights are set on helping PWHL Minnesota capture the championship later this year. To learn more about her journey, scan the QR code.



**MINNEAPOLIS/  
ST. PAUL  
BUSINESS  
JOURNAL'S TOP  
40 UNDER 40**

Congratulations to these alumni for being recognized!

**Jay Bhakta**, '09 BA, managing partner, JR Hospitality

**Wes Strait**, '05 BSB, '10 MBA, director technology transformation, Best Buy

**Stacy Braner**, '18 MBT, started a new role as tax manager at Cargill.

**Liz Hadala**, '18 MBA, is now principal marketing transformation manager at Boston Scientific.

**Craig Nelson**, '18 MBA, is now environment, health, and safety (EHS) standards, systems & data manager at Solventum, 3M's new healthcare spin off.

**2020s**

**Lucas Lentsch**, '20 MBA, was appointed to CEO at The United Soybean Board.

**Kaitlyn Schammel**, '20 BSB, has been sworn into the Minnesota bar as a licensed attorney and started a new role as associate attorney at Fafinski Mark & Johnson, P.A.

**Maddie Sutton**, '20 BSB, is now business recruiting manager at PwC.

**Thomson Thamsir**, '20 BSB, '22 MSF, is now a transactions advisory services senior associate-M&A at STOC Advisory.

**Nate Williams**, '20 MBA, is now president at Reviva.

**Maria Morande**, '22 BSB, started a new role as an analyst in cyber and strategic risk at Deloitte.

**Sarah Adams**, '23 MBA, was featured in the *Poets&Quants* MBAs to Watch list. Adams is poised for continued impact at Deloitte as a senior consultant, exemplifying the power of merging passion, education, and business acumen for change.

**Sanket Jasani**, '23 MBA, was featured in the *Poets&Quants* MBAs to Watch list. Jasani's exceptional leadership and problem-solving abilities have positioned him for a successful career at Amazon, where he has started as senior product manager.

**Lucia Madero Murillo**, '23 MBA, has started a new role as senior associate consultant at Foresight Strategy.



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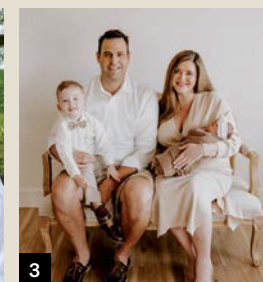
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MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

**1. Jennifer Lien Will**, '09 BSB, welcomed her second child, Cecilia Lien Will, in August 2023.

**2. Anastasiya Hrabivchuk**, '22 MBA, married Ryan Perket in August 2023 while wearing traditional Ukrainian wedding outfits to honor her heritage.

**3. Bailey (Wolfe) Bassett**, '13 BSB, welcomed her second child, Blair, with her husband, Garrett.



Recent baby or wedding news? Tell us about it at [carlsonschool.umn.edu/Share](https://carlsonschool.umn.edu/Share)

IN MEMORIAM

**1940s**

Elizabeth Vosbeck, '47 BSB, died in October 2023.

Edward Blegen, '49 BSB, died in July 2023.

**1950s**

Al Hilde Jr., '55 BSB, died in July 2023.

Donn Barber, '56 BSB, '58 MBA, died in August 2023.

Miles Locketz, '56 BSB, died in November 2023.

Roger Wingses, '58 BSB, died in June 2023.

Roger Arent, '59 BSB, died in October 2023.

**1960s**

Charles Anderson, '67 BSB, died in August 2023.

Robert Howell, '68 MBA, died in November 2023.

Dean Jacobson, '68 BSB, died in October 2023.

Steven Riley, '68 BSB, died in December 2023.

**1970s**

William Meek, '73 BSB, died in November 2023.

Paul Ference, '77 BSB, died in September 2023.

**1980s**

Marcia Agee, '81 MBA, died in July 2023.

Mary Kruchten, '81 BSB, died in December 2023.



**Kelly Doran**, '82 MBA, died in December 2023. A Twin Cities-based real estate entrepreneur, Doran is credited with transforming areas near the U of M campus after kickstarting new student housing developments in 2009. A hands-on, caring leader, Doran regularly gave his time and expertise to Carlson School students.

Mary Beth Fedie, '82 BSB, died in September 2023.

Sandra Lou Dyr Dahl, '83 MBA, died in August 2023.

Randy Smith, '83 BSB, died in November 2023.

**1990s**

Peggy Athman, '91 BSB, died in October 2023.

**2000s**

Crystal Goldman, '03 BSB, died in September 2023.

**Faculty & Staff**



Professor Emeritus **John Boyd** died in October 2023. An expert in banking and finance, he consulted the U.S. Treasury, White House Council of Economic Advisers, and the World Bank, among others. He leaves an indelible mark on many colleagues and former doctoral students.

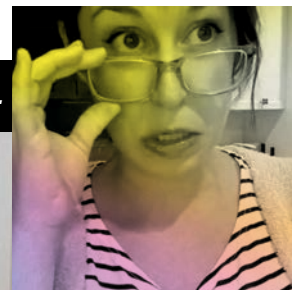


**Janet (Jan) Windmeier** died in January 2024. As the longtime director of placement for the Carlson School, retiring in the late 1990s, she matched countless students with meaningful careers. A warm, caring person, Windmeier is remembered fondly by many.



## Kristen Knutson

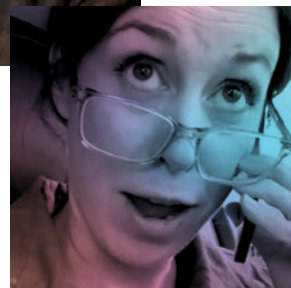
Kristen (Dussel) Knutson, '12 BSB, is a finance manager by day and "Boomer Mom" by night. Her social media personality poking fun at Baby Boomer mothers has racked up almost 700,000 followers on TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook. Based in Minneapolis, her pandemic-inspired hobby is now a full-fledged brand.



POV: YOUR BOOMER MOM...



doesn't believe in expiration dates



doesn't think "working from home" is an actual job

sharing her "holiday wish list"

### 1. Just start!

Sometimes we let our fears of "not being good enough" prevent us from doing the things we dream about. Everything requires a starting point and you don't have to be good at it right away to succeed. I look back on the first few videos I posted on my social media pages and cringe a little bit, but without those videos, I wouldn't be where I am today.

### 2. Success isn't linear.

Life is full of failures. Use every failure as an opportunity to learn, pivot if needed, and keep going. My presence online hasn't always been a "success" and it requires a lot of learning. I've been humbled many, many times in my life. It's OK to laugh at your failures.

### 3. Don't let others dull your shine.

This is the most Millennial thing I've ever written, but there are going to be people who don't like you simply for who you are. Don't ever let those people bring you down and always stay true to yourself. The people who "understand you" will gravitate toward you and will lift you up.

### 4. Never let go of your curiosity.

Be curious about life and the people around you. You never know when a small, little curiosity could lead to a really special adventure. You don't need your entire personality to be the career path you've chosen.

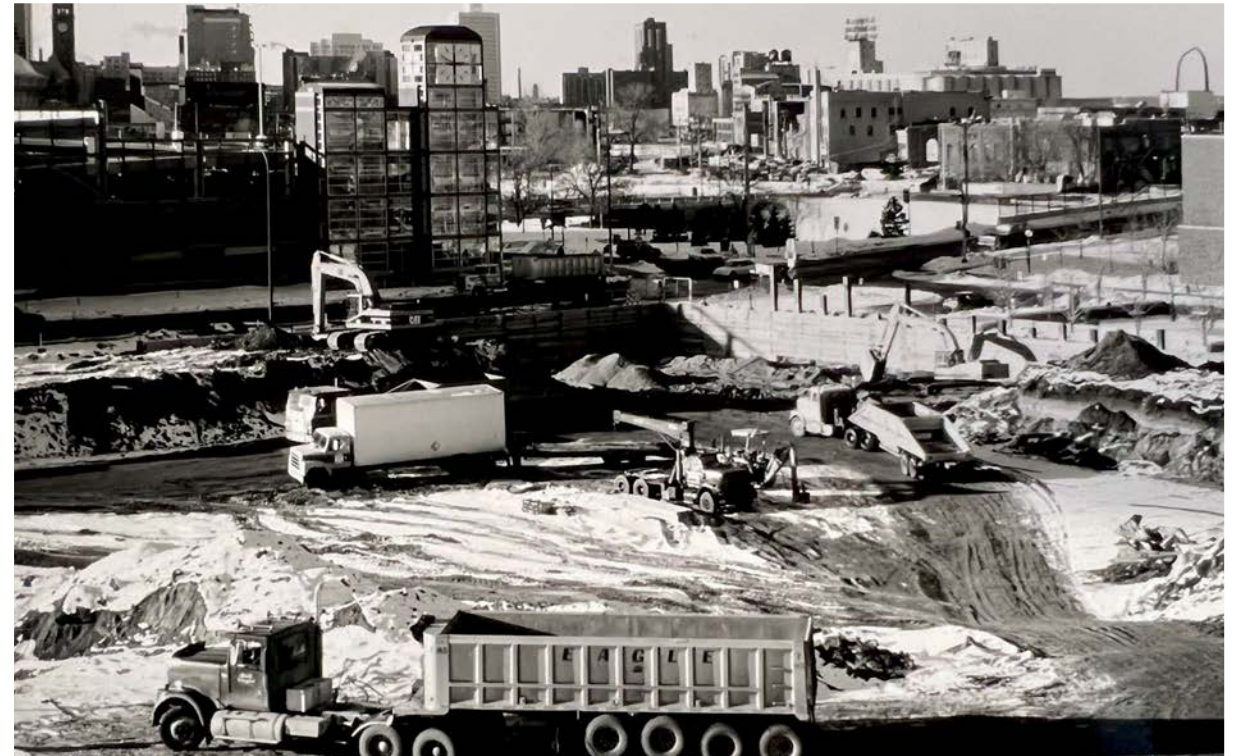
### 5. Your family and friends are everything.

At the end of the day, the people in your corner are the people who will make life full. Any success I've had in life is because of the support I've had from my family and friends. Life is hard and having people to lean on is so important. Take time to nurture and grow your relationships because life is short. Go call your mother or a friend right now and tell them how much you love them.

"Take time to nurture and grow your relationships because life is short. Go call your mother or a friend right now and tell them how much you love them."

KRISTEN KNUTSON, '12 BSB

With great changes coming to the Carlson School, here's a look back at the building's humble beginnings before it joined the Minneapolis skyline.



The groundbreaking in 1995 came with much fanfare as Goldy Gopher supplied the honorary shovels for the event after emerging from a tunnel of briefcases, symbolic of the world of business. Construction took three years, with the building opening for classes in 1998. For more information about the upcoming *Connecting Carlson* project, go to page 26 or scan the QR code.



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