Connecting Carlson

Introducing a building project that will transform school spaces and name the flagship building for Marilyn Carlson Nelson
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.”
MSBA Offers New Curriculum Focusing on Generative AI

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." - 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 solve a real-world business problem.

Illustration: Matt Chinworth
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... all know about [the performance],” Morgan Peterson

The self-choreographed routine was a love letter to the team’s performance for the past 20 years, which helped cement the program as a powerhouse in the dance world. Ma 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.

“At one using the theory, all the applications that we used, but then taking it beyond that...”

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

“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
**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 development and leadership of one of the many classes leaving an impact on students.

**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. Leading 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.”  
_Hannah Kida, 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_

**HIGHLIGHTING IMPACTFUL CARLSON SCHOOL COURSES**

**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.

**Helen Moser**  
Senior Lecturer, Finance

**2. What is your favorite website?**

I probably spend the most time on *finviz.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.

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

**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.

**Salman Arif**  
Associate Professor, Accounting

**1. What are you reading?**

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.

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**Salman Arif**  
Associate Professor, Accounting

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.

**All the News Fit to Print**

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 tollbooth, 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 Somalia, 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. 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
"If he sees a gap or opening or opportunity, he's covered 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 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 propping 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.

"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 of his vision, which others are clearly drawn to. Given this, he has a clear bias towards action — something that is simmering. "I want to take another risk, you know?"
Into the Drink

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.
“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

“We wanted a space where we could try different styles. Before Minneapolis Cider Company became what it is today—a multimillion-dollar business recently named 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.

TURNING OUTF CIDER IS NOT EASY

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 cidermaker, 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 sees 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.’”

Everything was coming together. Then the canoe tipped over.

“The manufacturer in Washington sent us samples,” says Dayton. “We got 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 cider 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 number of times,” agrees O’Neill.

RIGHTING THE SHIP

But the ship wasn’t completely sunk yet.

“Cider was growing at the time, and 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...

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 to bring our business to compete and try to keep up with the consultations 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.

""
It was at a cider festival that Dayton pitched Fisk: Join the team as head cidermaker, 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 struggled 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 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 10 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 3 million cans sold already) that new dreams began to unfold.

“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 cans 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 three ciders—Crispin Original and two new imperial flavors—all brewed by original Crispin cidermaker (and MCC hero) Bruce Niessen. 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 cider 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 lion-hearted 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.”

On brewing cider, from MCC head cidermaker 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 wine grapes have 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 brewing things, you’re selecting for something. 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.”
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.

BY BRIDGET BURNHAM

The figure behind the voice approached, unwrapping a tightly wrapped scarf to reveal Professor Gu Zhaoyang, an instructor from China's 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 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 Livata Superconductor Systems. 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 PASSION
Enrolling in the CHEMBA program forced Du to tackle deep-seated doubts 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 life. A friend from the program convinced Du, who hated running, to sign up for the Gobi Desert Challenge, an event for alumni in 2018. Though she no longer works in the Gobi Desert Challenge program, Veronica Zeng, a former CHEMBA staff member, found Du’s calling when the 2018 Gobi Desert Challenge reshaped her perspective and career. She recruited and ran with the first CHEMBA students to improve the CHEMBA program. Zeng had approached Du, urging him to “pass that lesson of perseverance on to others living healthier lives,” she says. “I learned about resilience to help me grow 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 not here just for training. If I can do it, you can too.”

“WOVEN WITH RESILIENCE”
Du was neither an extreme sports athlete nor necessarily an ace student growing up, but his route to the Gobi mirrored 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 Livata Superconductor Systems. 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.

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 of China in 1999. But it wasn’t until 2018 that CHEMBA students participated in the challenge. Veronica Zeng, a 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 classroom and training partner missed his goal time on the fourth day of the race. “We saw each other, exchanged hellos and covered in dust in the middle of the desert, and were on the verge of tears,” says Du. “It was a very 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 and professional life with a new level of transformation,” says Du. “I have confidence in the power of my persistence. If I set out to reach a goal, I know I can achieve it.”

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

Veronica Zeng: Resilience, Recovery, and Transformation
In the shadows of the Gobi Desert, Veronica Zeng, a former CHEMBA staff member, found her true calling when the 2018 Gobi Desert Challenge reshaped her perspective and career. She recruited and ran with the first CHEMBA students to improve the CHEMBA program. Zeng had approached Du, urging him to “pass that lesson of perseverance on to others living healthier lives,” she says. “I learned about resilience to help me grow 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 not here just for training. If I can do it, you can too.”

Wildlife and elements.

competitors in the gobi desert

challenge; it’s a mental one, “ says Du.

From daily 30-degree temperature swings to scathing sand storms, 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 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.

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. "I didn’t expect anyone to recognize my name," he heard someone calling his name.

"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 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.

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

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

A Masterful Combination

PUSHING BOUNDARIES

BY AMY CARLSON GUSTAFSON
“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.”

— KYLIE 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,’” recalls Burkhardt, “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, Sigill, 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. “It’s great to dream,” he says. “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.”

Jennings’ art primarily draws inspiration 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, children’s centers, art festivals, and Minnesota Public Radio’s “Your Classical Storytime.”

“I just need to be myself and to be confident. I’m not going to get any of these opportunities unless I try.”

In the Community

Tom Lindow, ’05 MBA

As a kid growing up in Shakopee, Wis., 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 won’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 important to get in there when they’re young. It’s one of those experiences kids need to be well-rounded. Whether it’s on stage today, “he says. “I want them 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.

“How I see my job now is being able to provide a service for the city.”

— TOM LINDOW, ’05 MBA
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.
S
ccessful business people can envision the future. They see a blank canvas and know how to fill it.

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—pass-through space; I see a destination space, a happening place where memories are made, and allegiance inspired.”

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 seeing my name on this flagship Carlson School building will attract more women to see business as a positive way to make a difference.”

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 our building will be named the Marilyn Carlson Nelson Hall!”

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
Doug & Peg Schmalz
Brian Gerhardson & John Shade
Norm & Conni Bjornnes
The Glaser Family Foundation
John & Annette Whaley
Marilyn Carlson Nelson Hall

Photographs by Dennis Gunderson

SPRING 2024 | CARLSON SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT
How new experiential learning opportunities enhance the undergraduate experience and empower local organizations.
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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.”

“Trenton Knutson

“A BEAUTIFUL COLLABORATION”

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. Amie 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 creating engaging 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, targeting young adults and tapping into networks beyond athletes’ family members. In the summer or off-season, “It’s this beautiful collaboration when you work with real people, it has ability to lead and it’s a huge quality that a people. I’m working with others, I’m able to talk about this and I’ve already applying his Impact Lab experiences when they are put in a role they aren’t normally put in,” says Brenna McClarey, a senior in the Undergraduate Program. “I’ve had a few internship interviews and I’ve been able to talk about this class on how I’m working 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.”

LEARNING WITH PURPOSE

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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 as if 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.”

Secrets, 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 working 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.

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SPRING 2024 | CARLSON SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT 33
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 leading 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 school in covering the full cost of the project. 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.

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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:

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 for the DEI subcommittee that helped stand up the Center for Inclusive Excellence and the hiring of Angela Stagnaro, 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.

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

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 minor ing 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.

Makayla Hillukka

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 groups.

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.

“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.

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.”

Happiness 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.”

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.
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 hear about their experiences and challenges. The diversity and inclusion team began to offer programming and events to help create a sense of community, “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.”

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.”

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, Nikh Herauf, ’22 MKTG, was tasked to help provide marketing direction for Schwan’s Global Food Project. Since Korea-based CJ Chil伊利edang 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 education.

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

SCOTT PETERSON, ’83 MHRIR

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

Mike Herauf ‘22 MKTG
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!

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.

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 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.

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.

View Prenkert’s 1st Tuesday conversation, and other past 1st Tuesday events, at z.umn.edu/1stTuesday
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

1980s

Dan Groskruetz, '83 MBA, started a new role as chief financial officer at Bluum. Dan Hagen, '83 BS, was appointed to the board of directors at Kratos Defense and Security Solutions.

David Ring, '83 BS, started a new role as president and CEO at Sherman eRally, Inc.

1990s

Bruce Backman, '90 BS, '99 MBA, was appointed chief financial officer at Mailbu 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.

Charissa Kummeth, '93 MBA, was appointed as a director at OrthoInternational.

David Brandmire, '95 MBA, was elected to a three-year term as board officer 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 at Wells Fargo Investment Institute.

Chris Hanegger, '98 BS, started a new role as partner at Vesy Street Capital Partners.

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

2000s

Mark Lorenzen, '00 MBA, started a new role as vice president of finance at Otter Tail Power Company.

Peter Gaertlich, '01 MBA, was appointed a new role as managing director of natural resources at Water Tower Research.

Andrew Miller, '01 BS, '04 MBA, is now vice president of finance at Torrington Power Company.

Gita Vellanki, '01 MBA, is the founder of Neush, a menstruation-support 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 FINNATION Lab.

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

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

Teal Perrine, '03 BS, started a new role as chief marketing officer at Evolv, Inc.

Matt Wilke, '05 MBA, started a new role as chief operating officer at TheaCare.

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 Youtess, '07 MBA, started a new role as senior sales marketing consultant at Carba, Inc.

Shay Curry, '08 MHRR, 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 Ameriserve Financial Services, LLC.

Brock Christianson, '00 MHRR, was appointed senior vice president and chief human resources officer of Tennant Company. A new premium 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.

Katherine Ellison, '06 BS, 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 MBA, started a new role as counsel at Winthrop and Weinstine, P.A.

2010s

Zack Geisfeld, '11 MBA, '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.

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

Emile Knox, '11 MBA, is now vice president and CFO of SmithCompany.

Mitch Krautkramer, '11 MBA, is now Chief Financial Officer of Care Solutions, Risk & Growth at Optum.

Lacée Reynolds, '11 MBA, 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 MBA, started a new role as a senior mortgage underwriter at Navy Federal Credit Union.

Heidi Ahrens, '12 MBA, is now mergers and acquisitions IT manager at 3M.

Inga Grath, '12 MBA, started a new role as senior manager, commerce and growth strategist at General Mills.

Michael Orlando, '12 MBA, started a new role as senior vice president of strategy and operational excellence at Ecomara 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 CBZ.

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

Brandon Bigelow, '14 MBA, '21 U.S. Citizen, 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 MBA, is now director of change management at C&W Services.

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

Aaron Grossman, '15 MBA, is now senior software developer at EBIM Software.
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 talent—including fellow Carlson Hockey League (PWHL), which BSB—Zumwinkle’s sights are

Scan the QR code. More about her journey, later this year. To learn

Best Buy BSB, ‘10 MBA, ‘05 JR Hospitality managing partner, Jay Bhakta, ‘09 BA, ‘09 MBA, being recognized!
to these alumni for Congratulations 40 UNDER 40 JOURNAL BUSINESS ST. PAUL ’S TOP
consultant at Foresight Strategy. , ‘23 MBA, has started as senior product manager. Lucia Madero Murillo, ‘23 MBA, has positioned him for a successful and problem-solving abilities have positioned him for a successful career at Amazon, where he has started as senior product manager. 1. Jennifer Lien Will, ‘09 BSB, welcomed her second child, Cecilia Lien Will, in August 2023.

Why not join them?

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Explore course options today at zum.edu/ExecEdCatalog

CLASS NOTES

Stacy Briner, ‘18 MFT, started a new role as tax manager at Cargit.
Lil 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 Solvants, 3M’s new healthcare spin off.

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

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, PA.
Maddie Sutton, ‘20 BSB, is now business recruiting manager at PeC.
Thomson Thamsir, ‘20 BSB, ‘22 MFE, is now a transactions advisory services senior associate-M&A at STOC Advisory.
Nate Williams, ‘20 MBA, is now president at Reviva.
Maria Moranda, ‘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.

IN MEMORIAM

Mary Kruchten, ‘81 BSB, died in December 2023.
Marcia Agee, ‘81 BSB, died in September 2023.
Paul Ference, ‘77 BSB, died in November 2023.
Steven Riley, ‘68 BSB, died in October 2023.
Roger Arent, ‘59 BSB, died in October 2023.
Sandra Lou Dyrda, ‘53 MBA, died in August 2023.
Mary Beth Felle, ‘82 BSB, died in September 2023.
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.

MINNEAPOLIS/ ST. PAUL BUSINESS JOURNAL’S TOP 40 UNDER 40
Congratulations to these alumni for being recognized!
Jay Bhakta, ’09 BA, managing partner, 88 Hospitality
Wes Strait, ’05 BSB, ’10 MBA, director of technology transformation, Best Buy

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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.

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.
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1989 • 1994 • 1999 • 2004 • 2009
2014 • 2019 • 2023