

# CARLSON

SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

FALL 2025

## All Work & All Play

Cassie Miles, '07 BSB,  
leads the new Great River  
Children's Museum.



THE MAGAZINE  
FOR ALUMNI  
AND FRIENDS



## Congratulations, Class of 2025!

More than 1,500 Minnesota Carlson students officially became alumni on May 19, 2025.

The graduating class included 999 undergraduates receiving Bachelor of Science in Business degrees, 573 graduate students receiving master's degrees, and 11 doctoral students receiving PhD degrees in business administration.

Families, friends, faculty and staff members—and everyone's favorite mascot, Goldy Gopher—gathered for two commencement ceremonies at 3M Arena at Mariucci to celebrate the Class of 2025.

"As you step beyond our campus, remember the spirit of agility you've cultivated," Minnesota Carlson Dean Jamie Prenkert told the graduates. "The business world is dynamic, demanding adaptability and continuous learning. Embrace the unexpected, stay curious, and see change as an opportunity for growth and innovation."

Asha Sharma, '11 BSB, corporate vice president of product for the AI Platform at Microsoft, was the keynote speaker at both ceremonies. She encouraged graduates to think big and stay innovative.

"Your power grows with every boundary crossed, every failure embraced, every perspective added to your training set. Your future will move at incredible speed—now it's time to pick the direction," Sharma said.

Each ceremony featured a student speaker: Matt Howe, '25 MBA, for the graduate students, and Jillian Buenger, '25 BSB, for the undergraduates. Also at the undergraduate ceremony, Niko Vasilopoulos, '25 BSB, received the 2025 Tomato Can Loving Cup Award, the most prestigious award that Minnesota Carlson bestows on an undergraduate student.

FOCUS

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# START-UP

## SCHOOL NEWS



For free, alumni can download official Minnesota Carlson alumni backgrounds for webinars and phone displays.

## Hello, Minnesota Carlson

With a new school year comes a new way to reference the school.

Minnesota Carlson is the new preferred, shortened name for the Carlson School of Management, a transition away from Carlson School, which had been used as the short-form for nearly 40 years. Minnesota Carlson accompanies the ongoing building transformation and our commitment to a new three-year strategic plan.

Minnesota Carlson creates a stronger association between the school and the University of Minnesota and reiterates the school's geographic location to elevate a greater connection with audiences on a larger scale. Additionally, this move aligns with a naming convention commonly used across business schools and even on campus, with the Law School changing to Minnesota Law in 2018.

"Minnesota Carlson is one tool in the toolkit to help elevate the school's national profile," says Minnesota Carlson Dean Jamie Prenkert. "Strengthening our connection to the University through our visual and written identity will emphasize who we are and the world-class education we have to offer."

While Carlson School of Management remains the school's official name and celebrated legacy, Minnesota Carlson will be used more broadly across visual and written communications, with the longer name reserved for formal occasions and official business operations. **C**

**"Strengthening our connection to the University through our visual and written identity will emphasize who we are and the world-class education we have to offer."**

DEAN JAMIE PRENKERT

### SHOWCASE YOUR MINNESOTA CARLSON PRIDE

Now it's time for alumni to have the look to match.

Check out a variety of Minnesota Carlson clothing styles in an online pop-up shop, which will be open October 10 through November 7. Scan to shop the collection:





Above: Students and staff gather for a meeting inside the new CAL space. Photo: Dan Gunderson

Center: CCE students speak with their clients, the Alliance Wellness Center staff, during a site visit. Photo: Michaela Bialek

Right: The Uptown Theater is among the attractions in Minneapolis' Uptown neighborhood.

## Connecting Carlson Makes Progress

The *Connecting Carlson* building project is more than halfway completed, with crews marking milestones in the construction process.

In May, the first major completion in the project came as the new Carlson Analytics Lab (CAL) opened up to faculty, staff, and students. Crews transformed space in the northwest corner of the first floor into a larger space for CAL, which was previously located in the lower level of the school. Professor Ravi Bapna, the CAL academic director, says the bigger space provides more room for teamwork.

“The new space enhances collaboration, fosters innovation, and opens doors for faculty and students to build corporate and community partnerships and co-create a better future with AI and analytics,” says Bapna, the Curtis L. Carlson Chair Professor in Business Analytics and Information Systems.

This summer, construction continued on the auditorium, atrium, and roof, and expanded to the new Glaser Family Experiential

“The new space enhances collaboration, fosters innovation, and opens doors for faculty and students to build corporate and community partnerships.”

PROFESSOR RAVI BAPNA

Learning Suite on the first floor, as well as breakout rooms, restrooms, and lower-level common areas.

*Connecting Carlson* focuses on updating some of the school's most prominent and frequently used spaces. This includes a transformation to the auditorium and atrium, select classrooms and study spaces on the lower, first, and second floors, and an Enterprise suite. The project intends to promote collaboration, elevate experiential learning opportunities, strengthen a sense of belonging, and enhance connections with the greater business community.

The entire project is expected to be completed by Fall 2026.

LEARN more about *Connecting Carlson*:



## CCE Students Tackle Opioid Crisis

The nationwide opioid crisis has taken a toll on Hennepin County, where hundreds of people have died annually from overdoses in recent years.

In a multifaceted effort to combat this problem, the county government has partnered with the Carlson Consulting Enterprise (CCE). Students consult for community organizations that receive opioid response funding from Hennepin County. The goal is to ensure this funding is being maximized to its greatest potential, helping to reduce and prevent opioid overdoses.

“If there is a good example of non-traditional business school work that's being done in the community, this is probably it,” says Hennepin County Director of System Design Lolita Ulloa, who leads the county's opioid response efforts. “The opioid crisis overlaps in so many different areas. [The students are] evaluating all of those pieces.”

The partnership began in Fall 2024 with two organizations and continued the next semester with three. The CCE students tailored their work to the specific needs of each organization. One client, the Aliveness Project, uses a harm reduction van, which offers first aid supplies, information about treatment programs, and other resources to people in need. Students spent time in the van to learn about that outreach firsthand.

MBA student Gayathry Pradeep, who worked with other clients, says the hands-on learning experience was challenging but rewarding.

“This project gave me the opportunity to look at the opioid crisis through that business consulting lens and try to help by using all the things that we have learned in class,” she says.



“How can we bring back vibrancy? How can we bring back people?”

ANDREW NGUYEN, '25 BSB

## Students Take On Revitalizing Uptown

Is Uptown dead? This question arises as Uptown—a business and entertainment district in Minneapolis—recovers from a slew of changes and challenges.

Minnesota Carlson undergraduate Marketing students tackled this issue in their Marketing Strategy capstone course last semester. They researched challenges facing the area and developed marketing recommendations for increasing vibrancy and improving public perception.

“In business, a lot of times things come down to, ‘How are we driving value? How are we generating revenue?’ But this project is something that's completely not within that realm,” says Andrew Nguyen, '25 BSB, who worked on the project. “This is, ‘How can we bring back vibrancy? How can we bring back people?’ And I think that's what's gotten so many people to care.”

Divided into groups, the students conducted surveys and interviewed residents, business owners, and government officials. Some also visited Uptown for in-person observations. As the students continued their research, the scope of the project grew. Even Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey visited the class to discuss the project.

At the end of the semester, the students presented their research and recommendations, which included improving communication among different Uptown stakeholder groups.

“The students are defining the path as we go, which is very representative of the real world,” says Senior Lecturer Allison Murn, who taught the course. “Almost all the stakeholders we've talked to want to be a part of the project. It's turned into something much bigger than I would've ever imagined, and it's been fun.”

## Three Thoughts from Dean Prenkert



In July, my wife, Deb, and I celebrated our 30th wedding anniversary in Peru by hiking the 26-mile Inca Trail to Machu Picchu. The experience revealed and affirmed several enduring lessons.

### 1. Follow the path, even when it's hard. But don't fail to assess the beauty of progress.

On the unrelenting ascent to the trail's highest point, it took all my focus to keep moving. Then, Deb said to me, “Stop. Turn around and look.” I saw an awesome vista. In challenging times, we must focus on our mission and purpose without losing track of how far we've come. It's a difficult time in higher education. *Elevate*, our three-year strategic plan, has set a path for us. Let's get to work, being mindful of all we achieve along the way.

### 2. A strong culture endures.

While the Inca Empire no longer exists, its impact remains—a testament to the enduring nature of a strong culture. We are building a culture of Courage, Curiosity, and Community. Together, we must deeply embed and authentically practice them in all we do. If so, the values will outlast the moment.

### 3. Comprehensiveness and nimbleness require balance and context.

After a day of hiking, we concluded our thoughtfully provisioned packs were too heavy. Enjoying the journey—even at the risk we might regret that we'd shed some luxury—was the goal. The same is true for an organization. Often, we try to be everything to everyone. But we can't. Making careful, data-informed decisions about where to focus our efforts and what we can let go is vital, especially in turbulent times like these.

## Why Collaborators With Big Ideas Should Start Small

BY CHARLY HALEY



**Myles Shaver**  
Associate Dean of  
Faculty and Research

To solve complex societal problems, people and organizations often need to come together. But cross-sector collaboration is not always easy—even when everyone shares the same motivation.

Research from the University of Minnesota presents a strategy for helping collaborators achieve their goals by narrowing their focus into small, tangible steps. Published last year in *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, this procedure, called the “minimum viable benefit (MVB) process,” is already being used in classrooms and professional settings.

Professor Myles Shaver, the Curtis L. Carlson Chair in Corporate Strategy in Minnesota Carlson’s Strategic Management & Entrepreneurship Department, researched and developed the MVB process with two cross-sector collaborators: Associate Professor Kathy Quick, from the UMN Humphrey School of Public Affairs, and Senior Fellow Vanessa Laird, from both the Humphrey School and the UMN Law School. All three have taught through the University’s Center for Integrative Leadership, which informed their research on cross-sector collaboration.

“The research is very much driven from our teaching experiences,” says Shaver, who is also Minnesota Carlson’s associate dean of faculty and research.

The MVB process guides collaborators through a series of questions to help them narrow their focus based on needs and resources, and then create a one-year plan for a project that is within their capacity. After the project is complete, the MVB process guides collaborators through evaluating whether to



“The notion is to start small with the idea of ending big.”

PROFESSOR MYLES SHAVER

scale up, pivot, or stop their project in order to meet their larger goals of positive societal change.

“The notion is to start small with the idea of ending big,” Shaver says. “If you start too big, you never get traction. We’ve seen that cross-sectoral projects often fail when people get stuck in the overwhelm.”

This bite-sized approach to problem-solving is part of the curriculum for the Center for Integrative Leadership’s Minnesota Young American Leaders Program (MYALP) and Integrative Leadership Seminar. Through MYALP, leaders from across Minnesota learn how

to collaborate across for-profit, government, and nonprofit sectors for the good of their communities.

Julie Ruzek, executive director of Cradle 2 Career MN, participated in the 2023 MYALP cohort’s Rochester group. “I am a dyed-in-the-wool believer in the MVB process,” she says. “Starting small, evaluating progress, pivoting when necessary, and scaling have been incredibly beneficial to the work my team and I do each day.”

Through the Center of Integrative Leadership, this research will continue to benefit UMN students as well as MYALP participants from across Minnesota.

“It’s this tie between scholarship and teaching and community outreach in Minnesota that has led to this,” Shaver says, “and our insights are now being much more widely adopted as well.” **C**

### TAKEAWAY

The minimum viable benefit (MVB) process guides collaborators through a bite-sized approach to meet their larger goals of positive societal change.

## Defeating Gamer Guilt to Boost In-Game Spending

BY ROSE SEMENOV



**Rachna Shah**  
Supply Chain &  
Operations Professor

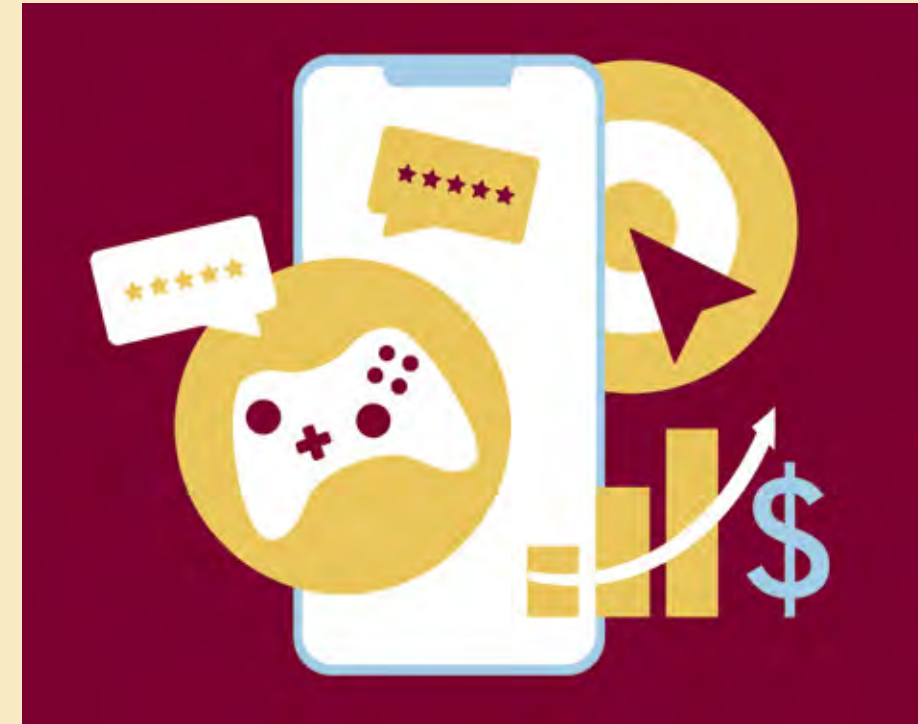
Power-ups. Special weapons. Premium character skins. All of these are examples of in-game purchases or microtransactions that provide billions of dollars in revenue for the digital gaming industry. While heavy-spending gamers make up only a small fraction of the overall player base, they account for the majority of those microtransactions. This leaves a wide swath of lower-spending gamers as a relatively untapped market.

The key to unlocking this spending power? Not game design—just less guilt.

Research co-authored by Supply Chain & Operations Professor Rachna Shah, published in *Production and Operations Management*, suggests many gamers hold negative attitudes toward in-game purchases and view the expenses as a guilty pleasure. Rather than tweaking gameplay mechanics, the researchers suggest gaming companies should tackle the stigma head-on.

“These deeply ingrained negative beliefs toward in-game purchases are particularly resistant to change because they are rooted in powerful psychological drivers: guilt, perceived unfairness, and moral unease,” Shah says. “In fact, our research reveals these negative beliefs are often more extreme than those associated with other forms of entertainment, including gambling. For gaming companies aiming to increase player spending, addressing and alleviating these negative perceptions is not just beneficial, it is essential.”

Moderate spenders emerge as the sweet spot. They’ve already expressed a willingness to pay, and the study found they respond best to targeted messages that ease gaming guilt and reinforce positive benefits. Nudges, such as



gamer testimonials and end-of-match performance summaries, could help subtly validate their in-game decisions.

However, the strategy isn’t one-size-fits-all. Genre matters. The study reveals players felt less guilt with real-world-linked games like sports or racing titles, and far more with puzzle or shooter games. Strategy gamers, meanwhile, were the most guilt-ridden. The researchers say developers of these genres should consider baking guilt-reduction messaging into the gameplay.

The findings also call attention to platform-specific differences. Console gamers were the most resistant to in-game purchases. Mobile gamers, on the other hand, proved far more open to changing their minds, giving marketers a clearer runway. For consoles, the

### TAKEAWAY

Guilt is the biggest barrier to increasing in-game spending across a wider player base. Coordinated industry messaging can reduce this friction and broaden engagement from light and moderate spenders.

researchers suggest a strategy focused on gameplay enhancements that provide long-term value to the player.

The biggest boss battle, though? Reframing the way gamers talk about and how they justify in-game purchases. The researchers propose that an industry-wide communications push to combat these negative sentiments could help influence perceptions toward microtransactions.

“Since these negative beliefs aren’t specific to one game, industry-wide initiatives to reshape beliefs may be more effective than isolated efforts,” Shah says. “Overcoming this psychological barrier is a critical step toward normalizing in-game purchases and unlocking broader monetization potential.” **C**

Faculty research is embedded throughout the courses taught at Minnesota Carlson. Here's a 60-second breakdown of one of the many classes leaving an impact on students.



MSMK 6055  
**Buyer Behavior**



Professor William Hedgcock

If a marketer's job begins and ends with the consumer, then understanding how that consumer thinks, feels, and acts isn't just helpful, it's essential. Taught by Professor William Hedgcock, a leading researcher in consumer behavior and the neuroscience of choice, Buyer Behavior dives deep into what drives decision-making in the marketplace. Hedgcock brings his expertise—from eye tracking to functional brain imaging—into the classroom, helping students decode behavioral patterns and translate them into marketing impact across various platforms.

**5 TAKEAWAYS**

**1** Buyer Behavior is a required course for graduate students in the Master of Marketing program.

**2** Students explore how internal factors, like motivation and perception, and external ones, like culture and social influence, impact consumer behavior.

**3** Students learn to apply behavioral findings directly to decisions around product design, pricing, promotion, and distribution.

**4** Touch is one example of a factor influencing consumers. Hedgcock's research shows shoppers resonate more when a photo or virtual reality experience shows a hand touching a product. This effect increases a willingness to buy and a feeling of psychological ownership of the product.

**5** "You can't influence a choice without understanding what drives it," says Hedgcock. "This class helps students decode those drivers and turn them into action."



**CSBS Economic Research and Policy Scholar**



Accounting Associate Professor **Michael Iselin** was named as one of the most recent Economic Research

and Policy Scholars by the Conference on State Bank Supervisors. A large focus of his work in this role will be working with the data acquired through the CSBS Annual Survey of Community Banks to bring new insights about banking and bank supervision to both the academic and regulatory communities.

SEE more faculty research news:



**Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis Scholar**



Finance Assistant Professor **Jacelly Cespedes** is among this year's cohort of visiting scholars

conducting research at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.

**AIS Fellow**



Information & Decision Sciences Professor **Gedas Adomavicius** received the AIS Fellow Award. The award

annually recognizes a select group of individuals who have made significant global and local contributions to the field of information systems through research, teaching, and service.

**Fulbright Specialist Scholarship**



Strategic Management & Entrepreneurship Professor **Paul Vaaler** has been awarded the Fulbright

Specialist Scholarship. He will be working on research with the head of the International Management Institute at the ZHAW School of Management and Law in Zurich, Switzerland.

**Lifetime Achievement**



Information & Decision Sciences Professor **Alok Gupta** received the INFORMS Fellow Award, a lifetime

achievement recognition from the Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences (INFORMS). The award is one of the highest honors in the operations research profession.

**Early Career Achievement Award**



Work & Organizations Assistant Professor **Nitya Chawla** won the Early Career Achievement Award

from the HR Division of the Academy of Management. This honor is awarded annually to an HR scholar who makes distinguished research contributions within seven years of receiving their PhD.



*Children play with kites in the new Great River Children's Museum, which is led by a Minnesota Carlson alum.*

# FOCUS

## *What We Can Build*

With courage, curiosity, and community, it seems there's no limit to what we can create. These stories explore how members of the Minnesota Carlson network are using their knowledge and skills to build great things—from impactful community spaces to life-changing partnerships to innovative industries.

Meet an alum who helped build a fun new children's museum for her community, an executive who is innovating in the beverage business, the people at Minnesota Carlson who are transforming learning with artificial intelligence, three dynamic duos who've helped each other push boundaries to reach their goals, and a dedicated Carlson staff member focused on fostering belonging as she steps into a new role.

Using our expertise and talents to shape possibilities, we're formulating a new blueprint for what we can build.



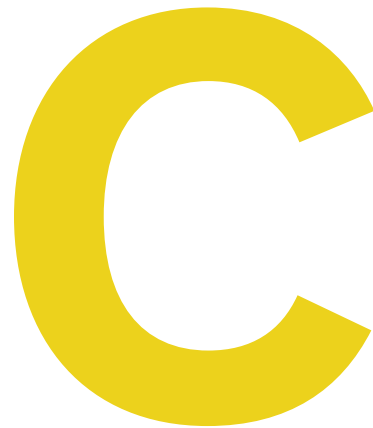
WHAT WE CAN BUILD

As leader of the newly built Great River Children's Museum, Cassie Miles, '07 BSB, is in the business of play.

# ALL WORK & ALL PLAY

BY CHARLY  
HALEY

PHOTOGRAPHY  
BY DAN  
GUNDERSON



**Children pretend** to canoe in the Mississippi River and discover constellations in the night sky. Others play with engineering gadgets or draw their own masterpieces on an art wall. Some young adventurers even

climb 30 feet to walk among clouds.

Cassie Miles, '07 BSB, helps create these fun experiences in her role as CEO of the Great River Children's Museum, which opened earlier this year in St. Cloud, Minnesota.

"Our mission is to shine a bright light on the power of play to spark children's learning, strengthen families, and build community connections," says Miles, who grew up in a small town near St. Cloud. "It's different than what people might think of when you say the word 'museum'—here, you can touch and play with everything. That's the whole point."

Miles worked to build the museum into the bright, joyous place that it is today. She put together large-scale fundraising campaigns, collaborated with an architect and exhibit designers, conducted community outreach, and eventually hired her 25-person staff.

"Cassie has a remarkable ability to rally people around a shared vision," says NeTia Bauman, CEO of the Greater St. Cloud Development Corporation, a regional economic development organization. "Her leadership is shaping something far bigger than a museum. She's helping drive a project that strengthens downtown, enhances quality of life, and signals that greater St. Cloud is a place where families, creativity, and community truly matter."

**ROOTED IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

Miles' drive to build an organization from the ground up largely started in her classes at Minnesota Carlson. As a first-generation college student, she double-majored in Finance and Entrepreneurship. Inspired by seeing her parents run their own businesses, Miles envisioned her career going in that same direction.

She even started her own business with classmates in Carlson's Entrepreneurship in Action course. The group created Gopheropoly, the first University of Minnesota-themed Monopoly game.

"That gave me a great foundation for understanding how multifaceted starting a business is," she says. It was also her first experience of work entwined with play—an idea that would come back years later at the children's museum.

Miles' Entrepreneurship in Action team partnered with the University to get permissions for using Goldy Gopher and other trademarked branding, and they found a manufacturer to make the parts, including little metal game pieces like an actual Monopoly

**"Our mission is to shine a bright light on the power of play to spark children's learning, strengthen families, and build community connections."**

CASSIE MILES, '07 BSB

Building this new community space in the heart of downtown St. Cloud has been a yearslong process. Miles took the CEO job in July 2020, becoming the museum's first paid employee. In years prior to that, a dedicated group of volunteers had been working to create the nonprofit children's museum.

"It was an all-volunteer Board of Directors, and they had received a donated building in 2018," Miles explains. "They were ready to renovate and launch into the project, and then they got a grant to hire me to do that."



The Gopheropoly board game was co-created by Cassie Miles when she was a student in Carlson's Entrepreneurship in Action course.

board game. "We assembled all the games ourselves, and then we sold them direct-to-consumer," Miles says. "We made about \$50,000 for our business and then shut it down at the end of the school year."

**A TUMULTUOUS EARLY CAREER IN FINANCE**

After graduating from Carlson in 2007, Miles moved to Chicago where her then-fiancé (now-husband) had been accepted into graduate school. Although she'd dreamed of pursuing entrepreneurship, she took a job in the finance department of a privately owned bank. Her role focused on interest rate risk management.

Not long after Miles started that job, the U.S. housing market collapsed. "It's a story that would make a good movie someday," she

says, explaining that the bank was shut down by the government and taken over by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC).

Amid widespread layoffs, Miles was one of the few employees retained to continue working to file Chapter 11 bankruptcy for the bank, she says. "That really sent me on a career path that I wasn't necessarily planning for, but I knew that I had to be flexible."

Miles soon transitioned into working remotely for a hedge fund based in New York. In 2012, she and her husband, Vincent, moved back to Minnesota, where Vincent would open his own psychology practice in St. Cloud and the couple would start their family.

While settling down in Minnesota, Miles says she felt eager to contribute to the community. "I wanted to do



Above: Children play in the Oxbow Outdoor Exhibit at the Great River Children's Museum.

Left: A family enjoys the museum's indoor exhibits.

something more local. So, I joined the board of a local theater in St. Cloud and became the board chair there for about seven years. That was my only avenue to connect with my community because I worked from home for investment companies that weren't located here."



**WATCH** a video to experience the Great River Children's Museum.



“Carlson helped me understand how important it is to be resourceful and not just immediately knowledgeable.”

CASSIE MILES

**PIVOTING TO THE MUSEUM**

Like Miles, her husband also started to get involved in the community. In 2018, the Great River Children's Museum's Board of Directors asked Vincent Miles to join because of his background in clinical psychology.

When the board was ready to hire a CEO in 2020, Vincent mentioned it to his wife. “I remember as she started to process the idea, I could see in her eyes that this might be a good fit,” he says.



Vincent abstained from the hiring process to avoid conflict of interest, but, he says, “the rest of the board members knew Cassie was the right person and the perfect fit for this—and when she got hired, she really hit the ground running.”

For her, the career shift was not only a way to connect with the community but also a jump back into the world of entrepreneurship that she'd explored at Carlson. And, it brought playfulness back into her professional life.

“This was truly a start-up,” she says. “The board brings the strong expertise behind childhood development and how influential play is in children's lives, and I stepped into my role to build the business side of that.”

Miles created organizational systems and helped the museum get its first major financial donors. She also coordinated renovations of the museum's building and worked to promote the museum

“From a community and economic development perspective, this project is a game-changer for the entire region.”

NETIA BAUMAN, GREATER ST. CLOUD DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION



water table, and Headwaters both teach children about Mississippi River environments. Everyday Engineering and Tinker Workshop each feature hands-on activities, and Community Connections inspires children to learn through role-playing. The Oxbow Outdoor Exhibit is a sensory garden, and Great Explorations is a space specifically designed for children younger than three.

**A WIDER IMPACT**

Bauman, of the Greater St. Cloud Development Corporation, says she believes the Great River Children's Museum will boost central Minnesota far beyond being a resource for children and families.

“From a community and economic development perspective, this project is a game-changer for the entire region,” she says. “It will increase tourism, support surrounding businesses, encourage new investment, and strengthen downtown as a place where families want to be. More broadly, it helps position the greater St. Cloud region as a vibrant, family-friendly hub, which is key to attracting and retaining both talent and business.”

Miles intends to support these broader community goals as she leads the museum for years to come. “We will grow and evolve our programming, both as we understand our greater capacity, and as our community evolves and we understand more of what they need from us,” she says.

As Miles considers the regional influence of the museum, she reflects on her own childhood, growing up in the small town of Annandale, near St. Cloud.

“I want kids in central Minnesota to have the same access to really cool, inspiring opportunities that others do,” she says. “You're not limited by a small town. Big dreams can happen in a small town.”

Miles is living proof of that. **C**



Opposite page, left: Cassie Miles plays with a museum visitor. Opposite page, top-right: Cassie Miles, her husband Vincent, and their son.

Above: Families explore the Great River Children's Museum during the grand opening weekend.



WHAT WE CAN BUILD

# POP

*Questions*

Keurig Dr Pepper  
CEO Tim Cofer,  
'92 MBA, knows  
what it means to  
have good taste.

BY ROSE SEMENOV

PHOTO BY  
PAT VASQUEZ-CUNNINGHAM

**A**cross 35 years in the consumer packaged goods industry, Tim Cofer, '92 MBA, has built a career working with big brands like Oreo, DiGiorno, Cadbury, and more. In 2023, Cofer joined Keurig Dr Pepper (KDP) as COO as part of a planned transition to CEO in 2024. KDP recorded \$15 billion in net sales last year, and under Cofer's leadership, Dr Pepper has surged in popularity among Generation Z, surpassing Pepsi as the second-favorite soda in the country. In August, Cofer announced KDP's plans to acquire JDE Peet's, one of the world's leading coffee companies. Once the acquisition is completed, the company will split into two, with one selling coffee and the other, which Cofer will lead, selling cold beverages.

A proud Minnesota Carlson alum, Cofer recently returned for a full-circle moment for Carlson's 1st Tuesday Speaker Series, sharing insights from a career that spans global leadership and transformative deals, including KDP's \$1.65 billion acquisition of GHOST Energy drinks. Cofer reflected on his leadership philosophy, how he's fostering innovation, and why this is just the beginning.

**Q: What started you on your trajectory to CEO of KDP?**

**Tim Cofer:** I started in the late '80s in marketing research at a Minneapolis field research agency doing store-level audits for big consumer companies. I wanted not just to collect the data but to leverage the insights to shape brand strategy. So, I got my MBA at Carlson and started my 35-year career in the consumer products industry.

**Q: What about Keurig Dr Pepper excites you?**

**TC:** Beverages is a fast-paced, dynamic industry that addresses a fundamental human need for hydration, and KDP is an advantaged platform within that attractive space. With our portfolio of iconic brands, we have the opportunity to evolve and innovate to stay on top of changing consumer trends. I also love that despite KDP's leadership scale, we remain a challenger and have the entrepreneurial spirit to drive and disrupt.

We describe our company culture as one with a challenger mindset, and I'm a big believer in that. Having an orientation that is always willing to think differently and to challenge how things are done is a really important cultural aspect in business.

**Q: You mentioned the challenger mindset. Dr Pepper recently overtook Pepsi as the No. 2 carbonated soft drink in the country. How do you foster innovation, such as Dr Pepper flavor variants, while also not straying too far from tradition?**

**TC:** It all starts with something that I believe in: consumer centrism, putting the consumer at the center of everything we do. At KDP, when you look at our strategy, that first strategic pillar, we talk about "champion consumer-obsessed brand building." That is the magic behind this innovation success and this exciting milestone. It's really about staying current in terms of



Cofer presents about Keurig Dr Pepper at the 1st Tuesday event in April. Photo: Craig Bares

consumer trends, consumer interests, cultural moments—identifying what's going on in broader culture, and then thinking: How do we uniquely connect our brands with culture and with consumer passion points in a brand-authentic way? That work led to successes, such as Dr Pepper Creamy Coconut and Canada Dry Fruit Splash, which help to drive innovation and grow our business.

There is this notion that consumers love experimentation, novelty, and fun. At the end of the day, it's a \$2 purchase for a beverage. That willingness to lean out and try new things is something that consumers gravitate to. Over the years, I've seen really successful innovation in driving various kinds of collabs in the snacking businesses where I've worked in the past. Things like chocolate and cookies, for example, or candy and drinks now in the beverage business. New flavors, exciting collabs tend to resonate with consumers.

**WATCH** Tim Cofer speak at 1st Tuesday:



**Q: Experimentation also comes from the organizational level. How is Keurig Dr Pepper expanding into other beverages, like energy drinks?**

**TC:** As a beverage industry leader, we're actively looking to shape our portfolio in a way that positions us to be a real leader in growth in the industry. So that means being consumer-centric and understanding where are the pockets of growth, where are the trends?

Three years ago, KDP basically had a zero presence, a zero market share in energy drinks. Yet, we saw that energy drinks was a \$23 billion category in the U.S. with a 9% three-year compound annual growth rate. What we've done is we've constructed a portfolio. Some we've acquired. GHOST Energy was a full acquisition. Some we've partnered with a minority investment, like C4 Energy. And some we're the distribution partner, like Black Rifle Energy, where we have no equity stake.

It's a flexible playbook, which I think is smart in terms of capital allocation and working with founders. Yet at the same time, it gives a company like KDP access. We go from zero share to six-and-a-half share, and I have an ambition to get to a double-digit share with multibillion-dollar business in energy drinks in the next few years.

**Q: If you were a carbonated soft drink flavor, what would you be?**

**TC:** Wow, you are the first to ask that question. That's a great question. I think I'd be Dr Pepper Zero Sugar. Because it is a unique, one-of-a-kind soda, right? Combination of 23 flavors. There's nothing like it. Zero Sugar because I do my best to maintain health and wellness and enjoy the pleasure and satisfaction of Dr Pepper, but not necessarily the sugar and calorie load. So, I think I'd be a Dr Pepper Zero Sugar. A little balance.

**Q: If you were to go back in time, what would you tell yourself as an MBA graduate?**

**TC:** It has been a wonderful career to date, and one where I've had a lot of help along the way. It started right here at Carlson, a fantastic education in business, a great set of professors, and exposure to the business community. This included a consulting project that I did with 3M while I was here. I also had an internship at a start-up food company in the Twin Cities. These things really cemented my passion for it. So, 33 years ago, did I think I would be CEO? No, probably not.

I had big ambitions, as we all do, and I think the advice that I would give young students today is to get comfortable out of your comfort zone. Be prepared to stretch yourself, and take smart risks. Value is rarely created by playing it safe, playing it on defense. I like to play offense; I like to go for it. I think that challenger mindset really does serve a young professional well. **C**

He has lived in 6 countries and 7 states.

Before KDP, he worked at Kraft, Mondelez International, and Central Garden & Pet.

He calls leading Kraft's \$19B acquisition and integration of Cadbury a career highlight.

He has driven the Oscar Mayer Wienermobile—an experience he "relishes" to this day.

He highlights new drink flavors from KDP brands in "Taste Test with Tim" videos on YouTube.





# Piecing Together the AI Puzzle

BY CHRIS MIKKO

ILLUSTRATION BY BLAKE CALE

How Minnesota Carlson students, faculty, and staff are building practical solutions for the AI age

# A

**Artificial intelligence** is dramatically changing the business landscape and business education with it. As the technology's future evolves, the complete picture remains unclear. However,

pieces of this complex puzzle are taking shape at Minnesota Carlson.

Google's generative AI tool, Gemini, is now available for use at the University of Minnesota. However, more innovation is underway. People across the Carlson community are crafting solutions to harness AI's power in a responsible, ethical, well-grounded manner—from faculty shaping the academic strategy, to the IT team creating the technological infrastructure, to students dreaming up new applications. In an atmosphere ripe for experimentation, Minnesota Carlson is diving into what it means to create transformative business education for the workforce of tomorrow.



**Vlad Griskevicius**  
Associate Dean of Academic Innovation & Operations

### TIME-TESTED METHODS FOR TOMORROW'S TOOLS

Workforce preparation is top of mind as faculty members integrate AI into the school's curricula. Associate Dean of Academic Innovation & Operations Vlad Griskevicius offers a perspective that slices through hype to focus on a fundamental question: In a world where AI can produce marketing plans, financial analyses, and business strategies at the click of a button, what value do human graduates provide?



**Brad Kaufman**  
Cloud & AI Architect

He predicts a near future where employers routinely test job candidates by asking them to evaluate AI-generated work. The candidates who respond with "It's pretty good already" won't get hired. The ones who can identify assumptions, spot weaknesses, and suggest improvements will thrive. "If you're an employer under financial pressure to increase productivity, you don't need another human who can do the same thing AI can already do for you at a much cheaper cost," Griskevicius says. "The solution isn't to teach students to compete with AI—it's to prepare them to work with it in ways that create unique value."

That vision drives three strategic priorities for shaping AI education at Carlson. First is doubling down on disciplinary expertise. "There's an issue if you don't understand marketing; you can show me all your fancy gadgets and widgets, but I can get AI to do it for me," he notes, adding that graduates need deep foundational knowledge to evaluate and improve AI outputs.

The second priority is expanding experiential learning. Entry-level roles that traditionally provided workplace training are disappearing as AI automates those functions. Griskevicius says graduates must be job-ready with real-world problem-solving experience—precisely what classes and programs, like the Impact Lab and the Carlson Analytics Lab, provide.

Third is integrating AI as a daily practice rather than a technical specialty. Griskevicius draws parallels to how business schools approached internet adoption in the late 1990s. Initially, they created "Internet 101" courses, but those quickly disappeared as internet use became intuitive. "AI will be similarly easy to use," he says, with integration happening within Carlson's existing disciplines rather than through standalone programs.

### INFRASTRUCTURE FOR SAFE INNOVATION

While Griskevicius and the faculty focus on preparing students for AI-driven careers, the school's IT team is tasked with another piece of the puzzle—how to build a foundation that enables such innovation. It's a challenge that starts with protecting privacy and safeguarding against security risks. "Student data is federally protected," says Carlson Cloud & AI Architect Brad Kaufman, '19 MSBA. "We also need to ensure that data is protected according to the University's policies. So one of our main tasks is to make sure information doesn't end up someplace it isn't supposed to go."

Led by Carlson IT Director Connie Buechele, '13 MBA, the team has embraced an approach that gives students a range of AI tools while also maintaining strict data protection. Case in point: They've developed a TA bot, which is an AI assistant that provides 24/7 support on select course topics. Pilot access was limited to students in participating sections via the University's learning management system. "The way you deploy and manage a TA bot is different from how you'd handle general-purpose, ChatGPT-type assistants," says Kaufman. "We do a lot of fine-tuning behind the scenes with the TA bot to safeguard privacy and make adjustments to give students the optimal experience."

The IT team has several other projects either in operation or in the works. One that's already in place is a tool that helps students write computer code. "The students aren't necessarily using it just for the sake of writing code," Buechele says. "A good use case example would be someone in an analytics course. They can use AI to help write the initial code, so they can spend more time on the analytics rather than the coding."

One project still in the development stage is a platform that will let faculty, staff, and students create their own specialized AI assistants for different purposes—research, student support,



**Connie Buechele**  
IT Director



**Mark Hove**  
Associate Director of IT



**Gurasis Singh**  
Senior in the Undergraduate Program

recruiting, and more. A longer-term goal is to extend these into capabilities where multiple AI systems—or agents—can coordinate and build on each other's outputs. That opens the door to flexible "AI teams" with different strengths, as Kaufman notes.

And, in line with Griskevicius' vision for Carlson's curricula, all of the IT team's innovations aim to support students as they enter the workforce. "Employers want graduates with practical AI tool experience and knowledge," says Associate Director of IT Mark Hove. "That sort of workforce preparation is at the heart of everything we do."

### INNOVATION FROM STUDENT INSIGHT

As Carlson's faculty and staff continue to build up the school's AI applications, some students are inspired to tackle the AI puzzle on their own terms. Gurasis Singh, a senior in the Undergraduate Program double-majoring in Entrepreneurial Management and Political Science, is one such student. Up until

recently, he never imagined himself as an AI company founder. That changed when he took the yearlong Entrepreneurship in Action course through Carlson's Gary S. Holmes Center for Entrepreneurship, during which students create an idea for a start-up and launch the business.

Singh, with classmates Isaac Porter and Samra Bojicic, created Echo Learn, an AI platform that reimagines how AI technology can enhance rather than undermine student learning. The idea grew out of Singh's interest in education policy, sparked by his political science courses. More specifically, he focused on active learning and different learning styles, including discussion, practice, and learning by teaching—a technique that can boost retention rates by as much as 90%. But after Singh conducted more than 50 interviews with professionals across the education industry, he zeroed in on a common challenge: Time and resource constraints simply don't allow for active learning. On top of that, the rise of AI has made it all too easy for students to rely

on the technology to do their work for them, something Singh calls an "education-tech misalignment."

This research led to the creation of Echo Learn. The idea is elegantly simple: Students upload course materials—textbooks, case studies, articles—and then engage in conversation with an AI chatbot that asks questions rather than providing solutions. Students must explain concepts to it, defend their reasoning, and demonstrate comprehension before the system acknowledges mastery. The system also won't give answers—it demands them, which helps avoid the misalignment issue.

The work has gained attention. Echo Learn was awarded the Most Innovative prize at the Holmes Center's annual Biz Pitch competition and has been piloted in some Carlson classes. While the platform is already live at Echolearn.org, Singh says he and his team are still making improvements, taking steps to create a positive social impact in education. "We don't have all the bells and whistles yet," he notes. "We're testing it, working on second-stage development, and figuring out our go-to-market strategy to help as many instructors and students as possible."

### BUILDING THE FUTURE

As AI technology continues to develop and change, Carlson faculty and staff are determined to change with it—empowering students to do the same.

No one claims to have all the answers. As Singh says, he's still fine-tuning his product and exploring what's possible. Meanwhile, Carlson's IT team is building secure infrastructure while learning what works, and faculty are preparing students for a reality where AI amplifies human expertise even as that reality continues to evolve.

Put together, these efforts at Carlson show that solving the AI puzzle isn't about having perfect solutions now, but about thoughtful experimentation with an eye on a rapidly shifting future. **C**

**"The solution isn't to teach students to compete with AI—it's to prepare them to work with it in ways that create unique value."**

VLAD GRISKEVICIUS, ASSOCIATE DEAN OF ACADEMIC INNOVATION & OPERATIONS



Opposite:  
Professor Joel Waldfogel  
and Professor Mary Benner

WHAT WE CAN BUILD

# DYNAMIC DUOS

## These Carlson Pairs Bring Out the Best in Each Other

BY AMY CARLSON GUSTAFSON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAT VASQUEZ-CUNNINGHAM

Fueled by ideas. Powered by partnership. Driven by change. Together at Minnesota Carlson and beyond, three dynamic duos—Professor Mary Benner, '82 College of Liberal Arts, and Professor Joel Waldfogel; Elizabeth Emery, '18 MBA, and Adam Rao, '17 MBA; and Shelly and Samantha Soupir, both '25 MBA—spark innovation, support each other's ambitions, and show what's possible when two people share a vision, challenge one another, and grow side by side.

### FACULTY COUPLE WITH A LIFETIME OF GOPHER PRIDE

Over the last 15 years, Strategic Management & Entrepreneurship Professors Mary Benner and Joel Waldfogel have cemented their place at Minnesota Carlson, taking on several roles, including leadership positions. But their love for the maroon and gold goes back decades.

The couple's ties to the University of Minnesota are found throughout their lives. Waldfogel grew up visiting his father's office in Jones Hall as a youngster. Melvin Waldfogel taught at the University for three decades as part of the Art History faculty. Father and son even graced a cover of one of the summer phone directories in the early '80s, posing in the doorway to Jones Hall. Years later, Benner's connection to the University came when she earned a degree in Economics as a first-generation college student from Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

**“Some people think it would be too much to work in the same place as your spouse, but we've enjoyed it.”**

PROFESSOR MARY BENNER

The two, who have been married for 33 years, first met in Boston, bonding over their Minnesota ties while working for the same company. When ready to marry, they returned to their mutual roots, saying their vows at the University of Minnesota's Campus Club at Coffman Memorial Union.

“My dad had been retired, but he was still a member of the Campus Club,” Waldfogel says. That's how the couple ended up saying “I do” at the U.

In 2010, the couple came to Carlson to teach. Currently, Benner is the associate dean for the Undergraduate Program and the John and Nancy Lindahl Professor for Excellence in Business Education in the Strategic

Management & Entrepreneurship Department. Waldfogel is the Frederick R. Kappel Chair in Applied Economics in the same department.

“Some people think it would be too much to work in the same place as your spouse, but we've enjoyed it,” Benner says.

Adds Waldfogel, a former associate dean for the MBA program: “The research that professors do is sometimes mysterious to the rest of the world. Mary and I have written papers together. We understand each other's tasks and responsibilities as researchers and scholars. It's easier when you have someone at home who understands this career's highs and lows.”

The couple has a strong mutual respect. Benner says she's in awe of Waldfogel's prolific output of research. Waldfogel admires Benner's multiple leadership roles, including as co-editor-in-chief of the *Strategic Management Journal*. The two have enjoyed collaborating, including on a recent paper exploring the digitization in movies and music, and the influence of digital technologies on how companies in those industries behave.

Benner says she and Waldfogel have taken on leadership roles at Carlson because they are invested in the school's future. She says it's rewarding to set a vision that people are committed to and watch it being lived out.

“We care about the success of Carlson,” says Benner, former chair of the Strategic Management & Entrepreneurship Department. “I'm inspired by the land grant mission and what we do for undergraduates from Minnesota. We're educating and training these capable young people who often return to work for companies in the state. I feel committed to whatever I can do to make all this work.”

**ADVANCING CAREERS WITH LOVE**

Elizabeth Emery, '18 MBA, and Adam Rao, '17 MBA, arrived at Minnesota Carlson to advance their careers. Little did they know, they'd also find love.

“I initially knew him because he was the Accounting TA,” Emery says. “Mutual friends observed that he and I should probably be friends. They were right.”

Over the past decade, the couple, who married in 2020, has found success in their personal and professional aspirations. Inspired to pursue an MBA, Emery, who had a liberal arts degree and managerial experience, was looking for advanced business roles. On the other hand, Rao wanted to pivot from work as a nonprofit entrepreneur and executive to the for-profit social impact sector and needed to sharpen his financial chops to go “from amateur to pro.”

The couple is now leading each of their companies. Emery is president of Paper Roll Products, an employee-owned company that sells and distributes receipt paper rolls and other point-of-sale consumables. She applies her “utility player” skills in her role as an integrator, executing vision and focusing on operational improvement. Rao is CEO of Triple20, a trade show exhibit company he transformed into a social impact enterprise. An entrepreneur at heart, Rao describes himself as a “control freak” and “visionary” who excels at setting the company's direction.

**“We use each other as sounding boards, even if it's just working through some things out loud to get another perspective.”**

ELIZABETH EMERY, '18 MBA

Opposite: Adam Rao, '17 MBA and Elizabeth Emery, '18 MBA





Opposite: Samantha and Shelly Soupier, both '25 MBA

“These are critical leadership roles, especially in organizations of the size that we’re leading,” Emery says. “From that perspective, we have complementary talents that allow us not to be competitive. We use each other as sounding boards, even if it’s just working through some things out loud to get another perspective. We’ve each gone on our own paths, but we can lean on each other and give each other that space to be ready to pursue the next thing or take a leap.”

Despite their busy schedules, the couple remains committed to giving back. Their history of recruiting at Carlson is a testament to their belief in the school’s students. Emery now serves as a contract coach in the Carlson Business Career Center, while Rao shares his expertise through guest lectures in Finance and Entrepreneurship classes.

“It’s this idea of passing the baton,” Rao says. “When you’re a visionary leader, doing something successfully is important. Being able to replicate it in others is even more important. ... I believe business can and should be a force for good. It’s one of the most consequential ways to transform the world by making money and making a difference. That allows us to sustain the activity through thick and thin, while also doing good. If there’s a future for that movement, that will have to come from people behind me and younger than me.”

**MOTHER AND DAUGHTER EARN MBAS TOGETHER**

This spring, Shelly and Samantha Soupier, both '25 MBA, each walked the stage during Carlson’s commencement ceremony. It was more than just a diploma for this mother and daughter team, who earned their business degrees together three years after enrolling in the Online MBA program. The

moment marked the realization of a goal—for Shelly, it was one decade in the making.

“It’s an experience that when you look at life’s plan for you, it was meant to happen at the time,” Shelly reflects. “It’s made me a better person having the chance to go on this journey with my daughter. It’s just true joy, knowing that I got to do something that I always wanted to do but never thought I would be able to do, and then I experienced it with one of my favorite people in the world. It’s one of those priceless experiences.”

**“It’s just true joy, knowing that I got to do something that I always wanted to do but never thought I would be able to do, and then I experienced it with one of my favorite people in the world.”**

SHELLY SOUPIR, '25 MBA

For years, family members close to Shelly earned advanced higher education degrees, but the timing to pursue her own never quite worked out. That is, until a conversation several years ago with her daughter, Samantha, caught her by surprise.

“I was talking to my mom about my goals for my professional career and how, for me, the only way that I can advance is to either get experience or go back and continue my education,” Samantha remembers. “And my mom was like, ‘Well, you should go get your MBA.’ And I was like, ‘Well, why have you never gotten your MBA?’ Then I told her, ‘I’ll go back if you go back.’”

No stranger to challenges, this MBA journey came right on the heels of the mother-daughter duo running together in the Boston Marathon. Samantha started her

courses in Spring 2022, and, after completing a pre-MBA math course, Shelly began her classes that fall, 30 years since her last college class.

“When I would tell people I was getting my MBA, they would say, ‘Why would you do that now?’ There’s a belief your life ends when you get to a certain age. It doesn’t,” Shelly says.

The two balanced full course loads amid working full-time, staying connected with classmates across the country. The mother-daughter relationship provided not only a

built-in study buddy, but also friendly competition on assignments as they motivated each other along the way.

Being at different stages in their careers meant each took away something different from the program. For Samantha, who works in brand management, it was learning more about finance; for Shelly, it was applying artificial intelligence in the business setting.

Samantha says she’s proud to see her mom set a powerful example for her and her younger sisters.

“I look at her going back after some time,” Samantha says. “I think it just shows us that there is no timeline and it’s all meant to happen when it’s supposed to happen, but to continue pursuing what makes you excited.” **C**

WHAT WE CAN BUILD

# Centered on Community

Geida Cleveland pairs the personal and professional to create community at Minnesota Carlson—and beyond.

BY KATIE DOHMAN

“Create change that is going to live without you in it. That is my wish for everything I do in life.”

GEIDA CLEVELAND, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF WELLBEING, EMPOWERMENT, AND BELONGING

As far back as she can remember, Geida Cleveland has relied on a sense of community. It started in her hometown of Nogales, Mexico, when her mother became seriously ill. With her father working in a distribution center across the border in Nogales, Arizona, to support them and work toward citizenship, it took a village to provide care.

A network of family, friends, and neighbors stepped in to help Cleveland and her two older brothers. By age eight, her mother was gone. That left her father to stitch together a combination of his visits and community caregiving until he could fully reunite with his children.

“This was probably the foundation of realizing that although you could be in a very lonely situation, there was always someone around, someone to ask,” Cleveland says.

That formative experience, and others, fed her education, ambition, and career. At Minnesota Carlson, Cleveland has dedicated her work to building a community where students feel they belong, and her efforts continue to grow as she’s recently stepped into a new role as the school’s executive director of wellbeing, empowerment, and belonging.

## CREATING COMMUNITY

The opportunity in front of her, and the school, rests on fostering a community where agile leaders can harness business expertise and insight to improve the world. The intersection of wellbeing,



Geida Cleveland dances with students on College Day, welcoming students for a new school year in Fall 2024.

empowerment, and belonging brings focus on three equally important areas that each play a distinct role in creating that community. Through new programming, partnerships, and approaches, Cleveland—who brings more than a decade of experience working in higher education, including five years in Carlson’s Undergraduate Program—aims to create a consistent employee experience for faculty and staff, and to support students in all programs in the school.

**OVERCOMING CULTURE SHOCK**

That attitude has certainly been tested. At age 12, Cleveland and her brothers moved with their father to Lakeville, Minnesota, where an aunt already lived.

“I didn’t know English. I had never seen snow in my life,” she says of the culture shock. She tried to fit in, but it was not easy. After graduating from Prior Lake High School, she enrolled at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities to pursue her undergraduate degree in human resource development, leadership, and communications studies. It was here that she began to feel a sense of belonging after seeking out other Latino students. “I had to figure out how to go back to my identity,” she explains. “I had tried to assimilate too much. It was a survival mechanism.”

**BUILDING BRIDGES**

Cleveland says as she settled into college, she realized she had an opportunity to change the system for students like her. “I decided to work at the University because it is rooted in systems not created for people like me. But the U gave me an opportunity to come back to who I am. I want to be that person who helps younger

generations feel the same way.”

She knew she wanted to help students feel more at home while getting the education they needed to change the trajectories of their lives. It began in 2009 when she was hired at the University as an admissions counselor and Latino recruitment coordinator. That’s also when she first met and worked with Eric Ly, who is now the Minnesota Carlson director of enrollment and belonging for the Undergraduate Program. Ly says they immediately connected over shared life experiences. “There’s an unspoken connection you have when you come from marginalized communities and a shared sense of struggle,” he says. He was struck by Cleveland’s willingness to do any job, including scrubbing some mis-chalked signage off the sidewalk at the end of a long day.

“She will never tell you to do something she is not willing to do herself,” he says. “That’s the kind of person she is: She won’t just tell you what to do. She will do it alongside you.”

**CHAMPIONING BELONGING**

By 2022, Cleveland led a team in Minnesota Carlson’s Undergraduate Program responsible for building pathways to college and creating a supportive environment for students. Ly says her clarity of purpose and courageous leadership have been integral to her success.

“We talk about it a lot: The courage of waking up and saying, ‘I’m going to try again,’” Ly says.

“But courage is also sometimes about being strategic. She thinks in terms of win-win for people,” he adds. “That is, ‘How do we win for students, but also in a way where everybody feels satisfied in that process?’ To see the long-term ‘This is great for us,’ that courage of trying again, and her background is really powerful.”

Cleveland says that perseverance has led to some of her proudest moments. One is the launch of the Maroon Lobby, an inclusive space at Minnesota Carlson that allows students to gather,

and otherwise take off any masks they wear during the day and be their authentic selves. Creating a welcoming space is crucial for the student experience and academic success, especially for those who typically don’t see themselves reflected in traditional business environments. Space at the bustling Big 10 university is always at a premium; landing it was a huge get.

“I don’t feel there’s one thing I did that did it. It was the asking, asking, asking,” Cleveland says. “That pebble’s ripple effect kept going, and it finally got big enough.”

Same goes for the Take What You Need Closet, stocked with donations from the school and others—toiletries, snacks, groceries, and more—that students can access and use on an honor system that removes shame and barriers.

These are big accomplishments, but Cleveland doesn’t view them as static ones. The very nature of progress requires plowing forward, even if it’s imperfect, messy, or needs adjustment going from theory to real life.

“Sometimes you just have to do a little bit, and continuing to evolve it will continue to create change and buy-in,” says Cleveland.

**BRANCHING OUT**

Community building is part of Cleveland’s life outside the University, too.

Notably, she’s a power squad leader with Poderistas, a nonpartisan organization founded by a handful of influential women—including actors America Ferrera and Eva Longoria—that helps Latina leaders to build community, develop leadership, and encourage civic engagement. Carmen Perez, one of the founders of Poderistas, calls Cleveland a “visionary leader.”

“She is doing it from a place of truth, knowing what it means to be systemically excluded and to fight your way into power with integrity,” Perez says. “She’s making space for others in every room that she enters.”

In 2022, through Poderistas, Cleveland was invited to the White



“What Geida brings is the know-how to create this kind of community, and a positive, optimistic attitude.”

DEAN JAMIE PRENKERT

“For the first time, we have one position thinking about these areas together,” says Dean Jamie Prenkert, who personally wrote the description for this new role and hired Cleveland. “What Geida brings is the know-how to create this kind of community, and a positive, optimistic attitude.”

The Maroon Lobby in Hanson Hall at Minnesota Carlson



House to visit with Latina leaders and be honored for her extraordinary leadership work. “It’s really powerful to see that sisterhood,” she says.

“When I think about leadership,” Perez says, “we don’t just need people who can imagine a better world, we need people who can actually build it. She is a builder of brave spaces and bold possibilities because of her persistence.”

While managing her professional role and her work with Poderistas, Cleveland also worked to obtain a Master of Public Affairs with a concentration in Human Rights from the UMN Humphrey School of Public Affairs in 2024. In addition, she is a wife to Bill, and a mother to eight-year-old Carter and five-year-old Idalia. Both children are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, which she helps them navigate through appointments, assessments, and schooling.

She is also running for the Roseville School Board to expand her influence and use her experiences to champion kids—ones like she was, and ones like her own children.

**FOSTERING CHANGE**

As Cleveland continues to broaden her work, she reflects on building both the Maroon Lobby and the Take What You Need Closet as accomplishments that are close to her heart. But what brings her joy and eases the bittersweet moment of moving on to her next role is that capable, passionate people have stepped in to take her big ideas and make them better.

“That’s the ultimate goal,” she says. “Create change that is going to live without you in it. That is my wish for everything I do in life. That’s a legacy. That’s what you hope for.”

That legacy of community is what she aims to build upon with wellbeing, empowerment, and belonging at its center. As she steps into her new role, memories from Mexico, Lakeville, the University, and more, fuel her mission.

“There are a lot of people who have fought for me to be here,” Cleveland says, “and I am not going to have my life mean nothing. While I’m in the world, I want to do my best to leave it better for future generations.” **C**

Cleveland aims to build community at Minnesota Carlson.



**DEAR FRIENDS,**

What an exciting time to be a member of this Minnesota Carlson community!

Carlson has always been a community driven to innovate, not satisfied with the status quo. Now,

in the midst of two significant building projects, that spirit of evolution couldn't be more apparent.

One is physical: the modernization of the flagship building that supports student learning, faculty research and innovation, and community and partner collaboration. The other represents a new, ambitious phase of growth for Minnesota Carlson with the implementation of *Elevate*, our strategic plan.

Starting from a strong foundation and more than 100 years of excellence in business education, both projects will serve to strengthen the Minnesota Carlson reputation nationally and globally, while ensuring that students continue to receive the first-class education that will set them up for career success and leadership.

Transformative student learning programs like the Impact Lab (see page 38) and Deluxe E-ternships (see opposite page) benefit from corporate and community partnerships, alumni mentors, and physical spaces that support collaborative learning. Each of these critical inputs is made possible by the amazing network of alumni and community members who share their time, talent, and treasure with the school.

I am excited to see where this season of growth takes us, together.

With gratitude,

Jess Kowal, Assistant Dean, Institutional Advancement



## Connecting Carlson Nears Fundraising Goal

Construction for the *Connecting Carlson* building reimagination began in December last year and can be seen—and heard—going strong as the transformation and modernization of critical facilities and learning spaces continues.

The *Connecting Carlson* project is being entirely funded by philanthropy, the only project with that distinction on campus at this time. To date, more than 90% of the fundraising goal has been completed, thanks to alumni, partners, and friends of the school who have invested in the future of business at Minnesota Carlson.

Once completed, the building will be named in honor of Marilyn Carlson Nelson. The former CEO

of Carlson Companies and a highly esteemed business and community leader, Carlson Nelson has been a champion of this project and the impact it will have on students and the broader Minnesota business community for years to come.

One of the most significant areas to see change, the space that will soon be the Glaser Family Experiential Learning Suite, is well on its way to becoming a hub of student, faculty, and community collaboration. The Carlson Analytics Lab space is already open for business (see page 4), while construction on the auditorium (see above) and atrium spaces began in the spring and is ongoing. The full project is expected to be complete in Fall 2026.

PHOTO: DAN GUNDERSON

“To sit in on team meetings, see how decisions are made, and be pulled in on projects that you wouldn't be pulled in as an intern at a big corporation has been a really good experience.”

SAVANNAH GUIANG, '25 BSB

WATCH a video for an inside look at the Deluxe E-ternship:



## Deluxe E-ternship Program Fosters Emerging Talent

Transformational experiential learning has been a hallmark of Minnesota Carlson since the school's founding. As entrepreneurial students seek opportunities outside of traditional internship and workforce models, new programs and partners have arisen to meet their needs.

Minnesota Carlson's Deluxe E-ternship program, run by the Gary S. Holmes Center for Entrepreneurship, matches students looking for start-up and entrepreneur-led experiences with early-stage companies in the Twin Cities area. Students gain insight and access that they might

not get at a larger company, and start-ups gain valuable student resources to address real business challenges and work on cross-functional projects. Interns are paid in a cost-sharing model by the company and the Holmes Center.

“To sit in on team meetings, see how decisions are made, and be pulled in on projects that you wouldn't be pulled in as an intern at a big corporation has been a really good experience,” says Savannah Guiang, '25 BSB.

The program allows students to gain the experience they are looking for while earning a fair wage and contributing meaningfully

to an emerging business. These opportunities are especially critical for students who cannot afford to completely forgo the wages they might earn from part-time work as they pursue unpaid internships. The program further benefits small companies that do not have the funding or structure to support competitively paid internships.

Currently, demand for the program far exceeds supply, with a number of students and companies turned away due to limited funding. The school's costs for the program are supported by an endowed fund earmarked for this purpose and facilitated by the Holmes Center.

To learn more about investing in the Deluxe E-ternship program, contact Zac Quammen (zquammen@umn.edu). To learn more about e-ternships or apply as an employer, contact Ally McDonald (mcdo0777@umn.edu).

Savannah Guiang works at her e-ternship at Houston White and takes part in team meetings. Photos: Rose Semenov





Students work in breakout rooms to discuss a project during an Impact Lab class.

## Making an Impact

The Impact Lab provides experiential learning for undergrads—and opportunities for business leaders to share their own experiences.

BY GENE REBECK

He wrapped up a 42-year business career in 2020, but Jon Campbell, '77 BSB, hasn't truly retired. He travels, has become a master gardener, serves on boards, and even works as a weekend bartender at a restaurant near his Minnesota cabin. And he remains open to new opportunities to serve the community.

As Campbell concluded his tenure on Minnesota Carlson's Board of Advisors in 2022, he and his wife, Susan, wanted to do something more. Nothing resonated at first. Then, he heard about a new curriculum Carlson was creating for undergraduate students. Once he learned more, it was an easy decision to help fund the initiative. "It really made

sense to us," Campbell recalls.

The program that captured the Campbells' attention was the Impact Lab, Carlson's experiential learning program that launched in Fall 2022. It has provided Jon Campbell the opportunity to support Carlson in multiple ways.

### THE LAB'S BEGINNINGS

The Impact Lab's origins arose from a curriculum review that Minnesota Carlson undertook several years ago. That review incorporated feedback from several thousand stakeholders, including employer partners, alumni, and faculty. One of the themes that arose from that feedback: "We have very smart students who have tended

to be individualistic and competitive and at times have struggled with teamwork and collaboration," says Ameer McDonald, the Impact Lab's founding managing director. "And we have very smart students who struggle with navigating ambiguity and uncertainty." These insights helped inspire the idea of creating a required experiential learning curriculum for undergraduates—an idea that became formalized as the Carlson Impact Lab.

The Impact Lab curriculum comprises two courses. The first introduces students to methodologies for developing problem-solving skills. In the second, students use those skills to help a nonprofit, social enterprise, or other community organization

craft solutions to business challenges, such as rebranding or strategic financial planning. Working with these organizations, McDonald says, helps push students out of their accustomed ways of thinking—and reveals new ways of thinking and problem-solving.

In addition, Impact Lab students meet three to four times a year with mentors from the business world who provide feedback and guidance for addressing complex problems. "Experiential learning is what's going to help keep business schools relevant because it's the thing that's helping students get employability skills," McDonald says.

### LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPARTED

One reason why Campbell found the idea of the Impact Lab so compelling is that "connecting community and business is one of my favorite topics. Social purpose combined with business strategy is something that resonates with a lot of students." After he and his wife made a gift to the Impact Lab, Campbell told McDonald that he'd love to stay in touch.

At least once a year, Campbell goes to Carlson to spend time with students,

particularly Impact Lab cohorts. He doesn't think of himself as a mentor per se. Instead, Campbell sees himself primarily as a storyteller. "In 42 years, you go through a lot of experiences in business," he says. "Reflecting on those can be helpful for students."

Earlier this year, for instance, Campbell presented a case study to Impact Lab students about a difficult period in Wells Fargo's history: the cross-selling scandal that came to light in 2016. In his position as executive vice president and head of corporate responsibility at Wells Fargo's Minnesota regional headquarters, Campbell had to address questions and anger from customers, journalists,

**"Experiential learning is what's going to help keep business schools relevant because it's the thing that's helping students get employability skills."**

AMEE MCDONALD,  
IMPACT LAB MANAGING DIRECTOR

and other stakeholders. In telling the story of that experience, "I was able to pass on some counsel and advice" that could help prepare the students for similar situations in their own business careers.

In addition to telling stories, he also likes to listen. "I've been told that I have a very curious mind," he says. "When I'm with the students, I love to ask them questions. I think my questions sometimes make them say, 'A-ha! I wondered about that.'"

Campbell believes the Impact Lab students enjoy learning that businesses have to be willing to talk about internal conflicts. "I think students find it energizing that people within businesses don't always agree on everything immediately," he says. "There's a great deal of discussion, debate, and give-and-take that occurs before decisions can be made." Listening and collaborating are two key soft skills that leaders need to tap as they struggle to make challenging decisions, he says.

Soft skills can serve business leaders in other ways. "I've talked about dealing with protesters when they didn't like something Wells Fargo was doing. I'd be asked, 'How did you deal with them?' Well, you talk to them. You learn about them, and you learn about what made them protest." This kind of communication can help build bridges between companies and other stakeholders, he shares. "You need to learn business principles," Campbell says. "But you also need to learn how to interact in an effective way."

### 'AN AMAZING PARTNERSHIP'

Given Campbell's experience in "bridging corporate and community," McDonald describes working with him in the Impact Lab as "an amazing partnership. He understands both sides—and why this program is important for students."

Campbell, who encourages others to give and to provide mentorship, says that he's "thrilled with Carlson's commitment to experiential learning. And I'm happy that Susan and I have been able to help in a small way." **C**



PHOTOS: DAN GUNDERSON

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

## Lively Conversations in New 1st Tuesday Season



With an adjusted series format and Minnesota Public Radio as a new media partner, the 2025 season of the 1st Tuesday Speaker Series has hit on hot-button issues and inspiring stories. Corie Barry, CEO of Best Buy, spoke in February and discussed timely topics like tariffs, adjusting to new consumer habits, and integrating AI into company strategy. In April, Tim Cofer, '92 MBA, CEO of Keurig Dr Pepper (see page 18), addressed how TikTok trends like “dirty sodas” can influence his product lineup and shared about his extensive international and cross-cultural professional experiences. Christy

Sovereign, '89 BSB, currently president and CEO of the 2026 Special Olympics USA Games as an executive-on-loan from Accenture, visited in June along with Special Olympics athlete Abby Hirsch (see above). Sovereign shared her personal passion for the Games and pulled back the curtain on the “beautiful symphony” that comes together to pull off the event, which will be hosted by the University of Minnesota next summer. Each executive was interviewed by MPR News and *Marketplace's* Chris Farrell, which attendees shared resulted in more dynamic events and lively conversations.

## Welcome, New Alumni!

This spring, Minnesota Carlson excitedly welcomed 1,583 new graduates into the alumni community, including graduates from Twin Cities–based programs, online, and global MBA programs in China and Vienna. Graduates were celebrated at a variety of events, including the school-wide commencement ceremonies in May and program-specific receptions. The Carlson Veterans Alumni Network hosted a celebration for military and veteran graduates, and Carlson Women Global Connect welcomed Executive and Global Executive MBA graduates into the community. The Alumni Relations office gave coveted alumni mugs to graduates as a parting gift to recognize their new status as alumni of Minnesota Carlson.



## Inclusion and Impact: Women's Leadership Conference 2025

Minnesota Carlson once again welcomed a sold-out crowd to the 2025 Women's Leadership Conference in March. The speaker lineup was packed with corporate and community leaders, faculty and subject matter experts, and thought leaders. University of Minnesota President Rebecca Cunningham (right) was joined by Kathy Schmidkofer (left), former president and CEO of the University of Minnesota Foundation, for an insightful keynote

session about building a career based on impact. Jacqueline Williams-Roll, '95 MHRIR, chief human resources officer at General Mills and the conference's honorary chair, and Linh Peters, '05 MBA, former senior vice president and chief marketing officer at Walgreens, had a memorable conversation about their experiences as women in the C-suite. All members of the community are invited to join next year's conference on March 6, 2026.

## Ongoing Job Search Support

Since February, Carlson's Alumni Career Services team has been hosting virtual three-week job search group sessions every other month. The groups, hosted and facilitated by Alumni Career Coach Nicole Centanni, provide helpful tools for preparing for, launching, and undertaking a job search. Participants are informed of the many ways

that Minnesota Carlson can support an alum's career journey, while building a supportive community of fellow Carlson alumni. All alumni who are job-seeking are welcome to attend. Small breakout groups are created based on years of experience.

LEARN more about Alumni Career Services:



## Carlson Women Global Connect Book Club: Author Edition

In August, Carlson Women Global Connect (CWGC) held a special summer edition virtual book club on *The Myth of the Fearless Leader*, joined by author Tonya Jackman Hampton. Hampton discussed the message in her inspiring work: a powerful call to redefine what leadership truly looks like, which

challenges outdated notions of strength and fearlessness in leadership and celebrates authenticity, vulnerability, and emotional intelligence. Held quarterly, CWGC book clubs are open to everyone.

SIGN UP to hear about the next offering:



# ‘Living Your Values with Every Interaction’

Chris Galvin, CEO and Chairman of Andersen Corporation

Chris Galvin, '95 MBA, has explored many aspects of corporate business. He joined Andersen Corporation 23 years ago and worked in leadership roles covering finance, corporate strategy, manufacturing, logistics, supply chain, and operations before becoming CEO in 2023. What drives him, he says, is continuous curiosity and a belief that collaboration across different areas of the business fuels success. Galvin recently shared his insights with Minnesota Carlson.

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

I've always approached any leadership role that I've been in with a healthy dose of humility. That includes things like having a genuine appreciation for the ideas and perspectives of others, finding joy in the success of others, and the belief that there's always room for improvement. Another principle to reflect back on is having a strong belief in striving to do the right thing, always. That involves keeping your promises, taking responsibility for your actions, learning from your mistakes—getting back to humility—and making things right, sometimes even when it's hard. It comes down to living your values with every interaction that you have.

**What lessons did you learn at Carlson that you still use at work today?**

What comes to mind is the power of bringing together individuals with diverse perspectives, with different backgrounds, and with different experiences. Carlson has been a melting pot for exactly that, bringing together this incredible diversity of

thought leadership. Today, as I look to pull together teams or build out my own leadership group at Andersen, I'm always looking for that diversity of perspective while, at the same time, making sure that we're all aligned around a common set of values. And I think it's that richness of bringing different perspectives to the table that is so powerful and critically important to our collective success.

**What advice do you have for current Carlson students?**

I always give the same advice: Take risks by exploring areas outside your core functional discipline. The greatest growth throughout my career has come from experiencing different areas of the business and learning how they contribute to the overall strategy and to the success of the company. It not only helps you get a different perspective on the business, but it also helps broaden your professional network. Ultimately, it expands the level of contributions that you can make to the company and to your team, resulting in additional opportunities for career growth. **C**

**Chris Galvin, '95 MBA**

**JOB TITLE**

Chairman and CEO, Andersen Corporation

**HOMETOWN**

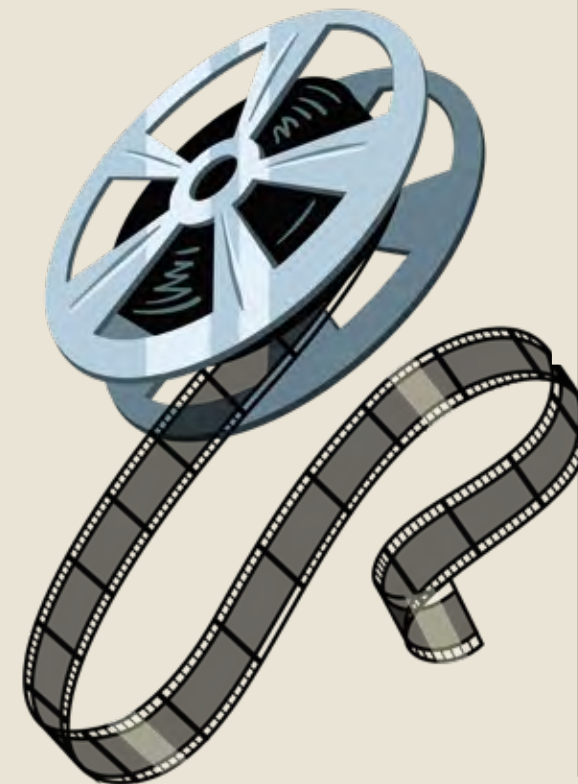
Abbotsford, Wisconsin

**HOBBIES**

Travel and cooking, especially with family and friends



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 Minnesota Carlson makes a positive impact, extending far beyond the campus.



**Sophia Mendoza-Rodriguez**

Senior in Undergraduate Program

**I cannot express how deeply I appreciate the scholarships that support my dreams. Having the financial support has allowed me to focus on my academics, campus involvement, and professional development.**

**I am pursuing majors in International Business and Finance because working internationally has always excited me. This passion also inspired me to co-found Global Business Nexus, a student organization dedicated to exploring international business topics and connecting students with global career opportunities.**

**Studying abroad has been my educational goal since I stepped foot on campus. This past spring, my scholarship allowed me to participate in the Business in Dublin program. I made new memories, experienced new cultures, and gained new skills as the Dublin International Film Festival intern—all without the stress of how to finance it.**

**“I made new memories, experienced new cultures, and gained new skills as the Dublin International Film Festival intern—all without the stress of how to finance it.”**

SOPHIA MENDOZA-RODRIGUEZ



**Eli Brown**

Senior in Undergraduate Program

**As I enter my final year at Minnesota Carlson, I had the opportunity to intern with Mortenson this summer as a strategic marketing proposal intern. This experience was incredibly rewarding, allowing me to gain hands-on industry experience and build valuable professional connections ahead of graduation.**

**I'm also taking advantage of Carlson's global learning opportunities by studying abroad in Barcelona this fall through the Carlson Global Institute.**

**I'm excited to make the most of my final year and feel confident about the future, knowing how much Carlson has helped me grow both personally and professionally.**

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)

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Samantha Soupir, '25 MBA

Shelly Soupir, '25 MBA

**1980s**

**Jeffrey Marentic**, '88 BSB, is stepping into a new role as president of International Markets Group at Ford Motor Company.

**Jeffery Weirens**, '88 BSB, started a new role as a vice chair of strategy and transaction at Deloitte Consulting.

**1990s**

**Scott Jameson**, '92 BSB, launched Jameson Advisory and serves as its founder and chief executive officer.

**Dave Davis**, '93 MBA, started a new position as president and chief executive officer of Spirit Airlines.

**Rich Lee**, '94 MBA, has launched a new venture, OntheSide, a new sports platform that went live in May 2025. OntheSide helps athletes monetize their expertise by connecting directly with fans and sponsors.

**Astrid Benedetto**, '95 BSB, earned the SHRM-Senior Certified Professional certification.

**Sean Murphy**, '98 BSB, started a new position as board member at Aspen AI LLC.

**Aaron Keller**, '99 MBA, started a new role as investor and advisor at Byggr.ai.

**2000s**

**Tom Hayes**, '02 MBA, started a new position as managing director, senior equity analyst at ROTH Capital Partners.

**Christopher Hunder**, '02 MBA, was recognized by *Marquis Who's Who* for his expertise in consumer electronics and business portfolio management. He is currently a business strategist focused on market intelligence at Torchlight LLC.

**Avanish Vellanki**, '04 MBA, was appointed president and chief executive officer of Garuda Therapeutics. Vellanki previously co-founded and led Rain Oncology.

**Carver Anderson**, '05 MBA, started a new role as chief executive officer at Suggestic.

**Priya Priyadarshini**, '05 MBA, started a new position as HR vice president for the Experience and Devices (E+D) business at Microsoft.

**Tyree Boze**, '06 MHRIR, started a new position as employee relations advisor at U.S. Bank.

**Navneet Narula**, '06 MBA, started a new role as chief sales officer at Motivus.

**Brad Pogalz**, '06 MBA, started a new role as chief financial officer at Donaldson.



Georgia, and seven years with the U.S. Department of Labor evaluating employment and training programs out of Boston and Seattle. He then embarked on a successful real estate career primarily focused on apartment buildings in the Seattle area until his retirement in 2022. Repass encourages fellow alumni to join him in generously supporting Carlson and its students.

**Elizabeth Ward**, '06 BSB, '11 MBA, started a new role as senior program manager consultant at Inspire Medical Systems.

**Ajay Kumar**, '07 PhD, was appointed chairman of the Union Public Service Commission. Kumar is the former secretary of the Ministry of Defense, India.

**Leah Larson**, '07 MBA, was appointed group president, air movement and heat at Madison Air. Larson will lead Big Ass Fans, Roberts-Gordon Infrared Heating Solutions, and Reznor LLC, driving innovation and growth across the brands.

**Fredrik Eliason**, '08 MBA, started a new role as director of business development—processed foods at Neogen Corporation, where he will lead strategic initiatives and growth in the industry.

**Maggie Manteuffel**, '08 BSB, '13 MBA, started a new position as product manager for the federal government.

**Jacek Zengteler**, '09 MBA, was appointed president of the management board at Yareal Polska.

**Michael Repass**, '68 MHRIR, recently established the Michael J. Repass Scholarship for undergraduate students with financial need, in gratitude for the school and professors that helped him build the foundation for his success, and to make an impact on deserving students. After graduation, Repass spent two years in the Volunteers in Service to America program in



**Erica El Hilali**, '17 MBA, is now an author with the release of her new book, *Soul Capitalist: How to Take Back Your Power and Change the World*, which was published on February 28. The book explores how individuals can integrate purpose and passion into their work, businesses, and consumer decisions to create meaningful change in the world.

**WOMEN WE ADMIRE IN MINNESOTA**

In July 2025, these distinguished Carlson alumni were recognized among the Women We Admire in Minnesota:

**Bailey Bassett**, '13 BSB

**Kasey Beeler**, '11 MBA

**Heather Gilbertson**, '01 MBA

**Sarah Johnson**, '07 MBT

**Janet Roller**, '11 MBA

**Lindsey Ryan**, '14 MBA

**Aline Schellhas**, '07 BSB

**Sheryl Wallace**, '96 BSB

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

**2010s**

**Bru Mutebi**, '10 MBA, started a new position as senior director, product marketing at Indeed.

**Nick Pilger**, '10 BSB, joined the board of directors of the Rosenau Family Research Foundation, supporting research and advocacy for Krabbe disease and cystic fibrosis.

**Peter Frisch**, '11 BSB, '14 MBA, is now senior director—retail/retail marketing and demand generation at Seagate Technology, a promotion from senior director—demand generation, global marketing.

**Vladimir Vano**, '11 MBA, has been named one of the Top 100 Most Influential Individuals From Slovakia on LinkedIn by Data On Steroids. The Vienna Executive MBA program alum is also listed as fourth Most Influential Finance Professional, by the same organization. Vano is an economic executive and consultant, who has worked in banking, government, and international economic policy.

**Alex Armbruster**, '12 MBA, started a new position as vice president, U.S. Finance & Global Commercial Operations at BD.

**Hannah Cairns**, '13 BSB, started a new role as director in institutional equities at Piper Sandler.

**Matthew Bellamy**, '14 MBA, started a new role as chief executive officer at Bibliotheca.

**Olivia Grev**, '15 BSB, is now operations lead, reality labs at Meta.

**KC Glaser**, '16 MBA, is now the president of the Betty's Family Pride Network at General Mills.

**Dane Stimart**, '16 MBA, started a new position as chief executive officer at AdvancedCPR Solutions.

**Kelly Breeggemann**, '17 BSB, '23 MBA, started a new role as associate director, ULE UHC MA product experience UCard planning & implementation at UnitedHealth Group.

**Juhyun Kwon**, '17 BSB, started a new role as the director of product management—EMRge MMM+ at Ovative Group.

**Katie Larson**, '17 BSB, is now director of supply chain at Gainful, a promotion from senior manager, supply chain.

**Kristen Resman**, '17 BSB, started a new position as senior manager, business development at Walmart.

**Ben Weir**, '17 BSB, is now a senior manager, member experience at Recuro Health.

**Kelly Grout**, '18 MBA, promoted to partner at Boston Consulting Group (BCG).

**Natalia Kluis**, '18 BSB, started a new role as director at Optum Advisory within Optum.

**Kaia Nordgren**, '18 BSB, started a new role as senior associate brand manager at Post Consumer Brands.

**Adam Vander Poel**, '18 MBA, was selected as a member of the 2025 Minnesota and National Young American Leaders Program cohort.

**Dhivya Nagasubramanian**, '19 MSBA, was recently recognized by *Marquis Who's Who* for her expertise in AI and machine learning. She is the lead AI solutions architect and vice president of AI transformation at U.S. Bank.

**Melissa Markay**, '19 BSB, is now the assistant director of donor relations and development communications at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business. She credits the class Philanthropy and Professional Fundraising Strategy, championed and supported by Linda and **Mike Fiterman**, '70 BSB, and taught by Senior Lecturer Anne Cohen, for setting her on this path to success in professional fundraising.

**Alec Wosepka**, '19 BSB, started a new role as a senior accountant at Koch Companies.

**2020s**

**Maria Andrew**, '20 BSB, started a new position as a summer counseling intern and is pursuing a master's degree in Art Therapy at Adler Graduate School.

**Elizabeth West**, '20 BSB, started a new role as senior account executive at Gardner.

**Jason Butina**, '22 BSB, started a new position as associate, M&A, at beBright.

**Zach Tucker**, '23 MBA, started a new role as a part of the Finance Leadership Development Program at The Cigna Group.

**Eric Mueller**, '24 MBA, launched Alliance Strategy Consultants, a strategy consulting firm focused on helping small and start-up businesses achieve their growth goals.

**Michael Wallace**, '24 BSB, started a new special assignment as continuous improvement analyst at Lunds & Byerlys.



**Want to go digital?**  
Sign up for an email-only alumni magazine.



1



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6

**1. Manu Narayanan**, '13 BSB, and his wife, Dharmisha, welcomed their son, Vihaan, in April 2025.

**2. Raaj Vyas**, '17 MBA, and his wife, Bhavna, welcomed their son, Jay, in March 2025.

**3. Jack Farnen**, '18 BSB, married Kylie Picek in April 2025.

**4. Samantha Hovland**, '19 MBA, and her husband, Steve, welcomed their daughter, Rowan, in July 2024.

**5. Michael Short**, '20 MBA, and **Morgan Short**, '23 MBA, welcomed their son, Benjamin, in November 2024.

**6. Amanda Unruh**, '20 MBA, and her husband, Jeremy, welcomed their son, Neil, in April 2025.

**7. Elizabeth Williams**, '20 BSB, married Nicholas Winklbauer in August 2024.

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



7



“

As I begin my final semester, I find myself reflecting on the experiences that have shaped my time at Carlson. The support I have received while studying abroad, being part of Women in Business, and working on campus provided me with mentors, friendships, and the confidence that ultimately guided me to my internship and the next steps in my career.

*Emily Brown*  
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT

Support students like Emily as she explores all that Carlson has to offer while preparing for her future career.

[z.umn.edu/impactstudents](https://z.umn.edu/impactstudents)



**Tom Swain**, '42 BSB, died in March 2025 at the age of 103. He was a longtime supporter

of many areas of the University of Minnesota, especially the Humphrey School of Public Affairs. Swain was known for his dedication to public service, his advocacy for climate action, and his lasting impact on the University community.

## 1960s

**Gary Andrew**, '65 MBA, died in December 2024.

## 1970s

**Daniel Latham**, '78 MBA, died in November 2024.

**Margaret McMillan**, '78 BSB, died in June 2025.

## 2000s



**Bob Kierlin**, '64 MBA, died in February 2025. Kierlin was the founder of Fastenal, which grew into a

multibillion-dollar global company, and he also served in the Minnesota Senate from 1999 to 2007. He served on Carlson's Board of Advisors and was a longtime supporter of the school and the College of Science and Engineering. He was a champion of his hometown and supported many causes in Winona, Minnesota.



**Mark Hortman**, '11 MBA, was killed in June 2025, alongside his wife, Minnesota Rep. Melissa

Hortman. Mark had a distinguished career, most recently with nVent, and previously at Digital River and John's Auto Parts. Born in Atlanta, Georgia, Mark was a man of diverse interests, including mountain biking, pocket billiards, homebrewing, and woodworking. He and Melissa met as volunteers through a mentorship program in the Washington D.C. area. They shared a love for travel and volunteered with Helping Paws, training service animals.

## Paul Mooty

Paul Mooty, '82 BSB, '85 JD, is the vice chairman and partner of Faribault Woolen Mill Co. In 2011, he and his family reopened the shuttered Faribault plant, resurrecting a beloved Minnesota brand. Before that, he served as the president and CEO of Custom Rock, a St. Paul-based manufacturer and architectural concrete contractor. In his free time, he participates in the Rotary Club of Edina and is a devoted husband and dad to three children, with multiple grandchildren.



### 1. If you do not ask, the answer is always no.

We have all had situations where we think that there is no sense in asking for something. We assume the answer will be no. While it may very well be true that the answer will be no, if you do not ask, you will never know. By bravely asking, sometimes the answer is yes. Be inquisitive, bold, and not afraid to explore.

### 2. Measure (listen) twice, cut (speak) once.

The old carpenter's saying "measure twice, cut once" translates very well into life. I have found learning to listen more than talking to be invaluable. Quietly listening before speaking also helps me develop more questions to better understand the conversation. When I do speak, I am better prepared and provide more thoughtful responses to the discussion. It is very hard to learn if you talk all the time—likely that is why we have two ears and only one mouth. Be a good listener.



*Mooty, a LEGO enthusiast, also enjoys building sets, including this Goldy mosaic, in his spare time.*

### 3. The Rotary Four-Way Test

More than 25 years ago, I joined Rotary, a service organization that uses a set of questions called the Four-Way Test to guide decision-making: Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Will it be beneficial to all concerned? This test and my faith have become my core values to help guide me in both my business and personal life.

### 4. There is a solution to every problem.

We all run into challenges where we feel there is no path out. My dad taught me that there are solutions to every problem. They may not always be ideal solutions from our perspective, but remaining calm and thinking through challenges can and will lead to a solution. Think creatively and outside the box, and have a "never give up" attitude. Calmness and a positive perspective can do amazing things.

### 5. Constant chaos interrupted by brief successes.

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to hear Gopher Football Head Coach PJ Fleck speak. He shared that "this job is constant chaos interrupted by brief successes." I immediately wrote it down and still have the Post-It note on my desk. His words speak to our jobs and regular life experiences. By acknowledging and learning from the chaos, we can appreciate even more the brief successes—and build upon them.

As Minnesota Carlson explores the frontiers of artificial intelligence, here's a look back at the early days of computers on campus.



In 1962, the business school received its first computer, a Remington Rand UNIVAC Solid State 80. Worth \$500,000, the computer weighed several tons and took up an entire room inside Vincent Hall. Even with air conditioning, the room stayed around 80 degrees.

Students in accounting and marketing research courses used the computer by day, while Remington workers ran research at night. *The Gopher* annual touted the computer's ability to run "a computation of tables containing 13 rows of 13 digits in less time than it takes to say, 'Jack Sprat.'"

Professor Gordon Davis supervised the use and, alongside Professors Gary Dickson and Tom Hoffman, went on to create the school's Management Information Systems (MIS) academic program and Management Information Systems Research Center in 1968. Due to these historic contributions, the school played a vital role in the development of MIS. Decades later, the center remains at the forefront of the industry, supporting faculty and scholars within Carlson and beyond.

Alumni Relations  
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