MINNETONKA

AlumniMagazine

2024



Connect, Engage and Inspire

Across subject areas and grade levels, experiential learning opportunities create spaces where lessons meet real life.

MINNETONKA
AlumniMagazine

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The Principal's Corner



On June 6, it was once again my privilege and sincere pleasure to preside over our graduation ceremony. This event signifies both the small step and the tremendous leap students will take as they venture out into the world.

In my conversations with former students, they often say that our high school courses are far more rigorous than many of those they took in college. I am proud to know that our commitment to academic excellence prepares our graduates for the challenges and opportunities that await them beyond Minnetonka. That is not the only way we help to prepare our students for life's challenges. At Minnetonka High School, we believe that fostering a sense of belonging and well-being is just as important as academic achievement. As such, I've made it a priority to create an environment in which every student feels valued, connected and supported through clubs such as Unified, which you can read about in the article below.

We've also made great strides in preparing students to enter the workforce. This winter, we opened the new VANTAGE/MOMENTUM Building, which you can read about on the opposite page. This new facility has already expanded our capacity to offer hands-on, experiential learning opportunities for students. It also provides more space for our signature programs to help students engage deeply in fields such as business, health sciences, public policy and the skilled trades. The addition of this building represents our ongoing effort to adapt and innovate in education, ensuring that Minnetonka remains at the forefront of preparing students for the future.

Thank you for your continued support of our school's vision. Together, we are shaping an inspiring future for all Minnetonka Skippers and equipping them with the skills, values and experiences necessary to excel in an ever-changing world.

Sincerely,

Jeff Erickson, Minnetonka High School Principal

Minnetonka Theatre & Unified Club Host Sensory-Friendly Show



Minnetonka Unified student leaders Hugh Kelly '24 and Chase Kickhaefer '24 pose together at the sensory-friendly showing of The Sound of Music.

This past December, members of Minnetonka High School's Unified Club and Minnetonka Theatre collaborated to host an accessible showing of *The Sound of Music*. MHS is a Special Olympics Champion School and offers Unified Club and Unified Physical Education, which support meaningful inclusion in school activities for students with disabilities.

Spearheaded by Unified Club member Chase Kickhaefer '24, the idea stemmed from her desire to include everyone in the theater experience. Kickhaefer is part of Unified's small events planning team, along with fellow senior, Hugh Kelly '24. For this event, they collaborated with Minnetonka Theatre to modify the musical for accessibility, including adjustments to the sound, lighting and duration.

Kickhaefer was deeply involved, helping to choose the songs that would be included and working with the stage and sound crews to change some of the elements to be quieter and without flashing lights. The night of the performance, Kickhaefer sang the title song, "The Sound of Music," and introduced each of the songs to help explain the storyline.

"My favorite part was to see everyone react to it and enjoy it," said Kickhaefer. "A lot of people came up to me to say how excited they were to be there or how excited their kids were. I've seen videos after the show of kids singing songs from *The Sound of Music* at home. It was very special and makes me want to do it again."

WHERE INNOVATION MEETS EDUCATION

New Possibilities Abound as VANTAGE/MOMENTUM Programs Expand

by Daniel Campbell



Minnetonka Public Schools is a place where innovation never stops. New and exciting courses are continually developed and expanded upon, and opportunities for students to pursue their passions increase each year. And, as interest in Minnetonka's experiential learning programs—such as the VANTAGE Advanced Professional Studies program and the MOMENTUM Design and Skilled Trades program—has grown, it was clear that new space was needed to ensure that as many students as possible could participate in these outstanding opportunities.

With unanimous approval from the School Board, the District broke ground on its newest instructional space, the VANTAGE/MOMENTUM Building, in May of 2022. Less than two years later, in March of 2024, the space welcomed hundreds of eager high school students.

"The new VANTAGE/MOMENTUM Building hosts some of the High School's most sought-after experiential learning programs," said Associate Superintendent Dr. Amy LaDue. "From the VANTAGE Global Business and Health Sciences strands to the MOMENTUM program's new aviation pathway, this facility will enhance these for real-world learning."

With cutting-edge technology such as state-of-the-art flight simulators and expansive, flexible classrooms, Minnetonka students are learning in a future-forward environment, specifically tailored to the kind of learning that takes place in the interest areas they are exploring.

VANTAGE is an experience-focused, project-based learning program that offers students a unique opportunity to apply their coursework to real-world settings. Through regular guest instruction, site visits and a rigorous curriculum, VANTAGE students engage in hands-on learning. Each student is paired with a mentor who guides them through real-world projects. The program offers 11 strands, allowing students to explore their interests in Business Analytics, Design + Marketing, Global Business, Global Sustainability, Health Sciences, Health Sciences 2, International Relations, Multimedia Communications, Public Policy, VANTAGE Computer Science and VANTAGE Education.

MOMENTUM offers students the opportunity to take courses that can lead to successful careers in the skilled trades. Launched in the fall of 2020 as a reimagining of many aspects of Minnetonka High School's technology education program, MOMENTUM has grown to include more than 500 students and features four distinct areas of study: Construction Systems, Manufacturing, Design and Transportation.

"Minnetonka High School is dedicated to unlocking each student's potential by offering diverse opportunities," said Principal Jeff Erickson. "Programs such as VANTAGE and MOMENTUM are instrumental in helping students explore their passions, apply their learning in real-world contexts and prepare for critical roles in the workforce. Our goal is that each student take advantage of at least a few of the experiential learning opportunities we offer before they graduate."

The outstanding programs that are housed in the new VANTAGE/MOMENTUM Building represent Minnetonka's ongoing effort to adapt and innovate in education, ensuring students are well-prepared for the future. With expanded and updated classroom spaces and facilities, these programs will continue to empower students to explore their interests and develop essential career skills.

CELEBRATING SUCCESS AT STATE

Varsity Athletics & Activities Report 2023-24

Wherever their competitions take them, Skipper athletes are making an impact in the statewide athletic landscape. Many teams and individuals took home championship or other podium-level titles. "Our student athletes played with spirit, skill and competitive drive this year," said Ted Schultz, Activities Director at Minnetonka High School. "I am proud of each of them and all that they've achieved athletically, academically and personally. This was an amazing year from beginning to end, I can't say enough about the high level of competition demonstrated! Well done, teams!" Read on for a brief update on teams' and individuals' state accomplishments, listed alphabetically by sport.

ADAPTED BOWLING
State Second Place, P.I. Division
Four bowlers competed to place second at the state adapted bowling tournament.

BOYS ALPINE SKIING
State Second Place
The team narrowly missed repeating as state champions after winning last year.

GIRLS ALPINE SKIING
State Champions
This is the team's second state title in three years and seventh in program history.

BOYS BASEBALL
State Fifth Place
The team's record for the season was 19-8.

BOYS BASKETBALL
State Champions
The Skippers beat Wayzata at state to earn the fourth state title in program history.

GIRLS BASKETBALL
State Champions
The Skippers beat Hopkins at state to earn the second state title in program history.

GIRLS CHEERLEADING
State Champions and National Second Place
The Skippers earned their 27th state title this year.

BOYS CROSS COUNTRY
State Second Place
This is the team's best finish at state in school history.

GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY
State Third Place
In addition to the team's success, two individual runners placed in the top ten. Evie Malec '27 placed eighth and Avery Marasco-Johnson '25 placed ninth.

GIRLS GOLF
State Third Place
The team was also the Section 2AAA champion.

GIRLS HOCKEY
State Third Place
The team advanced to the semifinal round.

BOYS LACROSSE
State Sixth Place
The team made it to the quarterfinal round.

GIRLS LACROSSE
State Fifth Place
The team made it to the quarterfinal round, for the best season in school history.

GIRLS NORDIC SKIING
State Eighth Place
The team made it to state for the second time in school history.

BOYS SOCCER
State Quarterfinal Round
In addition to qualifying for state, the Skippers were conference and section champions.

BOYS SWIMMING AND DIVING
State Second Place & State Individual Champions
In addition to the team's success, Evan Witte '25 won individual state champion titles in the 200-yard Individual Medley and 100-yard Freestyle. The 400-yard freestyle relay team also won the state title.

GIRLS SWIMMING AND DIVING
State Second Place, True Team State Champions & State Individual Champion
The Skippers won their fifth straight True Team state title. Individually, Paige Dillon '24 was state champion in the 200-yard Freestyle and Annabelle Wentzel '25 was the state champion in the 100-yard Butterfly.

GIRLS TENNIS
State Third Place
The team had a 21-5 record this year.

BOYS TRACK AND FIELD
State Fourth Place, True Team Third Place & State Individual Champion
In addition to the team's success, Tobias Williams '24 was runner up in the 200m Dash. The 4x100m relay team won the state champion title with the fastest time in the state for 2024.

GIRLS TRACK AND FIELD
State Champions, True Team State Champions & State Individual Champions
At state, the 4x800m relay placed second overall. Individually, Claire Kohler '24 won the 100m and 300m hurdle races at state. Evie Malec '27 won the 1600m run and was second in the 3200m. Bridget Koller '25 was third in the 800m and Zeal Kuku '25 was third in the 400m.

GIRLS VOLLEYBALL
State Quarterfinal Round
The team finished its season with a 16-16 record.

INDIVIDUAL STATE PODIUM FINISHERS
- GIRLS WRESTLING: Phoebe Kunerth '24 finished as the state runner-up in the 130lb category. She is the first Minnetonka state qualifier in girls wrestling.

For the latest sports updates, follow Minnetonka High School's official Athletics & Activities account on X (formerly Twitter) @TonkaSkippers.



Living Hoop Dreams

Both Boys and Girls Varsity Basketball Teams Earn 2024 State Champion Titles

by Mary Cornelius

It has happened less than a dozen times in state history that in one year, teams from the same school district have won both the Boys and Girls divisions of the Minnesota State High School League Basketball tournament. The Skippers have earned that claim to fame. Their twin championship berths—and their twin victories—led to an electrifying spring marked by school bus rides to downtown sports venues, stands filled with blue-striped overalls, and nail-biting victories over Lake Conference rivals.

Girls Varsity Head Coach Brian Cosgriff begins every year knowing the state title could be within reach. "We knew if we stayed healthy, we would have a good shot," he said.

The boys team also believed in its state tournament chances from the start. "The entire team bought in and played for each other with confidence believing that we could win," said Andy Stefonowicz '24, point guard for the boys team.

The teams demonstrated their skillful playing style and talent on the court not only by winning games, but by coming back from setbacks with grace and determination. Early on in season gameplay, both the boys and girls teams lost to the teams that would become their respective state championship final opponents, Wayzata and Hopkins.

"After the losses, we all came together to realize that those games would not define the rest of the season," said CeCe Nesseth '24, a forward for the girls team.

Off the court, the teams' strong relationships set them apart. The girls team included 10 seniors who have been playing together since fourth grade. "Their individual agendas were put on hold for the betterment of the team," said Cosgriff. "They were great role models for our youth."

Boys Varisty Head Coach Bryce Tesdahl reflected that the team's time spent together sharing meals and enjoying each others' company will be the defining marks of the season. "The unseen hours without the fans in the stands built the connectedness of the whole group," he said.

"I love being a Skipper," said Stefonowicz. "All season, we had tremendous support from our staff, families and fans. Winning the state championship was the perfect ending."

The double victory puts the spotlight on the district for the future of basketball at Minnetonka. Both teams look forward to getting back to work for 2025.



Celebrating the Class of 2024

On June 6, 2024, Minnetonka Public Schools celebrated the graduation of 890 students. We invite you to take a closer look at some of our joyful new alumni as they set sail for their next great adventure.

Honoring Minnetonka's Legacy Families

The following Class of 2024 graduates join their parents and grandparents as proud MHS alumni.

Sophia Aschoff joins mother, Dana (Woodhead) Aschoff '92

Grace Baeb joins mother, Julie (Clausen) Baeb '91

Emily Ballin joins mother, Courtney (Norton) Ballin '94

Robert Ballsrud joins father, Jason Ballsrud '93

Elliner Berger joins father, Patrick Berger '92

Sean Bowyer joins father, Patrick Bowyer '83 and mother, Mary (Chinander) Bowyer '84

Lacey Bright joins Kathleen (Mount) Bright '96

Emma Callahan joins mother, Dana (Rovick) Callahan '94

Colton Davenport joins father, Jeff Davenport '81 and grandmother, Elizabeth (Tallakson) Davenport '56

Chesney Delaria joins mother, Kary (Davis) Delaria '95

Campbell DeLuca joins father, John DeLuca '90

James Dyste joins mother, Jessi Franke '01

Evelyn Engebretson joins mother, Tara (Baker) Engebretson '91

Kaleb Firkus joins father, Rian Firkus '95 and mother, Karin (Johnson) Firkus '98

Henry Good joins mother, Margaret (Brown) Good '87

Caleb Hager joins mother, Valerie (Richardson) Hager '95 and grandmother, Marjorie (Bell) Modell '60

Dakota Hamblin joins mother, Mary (Alex) Hamblin '98 and grandmother, Lynnrae (Sheplee) Fors '71

Paige Hanus joins father, Tim Hanus '88 and mother, Amber (Clay) Pass '92

Jacob Johnson joins grandmother, Barbara (Garrison) Johnson '63

Wendy Koehnen joins father, Thomas Koehnen '97; mother, Erica (Carlson) Koehnen '98; grandfather, Todd Carlson '74; step-grandfather, Hal Guyer '70; grandfather, Bruce Koehnen '72; grandmother, Sandra Daum Guyer '74; grandmother, Susan Goebel Koehnen '74; great-grandfather, Harlan Koehnen '45

Sally Krantz joins mother, Jill (Arneson) Holter '85

Megan Holzer joins mother, Nancy (Scribner) Holzer '86

Luke Larson joins father, Al Larson '88

Matthew Lew joins father, Kevin Lew '84

Samuel Luessi joins mother, Alia (Bauman) Luessi '95 and grandfather, Stephen Bauman '61

Dallas McCanles joins mother, Marissa (Kelly) McCanles '97

Braydon McFarlin joins father, Dave McFarlin '74

Henry Miller joins mother, Mary (Woodburn) Stennes '85

Joseph (Joey) Mosiman joins father, Michael Mosiman '87; grandfather, Marc Mosiman '63; grandmother, Roberta (Staska) Mosiman '63

Taylor Mraz joins mother, Shannon Hoban '93 and grandmother, Lynn McLees '61

Paige Olson joins father, Craig Olson '85

Parker Olson joins father, Steven Olson '73

Hailey Pahl joins father, Brandon Pahl '01; grandfather, Bruce Haney '73 and grandfather, Douglas Pahl '76

Olivia Penteado joins father, Fred Penteado '93

Henry Remick joins father, Roald Remick '90 and mother, Nicki (Nordstrom) Remick '91

Molly Schottler joins father, Steve Schottler '85 and mother, Kim (Grimstad) Schottler '89

Sofia Sigel joins father, Mark Sigel '90

Aidan Smith joins father, Greg Smith '89

Ken Smith joins father, Scott Smith '86

Zach Steingas joins father, Charlie Steingas '97; grandfather, David Steingas '74; grandmother, Layne (Barke) Steingas '74

Caroline Studer joins father, John Studer '97; grandfather, Peter Studer '68; grandmother, Mary (Brown) Studer '67

Amelia Sulciner joins father, John Sulciner '88

Francesca (Frankie) Wandrei joins mother, Lisa (McFarlin) Wandrei

Ava Wilhelm joins father, Chris Wilhelm '91

Samuel Williams joins mother, Victoria (Chambers) Williams '86

Marisa Witte joins mother, Karin Witte '88

Madison Wright joins mother, Joan (Talbot) Wright '88

Lucy Zinn joins father, Max Zinn '94 and grandfather, Carl Zinn '61

Thank you to the Class of 2024 graduates who have reported that they will be serving our country!

- Charlton Barry – U.S. Air Force
- Liam Doyle – U.S. Navy
- Bo Mecklenburg – Minnesota National Guard
- Caden Wixo – Minnesota Air National Guard
- Talen Witte – U.S. Army









890 *graduates*

99%	of seniors graduated
8%	Attending 2-year colleges
79%	Attending 4-year colleges & universities
2%	Entering the workforce or pursuing an apprenticeship
5	Entering military service
1%	Taking a gap year
10%	Are undecided or chose not to respond
31%	Attending Minnesota colleges & universities
69%	Attending out-of-state colleges & universities





SIX TO WATCH

by Daniel Campbell, Silas Srnec ‘26 and Ming Wei Yeoh ‘24



Aaron Duong ‘24

Aaron Duong is known for his diligence, genuine passion and remarkable commitment to the Minnetonka community. Throughout high school, he has truly embodied all-around excellence, achieving academic, artistic and athletic success.

An accomplished musician, Duong played the viola all four years of high school. He also played football as a sophomore and junior. Additionally, he founded the Wool Besties Club, a philanthropic service club. Duong has earned numerous awards and accolades, including a Borlaug Scholarship, a Platinum Bilingual Seal in Chinese and the gold-level President’s Volunteer Service Award.

“Humor is a great tool to foster connections and build a sense of community, even with people you’ve never met,” said Duong. “Making a person laugh is a great way to break the ice, which is the hardest part. As a student at Minnetonka High School, you are lucky to have a multitude of opportunities to take advantage of. Whatever you choose to do, make the most of it by enjoying it and actively making connections with others who are involved.”

In the fall, Duong will attend Brown University to pursue a degree in cognitive neuroscience on the pre-med track.



Evy Engebretson ‘24

Evy Engebretson participated in a wide variety of activities and academic programs at MHS, excelling at each one. She took several AP classes and was a part of the IB Diploma Programme. Engebretson was recognized as an AP Scholar with Honors, was a National Merit Finalist, was honored with the St. Michael Book Award and received a bronze-level President’s Volunteer Service Award.

In her time at MHS, Engebretson led her peers in supporting the local community through the Tonka Serves steering committee, Legacy 2024 and Interact student organizations. She was also captain of the MHS Sailing Team for two years and has been on the team since she was in seventh grade.

“Don’t be afraid to try something new or put yourself in an uncomfortable situation,” said Engebretson. “It’s in those moments that you discover things about yourself, and it may lead to something you love.”

In the fall, Engebretson will attend the University of California—Santa Barbara to pursue a degree in chemical engineering and to sail competitively.

Elliot Lee-O'Halloran '24

Elliot Lee-O'Halloran is known for his passion for the performing arts and the kindness he shows to everyone around him.

Lee-O'Halloran has participated in both Minnetonka Theatre and Concert Choir. His leading roles, such as Nathan Detroit in *Guys and Dolls* and Clifford Bradshaw in *Cabaret*, have earned him Hennepin Theatre Trust's Outstanding Performance awards and recognition as a Spotlight Triple Threat Finalist. He was also a National Semifinalist in the 2024 National Association of Teachers of Singing competition. His hard work and talent led to his recognition as the Minnetonka High School 2024 Enrichment Student of the Year and recipient of the Charlotte Powers Award and Scholarship.

Outside of theatre, Lee-O'Halloran also participated in the IB Diploma Programme, and he has been an active member of the Chinese Club.

"I encourage self-awareness and inclusivity to help make yourself and others feel respected and supported," said Lee-O'Halloran. "Surround yourself with people who treat each other with respect and remember that when school presents its challenges, you do not have to face them on your own."

In the fall, Lee-O'Halloran will attend Ithaca College in New York to pursue a degree in musical theatre.





Tori McKinney '24

Tori McKinney is celebrated for both her athletic prowess and academic excellence at Minnetonka High School. An all-star athlete, McKinney competed on the girls basketball, girls tennis, and track and field teams. She was an active member of the Spanish Club and took Spanish Immersion courses all four years at MHS. Her hard work and dedication earned her numerous accolades, including Female Athlete of the Year (2023-24), AP Scholar, Senior Showcase honoree, and finalist for Miss Minnesota Basketball. She maintained a spot on the "A" Honor Roll throughout her high school career.

McKinney would like to thank her family for choosing to enroll her at Minnetonka High School. "It provided me with one of the best educations and set the standard high academically and athletically," she said. "I would like to thank my coaches and teammates at Minnetonka and give my biggest thank you to the custodians. Whenever I showed up to shoot, they always opened the doors and lowered the rims. They always gave me a place to improve and thrive. I will forever appreciate them."

Her advice to underclassmen is simple: "Every day, try and find something to look forward to at or after school, and your days will be way better and feel shorter."

In the fall, McKinney will attend the University of Minnesota—Twin Cities, where she plans to continue her basketball career.



Nicolas Quintana ‘24

Nicolas Quintana is known for his leadership and commitment to fostering an inclusive environment at Minnetonka High School.

Academically, Quintana has been a dedicated student in the IB Diploma Programme since his junior year and earned recognition as an AP Scholar.

In addition to his academic achievements, Quintana has been an active member of the swimming team for four years, serving as captain in his senior year. He also co-founded the Hispanic Student Union, where he worked tirelessly to promote cultural awareness and inclusivity within the school community.

“I love to be inclusive,” said Quintana. “I try my best to create an environment where everyone feels welcome and listened to. Get involved in things that you are interested in! It is the best way to find your community at MHS.”

His favorite memories include the end-of-year Hispanic Student Union potluck and the camaraderie of playing foosball with his advisory group in middle school.

In the fall, Nicolas will attend the University of Wisconsin—Madison to study economics. He plans to go on to graduate school and start a career at organizations such as the World Bank Group or the International Monetary Fund.

Deepti Pillai ‘24

Deepti Pillai’s strong leadership, kindness and spirit of service have distinguished her as a truly outstanding contributor to her community.

Pillai participated in VANTAGE’s Public Policy strand and Minnetonka Research. She served as a Student Government representative all four years and was elected Student Body President in her senior year. She was also involved in Model UN, Girls Tennis and Youth in Government and founded the Cultural Fair in her sophomore year to promote diversity.

Pillai has received numerous awards for her excellence in public policy. She was selected for the Hugh O’Brian Youth Leadership Program and was named one of two Minnesota delegates to the United States Senate Youth Program. The highly-competitive program granted Pillai a $10,000 scholarship and an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C. to engage with some of today’s foremost policymakers.

“Fostering a positive school culture is being inclusive and treating everyone you meet with unbridled kindness and respect,” said Pillai. “I believe that empathy and willingness to listen go a long way,” she said.

In the fall, Pillai will attend George Washington University and major in political science. She intends to pursue a career in public service after college.





A WILD LIFE

Bruce Miller's Journey to Combine Conservation and Art

by Ming Wei Yeoh '24

Bruce Miller '70 is a distinguished wildlife painter who has made lasting contributions in the fight for conservation. He has been awarded many prestigious honors for his artwork and generated more than $10 million in revenue for conservation efforts.

Miller's passion for art began as early as Kindergarten, when he discovered a passion for drawing. Growing up in Minnetonka, he found creative inspiration in the outdoor environment, developing a creative fascination with nature from a young age.

"My twin brother Brad and I became Eagle Scouts, and through Boy Scouts, we were exposed to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, as well as other camping areas around Minnesota and Wisconsin. We were outdoorsy kids, and that influenced my art," Miller said.

By the time he entered high school, Miller was confident he wanted to become a professional artist. MHS offered art classes that allowed him to explore many different styles and mediums. He honed his skills by pursuing additional independent projects outside of school. Touring art museums in Europe and exploring different natural environments after high school similarly contributed to a burgeoning artistic perspective.

Miller attended St. Cloud State University and was introduced to bird hunting around this time. "As a hunter and fisherman, I quickly realized the importance of conservation," he said. He became a member of several organizations such as Pheasants Forever, Trout Unlimited and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, donating to support conservation efforts.

"In 1983, living in Excelsior, I went to a local gallery, and while talking with the owner, I was surprised to see the rising popularity in wildlife art," said Miller. "The paper prints were selling well, and I was impressed. As a passionate sportsman and outdoorsman, I thought it was a natural fit for my artistic direction."

Thus began Miller's remarkable career in wildlife painting. He has since won countless awards for his work, but the most personally impactful was the Federal Duck Stamp.

"It was life changing," said Miller. He described the contest as "the pinnacle of the genre" at the time. "My wife, Deb, and I were invited to the Oval Office to meet President George Bush, and throughout the year, I was a special guest at several national art and stamp shows. My small painting of canvasback ducks was made into the 1993 Federal Duck Stamp required by duck hunters on their hunting licenses. The prints of the duck stamp painting were highly collectible, coining the phrase 'the Million Dollar Duck.'"

After winning the contest, Miller reached new levels of popularity and the prints of his art raised millions of dollars for conservation.

"I was presented with a sign for the newly crowned 'Bruce Miller Wildlife Preserve' in Mound. That was followed by winning two Minnesota Pheasant Stamp contests, and the 1995 Minnesota Duck Stamp contests," he shared.

He offered some words of advice to aspiring artists. "Try as many genres as you can. Become proficient with one medium, but take your time finding it. Making a living in art is difficult. There are other opportunities, such as commercial art, but to try and be a fine artist is altogether different. It takes strong commitment, discipline and an eye on the market. The main thing is to specialize and create a style."

At his expansive property in Mora, Minnesota, Miller continues to rejoice in the beauty of the natural environment through painting. "I continue to support the conservation groups that are important to me and try to improve our 250 acres for the benefit of the critters that inhabit the place."



FROM THE POOL TO THE BENCH

An Interview with Dakota County Judge Cynthia McCollum

by Daniel Campbell

Judge Cynthia McCollum '76 has dedicated her life to upholding the best traditions of our legal system. A former public defender with 28 years of service, she is now a judge in Dakota County where she works hard to ensure that every defendant receives fair treatment.

Outside of the courtroom, Judge McCollum has been shaping future legal minds for more than 30 years as a professor at Mitchell Hamline School of Law (previously William Mitchell College of Law). At Minnetonka High School, she was an accomplished athlete who went on to become a Big Ten All-American swimmer at the University of Minnesota.

She is also the proud parent of three Skippers, who have continued in her tradition of academic and athletic excellence.

You've had an amazing career—first as a public defender for nearly 30 years and now as a judge with Dakota County. Can you talk about what inspired you to pursue this line of work?

MCCOLLUM: I worked in a hospital as a mental health counselor with adolescents for several years before law school and was inspired to go to law school to help other juveniles navigate the legal system.

I was a public defender for 28 years—17 years as a supervisor. I had more than 100 jury trials and handled 45 homicide cases. I went on the bench in 2014 in Dakota County. I enjoyed trial work but was ready for a change and had always been interested in working in the system as a judge.

In Dakota County, we do work in criminal, civil and family law, so I saw it as an opportunity to expand on my legal experience. You represent the community as a judicial officer. I felt that criminal defendants deserved a voice for their constitutional rights.

What have been some of the most rewarding and challenging aspects of serving as a judge in Dakota County?

MCCOLLUM: It is rewarding to be a judge when you take actions that change a life. For instance, giving criminal defendants a chance to go to treatment and get sober instead of placing them in prison. It is rewarding when they maintain their sobriety and are back as law-abiding citizens.

Sometimes it is tough to maintain your patience when folks yell or scream at you when they are frustrated with their own situation and take it out on the court. Most people are not happy to be in court, and so you see them at their lowest state.

I understand that you also teach at Mitchell Hamline School of Law and lead mock trials for students. What is it like to help prepare future generations of legal professionals?

MCCOLLUM: I have been teaching for 30 years now. I work with mock trial students and teach practice-based classes in trial skills, appellate advocacy or advanced trial advocacy. It is rewarding to see law students excel as lawyers once they begin practicing.

Reflecting on your time at Minnetonka High School, what experiences or teachers had the most significant impact on your career and personal development?

MCCOLLUM: I want to thank Mr. Skoy, Mr. Streed and Ms. Woodey for their amazing teaching. I was on the *Breezes* staff as the sports editor my senior year and ended up being a double major in English and psychology because of their classes.

I also want to acknowledge Mr. Rogness, who convinced me to swim in college and to consider running track, as well, at the University of Minnesota.

You were a talented athlete at Minnetonka. After graduation, you went to the University of Minnesota and joined the Gophers swimming and diving team. How did it feel when your team won the Big Ten Championship in 1980?

MCCOLLUM: At Minnetonka, I was on the first state champion team for swimming, and I ran track.

When I went to the U of M, I swam all four years. I was an All-American swimmer on the 200 free relay my senior year. We were also Big Ten champions as part of that relay. I swam for the late great Jean Freeman who developed my discipline—which was a little lacking my freshman year—and love for the sport. I also ran on an intramural team at the U of M, and we won our meets for two years in a row.

How does it feel to have your children attend the same high school you did? What's changed most—or least—since when you were a student?

MCCOLLUM: Minnetonka Public Schools provided a great education for me and all of my children. I feel like Minnetonka has made great strides in education since I went there with all of the AP programs and the International Baccalaureate Programme. We had accelerated classes in the 70's, and I was in the Honors program at the U of M.

Two of my children, Neil and Sarah Mahoney, also swam for Minnetonka High School, and one child, Kevin Mahoney, played tennis for Minnetonka. Sarah also ran track for Minnetonka.

Sarah's swim team and track team were second place at state, and she was captain of both teams. Sarah was given the Scholar-Athlete of the Year award for Minnetonka. Sarah went on to swim at Tufts University.

Neil was a 12-time high school All-American and athlete of the year for Minnetonka. He was second in state in the 100 backstroke. Neil went on to swim for Johns Hopkins where he was a seven time All-American.

During Kevin's senior year at Minnetonka, the tennis team went to state for the first time in many years. He went to the University of Wisconsin – Madison and played club tennis.

Looking back at your journey from a Minnetonka High School student to a judge and professor, what advice would you give to a Minnetonka student today who might be interested in pursuing a legal career?

MCCOLLUM: Minnetonka students should take advantage of AP classes or the International Baccalaureate Programme and get involved in high school mock trial if they are interested in being a trial attorney.

You also have to be comfortable in an adversarial position. Law is arguing with the opposing counsel or the court—and sometimes your client. Most judges have been practicing attorneys for 15 years or longer, so having a judicial temperament is important. The profession revolves around logic, reason and history. Interest in those subjects will be helpful.

Spanish Immersion Graduates—5 Years Later, Where Are You?



Abri Click '19

"Being the first class of Spanish Immersion, we only had each other. We traveled to other countries together and overcame the various challenges that came with being the first. Because of the Immersion program, I have made best friends for life!

I attended the University of Wisconsin—Madison and graduated in May 2023 with my BS in Spanish and a minor in leadership on a pre-physician assistant (PA) path. I am currently working as an emergency department technician in Waconia. My career path is to be a PA, with hopes of starting next summer.

In my current occupation as an emergency department technician, I am one of two people in the entire department who speaks Spanish fluently, so they rely on me heavily.

I have been a part of a situation where a patient came in, and the ambulance team had no idea what was wrong because they did not speak his language. His injuries, if left untreated, could have been fatal. Knowing that I played a role in saving his life because of my language skills was an amazing feeling. At that moment, I knew that my 16 years of education were worth it."



Kate Hoelscher '19

"My favorite memory from Minnetonka was the Spanish Immersion trip to Chile. Staying with a host family in Concepción and exploring Santiago with my friends is something I will never forget.

Since graduating from Minnetonka, I earned a BA in Spanish with a minor in creative writing from the College of the Holy Cross. I am currently in law school, where I hope to use my Spanish skills to pursue a career in international law.

After graduating college, I spent the summer in Santander, Spain, working as an au pair—essentially a live-in nanny. It was a fantastic experience, and being bilingual made it even better. I was able to communicate easily with my host family and continue improving my Spanish. I hope to use my language skills in my future career in international law, allowing me to communicate effectively and work across different cultures.

Being bilingual has opened many doors for me, both educationally and professionally. I am grateful to have a valuable skill that allows me to pursue a variety of experiences and opportunities."

Minnetonka Public Schools launched its Language Immersion program in 2007, embarking on a journey to provide students with a bilingual education. The program saw its first cohort of Spanish Immersion students graduate in 2019. Now, five years later, these graduates continue to use their language skills in remarkable and diverse ways, showcasing the long-term benefits and success of the Immersion program. Are you a Chinese or Spanish Language Immersion graduate? We'd love to hear what you've been up to! Please reach out to us at communications@minnetonkaschools.org so we can share your accomplishments.



Jenna Keyho '19

"Being bilingual has been an invaluable skill in my life, and I am extremely grateful to have done Immersion. My favorite memory from Spanish Immersion program was being a 'backpack tutor' for underprivileged students, typically of Hispanic origin. We helped improve their communication skills in both languages.

I graduated college from the University of Massachusetts—Amherst with a BS in kinesiology and BA in Spanish. I studied abroad in Salamanca, Spain my third year of college. I attended classes during the mornings, then would explore the neighboring cities and immerse myself in Spanish culture in the afternoons.

Last fall, I started a doctor of pharmacy program at the University of Minnesota—Twin Cities. I aspire to use my Spanish as a pharmacist, preferably with an underserved population.

I have used Spanish at every job I have worked at over the past five years and know it helps my Spanish-speaking patients feel comfortable and heard. I cannot count the number of times employers and interviewers have noted my bilingualism and mentioned I will likely need to use it in my position."



Lexi Wagner '19

"The Spanish Immersion program was a fundamental part of my Minnetonka experience! My favorite memory was a trip to Chile in my sophomore year. I made friendships with students in Chile that have lasted to this day.

I attended Stanford University and studied abroad in Madrid, which was one of the highlights of my college experience. My language skills allowed me to immerse myself into a new culture and city, forming relationships and connections with locals. I graduated this spring with a BA in both economics and Spanish.

This summer, I am starting a full-time position as a wealth management analyst at Bank of America Private Bank in San Francisco. I hope to incorporate my Spanish into my future career by focusing on clients and organizations that are largely Spanish speaking in the U.S.

The most valuable benefit for me has been having the opportunity to learn about—and be immersed in—a new culture. I have found every aspect of Latin America and Spain to be fascinating, and learning about their history and culture has become a passion."

Connect, Engage and Inspire

Experiential Learning Personalizes Education for Minnetonka Students

by Mary Cornelius



"Discovery!" The call echoed through the wood, repeated and answered by a chorus of tiny voices: "Discovery!" "Discovery!"

A preschooler gestured excitedly to an upturned log on the side of the walking trail. At first, the discovery was not easily visible, but as the teacher and rest of the class approached (and then crouched, as needed, to the perfect three-foot-high vantage point that four-year-olds hold effortlessly), it came into view—two June bugs. A hush came over the group as they watched. Then, a river of questions began to flow. "Are they burying themselves?" "Are they making a home in the log?" "Why are they called June bugs?"

Each of the questions, and the well of curiosity they represent, provides a bridge for teacher Kendra Johnson to connect what students are experiencing to curriculum topics and skills. Because of that, announcing "discoveries"—like the June bugs—is an integral part of Nature Adventure, the class for four-year-olds that Johnson teaches at Minnetonka Preschool.

"When I find something, I announce that I have a discovery, and students come over to see what it is. I also encourage the students to share when they have a discovery," said Johnson. "Some of the best things we've found have been from preschoolers—a family of mice living in a log, mushrooms, ants and eggs, a baby bunny, and so much more!"

Now entering its third year, the class takes place three afternoons each week in the Minnetonka Community Education Outdoor Learning Center (OLC). Weather permitting, students stay outside for the entire three-hour class period, moving between the OLC, the playground and the nature trails that wind through the Deephaven woods along the shore of Lake Minnetonka. "The materials in these areas are different from what would be used in a traditional classroom, but children are still learning the same essential skills," Johnson explained. This encompasses authentic literacy and math skills to fine motor skills to how to interact with their peers and solve problems. "Instead of reading about life cycles in a book first, we might find ants and eggs and discover this naturally. We can then read books to expand this knowledge in a way in which students are leading their learning and inquiring about the things they find."

This type of experiential learning is not limited to one class, one age level or one subject area. Across the school district, Minnetonka students engage with their learning in hands-on ways, guided and supported by expert educators skilled in helping them to draw the connections between their experiences and the curricular goals they represent.

"When we say something is 'experiential learning,' we mean that it is where the lesson meets real life," said Minnetonka Schools Superintendent David Law. "Students connect what they learn in the classroom with real-world contexts, whether that is through a research project, a field trip, a visit with an industry professional, or working collaboratively with community leaders to address a challenge related to an academic subject area. It is a key component of how our District provides an engaging and personalized educational journey for each student."

This shows up in many forms and is offered both as specific programs, such as Minnetonka High School's VANTAGE Advanced Professional Studies program and MOMENTUM Design and Skilled Trades program, and as an integrated extension of core curriculum. "By doing first, students acquire knowledge through the act itself—not out of my head to yours, but out of your doing," said Diane Rundquist, director of advanced learning for Minnetonka Schools. "This is such an important role for teachers. They guide the 'making meaning' process and the reflection so that students have their 'aha!' moment."

"When students can make that connection and truly understand how a concept like civics or physics fits into and impacts their lives—when they can see how knowledge is a key that opens a door, or propels an idea—that's when the magic happens."

- David Law, JD
Superintendent of Minnetonka Public Schools

Rundquist noted that facilitating experiential learning can feel like a risk, because there is always an element of the unknown as to where students' curiosity may lead. "This is messy learning, and it takes time," said Rundquist. Within the unknowns, experiential learning in Minnetonka Schools has essential curricular learning goals and state standards at its heart according to Steve Urbanski, director of curriculum.

"When students can make that connection and truly understand how a concept like civics or physics fits into and impacts their lives—when they can see how knowledge is a key that opens a door, or propels an idea—that's when the magic happens," Superintendent Law said. "We see excitement build and engagement bloom."

For 2024-25, registration for the Nature Adventure preschool class filled up in minutes. Across the District, the Language Immersion program is growing, and at the High School, the VANTAGE, MOMENTUM and Minnetonka Research programs continually expand their offerings to engage an ever-widening array of both student interests and industry needs, so that graduates will be prepared to make an impact in the dynamic world they will enter.

PROJECT THINK OFFERS STEM-BASED PROBLEM-SOLVING CHALLENGES FOR ELEMENTARY STUDENTS



Project Think is an experiential learning enrichment program in Minnetonka's elementary schools that serves students in grades 3-5. The program was launched in 2014 to serve students with aptitude for tangible STEM-based problem-solving who may or may not be participating in other enrichment programs.

As part of the opportunity, students experiment, innovate and collaborate using the engineering design process to solve challenges. Small groups meet with a facilitator weekly for five to six weeks. More than 900 students participate annually.

"Units include parachutes, roller coasters, prosthetics, bridges, skyscrapers, wind energy, boats, human-centered design, tree houses, and more. There are areas in science that connect back to and extend content areas, such as learning about energy and forces in our roller coaster, parachute, and boat units," said Heather Baker, one of the founding Project Think facilitators. "Our prosthetics and human-centered design units help students to use empathy while creating prosthetics to build a fish tail, bird beak, elephant leg or prototype of a portable shelter for refugees. We challenge students to view problems from different perspectives and identify needs before jumping into a solution."

Using the engineering design process, students talk about the challenges, brainstorm ideas, select solutions and then move forward with building, testing and improving their design. "Testing is eye-opening for many students who thought their initial design was the best solution," said Baker. "They discover where their design is solid and where it needs improvement. They are often surprised and proud of how well their design ended up working with help from their teammates, improvements they made or new ideas that were sparked."

In addition to experiential science learning opportunities, Project Think helps students with teamwork, leadership and interpersonal collaboration skills.

PODCAST PROJECT ELEVATES MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT VOICES



Eighth grade students in District's middle school Advanced Learning Seminar classes shared their voices during a unit called "Podcast Challenge: Let Your Voice Be Heard." Working in small groups, students focused on discovering ways to connect their passions to the wider world.

"Our goal was to keep students focused on our essential learning: 'Contribute responsibly to the local or global community,'" shared Laura Frisbie, advanced learning teacher at Minnetonka Middle School West. "From sports to the history of the Space Race to 'Gen Z slang, students selected a wide range of topics," said MME advanced learning teacher Gina Nelson. "Some chose to do their podcast on their middle school's annual fundraising event, the Water Walk for Haiti."

Students dove into the unit head-first by researching and listening to podcasts while noting the aspects of different stories that resonated with them. "As far as the format went, once students identified a topic idea, they came up with a driving question that was meant to be their compass as they worked on the script for their podcast," said Frisbie. Students were encouraged to consider multiple perspectives as they wrote their scripts to ensure their story acknowledged different viewpoints, and part of that process was thinking about different voices they could include.

"The last phase was to work on the editing and sound mixing. Students used GarageBand for all of their sound and editing, and all music and sound had to be student-created," said Frisbie. "At the end of the unit, all podcasts were published to our Schoology Discussion Board page, and students spent time reflecting and providing feedback to each other. They had the opportunity to listen to and analyze their own podcast, as well as to receive feedback from me and from their classmates."

Many students told Frisbie that the unit was the most meaningful project they had completed in middle school, and nearly two dozen went on to submit their final projects to the National Public Radio Student Podcast Challenge.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS LOG FIRST FLIGHT HOURS IN MOMENTUM AVIATION



For Minnetonka High School students, the sky isn't the limit—it's just the beginning. In the 2023-24 school year, nearly 200 students participated in aviation courses as part of the transportation strand of the MOMENTUM Design and Skilled Program. This new program is designed to ignite a passion for aviation in students of all backgrounds.

Students took to the skies this year, participating in "discovery flights" with local company Aloft Aviation at the Airlake Airport in Lakeville. This was thanks, in part, to MHS alumnus Carl Bergquist '77, co-owner of Aloft, who helped to provide the opportunity at a discounted rate for students. During the discovery flights, pairs of students flew with a certified flight instructor to get their first logged flight lesson.

"To see the incredible growth in student interest in MOMENTUM in just a few years' time has been so exciting," said Mark Ambrosen, MOMENTUM advisory board member, retired air traffic controller and former Minnetonka School Board member. "The new aviation track aligns with the program's goal of preparing our students for future career opportunities in the trades. This is definitely opening doors for students to consider various aspects of aviation as a viable career option."

The field experience also included rotational groups where students learned about aircraft operations, maintenance, commercial aviation, military aviation and more. Students could also take a behind-the-scenes tour of the Minneapolis St. Paul Airport and learn from Delta employees.

Students in the aviation program have the opportunity to earn a ground pilot/drone license by the time they graduate and work toward a private pilot's license. Next school year, aviation classes will take place in the new VANTAGE/MOMENTUM Building. Three state-of-the-art flight simulators will provide unparalleled experiences for student learning, and a new course, "Flight Instruction Through Time: Navigating Aviation and World History," will offer an interdisciplinary path for students to complete core academic credits while exploring careers in aviation.

POST-HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS BUILD SKILLS THROUGH S.A.I.L. BUSINESS PROJECT



Students in the Students Achieving Independent Life (S.A.I.L.) transition program have a new business venture. S.A.I.L. is a post-high school special education program available to students ages 18-22.

Using crayons donated from elementary schools and sawdust recycled from MHS construction and wood shop classes, S.A.I.L. students create, market and sell fire starters. The business project gives students the opportunity to gain experience running a business model independently, while also raising funds to support S.A.I.L. student activities. S.A.I.L. students also bake and sell dog treats.

"I started thinking that we needed new products to sell. Teachers in the District gave us crayons to use for a different project, and we had a lot left over, so I thought, 'What could we do with all these crayons? We decided to start selling fire starters," said S.A.I.L. teacher Sarah Koopman, who helped to lead this year's project. To make the fire starters, students melted the crayons together with sawdust they had received from the High School's construction and wood shop classes.

"Every student in the program has a job and contributes in some way to the business," said Koopman. "We have students who manage inventory, purchasing and banking, students who create the products and students who do spin art to make our labels. I also have students who fill out the spreadsheet and keep track of our orders. It's really fun to see students move between those levels of projects."

Students are looking forward to testing out the products themselves, Koopman shared. "I'm going to bring in my fire pit, and we're going to roast marshmallows in the backyard. I think for any of the projects that we do where there's a product at the end, students look at it and say, 'I made this. I'm really proud of it.'"



Letter from the President

Greetings Minnetonka Alumni! Did you know that I bought the house I grew up in from my parents? It is located right on Lake Minnetonka, and, yes, I got the family discount so I can afford to live here. I feel so grateful to still be able to live in the Minnetonka School District. We have fabulous leadership, innovative teachers and high-achieving students. Our students achieve on many fronts—sports, education, life-long friendships—but most of all they are set up to win at life like so many of our alumni continue to do.

I hope you are as excited as I am about the All-Class All-Friends Reunion this summer. It will take place on Saturday, July 27, on the streets of Excelsior (see page 22 for all the details). I have no doubt that it will be the best party of the summer! One of the Minnetonka Alumni Association's top goals is to help alumni reconnect. This year's event is free, so please plan to attend and bring along your fellow alumni, family and friends.

Did you know that the Minnetonka Alumni Association actively supports current students throughout the District? We do, and the All-Class All-Friends Reunion is our biggest fundraiser. It ensures that we can continue to give through the Foundation's Teacher Grant Program. Thanks to your generous support, we were able to fund eight grants in 2024—which you can read about on the opposite page.

We welcomed three new Alumni Association Board members: Sam Randall '06, Carolyn Connelly '07 and Student Representative Molly O'Neill '24. Thank you for donating your time and talent to help us give back to Minnetonka Public Schools! I don't want to leave without acknowledging the passing of Tad Shaw in March. Tad—along with Bob Miller, DDS, and civics teacher Steve Frazier—was one of the visionaries that started the Alumni Association in 2002 to plan our first All-Class Reunion, which celebrated the High School turning 50! He told me recently he was proud of the work the Alumni Association continues to do.

Go Skippers! See you this summer!

Marietta Jacobsen '70, Minnetonka Alumni Association President

Meet the Minnetonka Alumni Association's Board of Directors



Pictured: Max Zinn '94, Gail (Thacker) Ofstehage '68, Dan Heiland '74, Laura Forslev '85 (Secretary), Molly O'Neill '24 (Student Representative), Brittany (Wittmers) Stuhr '00, Scott Meriwether '68 (Treasurer), Matthew Andrews, PhD '95 and Marietta Jacobsen '70 (President). Not pictured: Carolyn (Peterson) Connelly '07, Lisa (Lund) Mayer '79 and Sam Randall '06.

Annual Giving Update

As part of the Minnetonka Alumni Association's commitment to support current students, the Association funds Teacher Grants in partnership with the Minnetonka Public Schools Foundation. These grants make innovative ideas from teachers a reality and enhance the ability for students to learn.

Through the generosity of alumni like you, the Minnetonka Alumni Association gave a total of $4,251 to teachers this year, funding the following grants:

1. **Best Buddies Club** - The Best Buddies Club at Minnetonka Middle School West fosters one-to-one friendships between students with and without disabilities. The funds from this grant will provide for various activities and events. It will benefit all of MMW's students by helping to provide a more inclusive and understanding school climate.

2. **Art Frames** - This grant supports the purchase of new frames for the Minnetonka High School art department. They will be used to display student work throughout the year in the Arts Center and will benefit nearly every art student.



Minnetonka Alumni Association board members showed their support for Minnetonka's innovative teachers at the Minnetonka Public Schools Foundation 2024 Teacher Grant presentation ceremony. Front row: Meg Koenitzer, Rebecca Marks, Stacey Edlavitch, Sarah Johnson and Brittany (Wittmers) Stuhr '00. Middle row: Scott Meriwether '68 and Marietta Jacobsen '70. Back row: Thomas Tomashek, David Kitzmann, Roger Andre, Nick Bahr, Andrew Werner, Brian Kelly and Gail (Thacker) Ofstehage '68.

3. **Reading Pens to Help Students with Dyslexia** - This grant funds the purchase of reading pens for students with Dyslexia to use during Minnetonka High School's Anchor Time. These special pens will help students read from classroom novels and text books that are not available online and will allow them to become more independent learners.

4. **Demonstration Probes for Physics**- This grant will fund the purchase of three probes to be used for physics demonstrations at Minnetonka High School. The probes measure static charge, electrical current and electrical voltage. With these, teachers will be able to demonstrate a variety of electrical phenomena for most physics classes.

5. **LabCam** - This grant funds the purchase of a LabCam microscope attachment to enhance Minnetonka Middle School East's seventh grade science classrooms with the ability to photograph and record microorganisms found in pond water and other samples. This technology will provide students with a hands-on learning experience, fostering a deeper understanding of microbiology and ecology. By capturing detailed images and videos, students can engage in meaningful scientific exploration and analysis.

6. **Minnetonka Community and Resource Night** - A team of Minnetonka Schools staff will organize a resource fair to connect underserved families and students to community and District resources. This annual event aims to give families access to resources and decrease barriers. This includes language barriers, computer access barriers and lack of knowledge of available resources such as food and transportation. The goal of this event is to provide an evening of connection, information and resources to families who may be in need of resources in the District.

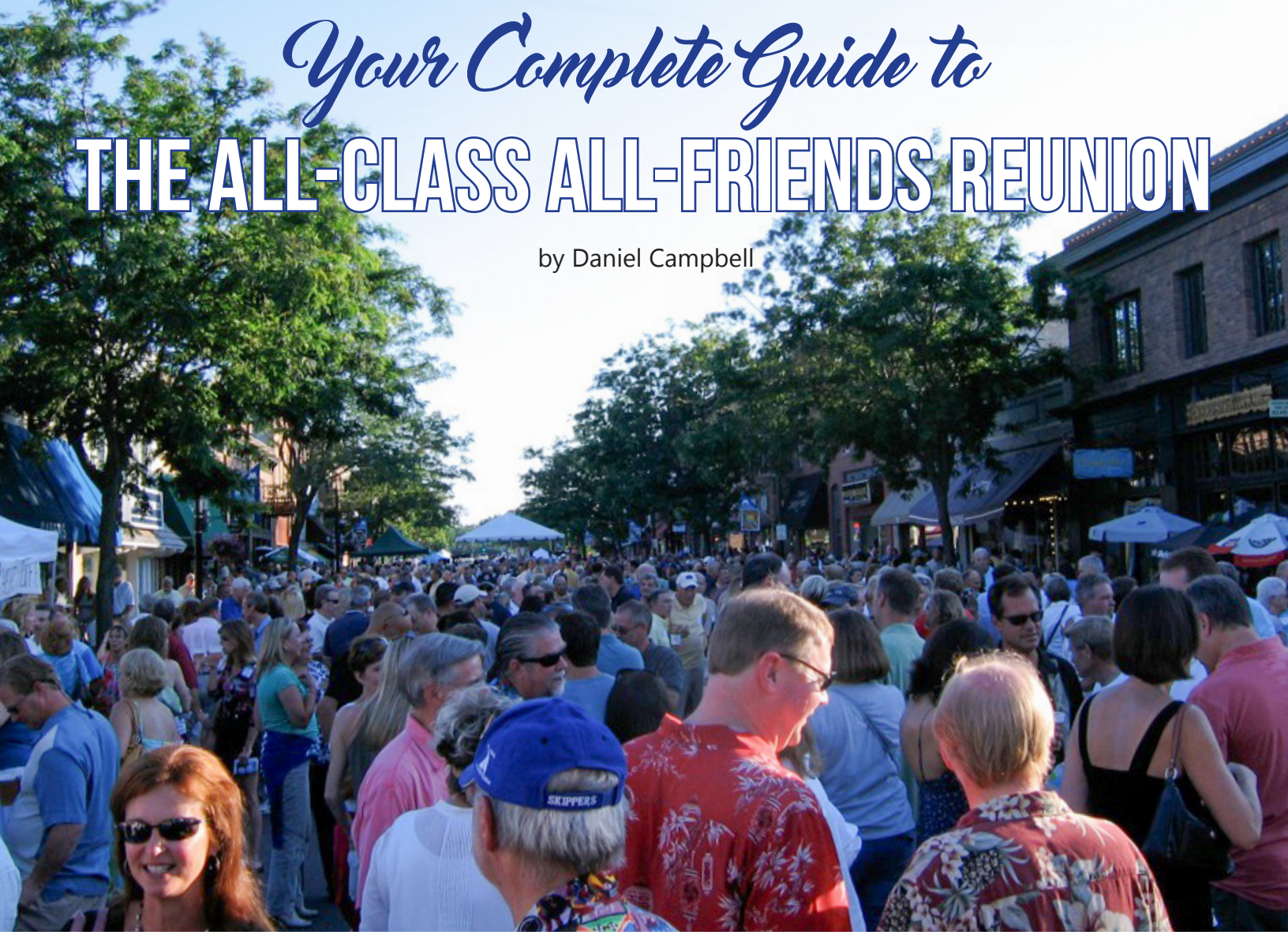
7. **Sonor SMART Series Xylophones** - This grant will purchase new xylophones for Clear Springs Elementary students. The SMART Xylophones sets are smaller than previous sets and easier for younger students to use. They will replace step bells that have experienced heavy use.

8. **The Virtual Naturalist** - This grant funds a collaboration with a local naturalist, who will lead virtual lessons about nature and environmental topics with the Tonka Online elementary students.

View a list of all teacher grants funded by the Minnetonka Alumni Association from 2005-present at bit.ly/MAA-teachergrants. To make a gift to the Minnetonka Alumni Association, visit minnetonkaschools.org/alumnigiving.

Your Complete Guide to THE ALL-CLASS ALL-FRIENDS REUNION

by Daniel Campbell



Join the Minnetonka Alumni Association on Saturday, July 27, 2024, from 4-10 p.m. in Downtown Excelsior for a day filled with fun, friendship and fantastic food at the All-Class All-Friends Reunion! This event is free and open to all alumni, families, teachers, staff and friends of Minnetonka Public Schools.

The first All-School All-Class Reunion (as it was called at the time) was held in July 2002 to honor the 50th anniversary of Minnetonka High School. It brought more than 3,000 alumni together to celebrate the school community and raise money for a Fine Arts Endowment. The event was so successful in both building community and raising money to support the District that the Minnetonka Alumni Association decided to hold one every four years. Unfortunately, the 2022 reunion was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With that in mind, rebuilding alumni and community connections and re-engaging in fundraising to support future Skippers is more important this year than ever before.

"I'm thrilled to welcome everyone to this year's All-Class All-Friends Reunion," said Marietta Jacobsen '70, President of the Minnetonka Alumni Association. "It's a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with old friends, make new ones and support our beloved teachers and students in the Minnetonka Public Schools community."

The Minnetonka Alumni Association, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, is dedicated to supporting Minnetonka Public Schools and the alumni community. Funds raised at the All-Class All-Friends Reunion will be used to:

- Support the Minnetonka Public Schools Foundation Teacher Grant program in the areas of fine arts, science & technology and student well-being.
- Hold future community-wide events, such as the annual Minnetonka Alumni Awards brunch.

By attending, you help to ensure continued excellence within the Minnetonka Public School District and the broader alumni community. Together, you can make a significant impact for Minnetonka alumni and future generations of Skippers.

For more information and updates, visit minnetonkaschools.org/reunion or follow the Minnetonka Alumni Association's social media accounts: facebook.com/MinnetonkaAlumni and instagram.com/minnetonkaalumni.

Free Admission:
This event is free for all attendees, including: alumni, families, teachers, staff and friends of Minnetonka Public Schools.

Family-Friendly Activities:
There will be activities for all ages at the event, including music, a vintage car show, bubbles and chalk, face painting, inflatable ax throwing and a photo booth. More activities will be announced on social media.

Wide Variety of Food and Beverages:
There will be a variety of food and beverage options available throughout the event. Guests 21+ may purchase beer and wine. This year, food and beverage vendors include:

- Asian Invasion
- Benny's Bigfoot BBQ
- D's Kitchen
- Dog Park Gourmet Hot Dogs
- Excelsior Brewing
- Firehouse Foods
- Sandy's Grill and Italian Ice
- Schram Vineyards & Schram Haus Brewery
- Zoe's Gone Bananas

Free Hydration Station:
Free water will be available at the Pentair water trailer. Cups are limited, so remember to bring your own bottle to fill in case they run out.

Exclusive Alumni Merchandise:
Don't forget to buy exclusive Minnetonka alumni merchandise, only available at the reunion.

- Color-changing Stadium Cups
- Alumni T-shirts & Sweatshirts
- Stickers & Temporary Tattoos
- And, much more!

Support Local Businesses:
Downtown Excelsior businesses will be open with some offering special menu items and deals for the event. Be sure to explore and enjoy!

Street Parking and Free Shuttles:
There will be limited parking in downtown Excelsior. Free shuttles and parking will be available from Minnetonka High School to the corner of Water Street and Third Street in downtown Excelsior. Shuttles will run from 3:45-10:30 p.m.

How to Give at the Event:
The All-Class All-Friends Reunion is the Minnetonka Alumni Association's biggest fundraiser. We encourage all attendees to show their support by participating in giving. You may give in any or all of the following ways:

- Donate at giving boxes located at each entrance point and food truck
- Purchase alumni merchandise
- Purchase an adult beverage
- Participate in a drawing or other fundraising game

Minnetonka High School Tour

3:30-5:30 p.m.
Current MHS students will be conducting tours of the high school. Take a tour of MHS before you board a shuttle to Excelsior!

Music & Entertainment

4-7:30 p.m.
Live DJ

4-8 p.m.
Vintage Car Show

7:30-10 p.m.
Live Band - Pandora's Other Box

Special Thanks To Our Admiral-Level Event Sponsors!

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YOUNGSTEDTS
THE AUTO SERVICE MASTERS
AUTO SERVICE · TIRES & WHEELS · COLLISION REPAIR · CAR WASH

Scan the QR Code Above to Visit the All-Class All-Friends Reunion Website!



GREG HOFFMAN '88

Distinguished Alumni Award

by Silas Srnec '26

Greg Hoffman '88 has made a career out of creativity. As the former chief marketing officer of Nike, he is recognized worldwide as a brand leader. Hoffman is now the head of his own brand leadership platform, Modern Arena, where he provides advisory services to Fortune 500 brands, startups and nonprofits.

During his time at Minnetonka High School, Hoffman recalls his drawing and painting classes fondly—as well as his time on the soccer and track teams. In fact, he attributes his success at Nike to the collaborative skills he learned from participating in Minnetonka's sports programs.

"Those teams were something I will never forget," said Hoffman, "because that's something that you take into business—your ability to collaborate, your ability to create chemistry as a team and your ability to win as a team and give credit to the entire team."

Hoffman also credits much of his success to his high school art teacher, Mr. Cunningham. "Mr. Cunningham was someone who absolutely wanted you to master the fundamentals before you started expressing yourself," he said, "and his class was really where I learned to hone my craft."

After graduation, Hoffman attended the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, where he earned a degree in graphic design. During his senior year, he was offered two internships—a summer internship with Nike and a year-long internship for the Walker Art Center. Nike was so impressed with Hoffman's work that he was offered a permanent position in its image design department.

"I didn't have to choose between my two passions of art and sports because Nike was a place where those were naturally in harmony," said Hoffman.

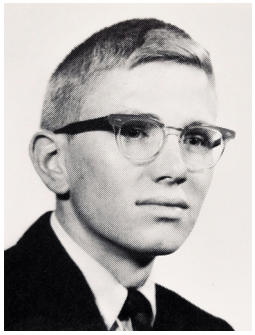
In his 27 years at Nike, Greg held pivotal roles in marketing, design and innovation. As Nike's vice president of global brand innovation, he spearheaded teams dedicated to pioneering the future of storytelling and crafting transformative consumer experiences for the brand. He has led countless successful ad campaigns, including six campaigns for the summer Olympics and six for the World Cup.



Hoffman has been listed on *Business Insider's* 50 Most Innovative CMOs, *Ad Age's* Power Players list and was named one of the Most Creative People in Business by *Fast Company*—which credited Hoffman for "keeping Nike in the spotlight."

Hoffman's main source of success comes from innovation. He said that, "In the world of marketing, innovation is the rocket fuel that drives great business strategies, great innovation and business. You have to make sure you're looking out in the world and continuing to learn and find different points of inspiration that you can bring into your work. I call this idea getting outside of yourself."

To current Minnetonka High School students and recent graduates, Hoffman offers a valuable piece of advice: "Give yourself homework in terms of meeting unique people, going to different places and trying to find the passion that you want to spend the rest of your life working within."



DR. MICHAEL CLARK STEINER '65

Distinguished Alumni Award by Ming Wei Yeoh '24

Dr. Michael Clark Steiner '65 has left a legacy of excellence in the field of American studies. His pioneering work as a professor and department chair at California State University—Fullerton, as well as his numerous scholarly contributions at the national and international level, truly distinguish Steiner as one of the foremost leaders in his field.

Minnetonka High School was a place of vast learning and inspiration for Steiner, enabling him to dive deep into his interest in literature, history and the social sciences. He also first explored cross country and track at MHS, kickstarting a highly successful athletic career.

"I was incredibly fortunate to have gifted teachers at MHS who encouraged and inspired me," said Steiner. "They gave me a strong academic foundation, a thirst for knowledge, an ability to express ideas and a realization of the sheer joy of running and pride of achievement in cross country and track."

Steiner went on to set several records as a runner at Carleton College, while pursuing an undergraduate degree in English. After earning his MA and PhD in American studies at the University of Minnesota, he achieved a tenure-track professorship at California State University—Fullerton.

"I was drawn to the idea and practice of interdisciplinarity—of bringing together the insights of literature, history, folklore, geography and culture studies into my work as a teacher and scholar. I could combine them all to provide a broad image of American culture," Steiner said.

As a professor for more than 40 years at both the graduate and undergraduate level, Steiner taught a diverse array of courses and seminars centering around American folk culture, regionalism, and architecture. He eventually became the chair and graduate coordinator of the American Studies Department. His contributions transformed the program and expanded it to five times the size, drawing in students from all over the world.

"Teaching for 40 years in southern California widened my awareness of cultural diversity and the powerful contributions of immigrants from Asia, Mexico and Latin America, as well the profound impact of African Americans on American culture. In all of my classes and seminars, I strongly urge my students to look at their culture with a critical eye. The term I use is 'critical affection,' seeing the flaws and shortcomings in order to do all that we can to overcome them and patiently make our [world] better and better," said Steiner.



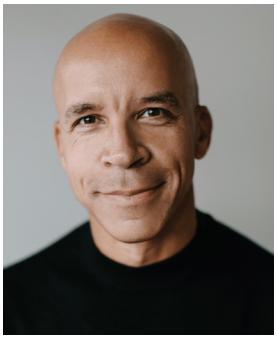
Steiner has published five books and more than 30 articles and book chapters on American Studies topics, including two award-winning essays focusing on the American frontier. Some of his longer works include *Mapping American Culture* and an in-progress book tentatively entitled *The Midwestern Foundation of American Regionalism, 1890-1945*. In 2006, he was honored with the American Studies Association's Mary C. Turpie Award, which recognizes outstanding achievement in teaching, advising and program building. Most notably, he was awarded two Distinguished Fulbright Chair awards in 1988 and 2004. The honors involved an invitation to teach American studies to students in Hungary and Poland, respectively.

"Students today need to have a broad background in a number of fields and disciplines, as well as a specialized career focus. This provides more flexibility and adaptability in a work world that is constantly in flux. But, this is just the beginning."

MINNETONKA Alumni Awards

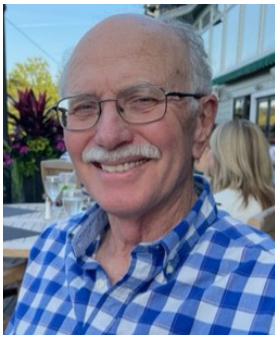
Congratulations to all 2024 Alumni Award Honorees!

You are invited to attend the 15th annual Alumni Awards Brunch on Saturday, September 28, 2024 at Minnetonka High School. Get event details and reserve your free tickets at www.minnetonkaschools.org/alumniawards



Distinguished Alumni Award
Greg Hoffman '88

Hoffman is the former chief marketing officer of Nike and has more than 27 years experience as a global brand leader. He now advises Fortune 500 brands, startups and nonprofits through his own company, Modern Arena.



Distinguished Alumni Award
Dr. Michael Clark Steiner '65

As a professor of American studies for more than 40 years, Steiner has taught a wide array of courses centering around American folk culture, regionalism and architecture at California State University, Fullerton.



Distinguished Service Award
Corby Koehler '91

As a Lieutenant Colonel in the National Guard and former City of Minnetonka police officer, Koehler has proudly protected his neighbors, defended Minnesotans against natural disasters and served with distinction overseas.



Young Alumni Achievement Award
Laura (Hampson) Neighbors '09

Inspired by her volunteer work at the Courage Center during high school, Neighbors is now a passionate physical therapist who has dedicated her career to helping patients with neurological conditions.



Skippers Hall of Fame
1999 MHS Fastpitch Softball Team

The 1999 MHS Fastpitch Softball Team was the first softball team in MHS history to win a state championship and ended its all-star season with a 21-5 record. The team excelled with record-breaking performances and numerous all-conference and all-state players.



Faculty Hall of Fame
David Stearns (Posthumous Honoree)

Stearns spent more than 30 years coaching girls tennis at Minnetonka High School. He was known for transforming players into their best selves and led the girls tennis team to an undefeated season during his last year as coach in 2020.



Faculty Hall of Fame
Ernie Gulner

Gulner is a distinguished teacher whose career is defined by a powerful commitment to child-centered excellence. His genuine passion for literature and next-level ability to connect with students enabled him to make a difference in the lives of his students.

Nominate a Classmate or Teacher

Nominations for the 2025 Alumni Awards are open now. Alumni are encouraged to submit a nomination for themselves, their classmates or their former teachers.

bit.ly/nominate2025

Building a Strong Foundation:

MPSF's New Endowment Project Focused on Building "Foundation Forum"

by Daniel Campbell



The VANTAGE/MOMENTUM Building, which opened this spring, provides new space and an array of cutting-edge educational opportunities for Minnetonka High School students. Among the many classrooms is the Foundation Forum—a space funded by the Minnetonka Public Schools Foundation and set to revolutionize experiential learning and community engagement within the District.

"The Foundation's Endowment Fund was established in 2001 and has funded multiple long-term projects within the district since inception, including the Writing Center, the HUB and Global Design for Learning," said Jill Howe, executive director of the Minnetonka Public Schools Foundation. "The Foundation Forum is the most recent three-year endowment project. We began funding it in 2022 and plan to provide up to $220,000 to equip this innovative space."

The Foundation Forum is a flexible and adaptive space which can accommodate up to 140 people, boasts state-of-the-art audio and video systems and has an 8' x 14' high-definition screen. These features will enable students to present to community members and businesses, host guest speakers and engage in various interactive activities such as TED Talk-style sessions. The space also encourages the creation of videos and presentations by using unique lighting technology that accommodates variations in skin tones and voice, ensuring an inclusive atmosphere for all participants.

The Foundation Forum's use extends beyond the classroom, too. In May 2024, the Foundation hosted its annual Teacher Grant Reception in the new space, bringing together educators and community partners to celebrate—and support—teacher innovation. Feedback from this event was overwhelmingly positive, with teachers and leaders expressing enthusiasm about the potential of the space. The District plans to continue utilizing the Foundation Forum for similar meetings and events.

"The Foundation believes that public schools are a shared community responsibility," said Howe. "We are proud to invest in an innovative space that facilitates the learning environment needed for the classroom of the future and hope that it will give students and teachers the resources necessary to cultivate a passion for growth and learning. Together, we can build a legacy of world-class schools and citizens through our focus on providing quality opportunities and growth in our classrooms."

Alumni can continue to support the Foundation's work by participating in events such as The All-Class All-Friends Reunion on July 27, 2024, Give To The Max Day on November 21, 2024, and Dream Makers on February 7, 2025. These events, along with the numerous activities hosted by the Foundation throughout the year, fund the Teacher Grant Program and other endowment projects. For more details, visit www.minnetonkafoundation.org.

Class Notes

The Alumni Magazine is pleased to feature updates from Minnetonka graduates. The Class Notes included in this issue were submitted between June 15, 2023 and June 15, 2024.

Interested in submitting a Class Note? The *Minnetonka Alumni Magazine* invites you to tell us about your recent award, new job, wedding or other life event you want to share. To submit a Class Note, email: alumni@minnetonkaschools.org or submit it online at minnetonkaalumni.com.

1950s

1955

Donald Truman is doing well at 87 and enjoys talking with his four children, 13 grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren. He is known as "The Whistler" in his community and likes to watch Hallmark movies, listen to bands and play cribbage. Donald says that, "Life is good, but so are Dairy Queen and Culvers' malts—yum!"

1958

Mike Jerabek and Sharon (Hennek) Jerabek started dating in the halls of Minnetonka High School in 1956. They have been together for 68 years and currently live in Lakeville, MN. Mike and Sharon continue to be active and enjoy their life and family, which includes four great-grandchildren.

1960s

1962

Steve Henrikson celebrates his 80th birthday this summer and 52 years of teaching. He currently teaches part-time in the OLLI program at California State University—Monterey Bay. "Teaching continues to excite me and gives purpose to my senior years," said Henrikson, adding that "my European history teacher from Minnetonka High School, Mr. Duff, is still the inspiration and muse for my own teaching."

1966

Linda (Strudwick) Flanders was a police detective in San Francisco, CA, for 17 years and is now a county commissioner in Goodhue County, MN. After following up on a complaint about trash along the Mississippi River, she learned that the Mississippi is #6 on the most endangered rivers list. In response, she led a public awareness campaign and local clean-up event. In 2023, her county challenged other Minnesota counties to join in, which led to Goodhue County winning a 2023 Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties. Flanders hopes that all Minnesota counties will join in 2024.

1967

Rick Wehler has been an "accidental" writer since 2000 and is the author of five books. His paperbacks contain funny stories of life events and anecdotes about growing up in Minnetonka. Several are available at the Minnetonka Historical Society. Wehler advises aspiring authors to keep in mind, "Who you are shows up in your writings without permission."

1970s

1970

Sharon (Johnson) Dana designed *A History of Big Island, Lake Minnetonka*, a book on Lake Minnetonka history. It was written by Paul Maravelas, Class of 1974.

John Flax is a featured performer in Godfrey Reggio's newest film, *Once Within A Time*, which premiered at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Flax is the founding artistic director of Theater Grottesco based in Santa Fe, NM.

1971

Marje (Ferguson) Miller finished 20 years of international teaching in 2022. Her past positions have included the American International School in Cairo, Egypt; International School in Dakar, Senegal; American Community School in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates and Georgetown International Academy in Georgetown, Guyana. She currently lives in Dennisport, MD and works at the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History.

Joni Schwartz-Chaney published a new book, *Critical Faith: What It Is, What It Isn't & Why It Matters*.

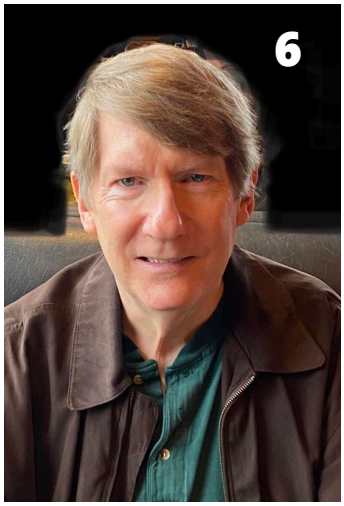






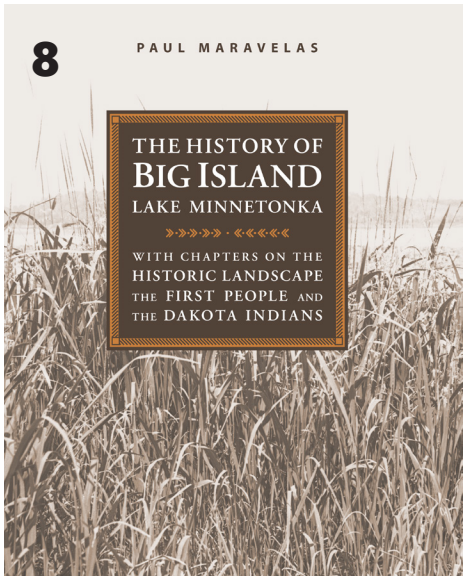


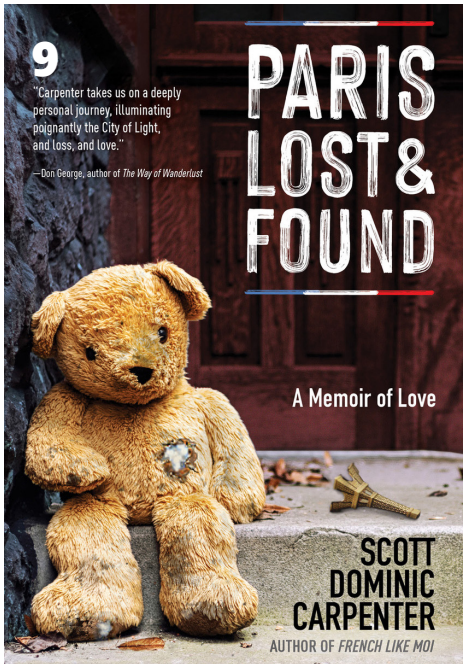






1. Donald Truman '55
2. Rick Wehler '67
3. Marje (Ferguson) Miller '71
4. Joni Schwartz-Chaney '71
5. Joan Marie Verba '71
6. Tim Kucij '72
7. Vicky (Zenisek) White '72
8. Paul Maravelas '74 & Sharon (Johnson) Dana '70
9. Scott Carpenter '76





Joan Marie Verba has had two novels published within the past year: *Secrets of the Sorcerers* and *Clash of the Sorcerers*.

1972

Tom Kitchar was in the first two years of Minnetonka's "School Within A School" program. He moved out west to go gold mining in 1980. In 2000, he was elected president (and still is) of the Waldo Mining District, which was established in 1852 as the first government in southwest Oregon prior to statehood.

Tim Kucij is retired from engineering management, but is still somewhat active in music and ministry. "I have only the fondest memories of my time at MHS," said Kucij. "They were truly the wonder years. I forged friendships that are still in place today and was taught and mentored by wonderful teachers who made an huge impact on my life. I am truly grateful. I hope the very best for all current and future MHS students and wish them the very best in life."

Vicky (Zenisek) White retired in 2018 after working for 15 years as an elementary school nurse. She and her husband spent five years in Wisconsin to be with her mother. After her mother passed, White moved to Wilmore, KY. She spends her time traveling with her RV to National Parks and visiting her four children and 11 grandchildren.

1974

Paul Maravelas published *A History of Big Island, Lake Minnetonka*, a book on Lake Minnetonka history. It was designed by Sharon Dana, Class of 1970.

1976

Scott Carpenter has a new book coming out in September, *Paris Lost and Found*. It is a "tragicomic tale" involving fellow Skipper and late wife, Anne (Maple) Carpenter '75. It follows his first book, *French Like Moi*, which is about the life of a Midwesterner in Paris. Carpenter will read and discuss his work at Excelsior Bay Books on September 26, 2024 at 7 p.m.


10


11


12

Lisa (Abbatiello) Powell is a real estate broker and owner of Sunshine Life Realty in central Florida. She returns to Minnetonka from time to time to visit one of her two sons. Lisa says, "I remember fondly my years in Minnetonka, and especially Minnetonka High School. I love the beautiful Minnetonka lakes and spent many days boating, ice skating and ice fishing on them, as well."

1978

The class of 1978 celebrated its 45-year reunion in July 2023.

1979

Ann (Ostergren) Wales is honored to be the chaplain for the La Crosse County Jail, where she serves both men and women.

1980s

1981

Kathy (Sevey) Larson retired after 35 years of teaching—28 at Minnewashta Elementary. She plans to supervise student teachers for Luther College in Decorah, IA as they complete their assignments in the Twin Cities.

1985

Pamela Hathaway started her 35th year of an amazing career flying with Delta and Northwest Airlines. Her son recently graduated from college and is now an Ensign in the US Navy.

1990s

1992

Paul Manley recently changed employers and is now senior vice president of Investor Relations at Usio, Inc. He lives in Fountain Hills, AZ.

1996

Amy Schott received the 2022 Washington Post Principal of the Year Award. She currently serves as a principal for the 15th consecutive year in Prince William County Public Schools in Virginia. She is also the VAESP-NAESP Federal Relations Coordinator and coordinates legislative advocacy efforts for public education. She lives in northern Virginia with her husband of 15 years, Brian, and is the mother of two children, Will and Elsa Marie.

2000s

2000

Jeff Bernett developed Caedence, a browser-based music collaboration platform. It is currently undergoing pilot programs in school districts in Oregon and Minneapolis Public Schools.



13

Chris Jurgensen married Laura McMahon in June 2023. He is enjoying married life and their new house. The couple lives in Park Ridge, IL.

Peter Norgaard was appointed captain in the US Navy on April 18, 2024.

2005

Ariel Feblowitz works in the film industry designing visual effects for major Hollywood films such as *Avatar 2: The Way of Water*, *Avengers: Endgame* and many more. He was nominated for an academy award for his work on *Guardians of the Galaxy 3* in 2024.

Jens Midthun was elected vice president of the Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council.

2009

After living in Washington D.C. for two years teaching German to members of the military, Mark Jensen, his wife and one-year-old son have moved back to Minnesota. He currently works in the office of admissions at the University of Minnesota—Duluth.





10. Lisa (Abbatiello) Powell ‘76
11. Class of 1978 Reunion
12. Kathy (Sevey) Larson ‘81
13. Pamela Hathaway ‘85
14. Chris Jurgensen ‘00
15. Mark Jensen ‘09

In Memoriam

Minnetonka Schools extends its deepest sympathies to the families and friends of all Minnetonka, Excelsior and Deephaven graduates, staff and key District supporters who passed away this year.

ALUMNI

Mildred (Strachota) Nordhal ‘47
Kathleen Carlson ‘53
Art Fredrickson ‘53
James Fillbrandt ‘54
Daryl Heimerl ‘57
Dale (Bollis) Kroc ‘57
Charles Rosenberger, III ‘57
Thomas Heger ‘58
Dean Jacobson ‘58
Deloris Melby ‘58
Theresa (Schmidt) Truman ‘59
Karon Alcott ‘60
Brian Gammon ‘60
Joseph Garaghty ‘60
Gwen (Beggs) Hauser ‘60
Sharon (Metcalf) Anderson ‘61
Gaylord Fries ‘62
Pamela (Ruff) Peirsol ‘62
Judy (McNally) Cave ‘63
Tom Doherty ‘63
Michael Griffin ‘63
Nan Marie (Heathcote) Nicolle ‘63
John Purdy ‘63
Ted Pederson ‘64
Kathleen (Albee) Harris ‘67
Brian Lindquist ‘67
Larry Niccum ‘67
Ellen (Doege) Guyer ‘69
Russell Born ‘70
William Leonard ‘70
Patty Young ‘70
Joseph Fuhrman ‘71
Mark Reeves ‘71
Heidi (George) Munroe ‘73
Bruce Hedtke ‘74
Victoria Johnson ‘74
Jerry Olson ‘74
John McIntyre ‘77
Michael Hazzard ‘78
Kelly Pankratz ‘85
Meeghan (Hiykel) Burnevik ‘90
Jeff Anderson ‘92
Melissa Laybourn ‘98
Ryan Knight ‘96
Jennifer Caughron ‘04
Christina Pickford ‘06
Whitney Nelson ‘15

TEACHERS, STAFF & FRIENDS

Earl Benhardus
Bruce Benson
Shirley Bierma
Gerald Cox
Marguerite “Betsy” Farness
Nancy George
Mary Grimstad
Marjorie Haasken
Helen Herzog
Dr. Ruth Howe
Patricia Jordan
William Keeler
Erik Kitt
Henry Lemke
Delois “LaRhea” Morseth
Marilyn Nelson
Pam Orr
Maggie Pistner
Nanette Sander
Josephine Sansone
Frank “Tad” Shaw
Margret Suckow
Rita Waletski
Thomas Warner

Upcoming Events

Minnetonka Schools is excited to share the many alumni and District events happening next year! To make sure you have all the latest event updates, visit **www.minnetonkaschools.org/alumni-events**.

Know of a reunion that should be added to the calendar? Email **alumni@minnetonkaschools.org**.

Upcoming Events for 2024-2025

- July 12 - Class of 2014, 10-Year Reunion
- July 26 - Class of 1964, 60-Year Reunion
- July 26 - Class of 1965, 59-Year Reunion
- July 26 - Class of 1970, 54-Year Reunion
- July 26 - Class of 1974, 50-Year Reunion
- July 26 - Class of 1984, 40-Year Reunion
- July 26 - Class of 1998, 26-Year Reunion
- July 26 - Class of 2004, 20-Year Reunion
- July 27 - Class of 1959, 65-Year Reunion
- July 27 - All-Class All-Friends Reunion
  Learn more at minnetonkaschools.org/reunion
- August 3 - Tour de Tonka, Minnetonka Community Education
- September 27 - Homecoming Parade in Excelsior
- September 27 - Homecoming Football Game
- September 28 - Alumni Awards Brunch
  Reserve your free tickets at minnetonkaschools.org/alumniawards
- September 28 - Fall de Tonka, Minnetonka Community Education
- November 9-24 - MHS Fall Musical at Arts Center
  Purchase tickets at minnetonkatheatre.com
- November 28 - Tonka Turkey Trot at MHS
- January 31- Deadline for 2025 Alumni Awards
  Nominate at minnetonkaschools.org/alumniawards
- February 7 - Dream Makers, Minnetonka Foundation fundraiser at Equestria West, Victoria
- February 15-23 - MHS Winter Play
  Purchase tickets at minnetonkatheatre.com
- April 26-May 11 - MHS Spring Musical
  Purchase tickets at minnetonkatheatre.com
- May 15 - Celebration of Excellence at Arts Center
- May 17 - Tonka Youth Tri, Minnetonka Community Education

FREE ATHLETICS PASS FOR DISTRICT RESIDENTS 65+

District residents 65 years and older can receive a free lifetime pass to District-sponsored student performances and athletic events held on District property where royalties are not involved. The pass is not valid for theatre productions or sectional/state contests. The pass is nontransferable and valid only for the person to whom the pass was issued. For more information, contact Carrie Voeltz, executive assistant to the Superintendent, at carrie.voeltz@minnetonkaschools.org.

MINNETONKA FAST FACTS

Minnetonka High School was ranked 5th best high school in the state—the top non-charter school on the list—by *U.S. News & World Report*.

Niche.com ranked Minnetonka Public Schools #2 in Best School District, #2 in Best Teachers, #3 Best High School and #4 in Best Places to Teach among public schools in Minnesota.

Twenty-eight Minnetonka High School seniors have been named 2024 National Merit Semifinalists.

The District is recognized for the 11th year in a row as one of the best communities in the nation for music education by the NAMM Foundation.

Celebrating Extraordinary *Experiences!*



Daniel Campbell, Editor-in-Chief
Minnetonka Alumni Magazine
daniel.campbell@minnetonkaschools.org

Welcome, Skippers, to Volume 15 of the *Minnetonka Alumni Magazine*! As always, it has been an absolute pleasure to gather and share these incredible stories. I can promise you that this year's issue is packed with exciting updates, heartfelt reflections and inspiring stories showcasing the excellence, innovation and strong sense of community that define Minnetonka Public Schools.

Each year, as I sit at my desk and start crafting an outline for the *Minnetonka Alumni Magazine*, I wonder how we can possibly match the amazing stories of student achievement, alumni success and boundless generosity that we wrote about in our last issue. And, without fail, we are able to do it with ease. I am ever impressed by the remarkable alumni who take the time to speak with me and my colleagues about their lives, and by the extraordinary experiences that the teachers and staff at Minnetonka Public Schools continue to provide to today's students. In the end, it just goes to show the strength of the Minnetonka community and the long-lasting impact our District had—and continues to have—on students past, present and future.

Let's start with our cover story, "Connect, Engage and Inspire." It's a story that starts off small, as many important things in life do—a sudden shout, the crunch of leaves on dirt, eager eyes focused on something new. It's a common experience for students in Nature Adventure, a special class for four-year-olds at Minnetonka Preschool. But, the spark of curiosity and unique hands-on experience is something that the Minnetonka Public School District nurtures at every level. I invite you to read the full story and discover a few of the many experiential learning opportunities available to students. From STEM-based problem-solving for elementary students and a middle school podcasting challenge to taking flight in Minnetonka's brand-new aviation course for high schoolers, our students are engaging deeply with the world around them.

In "The Principal's Corner," Minnetonka High School Principal Jeff Erickson reflects on how Minnetonka's unwavering commitment to academic excellence and fostering student well-being prepares our graduates to meet challenges in higher education and the workforce. His insights remind us of the solid foundation our students receive and the bright futures they are destined for.

We also have two features dedicated to the opening of the new VANTAGE/MOMENTUM Building, "Where Innovation Meets Education" and "Building a Strong Foundation." The former sheds a light on the new opportunities the space provides for students in our signature academic programs—the VANTAGE Advanced Professional Studies and the MOMENTUM Design and Skilled Trades programs—which have both grown to record numbers in the past few years. Each is constantly increasing the pathways students can pursue with new courses in the areas of aviation, health sciences and more. In the latter article, you can learn about the Minnetonka Public Schools Foundation's generous commitment to build students "the classroom of the future."

It's also no surprise that the excellence instilled in our students continues to shape their lives as alumni. In "A Wild Life," Bruce Miller '70 shares his journey to combine his skill in painting with a passion for conservation. We also delve into the multifaceted life of Judge Cynthia McCollum '76 in "From the Pool to the Bench." A former Minnetonka athlete and Big Ten All-American swimmer at the University of Minnesota, she now serves as a judge in Dakota County, working to ensure fair treatment for all defendants. She's also a parent in the District, and thrilled to share her perspective on the enduring impact of Minnetonka's academic and athletic programs. Lastly, in "Spanish Immersion Graduates—5 Years Later, Where Are You?" we catch up with the first class of Spanish Immersion students. I was blown away by the impactful ways these talented alumni are using their bilingual skills and the deep appreciation they have for their education.

Before I sign off for the year, I want to encourage each of you to attend the All-Class All-Friends Reunion on July 27, 2024. Trust me, this reimagined event is going to be better than ever. Be sure to read "A Complete Guide to the 2024 All-Class All-Friends Reunion" for a comprehensive look at everything you need to know about the biggest alumni event of the year, from parking to entertainment, food options and ways to give back. And, best of all, this year the event is free and open to all alumni, their families and friends of the school district. I hope to see you there!

Wishing you all the best,



-Daniel Campbell

Minnetonka Public Schools
David Law, Superintendent
5621 County Road 101
Minnetonka, MN 55345

www.minnetonkaschools.org

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Minnetonka Memories: A Look Back at the Year 2002

Twenty-two years ago, *Spider-Man* leapt onto the big screen, *American Idol* sung its way into millions of homes and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* captured the imaginations of readers worldwide. It also marked the 50-year anniversary of Minnetonka High School. In July, the Minnetonka Alumni Association celebrated this milestone by hosting the first All-School All-Class reunion. The event brought more than 3,000 alumni back to the Lake Minnetonka area to honor their school community and raise money for a fine arts endowment. These All-Class reunions, held every four years, have since become the association's biggest fundraiser and a cherished community-wide event.

You are invited to join the Minnetonka Alumni Association for this year's **All-Class All-Friends Reunion on July 27 from 4-10 p.m. in Downtown Excelsior**. Come for a day of fun, friendship and food! Admission is free and open to all Minnetonka Alumni and their families, District faculty and staff, community members and those who have a connection to Minnetonka Public Schools. Funds raised at this event will be used to support teacher grants in fine arts, science & technology, and student well-being; hold alumni events; and continue the general operation of the Minnetonka Alumni Association. The illustration below was created by local artist and Minnetonka parent, Bud Wudlick, for the first All-Class Reunion. A signed print will be part of a special drawing at this year's event. **For a complete guide to the event, check out page 22.**

