

MINNETONKA

# AlumniMagazine

2020



## Building Connection During COVID-19

In these unprecedented times, Minnetonka families, teachers and staff have come together to ensure that our vibrant community continues to thrive.

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The *Minnetonka Alumni Magazine* is an annual publication of Minnetonka Public Schools and distributed to all graduates of Minnetonka High School, Excelsior High School, Deephaven High School, all present and former members of the faculty, administration and the school board.

## Inside This Issue

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Bid a fond farewell to Coach Dave Nelson as Minnetonka celebrates his 42-year tenure coaching football and—just as importantly—building character.



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### FROM THE COVER

Teachers, staff, students and families have gone above and beyond the expected to ensure that 2020 is memorable for more than just how it kept us apart.

Here are a few ways we came together: Minnewashta families organized a car parade for a Spanish Immersion teacher. e-Learning sparked creativity by letting students recreate works of art. Students shared messages of support online during Teacher Appreciation week. Staff took extra safety precautions when distributing student supplies. Minnetonka High School students found ways to host virtual music performances when in-person events were shut down. Pets became new study buddies as learning shifted from classrooms to bedrooms. The show went on for *The Music Man KIDS*, as students streamed their performance from home. And, many activities such as Groveland's annual Solar Car Sprint overcame the challenges of our new normal.



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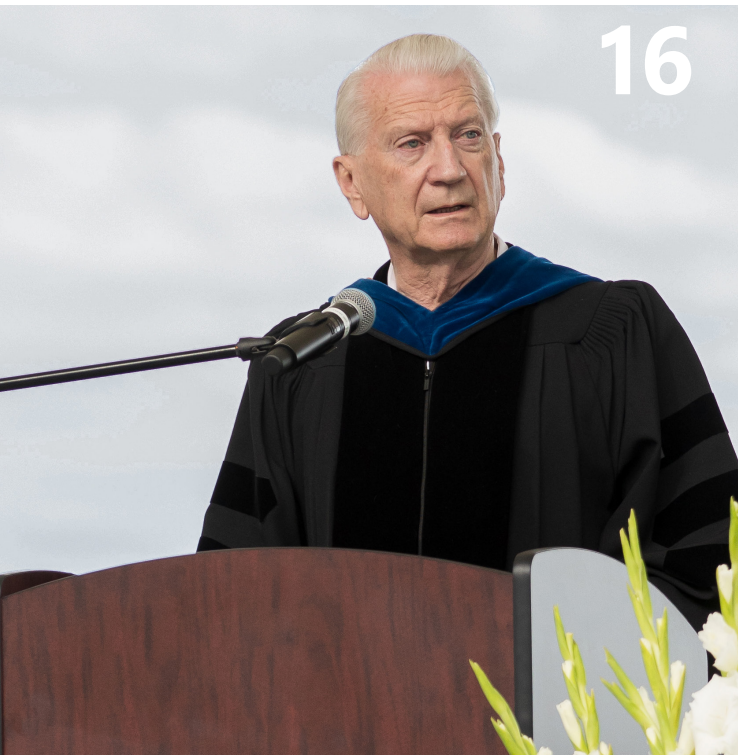


Lisa (McFarlin) Wandrei '81, shares the secret story of how a group of moms came together to solve the District's need for bus drivers.

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We celebrate Dr. Dennis Peterson and his more than 50 years of outstanding leadership as a public school superintendent.

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The Minnetonka Public Schools Foundation has provided more than one million dollars in support of the Minnetonka Public School District. Find out what the Foundation's new director has planned next.



# The Principal's Corner



It's fair to say that last spring began one of the most challenging times Minnetonka High School has ever faced, starting with the sudden school closure on March 15 due to COVID-19. Together, we adapted to the challenges and opportunities of e-learning. Our students in clubs, music groups, theatre, athletics and other activities also had to adapt, some missing their last chances to participate side-by-side with friends. The tragic death of George Floyd, which sparked a nation-wide movement to end systemic racism, gave us a chance to look deeply at how Minnetonka can do more and work even harder to support the success and well-being of all students. While we came together to honor our graduating seniors in new and innovative ways, it was not the same as having 800 students and 10,000 family members cheering them across the stage at U.S. Bank Stadium, as we had planned.

While we all continue to process what has happened in these past months, I feel that the sense of belonging our students, teachers and staff have with our school has only increased as we've come together to overcome each challenge and seize every opportunity. Minnetonka High School will continue the important work of

supporting students as they build their own moral compasses. We will help them to lead with respect and to advocate for kindness, compassion and human decency for all.

It will be many months before the challenges of today are behind us, but I remain hopeful that we will weather the uncertainty ahead. I challenge each of you—whether you are from the Class of 2020 or 1952—to do all you can to ensure that when things return to normal, our relationships are stronger, our systems are more just and our world is a better place than it has ever been.

Sincerely,

Jeff Erickson, Minnetonka High School Principal

## Students Bring Hope to the Homeless

When a group of Minnetonka High School students learned about Hope House, a nonprofit dedicated to ending child homelessness, they decided to raise awareness about this issue by organizing an event. The Show of Hands 'Fun'raiser took place last October and was a resounding success. More than \$27,000 was raised.

"Working with this talented group of students was so much fun," said Pam Langseth, a member of the Board of Directors of the Open Hands Foundation. "This event was planned and executed by them, and they did an outstanding job!"

Macie Anundson '20 said, "I decided to work on this project because I know how important this resource is for teens. Three to four percent of teens in our community do not have a safe place to sleep each night. That number should be zero. Hope House can only help if people know it exists, so I wanted to help get the word out and raise money for operational expenses."

"This was all student-led," said Principal Jeff Erickson. "It's one thing to have an idea, but it's another thing to carry it out. It's important for those students to know that they're not alone and that there's someone there for them."



*The 'Fun'raiser featured a resource fair for students, donation opportunities, live student music, a dunk tank and much more.*



## Trades Program at Minnetonka Gains “MOMENTUM”



Minnetonka High School is constantly looking to improve its programs and provide the best possible educational experience for each student, based on their unique skills and passions. Over the past year, there has been a renewed focus on improving the trades and technical education program.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the skilled trades gap in the United States is expected to reach three million job vacancies by 2028. The District engaged in a careful exploration of the needs surrounding post-secondary opportunities in the skilled trades and how Minnetonka could best prepare its students to succeed in that industry.

“I’m not the kind of person who likes to sit in a chair all day,” said one MHS student who participated in a focus group on the trades. “I learn by doing, through hands-on, independent work that allows me to identify problems and stick with it until I find a solution. My long-term goals are to be happy in a well-paying career where I can use my hands, do what I love and be useful to my family and my community.”

With special thanks to our student focus groups, Trades Advisory Board, staff and administrators, Minnetonka High School is excited to launch its new MOMENTUM design and skilled trades program for the 2020-21 school year. Following the model of innovative programs such as VANTAGE and Minnetonka Research, MOMENTUM will bring together professional connections, real-world experiences and new and improved courses.

“MOMENTUM captures the hands-on, forward motion and forward thinking that is part of this work,” said Principal Jeff Erickson. “It’s broad and expandable as we grow the offerings of this program.”

### For the 2020-21 school year, students can expect:

- Guest speakers and panel presentations
- Connections to local businesses
- Awareness of trade and technical school offerings
- Two new courses that fulfill core requirements
- Senior Capstone experience



*The MOMENTUM name and logo were designed by Minnetonka’s Communications Team with extensive student and staff feedback.*



## Sports Report 2019-20

Congratulations to all of Minnetonka's state-qualifying teams and individuals!

### FALL

- Cheerleading: State Champions, State Grand Champions, UCA National Champions, and UCA World Champions
- Cross Country (Boys): State Competitor Max Lauerman '20 finished 29th (16:12.0)
- Cross Country (Girls): State Competitors Anna Cherian '21 finished 23rd (18:49.6), Ella Graham '24 was 26th (18:51.5) and Kate LeBlanc '22 was 41st (19:04.5)
- Soccer (Girls): 15-2-1, Conference and Section Champions, State Qualifiers, Earned Coaches Association Gold Award with a 3.76 GPA average amongst all team members
- Swim & Dive (Girls): True Team State Champions (2nd Year in a Row), 2nd at State Tournament
- Tennis (Girls): 2nd at State Tournament, Sarah Shahbaz '23 and Annika Elvestrom '22 were State Doubles Champions
- Volleyball: 26-8, 4th at State Tournament

### WINTER

- Gymnastics: State Qualifiers Emma Siefker '20 and Elena Cantwell '23
- Hockey (Girls): Section Champions, 3rd at State Tournament
- Alpine Ski (Boys): Section Champions, 3rd at State Tournament, Eli Quist '20 finished 3rd
- Alpine Ski (Girls): Section Champions, 4th at State Tournament
- Nordic Ski (Boys): Conference Champions, State Qualifier Austin Hunter '21 finished 66th
- Swim & Dive (Boys): 3rd at State Tournament
- Wrestling: State Qualifiers Peter Barrett '22, Andrew Sanders '20, Gabe Schumacher '21, Tyler McReavy '20, Eric Benson '20, Quinn Sell '21

### SPRING

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, all spring sports were canceled. The District wishes to recognize its talented student athletes who were unable to participate this year.



*Congratulations to Tonka Cheer for finishing its season as Minnesota State Champions/Grand Champions, National Champions and World Champions.*

For all the latest sports updates, follow the District's official Athletics & Activities account on Twitter [@TonkaSkippers](https://twitter.com/TonkaSkippers).





## COACH NELSON RETIRES WITH HONOR

Minnetonka High School's head varsity football coach, Dave Nelson, has led the Skippers for 18 years. This season, he stepped onto the field for the last time in that role as he announced his retirement.

Prior to joining Minnetonka, Coach Nelson spent 18 years as Blaine's head coach, where he won a state title in 1988. In 2004, he led the Skippers to the first state title in program history. The Skippers won the Classic Lake Conference Championships in 2004, 2006 and 2009 and made it to the Class 6A State Playoffs in 2012, 2016, 2017 and 2018. Coach Nelson's 267 career wins rank him among the winningest high school coaches in Minnesota state history.

Throughout his career, he's helped shape the lives of every kid he's met because. According to Coach Nelson, "it's your character that matters most." To that end, he started the Men of Character program at Minnetonka High School. He also helped organize the annual "We Are One" football camp which pairs children with special needs with MHS football players for a fun, inclusive event, focused on community building.

Beyond his coaching career, Coach Nelson is the founder and chairman of Tackle Cancer, which has raised more than \$2

million since its start in 2012. Tackle Cancer allows football teams of all levels in the state of Minnesota to set aside one game each fall to raise awareness and money to fund cancer research.

Always humble, Coach Nelson has received numerous awards honoring his achievements both on and off the field. He was named KARE-11 Metro Coach of the Year twice, Minnesota State Coach of the Year in 2004, and joined his father in the Minnesota Football Coaches Hall of Fame in 2014. This year, the American Football Coaches Association® and the American Football Coaches Foundation® honored him with the Power of Influence Award.

"It has been a privilege to lead the football program at Minnetonka High School," said Coach Nelson. "I would like to thank our coaches, administration, support staff, youth coaches, parents and especially our players for making Minnetonka such a special place."

Throughout his exceptional career, Coach Nelson has carved out a legacy of success, teamwork and, most importantly, selflessness. He will be remembered by decades of students as a mentor and role model on and off the field.



# Class of 2020

**789** students

99% of seniors graduated

85% College-bound

76% Attending 4-year colleges & universities

9% Attending 2-year colleges

11 Entering military service

35% Attending Minnesota colleges & universities

50% Attending out-of-state colleges & universities

11% Are undecided or chose not to respond





# A FAMILY LEGACY

These 2020 graduates join their parents, siblings and other family members as proud MHS Alumni.

**Jeramiah Anderson** joins sister, Jayda Anderson '17, father, Greg Anderson '80, mother, Mary (Nehring) Anderson '82, aunt, Randi (Nehring) Graves '78, aunt, Liz (Nehring) McKimmy '88, aunt, Gale McHale '82, uncle, Mark McHale '80.

**Eleanor Aschoff** joins mother, Dana (Woodhead) Aschoff '92, aunt, Heidi (Woodhead) Gambardella '87.

**Eric Benson** joins mother, Laurie (Gray) Benson '87, brother, Luke Benson '14, sister, Elsa Benson '16.

**Dakota Bibeau** joins twin sisters, Abbigale and Gabriella Bibeau '17, mother, Lori Johnson '91, father, Rob Mucenieks '90, grandmother, Cammy (Walstad) Johnson '63, grandfather, Jim Johnson '62, grandmother, Anita (Upens) Mucenieks '63.

**Nick Bonthius** joins father, Phil Bonthius '87, uncle, Kevin Bonthius '88, grandmother, Sue Bonthius '59.

**Dylan Campbell** joins brother, Kristian Edson '11, mother, Erica (Shaw) Campbell '88.

**Bentley Cranbrook** joins father, Christopher Cranbrook '86, uncle, Kelly Cranbrook '92, uncle, Cory Cranbrook '92, aunt, Christina (Condon) Cranbrook '94, grandfather, George Cranbrook '57, great uncle, John Cranbrook '58, great aunt, Carole (Johnson) Cranbrook '60, grandmother, Lynda (Thompson) Cranbrook '62.

**Connor Goettelman** joins sister, Jennifer Goettelman '15, brother, Nolan Goettelman '16, father, Brian Goettelman '76, grandmother, Jean (Ritchie) Goettelman '57, grandfather, Don Goettelman '56.

**Andrew Hedtke** joins father, Scott Hedtke '95, aunt, Robin Hedtke '97, aunt, Nikki Hedtke '00.

**Quinten Kinney** joins grandfather, Richard Martin '56.

**Mackenzie Koppendray** joins mother, Tracy (Unze) Koppendray '94, aunt, Brittney (Unze) Finazzo '05, grandfather, Gary Unze '68, grandmother, Beverly (Asp) Koppendray '69.

**Mason Koonce** joins father, Matt Koonce '91, aunt, Rena Koonce '84.

**Carlton Krantz** joins brother, Asher Krantz '17, brother, James Krantz '14, mother, Jill Arneson Holter '85, uncle, Jim Arneson '84.

**Thomas Lane** joins father, Jon Lane '80.

**Jack Lesmeister** joins father, Brent Lesmeister '93.

**Andrew Linden** joins mother, Sarah (Crist) Linden '85.

**Kyleigh Luhman-Dold** joins grandmother, Pam Dvorak '77.

**Nick Lutz** joins brother, Willy Lutz '18, grandfather, Willy Skadsberg '63, great aunt, Lynn (Skadsberg) Hannah '66.

**Kate McHugh** joins father, Justin McHugh '91, mother, Andrea Leaf '91, uncle, Jeff McHugh '89, aunt, Lisa Bast '89, uncle, Chris Leaf '90, cousin, Molly McHugh '19, grandfather Mike McHugh '64, grandmother, Dani Ostlund '64, grandfather, Bob Leaf '62, grandmother, Carolyn Burk '64.

**Tyler McReavy** joins mother, Kim (Eggers) McReavy '85.

**Max Meyer** joins mother, Carey (Sirota) Meyer '89.

**Joshua Palm** joins brother, TJ Palm '11, sister, Madie Palm '17, mother, Noelle (Kane) Palm '86, grandfather, Jim Kane '64, grandmother, Carol (Guerre) Kane '64.

**John Rivers** joins sister, Megan Rivers '18.

**Jacob Swenson** joins sister, Elizabeth Swenson '14, father, Curt Swenson '91, aunt, Kim (Swenson) Pung '88, grandmother, Gretchen Swenson '63.

**Anna Sorenson** joins mother, Andrea Cole-Sorenson '93, father, Daniel Sorenson '90.

**Gabrielle Natalie Tan** joins brother, Kevin Alastair Tan '10.

**Andrew Thompson** joins brother, Adam Thompson '17, father, Peter Thompson '88.

**Jack Vukovich** joins sister, Kayla (Klein) Dow '11, brother-in-law, Tyler Dow '09, mother, Angela (Klein) Vukovich '89.

Thank you to the 2020 graduates who have reported that they will be serving our country:



- Karen Cragg, Army Reserve
- Zakaree Crawford, US Navy
- Riley Ferren, National Guard
- Grant Foslien, Air Force Reserves
- Jean-Luc Hocker, National Guard
- Nathan Krebs, National Guard
- Mary McDonald, US Naval Academy
- Nolan Scully, US Navy
- Samskrith Sriram, University of St. Thomas (Air Force ROTC program)
- Scott Vilinskis, National Guard
- Jack Witta, National Guard



# SIX TO WATCH

by Anna Geldert '21 & Emil Liden '21



## Mackenzie Ammon

Participating in every musical in your high school career is a feat not everyone can say they have accomplished, but Mackenzie Ammon did just that. Whether it was as a cast or crew member, Mackenzie has participated in a total of 19 musicals in her four years at Minnetonka. Along with musicals, Mackenzie has been a member of Minnetonka Choir for all four years of high school, noting that her favorite memory from high school was the Concert Choir tour to Los Angeles. In choir competition, Mackenzie received a superior rating for small ensemble with Dona Voce, an audition extracurricular choir at Minnetonka. In addition to much success in choir, she has also received the Presidential Service Award, a Student Recognition Award for excellence in the classroom and a Varsity Letter in theatre and choir.

In and out of the classroom, Mackenzie is known for her thoughtfulness. "I always try to treat everyone with kindness because I know that high school can be difficult for some people, and if I can make their day a little bit better than it was before, it makes me enjoy my day more."

Giving advice to underclassmen, Mackenzie said, "Academics are important, but make sure to have fun and enjoy your experience! High school goes by faster than you'd think, and these four years will be so much more meaningful if you do things you love."

In the fall, Mackenzie will attend the University of Minnesota, Duluth and plans to earn a BFA in musical theatre.

## Jai Chadha

Jai Chadha is more than just a stellar student. He is a National Merit Semi-finalist, an AP Scholar with Distinction and was selected to attend the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair in 2019. Outside of the classroom, Jai rose to leadership in various positions: a leader for Backpack Tutoring, a Debate Captain, a DECA Officer and National Honor Society President. Jai was also elected Homecoming King and was the student speaker for the Class of 2020's graduation ceremony.

What truly sets Jai apart from his peers is his drive to make an impact in the community. In his junior year, Jai organized Minnetonka's first TEDx event which included several speakers, from teachers to CEOs, who shared their stories about overcoming adversity. This year, his theme was *Towards a Technological World*. His drive for creating this event came when he heard Principal Erickson ask his sophomore class, "What will your legacy be at Minnetonka?"

A special moment Jai remembers from his time at Minnetonka was being a backpack tutor and helping a fellow student who was struggling with her math homework. "I treasured my part in her journey from counting to Calculus," he remarked.

Jai plans to study Computer Science and Economics at Yale University next fall.







## Chelsea Lai

Chelsea Lai has a passion for music and expressing her creativity. As a board member for Coffeehouse, Chelsea organizes and performs in three concerts throughout the school year for her peers and the Minnetonka community to enjoy. Additionally, she performed at the underclassmen concert during Heart Week and loved getting younger students involved in the music. "My favorite memory was having a *Sweet Caroline* sing-along with the freshman and sophomores," recalls Chelsea.

With her hard work in both accelerated classes and Chinese Immersion, Chelsea is also an exceptional student. She is an AP Scholar with Distinction and received the Minnesota Language Proficiency award.

Chelsea hopes she has been able to foster a positive school community by always staying true to herself and encouraging those around her to do the same. "I do my best to be empathetic and supportive of the people I encounter and try to support those doing their best to be themselves, whether that be in their musical pursuits or academic interests. Taking interest in others and contributing to their growth or their passions is an incredible feeling."

Next year, she plans to study neuroscience and psychology at the University of Chicago.

## Joshua Moe

After moving from Singapore to Minnetonka as a sophomore, Joshua Moe immediately got involved in a variety of clubs at MHS, including debate, speech and ultimate frisbee. Joshua also excelled in academics, taking nine AP classes in just three years. However, he also stresses that advanced coursework isn't everything.

In addition to schoolwork, Joshua is a talented violinist and was heavily involved with the Minnetonka Orchestra program. He participated in both Solo and Ensemble competitions, and he won two Exemplary Varsity letters. His favorite memory from high school was the orchestra trip to Greece last year.

Joshua would like to thank his orchestra teacher, Ms. Finn, for the support and opportunities she provided him, including the chance to perform his favorite piece, *Sarasate Zigeunerweisen*, along with the rest of the class. "She somehow put up with my shenanigans for three whole years in orchestra. The camaraderie in that class was something really special."

Joshua advises underclassmen at MHS to "not take a ton of AP classes just for the sake of taking a ton of AP classes. Pick AP classes that you are actually interested in. You should get involved in a lot of sports, clubs and activities not only because it will look good on a college resume, but because they are also good places to meet more people with common interests."

Next year, Joshua plans to study political science and violin performance at Gustavus Adolphus College.





## Eli Quist

Throughout high school, Eli Quist has excelled in the four A's: academics, activities, arts and athletics. Eli engaged in challenging coursework through Minnetonka Research and AP science and math courses. He also enjoyed classes that pushed him outside of his comfort zone, such as IB Literature and Performance. He has been honored with many awards and recognitions, including AP Scholar with Distinction, National Merit Semi-Finalist and the Yale Book Award.

Eli is passionate about music, and he has participated in both orchestra and Coffeehouse performances. Eli was also involved in Legacy 2020, French Club and Boundary Waters Club.

His passion also extends to sports such as alpine skiing and the trap shooting team. Eli lettered in both sports and won numerous awards for alpine, including the Alpine Section 5A Individual Gold Medal, Alpine Individual State Bronze Medal, 2019 Minnetonka Alpine MVP, All-State awards and team state championships.

Eli strongly believes in upholding the core values at Minnetonka, "do the right thing" and "represent us well," in order to foster a positive environment at Minnetonka High School. "Whether it is leading through positions in clubs or activities, in class or simply through interactions in the hallway, trying to make a positive impact on someone else can be the most valuable way to spend your time," he said. "These simple actions can create a basis of trust and positivity among an entire school, and I believe my class certainly exemplified this."

Next year, Eli will be attending the Honors College at Montana State University. He plans to pursue a variety of interests, including math, biology, computer science and undergraduate research.



## Skyler Seets

Skyler Seets is dedicated to improving her community through volunteering. She has been a member of the Earth Club, Minnetonka Climate Initiative, Feminist Club, Human Rights and Relations, Women in STEM, Tonka Serves Steering Committee, First Mates and Hope House. She received both the President's Volunteer Service Award and the Varsity Letter in Community Service for her contributions to her community.

Skyler believes that service begins by looking after your own mental health and well-being. "I find that when I put the time into making sure that I am in a good state mentally and taking care of myself, I am a kinder and more compassionate person. I think it's also important to lead by example and show that a positive school culture begins with ourselves and extends outwards."

As both a National AP Scholar and an IB Bilingual Diploma Candidate in Spanish Immersion, Skyler is also an exceptional student academically. She received many awards, including the Platinum Bilingual Seal, was a National Merit Semi-Finalist and received the Harvard Book Prize.

"Something that I think is extremely important is learning to recognize and develop your own boundaries and morals," said Skyler. "These will likely change and be challenged throughout the next few years, but always checking in with yourself will help you grow an awareness of what's fundamentally important to you."

Skyler plans to attend the College of William & Mary in Virginia this fall.



# Alumni Giving Back

## Capstone Program Gives Insight Into Future Careers

Get an inside look at Minnetonka High School's Capstone Program, a unique off-campus experience for seniors. Eligible seniors can choose to explore a career field, service work or a project of interest by working with a mentor in a unique, real-world learning environment outside the boundaries of traditional school.



**BEN RICE '13**  
**CAPSTONE MENTOR**

"I love being a mentor!

Since graduation, I've been involved with the Capstone Project. It is a two-week program that helps seniors start making a plan for their adult life and explore different job opportunities or aspirations that they might have through internships and job shadowing.

I used to work for the Minnetonka School District through the Explorers Program, and I have always loved teaching. Whether that's my team members, customers or small business owners, helping people learn is something I am passionate about. Minnetonka Schools played a huge role in where I am today, and I want to give back.

I saw this as a great opportunity to not only teach, but to guide kids into a secure financial future. We talk about what makes someone successful, what hinders people from having financial peace and decisions that they can be making today to influence their future finances for the better. We talk about their personal aspirations and the practical steps that they can take to get there."



**JACK ESTENSON '19**  
**CAPSTONE STUDENT**

"I really enjoyed how [Capstone] offered me the opportunity to experience the future.

I knew I wanted to go into something business related, so I worked at Wells Fargo for my Capstone project, and that helped me understand what I wanted to do with the rest of my life.

It was really nice to have Ben there as a mentor because whenever I had a question I could go ask him. He was a great teacher. He would always explain everything really well when it came to the bank.

It was helpful to have another person at the workplace that I could relate to. He was also pretty much as proficient as you can get, at least in my eyes, at his job, and it was very inspiring to see that much passion and expertise in the workplace.

VANTAGE changed my career path to business. Capstone helped me narrow it down even more into the finance world. Having these opportunities at Minnetonka High School was fantastic for my future."



# Minnetonka's Bus-Driving Moms

by Anna Geldert '21

As a kid, Minnetonka alumna Lisa (McFarlin) Wandrei '81 would often wake up to the sound of her mother, Jean, leaving for work. Each evening, her mom would tell her about how the day had gone. Some days were cold, and some were hot. Some were filled with laughter, others with tears. Sometimes her shoulder ached after a long day. Yet, each morning, Jean, along with six of her closest friends and fellow Minnetonka mothers, would put on their biggest smiles and head to work without any regrets. Jean's passion for being a bus driver for Minnetonka Schools was clear for anyone to see.

It all started when Jean saw a "Bus Drivers Needed" advertisement while out in the Minnetonka community. After noting that it was posted by a family-owned bus company she knew well, she decided to apply. Having never driven a bus before, this was a big step for Jean. It turned out to be a perfect fit for her, and it wasn't long before her friend Barb joined her. "Somehow, word kind of got out," recalls Lisa. "They let their friends know, and pretty soon there was this core group of moms who were

liked to take their buses back home and enjoy lunch together.

"What's really cool about those ladies is that they stayed really close," explains Lisa. "Even after some of the bus-driving moms retired, they would continue to celebrate birthdays, they would get together, and they would go out on little trips. I think there was just some chemistry there with all of them, even though they were all very different."



*Jean McFarlin, the original "Bus-Driving Mom."*

The District thanked Jean for her long-standing contributions to the students by awarding her a Skipper Anchor Award in the 1980s. Over the years, the moms demonstrated outstanding reliability and dedication to their jobs. Beyond that, they opened their arms to each student who stepped on the bus and created a welcoming environment where everyone felt safe.

"Especially in the early years, when kids are transitioning from preschool to Kindergarten and parents are sending their kids on a bus for the first time and they see someone like my mom driving, they feel like [those kids] are in good hands," concludes Lisa. "The community felt safe knowing that she and these other ladies were driving their kids."



*The "Bus-Driving Moms" gathered together for Barb Rau's 65th birthday party.*

all driving and who all had kids in the district." The core group of moms included Jean McFarlin, Barb Rau, Florence Hanus, Sue Hanus, Pat Bowman, Emily Warren, Joanne Chan and Judy McDonald. Most of the moms continued with their bus-driving careers for a long time, long after their kids had graduated. Jean herself drove for more than 30 years, and another mom, Pat Bowman, drove for 40. Perhaps because of this, the women formed a tight bond that spilled out of their work and into their personal lives, as well. Between shifts, they





# Building Connection During COVID-19

by Daniel Campbell



Joel Newman and Scott Storlie, two teachers at Minnetonka Middle School East, biked through several Minnetonka neighborhoods to greet their 8th grade Spanish Immersion students when school buildings closed in March. It was just one of many creative ways that teachers and students found to stay connected during the COVID-19 pandemic.





*Minnewashta students Charlie Thomas '28 and Nolan Francois '28 send a socially-distanced thank you to their 4th grade teacher, Mr. McCashin, during Teacher Appreciation Week.*

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges to educators. When schools were ordered to close on March 15, many families wondered how Minnetonka would be able to shift from in-person to e-learning while still providing an exceptional academic experience and supporting the social and emotional health of all students. That question might have been unanswerable for many districts across the state, but Minnetonka had already developed a comprehensive response plan in case such an order was deemed necessary.

For weeks, District leaders had been working to secure the resources needed to make sure that students were able to thrive socially as well as academically in a time when isolation was being touted as the new normal.

"This spring was a very fluid situation, and it was changing daily," recalls Dr. Dennis Peterson, Superintendent for Minnetonka Public Schools. "Staff put in many hours to develop a comprehensive plan that was flexible enough to respond to any situation involving COVID-19 within our schools. While we didn't anticipate the shutdown of every school in the state at the time a new plan was crafted, we were already well-prepared for e-learning in case an outbreak happened in one of our schools."

Thanks to the tireless work of staff, the flexibility of students and the support of parents, the plan was a success, allowing teacher-to-student and peer-to-peer connection across all grade levels and subjects to flourish. One example of this was the annual Minnetonka Arts Festival, which went virtual for the first time.

"Each year in May, Minnetonka Schools celebrates the work of our talented student artists through concerts, gallery displays and theatre performances," said Lauren Bartelt, Associate

Director of the Arts Center on 7. "This year, the arts festival doesn't look the same as it did in years past. The buildings are closed. The students are learning from home. But, they are still creating art. We wanted to showcase the fact that our students, with the help of their amazing teachers, are still being creative."

Throughout the month, creative student work flowed in from every grade. Minnetonka High School theatre students debuted their 2020 One Act Play, *The Glass Menagerie*, as a live-streamed performance. Clear Springs orchestra students sent in individual recordings to their teacher, who mixed them together to create a virtual ensemble performance. Minnetonka elementary and middle school students created a digital art show of their visual artwork using

Google Slides. These stories and dozens of other examples of student art can be found at [minnetonkaschools.org/artsfest](https://minnetonkaschools.org/artsfest).

Teachers also found creative solutions to overcoming social distancing and keeping kids engaged in e-learning. Christin Congdon, an art teacher at Minnewashta Elementary, took a unique approach to educating students about art history. She let them become part of the masterpiece of their choice. "Artists and art teachers can't help but notice all of the museums needing a little help keeping their patrons visiting in our digital world," said Mrs. Congdon, "so I thought our students could help out by visiting online and recreating their favorite works of art."

As part of the assignment, students were asked to submit a photo of their project and join a Google Meet session to talk about why they chose a particular work of art, how they recreated it and how it might have originally been created. Mrs. Congdon knew that students would have different supplies available to them at home, so she kept the process of recreating artwork entirely up to the students' imagination. "Some students included themselves, while others used household items or nature to create their works of art," said Mrs. Congdon. You can view examples of her students' work here: [bit.ly/Tonka-Masterpieces](https://bit.ly/Tonka-Masterpieces).

Teachers across the District made sure to engage with students daily on their device, but sometimes virtual check-ins weren't enough. Joel Newman and Scott Storlie, two teachers at Minnetonka Middle School East, decided to personally visit their students (from a proper social distance) to make sure they were doing okay and to show their support.

"Mr. Storlie and I are both very active, extroverted, social people, and after a few especially long days in front of computer



screens, we got to talking about what we could do to lift spirits and connect with our students,” said Mr. Newman. “So much of education is based on building and maintaining strong relationships, and the transition to e-learning has really put our ability to stay in touch with one another to the test.” Mr. Newman and Mr. Storlie compiled a list of their students’ addresses and mapped out different routes to visit each week. Their goal was to visit all 90 students on their list by the end of the school year.

“Seeing students’ faces—surprised, excited and even confused—has been such a joy for both of us,” shared Mr. Storlie. “All of us care so much about our students and miss them deeply, so this experience has given us at least a small glimpse back at normalcy. The love returned to us from students, siblings and parents makes it well worth the time invested.”

Graduation was another unique challenge for Minnetonka. More than receiving a slip of paper, graduation is a chance for the District and families to send graduates off with the honor and recognition they deserve. It’s a chance, in short, for the community to come together.

In light of COVID-19 guidelines, the Class of 2020 had three options for graduation: having diplomas mailed to them, participating in an individual graduation/photo session in the High School’s gym or participating in one of several “mini-ceremonies” that allowed for a socially-distanced graduation experience on July 28, 2020. The mini-ceremonies proved to be the most popular option, allowing students to have a more traditional ceremony by grouping them into socially distanced sections of 75 and holding the event outside on Einer Anderson Field. Over the course of eight separate ceremonies—and 12 hours—students heard words of encouragement from Minnetonka High School Principal Jeff Erickson and Superintendent Dr. Dennis Peterson, as well as pre-recorded messages from student speaker Jai Chadha ’20, staff speaker Sean Kern and musical groups.

“Congratulations on the completion of your senior year!” remarked Principal Erickson to students. “Your class has demonstrated tremendous resilience, compassion, kindness and humor. I challenged seniors in March, when we began e-learning, to know that their work wasn’t done and that their legacy was still being written. You met that challenge and will leave MHS having made it a better place and a stronger community.”

“It has been heartening to observe so many of our staff working together to build thoughtful and comprehensive e-learning opportunities for students,” said Dr. Peterson. “We are also humbled by the generous words and offers of support, patience and kindness and the genuine caring that so many parents have expressed to our principals, to our teachers, to our staff and to me. It’s an incredibly difficult time, and I want to recognize that without parent and community support, it would be much more challenging for our staff to accomplish the amazing things they did this spring.”



*Above: Campbell Hohn '26 discusses her math assignment virtually with classmate, Mari Christiansen '26.*

*Below: Class of 2020 graduates embrace the future with perseverance and confidence.*





# Education Spotlight

## A Half-Century of Inspiring Excellence



Earlier this year, Dr. Dennis Peterson was recognized by fellow superintendents for 50 years of service as a superintendent. We asked him to reflect on this amazing achievement, his life of service and vision for the future.

...

*You are the longest-serving superintendent in the nation. Why have you chosen to dedicate your life to education? Was it something you always had in mind as a career?*

**DR. DENNIS PETERSON:** I made a commitment early in my life to make a difference in the lives of young people, and I am driven to continue to make good things happen in the lives of all students in my district. My joy in life is seeing students and the adults who work closely with them doing great things and showing how they are realizing their potential.

*Talk about your early years in education.*

**DR. PETERSON:** I started as a teacher in the Clark County School District in Nevada (Las Vegas), and they assigned me a part-time administrative role in my second semester of

that first year. I then was a teacher and the Superintendent in South Dakota starting in 1967. During that time, I enabled the community to expand the district from one district to encompass 22 districts.

I had started on my Ph.D. at Stanford University in California. Then I was selected to serve as an Executive Assistant for the American Association of School Administrators in Washington, D.C. After completing my Ph.D. at the University of Colorado, I became Superintendent in the Southland District in Southern Minnesota. From there, I became Assistant Superintendent in the Mounds View District in Minnesota. Then, I became Superintendent in the Mitchell District in South Dakota, which was followed by becoming the Superintendent in Laramie County, Wyoming (Cheyenne). From Cheyenne, I became the Superintendent in the Rockwood District in suburban St. Louis. I went from Rockwood (Eureka, MO) to Superintendent of the Princeton District in suburban Cincinnati (Glenview). Finally, after five and a half years in Princeton, I became the Minnetonka Superintendent in 2001.

*Who was your inspiration for becoming a strong leader?*

**DR. PETERSON:** My stepfather, Sam Tidball. He was a great example to me in his values and strong work ethic. He was always a leader in his community and throughout the state.

*What is something you learned early on in your career about leadership that has guided your decision-making?*

**DR. PETERSON:** Everyone is important. My stepfather always introduced me to his customers, and that instilled in me that everyone is worthy of acknowledgment and valuing.

*What made you choose to come to Minnetonka and what's kept you here?*

**DR. PETERSON:** I had known about Minnetonka since I arrived in Minnesota in 1974, and I had wanted to get back to Minnesota during my 20 years away (1981-2001). When the Minnetonka Board recruited me to apply and then selected me, I was very excited.

*Back in the early 2000's, Minnetonka School District was facing some big challenges. Enrollment was declining and the prospect of closing some of our schools seemed to be a real possibility. Today, it's one of the top school districts in the nation, attracting students to open-enroll from across the state. How have you turned things around?*

**DR. PETERSON:** When I came to Minnetonka, there was little community support for the schools, enrollment was



declining, student performance was a little above the state average, there was tension among School Board members and the Superintendent and there had been budget cuts for several years. We began Tonka Pride to increase community support for the schools, and we passed a referendum in 2002. We opened all schools for enrollment by non-residents. We began to improve the program and established strong hiring protocols. We hired some excellent teachers to add to our wonderful staff at that time.

Then in 2007, we introduced Spanish and Chinese Language Immersion opportunities to our students, and enrollment began to increase dramatically. Also, we passed another referendum in 2007. All of that started to build a strong financial base for the District. As finances improved and enrollment grew, we were able to offer even more excellent programs. Student performance improved dramatically over the years, and Minnetonka Public Schools began to be recognized as the top district in Minnesota.

*With COVID-19, schools are facing a challenge unlike any other. How have you navigated this crisis? What are learning moments you will take away from this experience?*

**DR. PETERSON:** I have never been involved in anything like this crisis. It is not only difficult logistically to keep everyone safe and enable the students to learn, but it is a difficult political landscape to navigate. The public is divided on the wisdom of each measure considered, and there is virtually no agreement. People feel strongly about each aspect of the situation. I have navigated it by looking at the practical aspects of using science to make good decisions. As I always have over the years, I do what I believe is right for others and for the safety of all concerned.

*You have undoubtedly had many achievements in your career, but what has been your proudest moment?*

**DR. PETERSON:** I have been blessed with many achievements in different ways for which I am proud; however, I am the proudest whenever I see a student do something great. Seeing students and adults who work with them achieve remarkable things is what keeps me going every day. I am proud that I have been able to make a difference in so many lives.

*What continues to excite you about public education?*

**DR. PETERSON:** Seeing students enjoy success and seeing them grow into wonderfully prepared adults. All students overcome obstacles, and many overcome big challenges. Rising above those challenges to success is always inspiring.

*We've talked a lot about your past, but what is your vision for the future of Minnetonka?*

**DR. PETERSON:** I still have an evolving and powerful vision for Minnetonka's students and staff in the future. I want to create more opportunities for them to grow and be more innovative in facing challenges in their future. They can go higher than anyone before if they stay focused on their growth and the opportunities life will present to them. We are creating opportunities for the future that have not even been known before, and our students will be ready to jump on those opportunities.

*What do you hope your legacy for the District, or public education as a whole, will be?*

**DR. PETERSON:** I really do not worry about my legacy. I am focused on what legacy others can create for themselves and their families. I know that I have made a big difference in what thousands of students have accomplished as a result of the programs and staff that we have put in place. We have created an outstanding staff at all levels, and those staff members will be in place for many more years. I have advocated for students in ways that have enabled them to have a better future, and most have no idea that I have done that.

*What message would you like to share with Minnetonka Alumni?*

**DR. PETERSON:** I am, of course, proud of all Minnetonka alumni, whether they have gone through school since I became Superintendent or prior to my time, but I am especially proud of the students who have graduated during my 19 years and the students who will graduate after I leave.





# Alumni Association Update

## New Alumni Board, New Goals



*Meet the 2019-20 Minnetonka Alumni Association board members. Top row: Bob Edmondson '73, Marissa Haeny '12, Dan Heiland '76 (president), Marietta Jacobsen '70 (secretary). Bottom row: Lynn Krafve (teacher representative), Lisa Mayer '79 (treasurer), Gail Ofstehage '68, Sylvia Shutes '20 (student representative).*

It has been an exciting year for the Minnetonka Alumni Association. Despite recent challenges with COVID-19, the association has made several big advancements since last summer. From welcoming new board members, to setting new fundraising goals and celebrating another year of amazing giving, this year has opened up many new opportunities for this group of dedicated alumni.

### New Board Members

**Marissa Haeny '12** is a young alumna with a passion for engagement and giving back to her community. Marissa has past experience building alumni communications, planning major events and fundraising as Assistant Director of Alumni and Parent Engagement for Gustavus Adolphus College and is currently an account manager for One10 Inc. Over the past year, she has made a tremendous impact on the Minnetonka Alumni Association through leading the fundraising subcommittee, developing a comprehensive research document around giving and helping the board to establish its new fundraising goals.

**Bob Edmondson '73**, a long-time supporter of Minnetonka Schools, has a gift for building community and volunteering. As a parent, he did everything from helping to run Minnewashta's Imagination Science Fair to donating American flags for every school in the District. Outside of the schools, Bob has volunteered with or served on committees benefiting the ICA Food Shelf, the Minnesota Heart Association, Lupus Foundation, City of Shorewood Parks Commission and more. While serving on the Alumni Association's Board of Directors, Bob hopes to use his talents to honor the past and build towards a bright future with a focus on raising money to support Minnetonka schools. "I can't tell you how proud I am to be a new Alumni Association Board Member," said Bob. "Having grown up in Minnetonka since age 10, I'm now 65, and I still bleed blue. Go Skippers!"

The Minnetonka Alumni Association is still looking to connect with passionate alumni who want to make even bigger impacts for our community and the Minnetonka Public School District. Interested in getting involved? Complete this short form and someone from the Alumni Association will be in touch: [bit.ly/alumni-connection](https://bit.ly/alumni-connection)



## New Fundraising Goals

This past year, the Minnetonka Alumni Association took a close look at how money is raised, what it's raised for and how these funds benefit the school district. In an effort to meet new and developing needs, it has decided to direct its giving into four key areas:

- **Support for the Fine Arts** - To help ensure a vibrant future for fine arts education in the Minnetonka Public School District, the Minnetonka Alumni Association funds Teacher Grants that help to make extraordinary opportunities in the visual, performing and literary arts a reality. More than \$900,000 has been raised since 2005.
- **Support for Science & Technology** - To help Minnetonka students stay current with the ground-breaking science and cutting-edge technology that is being developed every day, the Minnetonka Alumni Association has started a new fund for Science and Technology Teacher Grants.
- **Support for Student Well-being** - To ensure that Minnetonka students can successfully develop socially and emotionally, and reach their greatest potential, the Minnetonka Alumni Association has established a fund for Student Well-being Teacher Grants.
- **Support for the General Fund** - Gifts to the Minnetonka Alumni Association General Fund support fundamental aspects of the day-to-day operation of our organization and Minnetonka Public Schools. This unrestricted fund allows your donation to go wherever it is needed most.

## 2019-20 Teacher Grants

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 was able to give a total of \$3,000 to the following Teacher Grants this year.

- **Art Therapy (Excelsior Elementary School)** - The art therapy program will give students with developmental cognitive disabilities the opportunity to practice important life skills including: communication, social etiquette, fine motor skills, self-regulation and direction following.
- **Art Banners (Minnetonka High School)** - Artwork from various classes will be showcased on banners and displayed in the parking lot at Minnetonka High School.
- **Enhancing Well-being and Reducing Anxiety through VR Experiences (Minnetonka Middle School West)** - Oculus Go Virtual Reality (VR) devices are used to help students experiencing anxiety, panic and emotional distress.
- **Human Genome and Ecology Documentaries (Minnetonka High School)** - This grant focuses on the purchase of a three-year license to show *Human Nature*, a CRISPR documentary, and the documentary film, *The Biggest Little Farm*.

See a full list of teacher grants funded by the Minnetonka Alumni Association from 2005-present at <http://bit.ly/TonkaTG>.

## GIVE A GIFT, MAKE A DIFFERENCE



There are many ways to make a direct and lasting impact on Minnetonka Schools:

- Direct donations
- Sustaining gifts
- Establishing a scholarship
- Establishing a named fund

Your tax-deductible donation will support fine arts, science & technology and student well-being programs in the Minnetonka School district and events for the alumni community.

Contact the Minnetonka Alumni Association at **Alumni@minnetonkaschools.org** to find out how you can support your alma mater!

Give online at  
[minnetonkaschools.org/alumnigiving](http://minnetonkaschools.org/alumnigiving)



## Alumni Award Winners

# JANE (ZACHARY) BRATTAIN '65

## Distinguished Alumni Award

by Anna Geldert '21

Jane (Zachary) Brattain never intended to have a cancer treatment center named after her; but then, she didn't intend to be diagnosed with breast cancer, either.

Jane's story began the day she donated a stereotactic biopsy machine to Park Nicollet. "We decided to donate this machine to help other women," Jane said. "However, about six months later, I was diagnosed with breast cancer and ended up being the first patient [to use that] machine."

Jane was diagnosed early on and was able to get the treatment necessary to beat her cancer. In the midst of her treatment, she and her husband, Don, decided they wanted to expand their outreach for patients with breast cancer in honor of Jane's personal journey. Along with Jane's oncologist and another radiologist, they quickly moved forward with helping Park Nicollet establish the Jane Brattain Breast Center, specializing in diagnosing and caring for breast cancer patients.



*"Women should not have to choose between buying shoes for their children and getting a mammogram."*

"The vision of what a breast center could be like included a few things," Jane explains. In addition to the new stereotactic biopsy machine, a center dedicated specifically to breast cancer needed a specialized care team, including a "nurse navigator" position. A nurse navigator would be in charge of walking the patient through the process and calling patients if they were positively diagnosed as a way to make the experience more personalized. Since the Center was established 28 years ago, 1.5 million women have been screened there, including 60,000 in the past year.

In 2014, Jane and Don added a mobile mammography unit called "Mammo-a-go-go." This program, run out of two large, pink buses, travels to different areas around the Twin Cities to encourage women to get regular screenings to detect cancer early on.



"[Mammo-a-go-go] offers mammogram and diagnostic services to under-served communities at no cost," Jane said. "Women should not have to choose between buying shoes for their children and getting a mammogram, because early detection is key." During the first year, it was offered at 16 different awareness events and screened 261 women. This past year, those numbers have grown to 133 events and 2,189 women screened. Many of the events provide bilingual resources to ensure that all women have the chance to be screened.

Each year in October, the Center runs a program called Be Pink, which uses sponsors to raise money and awareness for breast cancer. Be Pink also hosts a breakfast each year at which cancer survivors have a chance to share their story. The breakfast is one of Jane's favorite parts of her work with the Breast Center because she can see the impact of her outreach personally. "I am reminded truly about the good work that we do and what it brings to the community— it's pretty amazing," she said.

Rather than offer advice, Jane encourages current Minnetonka students and recent graduates to simply keep up the good work. "I think your generation is by far and away much more in tune with the importance of outreach," she said. "I really mean that. I think we learn from you and not the other way around."



# RICHARD MARTIN '56

## Distinguished Alumni Award

by Emil Liden '21

Richard Martin has been recognized by many for his outstanding 43-year career with the National Park Service.

Richard graduated from Minnetonka High School in 1956. He became the first person in his family to attend college and graduated in 1962 with a degree in forestry from the University of Minnesota. Richard said the hard work he put into his education stemmed from the support he received from Minnetonka: "The profound message I got was 'You can always do better,'" he said.

Richard began his career as a Park Ranger at Olympic National Park in 1962. Afterward, he moved on to Mount Rainier National Park and then to Yosemite National Park to be a Valley District Ranger, considered to be one of the most challenging district ranger jobs in the National Park System.

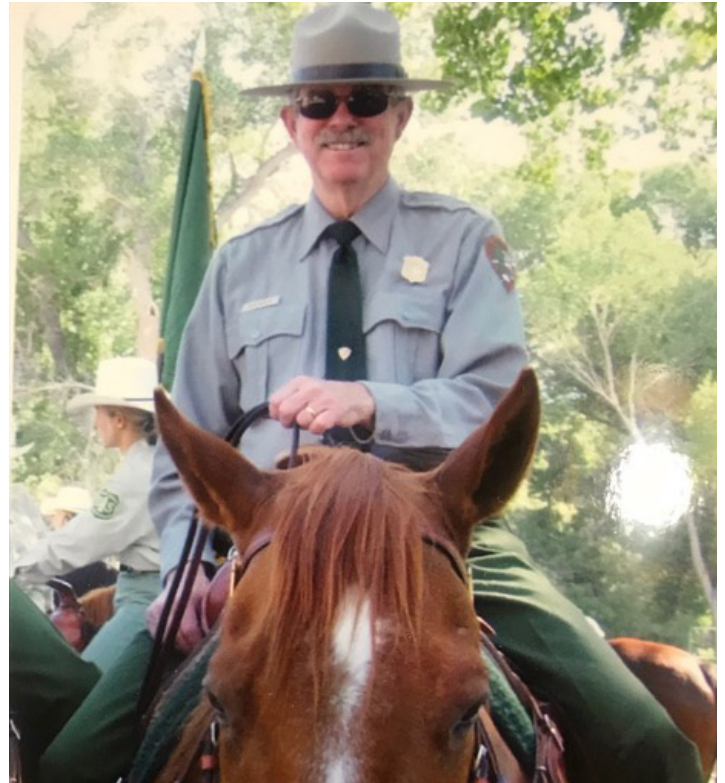
When Queen Elizabeth II traveled to Yosemite in 1976, Richard served as Incident Commander for her visit. Richard and his team were among the first in the United States to use the Incident Command System, a system once used primarily for wildfires and searches and rescues, now used by the National Park Service and U.S. Coast Guard.

Richard was then promoted to Superintendent at Wrangell St. Elias National Park in Alaska where he worked informing people living in and near the park about safety and protecting the diverse wildlife from hunters.

"What I love best is that it's the wildest place I've ever been," said Richard, speaking to his time in Alaska. "I appreciate the opportunities the park service and the people of the country gave me to be able to experience it."

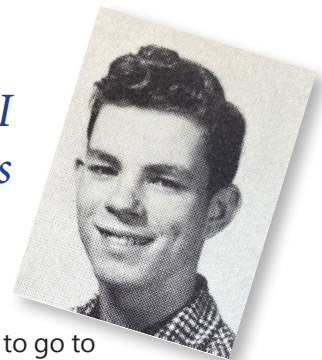
After that, he moved to Washington D.C. to work as Chief of Park Resource and Visitor Protection Park Ranger. The transition for Richard was a complete change: "I went from one of the wildest places, where the nearest restaurant was about an hour and a half, two hour drive away to staying in a little apartment there in urban Washington D.C., where I could walk to [more than] 50 restaurants," he said.

Not only was the new urban environment different, but so was the job. About attending meetings and congressional hearings, Richard said, "The politics were a shock to me." After his time in D.C., Richard moved to Death Valley National



Park where he worked with the Timbisha Shoshone Native American community to reach an agreement with the Park Service for restoration of homeland.

*"The profound message I got was 'You can always do better.'"*



"When I transferred out of Death Valley to go to Sequoia National Park, [the Timbisha Shoshone] made me an honorary member of the tribe. I cherish that."

When he looks at what Minnetonka students are doing today, Richard is hopeful about the future. "As far as young folks coming out of Minnetonka High School, I couldn't be more optimistic," he said.

The advice Richard would give today's students is the same he had received from his mentors at Minnetonka: "You can always do better."



# MINNETONKA *Alumni Awards*

## Congratulations to all of the 2020 Alumni Award Honorees!

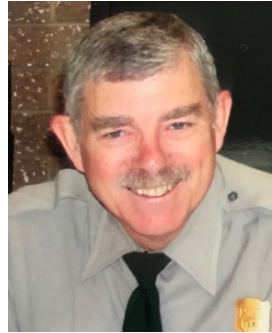
Join us for a virtual ceremony on Saturday, October 10, to honor their achievements.

Learn more at [www.minnetonkaalumni.com/AlumniAwards](http://www.minnetonkaalumni.com/AlumniAwards)



Distinguished Alumni Award  
**Jane (Zachary) Brattain, '65**

After battling cancer herself, Jane went on to help others do the same by establishing the Jane Brattain Breast Center. Each year, the center provides free breast cancer screenings for thousands of women in need.



Distinguished Alumni Award  
**Richard Martin, '56**

From Park Ranger to Superintendent at parks all around the country, Richard has led an incredibly successful career with the U.S. National Park Service. He is dedicated to preserving the country's natural beauty for the community to enjoy.



Distinguished Service Award  
**Tonya Andruskiewicz, '92**

Tonya is dedicated to creating an inclusive community. As president of West Metro Miracle Athletics and iCANhoop and founder of FlexAbility Fitness, she offers athletic opportunities for kids and young adults with autism and special needs.



Young Alumni Award  
**Jeff Edmondson, '05**

Since his days as "Weatherman Jeff" at MHS, Jeff has gone on to work as a meteorologist on KARE11 and WAVY10 in Virginia. Jeff also enjoys doing school visits to encourage students to follow their passion for science.



Young Alumni Award  
**Connor Johnson, '05**

Connor served at AmeriCorps in Los Angeles where he worked to help individuals who are impoverished. Later, he started his own non-profit organization, WouldWorks, which helps people in need reach a goal by completing woodworking projects.



Skippers Hall of Fame  
**Gary Christensen, '71**

Gary was a stand-out wrestler at Minnetonka and later at Mankato State, where he achieved All-American status and won an NCAA championship. He later returned to MHS as a coach and led many wrestlers to state championships.



Skippers Hall of Fame  
**1970-71 Girls Gymnastics Team**

The 1970-71 Girls Gymnastics Team made history as the first female sports team at Minnetonka. The team was established before Title IX and is an inspiration to female students and athletes.



Faculty Hall of Fame  
**Joan Larson**

Joan went above and beyond in her role as a choir teacher at Minnetonka. She individually welcomed, encouraged and inspired each young singer who stepped foot into her classroom.



# Creating a Strong Foundation of Support

by Daniel Campbell

Since 1986, the Minnetonka Public Schools Foundation has been supporting the District to empower students' pursuit of excellence. Countless unique and innovative opportunities have been created through the Teacher Grants program, which has raised \$1,144,000 since its inception in 1999, and the Endowment Fund, which has supported major initiatives such as the Writing Center and The Hub. That legacy of giving has ensured that tens of thousands of students have been able to get the innovative support for their education that only Minnetonka Schools can deliver. It's a legacy that the Foundation's new executive director, Lya Hurst, is excited to build upon.

Lya earned her bachelor of arts in communications from DePauw University in 2005 and has more than 14 years of experience in marketing, fundraising, event planning and communications. She is also a parent in the District and volunteers with the Clear Springs Elementary PTO.

When asked about why she chose to go into nonprofit work, Lya said it all came down to her father. "My dad instilled a belief that giving is good business. I believe that giving back is something every human should do."

In looking at her goals for the Foundation, Lya makes it clear that expanding awareness is key. "I want people to know what [the Foundation does] and how it impacts students in



*Lya Hurst, executive director of the Minnetonka Public Schools Foundation, shows off her Minnetonka spirit with her family.*

different ways." Lya adds that, above all, she'd love to "let families know we've touched every single student in some way, shape or form."

COVID-19 has changed many plans for 2020, but for Lya, it has also become an opportunity for innovation. "I started three weeks before schools shut down. In some ways, it was a bit of a blessing. It was a chance to take things in a different way. I hope that our events will be in-person, but there are plans and options in the works. It's really thinking out of the box and coming up with different ways to get the messaging out to everyone. A lot of things are unknown, and we are excited to change things up where we can."

Beyond general fundraising, Lya is deep in the process of selecting the next major endowment fund. "The Foundation wants to be there as a support [to the District] and bring all the changes we can that will help. It's a great time to focus on what's needed and wanted in the district and the world. It should be something that will help enlighten and innovate the district as a whole, but we really want to make sure we pick the right project. We should know more in the next couple months."

"Education is such a key focus," Lya concludes, "and a necessary stepping stone. It's really the foundation of what a child will become. Through Teacher Grants and endowments, we can let students experience new and different ways of learning that will benefit them in college and in the real world."

You can support the Foundation by making a gift through its website: [minnetonkafoundation.org](https://minnetonkafoundation.org).



*Families were given a chance to learn about The Hub and engage in "maker-based learning" during an event at Scenic Heights Elementary.*



# Class Notes

## 1950s

### 1950

Carol Jones, 88, wanted to share that she is alive and well but missing everyone due to quarantine.

### 1951

Margaret "Peg" Lee currently lives in Houston, TX. She has four children and has been a widow for 37 years. She was active in many non-profit organizations and has been running cooking schools in the retail food business for the past 35 years. At 87, she is still employed on a part time basis. "I had such a terrific education in Excelsior with such great teachers who enabled me to make the most of my time on earth," said Peg. "I can still remember their faces, if not their names."

### 1954

Dr. Michael Herz, who holds a doctorate in psychobiology, had two careers. First, he ran experiments to learn how memories are stored at the Univ. of Calif., San Francisco. Later in life, he went into marine environmental advocacy, founding San Francisco Baykeeper to stop and prosecute polluters. Michael spent Father's Day stand up paddling, sailing and motor boating on the Damariscotta River in Maine.

### 1955

Dick Engen and wife, Cathy, moved from California to Sun Lakes, AZ. They play golf weekly and spend most afternoons in their pool. "We do miss our Minnesota days," said Dick, "but not the winters!"

### 1957

Michael Lewis retired after 24 years of providing adult foster care for people who are developmentally disabled.

### 1959

Doreen Gamradt currently lives at RidgePointe Senior Apartments and works for Target.

## 1960s

### 1960 (1961)

Penny Anderson '60 and Larry Tisdell '61 were married in 1968. They welcomed daughter, Becky, in 1969 and son, Scott, in 1976. Both taught school in Barnesville until 2001, when they retired and moved to Walker, Minnesota where they are currently living their dream and enjoy watching their five grandsons play hockey and granddaughter do synchronized skating at the University of Miami, Ohio.

### 1961 (2024)

Carl Zinn wishes the best to his granddaughter, Lucy Zinn '24, who will be starting school at MHS this fall. She will be the third generation of Zinns to attend Minnetonka Schools.

### 1963

Bruce Goetz retired from the faculty of Northland College, Ashland, WI, in May 2016, after teaching there for 47 years. In 2017, Northland College awarded Bruce the academic rank of Professor Emeritus. He was only the tenth faculty member in Northland's long history to be awarded this prestigious honor. Bruce lives with his wife Ruth in Cable, WI.



*The class of 1964 gathered on August 3, 2019 for their 55th reunion.*



## 1968

Kerry Olsen is retiring from a career as a Head and Neck Surgeon at the Mayo Clinic. He had a busy surgical practice and is an emeritus member of the Board of Governors and Board of Trustees at the Mayo Clinic. He also was President of the Mayo Physician Staff. He served as the Medical Director of the Dan Abraham Healthy Living Center and was in charge of numerous construction projects at Mayo Clinic including the Gonda Building. He has four married children and 12 grandchildren and shares his time with them.

## 1969 (1959, 2021)

Colleen (Ohrbeck) Browne, CEO of marketing firm Browne+Browne Marketing and its book publisher division, Browne+Browne Books, has published a new children's book, *Quacky, Smacky, & Tacky: A Story About a Boy Raising Three Baby Ducks*. The author is Colleen's son John Browne '21, a senior at Minnetonka High School. The book was illustrated by MHS alum Alan Tollefson '59.

Sam Simonson retired five years ago from wholesaling a gift line, including *New York Times* best-selling recipe book, *Recipes From Minnesota with Love*. Sam's "semi-retirement" job is teaching Title 1 math at Park Elementary School in Hutchinson, MN.

# 1970s

## 1970

Last fall, 19 women who competed on the 1970-1973 Minnetonka Girls' Gymnastic Teams gathered for a reunion. The Minnetonka Gymnastics team of 1970-1971 was the first competitive girls' athletics team at Minnetonka High School. Title IX didn't begin until 1972, and all members were proud to help break barriers.



## 1972 (1968)

Greg Svenson and Bob Meyer '68 were featured in the documentary, *Secrets Of Blackmoor*, which had its red carpet premier in the Twin Cities in 2019. Both were good friends and players with David Arneson, creator of the game "Blackmoor." Dungeons and Dragons was developed out of Blackmoor,

with a collaboration between Arneson and Gary Gygax. Bob took over as Dungeon Master of Blackmoor after Arneson passed away, and is still asked to act as Dungeon Master at gaming conventions around the country.

## 1973

Becky Plowman-Hahn, U.S.P.T.A. tennis professional, has come out of retirement to start a Tennis Instructor Academy in the Lake Minnetonka area in the spring of 2021. From 1973 until her retirement in 2016, Becky and her more than 30 instructors taught tennis to approximately 33,570 kids in the Lake Minnetonka area.



## 1976

Julie Conklin was married in 2008, and is a step-mother to two adults and grandmother to three grandchildren. She lives with her husband in Seattle, WA.

# 1980s

## 1983

Bernie Gaytko was named chair of the Independent Community Bankers of Minnesota at an annual convention in Bemidji. Bernie is the President and CEO of the First National Bank of Waseca where he is an active member of the community and a strong advocate of Community Banks.





**1985**

Christi Sutphen started her own interior design firm, Sutphen Studio, Inc., in Carmel, CA.

**1987**

Anthony C. Bowyer passed a milestone in March 2020, having spent 25 years with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) in Washington, D.C. He currently serves with IFES as Europe & Eurasia Advisor. His daughter Natasha graduated from Westfield High School in Chantilly, Virginia in June 2020 and will study at Virginia Tech University in the fall.



Heather (Burrows) Freeman retired after 27 years of teaching for Nye County School District in 2018. She currently serves the public as master gardener coordinator for University of Nevada-Reno Extension, in southern Nye County, Nevada.



Aimee Mell was named a board trustee for Seattle Opera in June 2020. A choral director in Seattle Public Schools since 2013, she has founded three choral programs in the district, most recently at the newly re-opened historic Lincoln High School. In 2019, she was one of five choral directors selected nationwide to participate in the International Conductors Exchange Program through the American Choral Directors Association. The exchange allowed fellows to travel to South Africa for an interchange of music, culture and pedagogy.



## 2000s

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**2001**

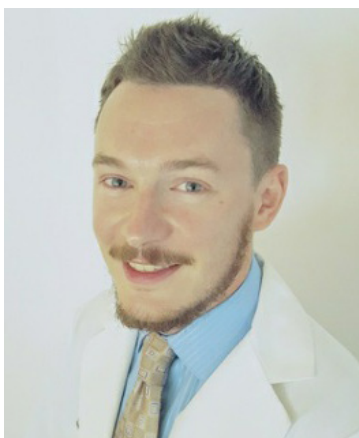
Tom Beukhof was married to Megan in October 2016. They welcomed their first daughter, Elliana, in August 2019. Tom works as a software engineer at Thomson Reuters.

**2004**

Amanda (Love) Holland and her husband welcomed their fourth child, Clementine, in 2018. They moved from Fairhope, AL to Tucson, AZ in 2019 to continue working in Youth Ministry.







## 2006

Ted Griggs, M.D. and Ph.D., completed his Internal Medicine Residency at the University of Illinois College (UIC) of Medicine and is a Physician-Scientist Fellow in the Department of Gastroenterology and Hepatology at UIC in Chicago with a career path in Academic Medicine; Basic and Translational Research.

Megan Stanga started her own accounting firm in January 2020 specializing in personal and small business income tax returns and other business financial services. Timbercreek Financial Services is based out of Lakeland, Florida but is a completely remote business.

## 2007

Sonja Midtune released a brand new single. The song, "Talk to Me," is a deeply personal piece about relationships and is her second of 2019. Sonja also recently accepted a teaching position at Cal Poly Pomona where she teaches songwriting.

## 2009 (2007)

Flavia Wilson-Janzen and husband, Joe Janzen '07, moved to Boston in 2016. They are now moving to Melbourne Beach, FL for Joe's fellowship. The couple hopes to make it back to Lake Minnetonka afterward to be closer to their families and friends once again. "Minnetonka will always be our home," said Flavia.



Laura (Hampson) Neighbors was married on June 6, 2020.

# 2010s

## 2010

Andrew Betker has been working at Patisserie Margo for four years and Olive's Fresh Pizza Bar for two. Andrew is a DJ and enjoys helping out in the community. Andrew said, "I have been blessed with some very great people in my life."

## 2013

Tori Hill graduated with her doctorate in physical therapy. She hopes to practice in a hospital or nursing facility soon. Tori said, "Thank you, Minnetonka, for the opportunities I was given early in my education to help promote my success."



## 2016

Wally Estenson recently launched a new podcast called *The Wally Pod*. In the podcast, Wally interviews extraordinary students and young adults to help others better navigate career, college and life.

Send your updates to:

[alumni@minnetonkaschools.org](mailto:alumni@minnetonkaschools.org)

or submit them online at [www.minnetonkaalumni.com](http://www.minnetonkaalumni.com)



# In Memoriam

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

## Alumni

Peter Bergren '53  
John Marty '54  
Tom Smith '54  
Donald T. Pederson '55  
Raymond Jezierski '56  
George "Doug" Laing '56  
Bob Lazier '57  
Lloyd Troendle '57  
Carol Gay (DeGrote) Anderson '58  
Brad Dyar '60  
Thomas Hennek '61  
Jim Preston '61  
Marlys Smieja '61

Craig Boone '62  
Jeanne (Adsem) Scholle '63  
Lynn Hammond '64  
Jeff Follett '66  
Larry Hiemarl '66  
Maury Graham '67  
Howard A. Hahn '67  
Jan York '67  
Melissa (Mayo) Sorman '67  
Ed Thonander '67  
Howard Hahn '67  
Steven Maupin '69  
Linda Kaye (Seiler) Thielen '69  
John Holasek '71  
Daniel Hoo '71  
Pamela Johnson '71  
Dave Krysel '71  
Paul Mueller '71  
Dave Winsor '71  
Patrick Smith '72  
Kathleen Zimmerschied '73  
Steve Evangelista '74  
Allan Hoops '75  
Anne (Magnuson) Nalevanko '75

Stacy (Peterson) Kuschel '79  
Stacy (Hexum) Lundberg '81  
Elizabeth Keane Andersen '99  
Michael R. Kopecky '06  
Alex Burud '09  
Boston Iverson '15

## Teachers and Staff

Helen Carlson  
Don Carruth  
Judy Erdahl  
Bill Fulcher  
Cindy G. Idelkope  
Raymond Jezierski  
Nancy Elaine Maas  
Duncan MacKenzie  
Marvin Muires  
Lois Pardun  
Gerald E. Poppler  
Dr. Laurence "Doc" Smith  
Paula Joanne Soukup  
Susan E. Wolfe  
Eleanor Woodey

# Upcoming Events

## 2020

Oct. 10 - Alumni Awards Virtual Ceremony

## 2021

February 1 - Deadline for Alumni Award Nominations - [www.minnetonkaschools.org/alumniawards](http://www.minnetonkaschools.org/alumniawards)

July 10 - Class of 1980 40-Year Reunion (Rescheduled)

July 17 - Class of 1971 50-Year Reunion

July 30 - Class of 1990 30-Year Reunion (Rescheduled)

August 7 - Class of 2015 Five-Year Reunion (Rescheduled)

## TBD

Class of 1965 55-Year Reunion (Rescheduled)

Class of 1970 50-Year Reunion (Rescheduled)

Class of 1985 35-Year Reunion (Rescheduled)

Class of 1995 25-Year Reunion (Rescheduled) - Check the Class of 1995 Facebook page for updates.

Class of 1996 25 Year-Reunion - Check the Class of 1996 Facebook page for updates.

Class of 2010 10-Year Reunion (Rescheduled)

For all the latest reunion and alumni event updates, visit [www.minnetonkaschools.org/alumni-events](http://www.minnetonkaschools.org/alumni-events). Know about a class reunion that is not listed? Email us at [alumni@minnetonkaschools.org](mailto:alumni@minnetonkaschools.org). We would be glad to include it on the website.



# Letter From the Editor

## Bringing it all TOGETHER



Daniel Campbell, Editor-in-Chief  
Minnetonka Alumni Magazine  
[daniel.campbell@minnetonkaschools.org](mailto:daniel.campbell@minnetonkaschools.org)

Greetings Skippers! I hope you've enjoyed reading Volume 11 of the *Minnetonka Alumni Magazine* as much as I did bringing it all together.

Togetherness is such a huge theme for this issue, especially in the face of something as isolating as the COVID-19 pandemic. You'd be hard-pressed to find anyone who hasn't been deeply affected by the sudden, often heartbreaking, reality of our time. But I challenge each of you to look deeper, to see that though this disease has physically separated us, it has also brought people together in ways both big and small.

In this issue, we saw Minnetonka come together to celebrate one of the winningest high school coaches in Minnesota history, Dave Nelson. We learned that stepping up in a time of need is not some new trend for Minnetonka families as Lisa (McFarlin) Wandrei '81 shared the story of how a group of moms helped to fill a shortage of bus drivers in the district. Her mom and others stayed on for decades because they loved to greet the kids who boarded their bus each day with a smile. Equally inspiring was hearing first-hand from Minnetonka's superintendent, Dr. Dennis Peterson, about his unparalleled career in bringing families and teachers together, because all children deserve the chance to excel

and reach their unique potential. Of course, the biggest story we had was talking about the school building closures last spring due to COVID-19. I'll admit, it's one that I approached with some trepidation. It's a big topic after all, big enough to fill an entire magazine by itself. But once I started writing, I realized that it was the small things that made our e-learning program a success: small acts of kindness, small moments of gratitude and small changes to make a child's learning work better for them. If you take the time to add up all the small things that happened this spring, they truly show how strong the Minnetonka Public Schools community is.

I'm very proud to have been the steward of this amazing magazine and am already looking forward to telling more stories of past and future Skippers. While no one knows for sure what the next 12 months may bring, I am certain they will be marked by collaboration, generosity, excellence and—of course—Tonka spirit.

Wishing you all the best,

A handwritten signature of Daniel Campbell in black ink.

## MINNETONKA FAST FACTS



97% of parents in our annual parent survey rated Minnetonka Schools as Excellent or Good.



In 2020, Minnetonka Schools ranked #1 in Best School District, Best High School, Best Middle School, Best Elementary School and Best Teachers in Minnesota.



Minnetonka Schools was selected as a Top Workplace in the Twin Cities.



The District is recognized as one of the best communities in the nation for music education by the NAMM Foundation.





Minnetonka Public Schools  
Dr. Dennis Peterson, Superintendent  
5621 County Road 101  
Minnetonka, MN 55345

[www.minnetonkaschools.org](http://www.minnetonkaschools.org)

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## Minnetonka Memories: A Look Back at the Year 2000

Twenty years ago, the world was deep in the grip of fear. The cause wasn't concern over pandemics, politics, World War III or climate change. It was over a bit of computer code. To save money, many computer systems used two numbers instead of four to record a date, assuming their systems would all be replaced well before the year 2000. They weren't. Known as the Y2K Bug, the fear that every major electronic system would simultaneously crash on New Year's Eve was palpable. Due to the work of IT professionals, all that happened was a good story. So don't be fooled by the calm expression on sophomore Joe Allen '02 (below), he was undoubtedly terrified for his computer!

