Mama Carol
Finding Life's Purpose among the Street Kids of Zambia
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This issue of HORIZONS is the first of its kind for the publication. The change was suggested by Dr. Janice Haworth, a member of the BSU faculty. This issue features articles on faculty and student achievements, and provides information on upcoming events and activities at the University.

Hauser Wins $25,000 Poetry Award

In March, Susan Carol Hauser, chair of the English department, won a $25,000 Lott Award in poetry from the Minneapolis-based McKnight Foundation. Hauser was one of four recipients in the poetry and spoken-word category. Retiring this summer after a 30-year career with the University, Hauser plans to use the award for travel and other activities related to her writing.

Hauser is the author of 12 books, including: Other Days, Dark Nue and Solated Pares, nature books on poison ivy, ticks, wild rice, and maple sugar, and a volume on writing. She received Minnesota Book Award for Wild Rice Cooking: History, Natural History, Harvesting and Love, and her photo My Aunt Te Be Read Out Loud.

Two BSU Profes Awarded Fulbright Scholarships

Two BSU professors have been awarded Fulbright scholarships for the upcoming academic year: Dr. Louise Jackson, professor of psychology and director of the women's studies program, and Dr. Jon E. Quistgaard, professor of music.

Jackson will be a guest lecturer at Purdue University in the Slovak Republic during the 2010-2011 academic year. Besides teaching courses in counseling, counseling supervision, and family therapy, she will help the university develop a graduate curriculum in counseling psychology. In 2001, Jackson also received a Fulbright grant to teach at Taller University of Education Sciences in Estonia. Haworth will be a guest lecturer at the Institute of Fine Arts in China, West Africa, next year. She will teach both research and teaching methods courses. While there, she also will learn to play local African drums and use a new notation system she helped create to conduct research on West African drum music.

Student Scholarship and Creative Achievement Conference

In April, nearly 200 BSU students showcased academic work during a day of presentations, performances, exhibits, and poster sessions at the University's 11th annual Student Scholarship and Creative Achievement Conference. In total, the conference featured more than 100 presentations and poster sessions, three art exhibits, a ceramics show, and the annual Film Festival. This year's keynote speaker was noted forensic scientist Brent Tarway, who once appeared on Forensic Science, LLC. Tarway's lecture, Terrence Cunliffe, Educator, Ethics and Canvass, introduced students to the broad range of professional possibilities available in forensic science.

Lighting Grant to Reduce Usage

In February, BSU received a $25,000 grant from Minnesota State Colleges and Technical Colleges’ Clean Energy Fund, the Bangsberg Fine Arts Complex, and BSU Gymnasium. Using high-efficiency technology, the grant will reduce energy consumption and operating costs while alleviating some safety concerns associated with these buildings. Besides their academic use, these visible, high-traffic campus facilities host a variety of public activities, so efficient, yet brightly lit. Facilities are needed in the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources, funded the grant.

Retired Prof and Initiator of BSU Song Dies

Dr. Ron Gaier, a member of the BSU music faculty from 1946-77, died in March at the age of 90. Gaier taught a variety of music classes and was chair of the University’s Division of Fine Arts. In addition to his enduring impact as an educator, mentor, and friend to three decades of BSU music students, Gaier also made a lasting contribution to the University when he oversaw the creation of “Cf. Bemidji Beavers,” the school’s fight song. The song was penned by students in one of Gaier’s advanced harmony courses. In his book, The History of Bemidji State University: Music Department, Gaier also spent time highlighting the University’s rich history of lyrical and musical talent, and music, voted on their favorites, then crafted the final piece, phrase by phrase, on a blackboard.

Leadership Center Opens in February, BSU oracled the excellence in Leadership Center, housed in the Hobson Memorial Union. The center, a partnership with the Bemidji community, was developed to further the University’s civic engagement strategy. The mission of the student-led center is to develop active citizenship through social and environmental outreach, increase opportunities for collaboration between students, faculty, staff, and the community, embrace diversity, and foster greater ground through education, interaction, and culture.
Men's Hockey

For the second consecutive season and the fourth time since 1999, Bemidji State reached the NCAA tournament in men's ice hockey. The Beavers were seeded second in the Midwest region, receiving an at-large bid after winning the College Hockey America regular-season championship. The Beavers, who were ranked as high as fourth in the nation during the year, finished their season 23-10-4 after falling to Michigan in the first round of the NCAA tournament. Six Beavers earned All-CHA honors.

Women's Basketball

In March, center Jessie Althoff from Becker was named to the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference All-Freshman Team. Althoff averaged 1.6 points per game during her rookie season, leading a Beaver offense that ranked eighth nationally in scoring. She was the first BSU player to earn All-NSIC honors since 2008. Althoff helped guide the Beavers to a 1-15 overall record, including a 4-14 mark in NSIC play. BSU's 12 wins marked a nine-game improvement over last season.

Women's Hockey

Bemidji State women's hockey capped an historic season with the program's first-ever berth in the WCHA Final Faceoff. The Beavers were seeded second in the conference tournament and defeated No. 1 seeded Bemidji State in overtime. The Beavers finished with an overall record of 12-19-7, their most wins since winning 12 games in 2001-02. Sophomore goalie Zuzana Tomcikova was named WCHA Co-Player of the Year and sophomore defender Montana Vichorek earned WCHA All-Tournament honors. BSU's Tommyk was named national player of the year for her Slovakian team in the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, Canada.

Three Athletes Earn All-America Honors

Three BSU student-athletes earned All-America honors recently: Matt Read, men's hockey; Kristi Buekle, indoor track and field; and Zach Preble, indoor track and field. A junior forward on the men's hockey team, Read was named Second-Team All-America by the American Hockey Coaches Association. He also was named the College Hockey America Player of the Year in March. The Biron, Ontario native is the 8th BSU men's hockey player to be named to an All-America team and only the second player since the team moved to NCAA Division I in 1999. For the fourth consecutive year, at least one member of BSU's indoor track and field team has earned All-America honors. At the 2010 NCAA Indoor Championships, held in Albuquerque, NM, in March, Buekle, a junior from St. Louis and Zach Preble, a senior from Colorado, finished second in their respective events to earn All-America distinction. Buekle finished second in the 600m dash with a school-record time of 1:28.76 seconds, and Preble finished second in the 3000m steeplechase with a school-record 9:54.75 points. Heading into the 2010 outdoor season, both Buekle and Zach Preble were named pre-season Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference Outdoor Athletes of the Year.

The Mission of Healing

On July 20, 2006, Mark Backlin's wife, Judith Lombeida, and their two teenage children were hit by a car on Interstate 80 through Kearney, NE, while driving to a family gathering in Minnesota. "We were passing a vehicle on the right; he lost a very large piece of furniture off the side of his trailer in front of my car," says Backlin. "I swerved to avoid it, and, in the process, we rolled our car six times." The driver, a man named Backlin (BSU '79), his wife, and their two teenage children were driving west on Interstate 80 when a truck carrying to Family Entertainment, Minnesota. The driver, a man named Backlin (BSU '79), his wife, and their two teenage children were driving west on Interstate 80 when a truck carrying a very large piece of furniture off the side of his trailer in front of my car," says Backlin. "I swerved to avoid it, and, in the process, we rolled our car six times." The driver, a man named Backlin (BSU '79), his wife, and their two teenage children were hit by a car on Interstate 80 through Kearney, NE, while driving to a family gathering in Minnesota. "We were passing a vehicle on the right; he lost a very large piece of furniture off the side of his trailer in front of my car," says Backlin. "I swerved to avoid it, and, in the process, we rolled our car six times."
The day after the accident, Backlin and his children convened in his hospital room. Bruised and broken, they clung to each other, determined to get through the horrific loss together. They were equally determined to find a way to honor Lombeida – an Ecuadorian native and neurologist in the U.S. Air Force – and the extraordinary life she lived.

“We’re on a journey,” Backlin recalls telling his kids that day. “It’s not an easy journey, and it’s going to be a long, hard road. You’ll get through it. You will get through it.”

With those words, his course was set. Over the next year, Backlin, a federal serviceman in the U.S. Air Force, created the Judith Lombeida Medical Foundation (JLMF). Besides honoring her memory, he was fulfilling his wife’s dream of starting such a foundation. The foundation has already enabled Backlin to lead five medical missions to some of the poorest and most medically neglected areas of Ecuador.

**Reconnecting with Roots**

Although poor, Lombeida’s parents encouraged education. Their encouragement eventually led her to the United States with dreams of becoming a librarian. She soon discovered, however, a passion for medicine. After medical school and a residency in Texas, Lombeida moved to Washington, D.C., to fulfill a fellowship at Georgetown University. While there, she joined the United States Air Force as a neurologist at Andrews Air Force Base and began reconnecting with her roots.

“She started to work with Air Force attachés from Ecuador, it was a natural connection,” says Backlin. “She helped these guys quite a bit and built quite a reputation for herself there. That set the basis for her future trips.”

Even as she cared for her patients in the U.S. and overseas, Lombeida worked tirelessly to bring medical relief to the poorest parts of Central and South America. She organized four U.S. Air Force–led medical missions to Chile, Peru, El Salvador, and Ecuador, with teams treating up to 7,000 patients in a two-week period. Her efforts, and natural ability to work cross culturally, earned her respect in the U.S. as she advanced in the Air Force. She also received one of the Ecuadorian Air Force’s highest honors, the Estrella de las Fuerzas Armadas de Ecuador (Star of the Armed Forces of Ecuador), a medal typically reserved for retiring generals. Lombeida remains the only female to receive the decoration.

In April 2006, Lombeida completed what would be her last mission to her home country. In all, nearly 40,000 patients throughout Central and South America received medical care thanks to her.

**Renewing the Mission**

With his arm still in a plaster cast, Backlin flew to Ecuador seven weeks after the accident to deliver the tragic news to his wife’s 96-year-old father. On the return flight, he reflected on his wife’s passion for medical mission work and began planning the JLMF, which he formed after returning home to Colorado. Fundraising and assembling a medical team soon followed.

“I got donations started from people who knew her,” says Backlin. “We knew an Ecuadorian Air Force general who Judith had helped in 1992 in Washington, D.C. He helped me connect with the chief of staff of the Ecuadorian Air Force, along with a surgeon who was on her last mission in 2006.”

In December 2006, Backlin returned to Ecuador to make a presentation to the country’s Air Force and seeking support for JLMF, which he obtained.

While in the country, Backlin, his children, and Lombeida’s Ecuadorian family also held a funeral for her.

“It was an incredible high and low during those two weeks of Christmas in 2006,” he says. “We went through this whole high of getting the mission set in stone, then the next week, we had her funeral.”

Less than a year later, JLMF set out on its first mission to Ecuador. The team included Backlin, his children, and a group of volunteers – many of whom had known and were inspired by Lombeida.

“This was a huge mission,” recalls Backlin. “We saw 2,500 patients in five days. It involved the people who knew her – just a phenomenal number of people. In the regions surrounding Lombeida’s hometown, the team administered medication, treated minor wounds, and delivered a baby. The Ecuadorian Air Force followed up on those the team couldn’t treat.

In the two and a half years since that first mission, the JLMF volunteers have treated more than 6,000 Ecuadorians through clinical, surgical, and dental trips. The volunteer teams – often collaborating with local missions and the Peace Corps – establish clinics and pharmacies in remote areas of the country or occupy existing surgical centers, with patients brought to and from the sites.

**Touching Hearts**

Between missions, Backlin raises funds for the foundation through the United Way, private donor, and an annual golf tournament in Colorado Springs, CO. The Bemidji State University music major also uses his skills as a composer to garner financial support for the JLMF.

“If people want a song for $200, I’ll compose a song and send it to them,” he notes. “When you can touch people’s hearts through music, which is what I like to do, it’s very powerful for them and me.”

When it comes to recruiting medical professionals, Backlin hasn’t missed a beat, even though the volunteers must pay their own travel and lodging expenses. “I have found that if you provide an avenue for people to volunteer, they will come do it,” he says. “What I do is provide that avenue.”

For those who loved, respected, and admired Lombeida, the foundation bearing her name is a constant reminder of her caring spirit and concern for those without ready access to medical care. On each mission to Ecuador, Backlin and his children carry her memory with them and honor her by serving the people she loved.

“My wife was the most amazing lady,” he says. “These missions provide an immense sense of connection with her and keep her legacy alive through what she used to do.”

For more information on the JLMF go to: www.jlmf.org
A Rebellious Beginning

When Carol McBrady chose Bemidji State University, rebellion was one of her motives. She wanted to be as far away as she could possibly afford from her Maple Lake home. Little did she realize it was a first step that would lead her 8,500 miles from home to Zambia, Africa, where she would become a mother and counselor to street children in a country estimated to have over half a million orphans because of HIV/AIDS.

Thirty years later, the rebellious teen is a feisty 50-year-old, known as Mama Carol, with a reputation so respected that she walks safely in slums where police and soldiers won’t go.

McBrady rents a five-bedroom home secured with a concrete block fence and locked gate, typical for her Lusaka neighborhood. Salvation Home’s bunk beds are usually filled to capacity with 32 children, two per bed. Meals are nshima (corn flour mush) and vegetables. Evening electricity is sporadic.

Money is always tight. Action for Children-Zambia, the organization McBrady started in 2005, is always at the mercy of donors’ generosity, but McBrady is at peace.

“Most people spend their whole lives looking for that ‘thing’ to make them happy and bring satisfaction,” she says. “I am so blessed to have found my purpose in life.”

McBrady discovered her purpose nearly a decade ago when she handled a mid-life crisis by going to Africa during summer vacation from her school social worker job. Her goal was to do mission work and to hold AIDS babies. She ended up discovering something about herself.

An Unpredictable Path

McBrady’s path started in Maple Lake, where being involved was part of community and family life. The sixth child in a family of five daughters and three sons, she was influenced by nuns in the St. Joseph of Carondelet order and by Benedictine sisters who taught the McBrady children. The family’s commitment to helping neighbors, whether it was painting a house or sharing garden bounty, also gave root to her sense of service.

A talented oboe player, McBrady planned to major in music at BSU, but soon realized she was drawn to social work.

As dusk drapes the capital city of Lusaka, Zambia, the street children—some as young as five, many orphaned, abused, or runaways—seek shelter in the city’s shop fronts, open markets, and empty buildings. An estimated 75,000 strong, they’re casualties of poverty, AIDS, child trafficking, and drugs. While their futures appear hopeless, a variety of organizations and individuals are determined to re-route their destinies. One such individual is BSU alumna Carol McBrady, a 1982 social work graduate.
**MAMA CAROL**

(Continued from page 10)

Carol McBrady and her staff have been described as “passionate and loving; able to see where it would propel me; able to help troubled children and with Native American youth. Along the way there were personal struggles as well as two miscarriages, a stillborn birth, a husband diagnosed with mental illness, a divorce, and the death of her father who greatly influenced McBrady with his gentle spirit and servant’s heart.

“I tell you, this was a dark time in my life. It was my 40th year, and I had nothing,” McBrady recalls. “I had been able to see where it would propel me, it would have been so much easier but God gave me faith, not forgetting. I ended up selling my home and using the money to start Action for Children-Zambia.”

Carol’s departure for Africa didn’t surprise her mother. “I think the attraction for her is being a mom there, and I hope she finds her calling there,” McBrady’s mother says. “I think the attraction for her is being a mom there, and I hope she finds her calling there,” McBrady’s mother says.

The Lusaka Streets

Because children from the streets are usually traumatized and often abandoned, effective treatment requires transcending traditional therapies, McBrady says. Many have been raped and physically abused and are dealing with health issues such as HIV, malaria, and drug addictions.

According to Balluff, wherever he went in Lusaka, people knew and respected Mama Carol and the unique, long-term program she has developed for street kids.

Filing at the Salvation Home, Balluff recalls being impressed with the children. “It was amazingly peaceful,” he says. “The kids were well behaved, like any nice family. She can handle abused kids.”

Though McBrady is a loving mother, she has rules, says Paula Discher, a nurse from Eagle Bend, who spent six weeks with McBrady in 2008. Carol’s rules are: no drugs, sex, or stealing. The rule against theft is an especially difficult rule for kids in survival mode. Breaking a rule results in eviction from Salvation Home.

Besides the stick, however, McBrady provides carrots, including a home with a mother figure, plenty of love, and as close to a normal family life as possible. It’s an environment with regular meals, school, homework, chores, and play.

When there are fights and crises to deal with, McBrady relies on other tactics. “I turn into Mama Cena as the boys call it, after John Cena, one of their favorite WWF wrestlers,” McBrady says. “They will look around and ask, What happened? But it works. It’s a language they know.”

McBrady has one other important tool. She rises at 4:30 a.m. for quiet prayer time.

There’s always time for play at Salvation Home.

**The Road Ahead**

McBrady relies on social worker skills such as listening, behavior modification, and charting. She also uses instructional skills as she teaches case management models to the University of Zambia social work interns at Salvation Home. However, she’s called upon to be much more than a social worker or teacher. Daily she finds herself being an advocate, nurse, mother, and, most recently, a farmer.

A nearby village gave her and her children 30 acres of land. Using only hand tools, some of the older boys cleared eight acres for maize and four acres for vegetables. An Irish grant group plans to help build housing for 12 children to live there. The farm represents an important step for the children’s future by creating the opportunity to grow food, provide jobs, and generate income.

Though they call her Mama Carol, McBrady emphasizes she doesn’t want the children dependent on her. She finds relatives to care for abandoned children.

Carol McBrady

Carol McBrady, originally from Bemidji, Minnesota, is now the leader of Action for Children-Zambia. She is deeply committed to helping children in Zambia.

Carol McBrady’s passion for her work stems from her own experiences. She is a mother of three and has a strong desire to help others. She has dedicated her life to making a difference in the lives of children in Zambia.

Carol McBrady has established a home for children in Zambia, providing them with a safe and nurturing environment. She is guided by her faith, which is an important part of her life. In addition to her work with the children, Carol McBrady is also involved in fundraising efforts to support her organization.

Carol McBrady is a true example of someone who is making a positive impact in the world. Her dedication and commitment to helping others is truly inspiring.

There’s always time for play at Salvation Home.
“I figured we’d have fosters for a while, eventually getting our own dog, and then we’d be done. Little did I know how much we both would love working with this organization, it became part of all of our lives.”

Dee Dee Heffernan

BSU Alums Pat and Dee Dee Heffernan aren’t superheroes, but if you’re visiting their hometown of St. Paul, you may see them walking around with one.

The Heffernans, along with their two teenage children, are volunteer puppy raisers and foster parents for Can Do Canines Assistance Dogs in New Hope, a non-profit organization providing service dogs to people with a range of disabilities. The dogs, distinguishable by the bright red capes they wear, are trained to do everything from picking up dropped keys to sensing when a diabetic’s blood sugar is dropping.

“They are definitely superheroes,” says Shelly Hiemer, marketing and communications specialist for Can Do Canines. “Not only are the dogs providing a physical service for clients, but they’re also providing loving companionship. That makes a big difference for people.”

The dogs benefit too. Between 80 and 40 percent of the organization’s service dogs are rescued from local animal shelters and trained as assistance dogs. “That works very well for both, giving the dog a second chance on life and giving the client a new life,” says Hiemer.

Before they can begin their new lives, however, each dog must go through rigorous training. The process starts with a team of committed volunteer foster parents and puppy raisers like the Heffernans, both 1984 BSU graduates. They began fostering dogs through Can Do Canines, formerly Hearing and Service Dogs of Minnesota, in 1992 when Dee Dee came across an ad in her company newsletter.

“I really wanted a dog, and my husband was not quite ready for one,” says Dee Dee. “We thought this might be a good opportunity to try having a dog in the home for a short time to see how it would work. Then we could also volunteer, which we really like to do.”

Their first dog, a two-year-old American Eskimo named Max, came to live with them that year, and they were hooked.

“I figured we’d have fosters for a while, eventually getting our own dog, and then we’d be done,” says Dee Dee. “Little did I know how much we both would love working with this organization, it became part of all of our lives.”

Over the next 15 years, the family welcomed more than 15 dogs into their home, sometimes for a month, sometimes longer. While loving and training the dogs, they also developed a passion for Can Do Canines and began helping the organization in other ways.

“Not only are the dogs providing a physical service for clients, but they’re also providing loving companionship. That makes a big difference for people,” says Hiemer. “They need to pay attention to the client and learn to work through the distractions.”

To make sure their puppies stay on track, the Heffernans have devised a system. They post a list on the refrigerator with tasks the puppy needs to work on each day. When the task is completed, they check it off the list. “I love the way the Heffernans make it a whole family experience,” says Hiemer.

For more information about Can Do Canines, visit www.hsdm.org

Top left: Pat and Dee Dee Heffernan. Top right: DeeDee works on service skills with foster dog. Left: Can Do Canines is a family affair for the Heffernans (l-r): Katherine, Dee Dee, Pat, and Samuel.
“It’s really amazing to me how a little cup of coffee can mean so much to people when you sit down at a table and just talk. That’s how I connected with town. I started with one person, and a big network just emerged.”

Cody Nelson

As a Bemidji State student, Cody Nelson lived by a simple motto: Say yes to everything. This straightforward message is one the 2008 grad wants to pass along to current students. “If someone gives you an opportunity, say yes to it,” he advises. “You’re only on campus for just a small piece of your life, and it’s where you grow if you take advantage of it.”

While at Bemidji State, the 24-year-old Crookston native was active in a variety of campus activities. He served as Student Senate president, started a green movement, worked in the computer store, to name a few. Nelson also made it his mission to venture off school grounds and engage with Bemidji’s broader community. “I thought that Bemidji State was kind of an island,” he says. “I felt I had to network as much as I could, sharing ideas and saying to the community, ‘There’s a campus here with lots of excited kids that you can work with.’

A way that Nelson built his network was through coffee chats with local community leaders. He and a group of BSU classmates sought their advice on business practices, life lessons, and getting students more involved in the community. “It’s really amazing to me how a little cup of coffee can mean so much to people when you sit down at a table and just talk. That’s how I connected with town. I started with one person, and a big network just emerged.”

In 2008, Nelson received the Jim Bensen Bemidji Individual Steward of the Year Award from the community organization, Bemidji Leads! Recognized for bringing the community and the campus together, Nelson noted that the real reward came this past February when Bemidji State’s Excellence in Leadership Center officially opened its doors. “With a mission to increase collaboration opportunities, the student-led center will be a model for developing and engaging students in civic leadership,” Nelson says. “It will be a place where the students, University, community, and region are integrated.”

Nelson recalls sitting around a table and dreaming about a place like the leadership center, and he couldn’t be more thrilled that the dream is becoming a reality for current students. “I’m realizing now that it’s a responsibility of mine to give back to my campus,” he says. “The reason I had such a successful education is because people who preceded me gave back. Now it’s my turn, my responsibility, to do the same.”

Nelson now organizes trips geared for high school students and led by college students. “We take students and expose them to social issues that actually exist in their own community,” he says. “Then at night, we talk about it, asking, ‘How are you going to make your community a better place?’ It’s uncomfortable; it’s challenging, and it’s huge impact, but it makes a lot of change.”

Working for a nonprofit has been a learning experience for Nelson. He now sees firsthand how integral volunteers and philanthropy are to making an organization run successfully. “I’m proud that Bemidji State is putting its values truly on the forefront,” says Nelson. “It’s putting the signature themes out there. That makes me proud of campus and proud to be a Bemidji alumn.”

Since graduation, Nelson has transitioned into a job that also began as an undergraduate project. While on campus, he founded the University’s Students Today, Leaders Forever (STLF) chapter, an organization initiating “pay-it-forward” road trips for students from middle school to college. As manager of the high school program for the Minneapolis-based nonprofit, Nelson now organizes trips geared for high school students and led by college students. This, he says, gives both groups a unique perspective on social issues – homelessness, poverty, and the environment – they may not recognize in their own towns and cities.

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Nelson serves as a member of the BSU Alumni Association’s board of directors and participates on its student affairs and recognition committees. Through his work on the board, Nelson hopes to inspire other recent grads to support Bemidji State, even if they don’t have the means to donate money. He envisions a network where these recent alumni can find non-financial ways to enrich their alma mater, whether by speaking to a class, volunteering on campus, or mentoring a current student.

“There are still active, energetic young people who are trying to make a difference and haven’t forgotten about campus,” he says. “We’re just trying to pay back student loans right now.”

As for the future, Nelson hopes to pursue a dual master’s degree in public policy and business so he can eventually work in higher education administration. For the time being, though, he considers himself a student of life with a responsibility to both teach and continue to learn. “I was a freshman at Bemidji State, and I graduated. Now I’m a freshman at life,” he observes as he talks about finding ways to help others along their paths. “I’m always looking to meet more people and continue the coffee conversations.”

For more information about Students Today, Leaders Forever, visit www.stlf.net

Meet Corinne, Andrew, and Stephanie.

They’re shaping their worlds by helping others.
Andrew Spaeth spent his boyhood summers fishing in northwestern Ontario, an area he appreciates for its pristine beauty. He became alarmed, however, when he later learned that his outdoor paradise had been contaminated in the 1960s by mercury pollution, devastating the indigenous people there.

“This had all occurred before I came there, but I was exposed to it afterward,” reflects Spaeth, who graduates from Bemidji State University this spring with a degree in environmental studies and a minor in applied public policy. “This stuff happens right in our backyard, maybe even in our vacation destinations, and we don’t even realize it.”

Spaeth, from Montevideo, hopes to heighten awareness about environmental issues, as well as advocate for groups who are affected by environmental degradation. He believes that environmentalism and social justice go hand-in-hand.

“I’m passionate about the outdoors,” explains Spaeth. “I want to ensure that my children and my children’s children have the opportunity to be part of it.”

In high school, Spaeth joined a grassroots effort to clean up the Chippewa River watershed. For the past four summers, he was an outfitter in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. While there, he became inspired by the writings of the late Minnesota naturalist Sigurd Olson who helped pass the Wilderness Act of 1964. In 2009, he discovered a kindred spirit for a life of civic engagement.

At BSU, Spaeth has been active in the Student Senate, the Outdoor Program Center, campus Relay for Life, and several University organizations. He’s been president of the Students for the Environment Club, co-taught a freshman orientation course, and mentored with Upward Bound, a program encouraging high school students to attend college. He also initiated a campaign to conserve water used in the residence halls and helped with a project to reduce campus food waste.

Thanks to undergraduate research opportunities, he’s been able to meld his concern for the environment with his interest in social justice. In 2008, the BSU Journal of Student Research published his paper on the Northern Alberta tar sands and the industry’s destructive impact on native people.

Spaeth spent this year grappling with a variety of higher education concerns as a Student Senate co-president and board member of the Minnesota State University Student Association, representing the state’s seven, four-year colleges. He was recently elected to serve as the association’s chair for 2010-2011.

“Andy just becomes engaged,” explains Erika Bailey-Johnson, BSU sustainable campus director. “He’s an excellent ability coordinator. "He's an excellent leader and makes a positive impact wherever he goes."

Spaeth’s leadership is about looking out for the well-being of others, always focusing on the issues with an eye for social justice.

Andrew Spaeth

Stephanie Chuah, from Malaysia, was 14 years old when she decided to study psychology, a bold choice in a country where psychology is not highly regarded. Bright students there are expected to pursue more lucrative fields such as law or medicine, but Chuah has always been more motivated by her passion for justice than by personal wealth.

As part of a secondary school project, she learned that people with mental illness are often stigmatized in Malaysia and have inadequate treatment options.

“Something has to be done,” explains Chuah, who is fortunate that her parents support her ambitions. Chuah transferred from a Malaysian university to Bemidji State University in January 2009 and graduates this May with a psychology degree. She plans to complete a U.S. work-study experience, attend graduate school, and eventually work in Malaysia’s mental health system.

Chuah is also concerned about poverty and the plight of women. In Malaysia, she volunteered at a shelter for victims of domestic violence and with hunger awareness events.

“The more I learn, the more I see how things are interconnected,” notes Chuah. “Wherever you have poverty, you have issues of social justice. It’s not that people are lazy or lack morals. No one is born lazy, we all want to be something.”

She’s also honed her leadership skills at Bemidji State. As president of the BSU International Student Organization (ISO), she launched a mentoring program to help arriving students adjust to campus life. She hopes to see U.S.-born mentors participate in the future to create more cultural interactions. She’s also helped plan ISO trips, as well as social events for students and the community.

Through the BSU women’s study program, Chuah helped with a regional hall of fame induction ceremony celebrating women’s accomplishments. She also volunteered with the BSU theater program and served as artistic director of a staged reading for Women’s History Month.

As she considers her future, Chuah deliberates whether to concentrate on clinical psychology or focus more broadly on ways to affect social change.

"Those questions tell a lot about her character," says Dr. Richard Hook, chair of the Department of Psychology. “She wrestles with the big picture and matters of social justice.”

Chuah wants to make the world a better place. Her experiences, coursework, and mentors at Bemidji State inspire her to persevere.

“When you get involved, you see the changes, and you become part of the change,” observes Chuah. “The biggest thing for me is to keep learning and doing as much as possible.”

Stephanie Chuah

Andrew Spaeth

Horizons  Bemidji State University  18
The Kellys mortgaged their farmland north of Bemidji to purchase the vacated church structure in an older neighborhood just a few blocks from downtown. Considered a mission outreach, the church is financially supported by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA). Most of the church’s board members have been homeless or still are.

“We didn’t have any expectations,” Kelly reflects about starting the church. “We didn’t plan anything more to begin with than just to be friendly to people, be open, and have this church where people felt welcome. And also, that we would respect every spiritual faith, so anyone could just come and be present.”

Volunteers helped repair the building, and people started attending the informal Sunday worship services. Shaping a mission rose from the bottom up.

“If someone thought there was a need, and people thought they could help, they did,” Kelly notes.

As a result, the mission widened. With a shortage of shelters for some of the area’s most needy, Peoples Church began housing the homeless and assisting those transitioning from jail.

“Just to be connected with people in the health community is so important, just to have that friendly face,” says Kelly.

Steps are being taken to start such a clinic. Nurses, doctors, and other professionals have offered to join her if the church obtains the city permits necessary to start the clinic. Having earned a nursing degree at BSU in 1988, she now is working on a graduate degree to become a family nurse practitioner, which would broaden her service capabilities. The church and the ELCA have raised $150,000 for building renovations, including clinic space. Overall, Kelly is hopeful the dream will come to fruition.

Several years ago, she joined a grassroots effort to create a dental clinic serving low-income patients in northern Minnesota. From that experience, she sees how providing basic services improves lives.

She has also witnessed the power of faith in changing lives. Believing in a preferential option for the poor—a view that God loves everyone, but is especially attentive to the poor—she finds evidence of that belief in the spirituality of the poor, their prayers, and their gratefulness.

“They’re so thankful for what they have,” says Kelly. “It’s just amazing to watch. We have so much to learn from the people who come to Peoples Church.”

For more information about ministries at Peoples Church, contact Carol Kelly at 218-766-4503.

Alumna Carol Kelly, a Beltrami County public health nurse, and her husband, Pastor Bob Kelly, opened their hearts to the homeless when they unlocked the doors to the Peoples Church in 1998. This unassuming house of worship in the center of Bemidji welcomes everyone, particularly the poor.

“Embracing the Homeless

ALUMNA OPENS HEART AND CHURCH TO THE NEEDY

Carol Kelly and Juanita Rodriguez, board president of the Peoples Church, share a moment of laughter inside the multi-purpose sanctuary.

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Carol Kelly

Now Kelly would like to start a front-line health clinic at the church. She already leads a holistic health ministry that offers basic counseling with a focus on body, mind, and spirit. The new clinic would refer patients to a primary care physician when needed, offer treatment or medications, update immunizations, do pregnancy testing, make prenatal care referrals, and provide education for a variety of chronic illnesses.

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Dr. Muriel Gilman is ardently about cross-country skiing. It’s a sport that reflects her driving desire to get people moving, encouraging them to adopt active lifestyles by changing their approach to well-being. A physical education, health, and sport professor, Gilman arrived at Bemidji State in 1973 as the University’s first women’s athletic trainer. A downhill skier at the time, she felt cross-country skiing was more fitting in Minnesota’s north country. She quickly discovered hitting the trails was more than fun.

“I liked going fast on skis, and I was hooked,” she recalls.

The sport became an integral part of her life. She raced regionally and nationally, winning the American Birkebeiner on her third try. She also became involved locally, serving 10 years on the Minnesota Finlandia Ski Marathon board, including one stint as president.

During this time, a deep-rooted long-term emerged, one that would meld her active lifestyles by changing their approach to well-being.

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Sometimes memories of Iraq haunt decorated U.S. Marine veteran Gabriel Wakonabo with questions he can’t answer, like why he survived the blast that killed five of seven comrades in the predawn darkness of July 6, 2004. Wakonabo’s unit was patrolling a U.S. convoy route from Abu Ghraib to Fallujah when an anti-tank mine tore through the armored vehicle. In the aftermath, one report described Wakonabo of Bemidji as the luckiest. After six weeks, most of his bruises and lacerations healed, so he could resume his duties.

“After everything that happened, I had to put it all in a box and keep the mission in focus,” recalls Wakonabo, who returned home to Bemidji with a Purple Heart when his tour of duty ended in May 2005.

But for Wakonabo, a junior pursuing degrees in English and American Indian Studies at Bemidji State, mending the spirit proved more challenging. From his perspective, being the luckiest made no sense. All of his comrades had promising futures, including one whose daughter was born just three days after his death.

“That was a life-altering experience having to deal with that loss,” reflects Wakonabo, 23 at the time of the blast. “We’ve had bad guys who hadn’t touched on issues in some 30 years who are actually taking a stab at things that may have held them down,” says Wakonabo, who feels an affinity with the struggles of many Vietnam-era veterans and appreciates their insights.

“Advocating for veterans is one way he honors their memory. At 28, he’s the youngest active member of the Bemidji American Legion. He encourages younger veterans to join since most members are World War II veterans. He also serves on the community’s Freedom Defenders Veterans Memorial board, speaks to various groups on behalf of veterans, and has helped coordinate a weekly veterans support group.

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“In fall 2010, the BSU men’s and women’s hockey programs will move to the new Bemidji Regional Event Center as members of the WCHA. The BSU women have been a member of the WCHA since 1999, the men join them on July 1.”
Nick Engel. A 1973 BSU (Bemidji State University) graduate with a physical education and health degree. Engel was a four-year letter winner in wrestling and a team captain in 1977. A three-time Northern Intercollegiate Conference champion and a four-time All-America selection, he placed at the NCAA national tournament each of his four years and was a two-time BSU All-America selection. With an overall record of 75-14-1, he set school career records in victories, pins, and points scored. He also set a single-season record for points scored. Engel is a member of the NCAA Wrestling Coaches Association NCAA Wrestling Hall of Fame.

After graduating, he spent two years at Fosston High School where he was the wrestling head coach, assistant girls' track coach, and eighth-grade football coach. He then served two years as assistant wrestling coach at Cooper High School. Currently working in construction, he lives in Plymouth with his wife, Kristi. Engel has two children.

Cherie Nett. A 1974 graduate. Knott was a standout football and wrestling athlete. The physical education and health degree major was a four-year letter winner and captured BSU football team in 1970, earning All-Northern Intercollegiate Conference honors in 1971 and 1972 and an NAIA All-District selection in 1972. A three-year letter winner in wrestling, Knott was a three-time BSU Open champion. In 1971, he was runner-up conference champion and qualified for the NCAA national tournament.

Kopetka was a three-time All-American in college baseball. As the Beavers' hitting ace, he led the Beavers in scoring and earned the team's single-game record, which was set at St. Cloud State in 1974. Earning All-Northern Intercollegiate Conference honors in 1973, 1974, and 1975, Kopetka was a 1975 Honorable Mention All-America selection. He has two of BSU's top 10 highest-scoring games for an individual and is the seventh-leading career scorer in BSU history with 1,272 points.


After graduating in 1979 with a degree in physical education and health, Kopetka embarked on a coaching and teaching career at Sault Junior High School in Elk River that spanned more than three decades. He coached boys' and girls' basketball, softball, and tennis at Sault Junior High. In 2008, he was inducted into the Elk River High School Athletic Hall of Fame. Kopetka and his wife, Cindy, live in Elk River with their two children.

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2003

Anita Pursch from Bemidji, served as a member of the University of Minnesota’s team working on the University of Minnesota’s project on the African fish species, tilapia, in West Africa. She was a member of the University of Minnesota’s project on the African fish species, tilapia, in West Africa.

2003

Togo, West Africa, from February 13 - April 10. A trip to Togo came from Crookston and Bemidji. The trip was led by Dr. Michael Jackson, a professor in the Department of Political Science.

2003

She previously worked for companies in the Twin Cities area before joining the company in 2001. She is originally from Bemidji and has been living in the area for 10 years.

2003

Her husband and children are from the area, and she is currently serving as the head girls’ basketball coach at Park Rapids High School.

2003

He joined the company in 2001 and has been responsible for developing and implementing public relations campaigns for the company.

2003

The couple resides in Chicago, IL, while Kevin is employed by Nurturing Making, a company that focuses on developing and implementing customer service and leadership activities.

2003

The couple was married last August in Lindstrom.

2003

The couple currently resides in Minneapolis and serves as the head of the company. They have two sons.

2003

Rachelle Martin

She is currently enrolled in a program to obtain a K-12 teaching certificate. She earned a master’s degree at BSU and is currently working as a substitute teacher at various schools in Crow Wing County to increase her teaching experience.

2003

The couple currently resides in Chicago, IL, where he is a special agent for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. She currently resides in Chicago, IL, where she is a special agent for the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

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He earned a master’s degree at BSU and is currently working as a substitute teacher at various schools in Crow Wing County to increase his teaching experience.

2003

He lives in Hibbing with his wife, Jane, and their children.

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The couple was married in Las Vegas, NV.

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Scot Bengtman teaches math in the Sauk School district while also serving as head coach of the school's boys' and girls' basketball teams.

1984 Cindy Reather of St. Paul is the recipient of the Dream Maker Award presented by the St. Croix Foundation, a nonprofit organization that supports girls and women in realizing their potential. Reather founded the Laura Jeavons Academy in 2007, the only all-girls charter school in Minnesota. The middle school, located in South Minneapolis, enrolls 150 girls ages 12-18 and offers social, arts, science, technology, math, and engineering. Prior to founding the Academy, Reather was a Program development consultant working with charter schools.

1985 Roy C. Booth was named from businesses, education, and service who make significant contributions to the University of Minnesota. Booth was a 2014 inductee into the Minnesota State Stroke Committee. He holds a master's degree in social work from the University of Minnesota.

1994 James Hecimovich is a social worker who serves the Minnesota Department of Human Services. He is the father of two grown children and resides with his wife, Elizabeth. He recently received a Master of Social Work degree from the University of Minnesota.

2004 John Meyer has announced that he will seek a seat as a Republican in District 18 of the Minnesota Senate. Wilson has been the Glencoe School superintendent since 2005 and previously was a city council member from 1999 to 2002. He is a commuter property owner in the city, serves as a K-8 principal, and is an instructor for homeschool students. He and his wife, Kay (Warner) '92, live in Glencoe and have two children and one granddaughter.

2009 Terry Ogorek is a member of a social work team at Mankato's River Chorale, he combined his current choir director position with a position as the CFo for 15 years and teaching in Herman schools for 40 years.

2013 Mary White is a member of the Board of Directors of the Minnesota Board of Education. She has served with TASC in a variety of capacities since 2001, and was also honored as the Minnesota Employer of the Year for 2010.

2014 Norma D. (Cedar) Quaderer '70, Bemidji, MN

2017 James E. Kindsvater '81, White Bear Lake, MN

2020 Michael J. Kovar '66, Longville, MN
### ADMISSIONS

**BSU Summer Sampler Days**
- Monday, June 21
- Monday, July 12
- Friday, July 30
- Friday, August 6

**Academic Advising and Registration**
- Freshmen: TRANSFER
  - Friday, June 18
  - Friday, July 23
- Transfer: TRAANSFER
  - Friday, June 25

### CAMPUS Calendar

- **May Session**: May 12 - May 28
- **Summer Session I**: Begins June 7
- **Summer Session II**: Starts July 12
- **Fall Semester**: Begins August 24
- **Homecoming Weekend**: October 2-3
  - Beaver Block Party
  - Evening street dance, October 2

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**Step into the Action!**

Go to [BSU Today & Events Calendar](http://www.bemidjistate.edu) at www.bemidjistate.edu for BSU updates. Look for BSU on Facebook and Twitter, too!