

Alumni Who've Made a Difference

Nestor Amarilla ('05) a theater program graduate, is making a significant contribution to social and political change in his home country of Paraguay. He is a playwright and stage director, and was nominated for a Nobel Prize in Literature in 2010 for his play *Saved by a Poem*.

Elvira Barnes-Wycough ('02, '05) works for Minnesota AARP as the community outreach/volunteer engagement and diversity director and has also been a community faculty member at Metropolitan State University. She authored the autobiography *Dancing on Black Ice* and was the governor's choice for Outstanding Women in Government in 1995.

Jodi Barthel ('10) works with school administrators, counselors and teachers regarding their concerns about respect and kindness at the nonprofit Youth Frontiers. She has also been a lunch buddy for the past two years at Partnership Academy where she serves as a mentor for a second-grade girl.

Peter Bell ('76) chaired the Metropolitan Council from 2003 to 2010 and oversaw transit growth including the Hiawatha Light Rail transit line, the Northstar Commuter Rail line and the Central Corridor Light Rail transit line. Previous positions include vice president at TCF Financial Corporation and publishing vice president at Hazelden. From 2002 until 2007, he was a member of the University of Minnesota Board of Regents.

Steven Bosacker ('83) is the Minneapolis city coordinator. He has served as chief of staff to U.S. Rep. Tim Penny, to the University of Minnesota Board of Regents and to Gov. Jesse Ventura. He has also worked for the Scottish Liberal Party in Edinburgh and did independent business consulting in Hamburg, Germany.

Dan Brevia ('94) served at the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for more than 40 years managing state parks and working to build bicycle recreation opportunities. He now serves as operations director of Minnesota's first bike sharing program, and is on the Minnesota State Nonmotorized Transportation Advisory Committee and the Minnesota State Bicycle Advisory Committee. His efforts have paid off, as Minneapolis was recently named the best biking city in the country by *Bicycling Magazine*.

Monte Bute ('91) is an associate professor at Metropolitan State. In 2010 the state universities' faculty union created the Monte Bute Award for Outstanding Government Relations Service in honor of Bute's legislative work on behalf of the union. In 2004, the Sociologists of Minnesota gave Bute its Distinguished Sociologist award. He had a first career as a grassroots organizer with a variety of advocacy organizations.

Shirley M. Cain ('85), a political science graduate, is using her education in law to make important strides in Indian country. Having served as a tribal judge for Turtle Mountain and Red Lake tribal courts and as attorney and law instructor at Turtle Mountain Tribal and Community College, Cain is now dedicating her time and expertise to community development in the Twin Cities urban Indian community. Working with the American Indian Community Development Corporation, Cain is focused on a housing project that will provide elders with affordable and appropriate housing options in South Minneapolis.

Karen Casper-Robeson ('79) was a wheelchair athlete for more than 15 years competing at local, regional, national and international levels. Recognizing the positive impact sports had on her life, Casper-Robeson then became more involved in the administrative side of the National Wheelchair Basketball Association, including serving on local conferences, national committees, the women's division and the board of directors for the association.

Senator Roger Chamberlain ('01) was elected to the Minnesota Senate in 2010 representing District 53. He works at Ameriprise Financial,

Inc. as a senior corporate tax accountant and has served in the United States Navy and the Army National Guard.

Laura Crosby ('77) is a fine art and documentary photographer. Her work explores many issues including Minnesota's homeless youth, physically challenged and disenfranchised youth and teenage prostitution. Her photographs were used in the Channel 2 NOVA documentary *Dying to Be Thin*. She has also photographed women of all ages to document the progress of time through the different stages of women's lives.

Ramona Dohman ('98) was appointed Minnesota public safety commissioner by Gov. Mark Dayton in January 2011. Prior to the appointment, she was the police chief in the city of Maple Grove. Dohman has almost 30 years of experience in law enforcement.

Irene Gomez-Bethke ('88) is a founder of *Centro Cultural Chicano*, a bilingual social service agency, and a founder and executive director of *Instituto de Arte y Cultura*, a Minneapolis cultural arts organization for Hispanics. She served on several Hispanic advisory committees under Minneapolis mayors and governors Perpich and Quie.

Patty Gordon ('96) serves as a top American Sign Language interpreter working in Minnesota, the nation and the world. She has been recognized as a Notable Woman of Minnesota in 2007 and was the Minnesota Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf's outstanding member in 2004.

Jodie Hardenbrook ('05) brings the joy of science to urban students as a middle school science teacher at Odyssey Academy in Brooklyn Center. She is also a science curriculum leader and school board chair. Prior to working at Odyssey, she worked with at-risk high school students at the Mounds View Alternative Learning Center.

Angeline Ibarra ('92) is a licensed private detective and now works for ADP Screening and Selection Services, an international company that does background checks. She recently published a book, *Tales of a Community That Was*, about the experiences of her ancestors who were displaced first from Germany and then from Russia, eventually emigrating to North Dakota.

Patsy Kahmann ('98) has produced film documentaries that won Minnesota Historical Society awards in two of the last three years. Her film *Gentle Giant on the Thin Blue Line: a Story of Officer Rick Crittenden* and a second film, *Roll Call of Heroes*, have received acclaim from local and national law enforcement organizations. She is the basketball office director for the University of Minnesota women's basketball program.

Senator Ken Kelash ('84) has represented Minnesota Senate District 63 since 2008. As a retired carpenter, union officer and regional business agent, he has also been active in several trade unions. His leadership in labor, public service and politics was recognized by the Bush Foundation and used their Leadership Fellowship award to earn his M.P.A. at Harvard.

Akmed Khalifa ('08, '10) has worked with young people in educational settings for many years, receiving two national awards from Junior Achievement. He was recognized with a proclamation from the city of Pittsburgh for his work to increase inclusiveness in business for minority-owned firms throughout Pittsburgh and the United States. He has also written several plays and a book, and is a published poet.

Ernest H. Matilla ('76) served as a city planner for 25 years in Minnesota and Louisiana before pursuing a career in emergency management at Minnesota Homeland Security. As a volunteer member of the National American Red Cross Disaster Relief Team, he performed early damage assessment in response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. He now works with the Minnesota State Patrol administering traffic and public safety grant programs.

Patricia McDonald ('87) cofounded Afton Historical Press with W. Duncan MacMillan in 1993. She has published more than 50 books that celebrate Minnesota's history, art, culture and achievements. Each year, through a donor-supported Books for Schools program, Afton Press gives thousands of books to students and educators in Minnesota classrooms. Afton Press has received numerous publishing awards.

Tabitha Mitchell ('10) has built on her extensive experience as a local community activist and a rank-and-file union member to become a frontline union organizer nationally for AFSCME International. She passionately advocates for social justice and the rights of all workers and is particularly involved in recruiting, motivating and training Next Wave union activists (age 35 and younger).

Scott Nelson ('91) is a seven-year pancreatic cancer survivor dedicated to giving back to the people who helped him by counseling newly-diagnosed patients and their caregivers, and by assisting medical researchers in the search for a cure. He is a member of the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network's Survivors Network and is also the patient advocate on the University of Minnesota pancreatic cancer research team and a member of Rapport, assisting the Mayo Clinic in their search for a cure for pancreatic cancer.

Suzanne Nielsen ('97) makes a difference as a writer, teacher, mentor, tutor and leader. Her published books contain poetry, fiction and essays and her writing frequently appears in literary journals nationally and internationally. As faculty advisor for Haute Dish, The Arts and Literary Magazine of Metropolitan State University, she revived the publication in 2005.

Senator Sandy Pappas ('86) was first elected to the Minnesota House of Representatives in 1984, serving three terms. In 1990 she was elected to the Minnesota State Senate and is now serving her sixth term representing District 65. Pappas has championed numerous efforts to ensure the exceptional quality of educational institutions and affordable access to colleges and universities.

Nieeta Presley ('06) is the executive director of the Aurora/St. Anthony Neighborhood Development Corporation (ASANDC). Presley came to ASANDC after working 16 years at HealthPartners where she led several initiatives to change how HealthPartners approaches its health care delivery to be more culturally competent and respectful. She has won two employee leadership awards.

Debra Ricci ('79) Debra's lifelong learning journey as a graduate and then faculty member at Metropolitan State has ultimately led her to a volunteer career in peace and justice activism. Debra serves as a victim-offender dialogue facilitator and circle keeper in a variety of settings in Minnesota. Since 2003, she has visited Palestine and Israel three times to study the conflict from both points-of-view. This has led her to a new career in trauma healing. Presently, she is training volunteers as first responders to victims of trauma in Isanti County.

Jenni Runte ('91) was appointed writing center coordinator at Metropolitan State in 1997. Recognizing Runte's dedication to student academic development, the university placed one center after another under her capable leadership. Today she is director of the Center for Academic Excellence, managing the Writing, Math, Science and Testing centers, leading a staff of more than 70 to serve approximately 4,000 students through nearly 12,000 tutoring and testing sessions each year.

Samuel Sam-Sumana ('02) is the vice president of Sierra Leone. He grew up in Sierra Leone and later lived for several years in Minnesota while working in information technology. After returning to his home country, he was elected vice president in 2007.

Fredda Scobey ('93) executive director of the Riverside Plaza Tenants' Association has been praised for her work on behalf of new immigrants to the community. The *Star Tribune* featured her in an article about her work to reunite an Eritrean mother, living in Riverside Plaza in Minneapolis, with her two daughters who were being detained in a refugee camp.

Iztchel Skovholt ('08) is a math teacher for fifth and sixth graders at Laura Jeffrey Academy. Originally from Honduras, her goal is to

continue teaching with enthusiasm and become a role model, not only for the Hispanic community, but for all students.

Vanessa Sheridan ('94) is a nationally-recognized transgender business expert and corporate consultant, speaker, presenter and inclusion/awareness trainer on transgender issues. She works with organizations of all sizes to help them become transgender-inclusive. She is the author of *The Complete Guide to Transgender in the Workplace*. She is also a two-time national Lambda Literary Award finalist for her pioneering books on transgender spirituality topics.

Thomas E. Smith ('98) joined the Saint Paul Police Department as an officer in 1989 and worked his way up, being named chief in 2010. He has won numerous honors, including medals of valor and commendation, as well as four achievement awards.

Esther Tako ('10), a native of Cameroon, encourages holistic health care in the nursing profession and has worked for several years as a licensed practical nurse and nursing assistant in nursing homes. She is also involved with two groups which assist youth in Cameroon.

Mary Jane Thompson ('77) has an impressive career in long-term care services. For 28 years, she worked at North Ridge Care Center in New Hope in several high-level nursing positions including nursing director. Upon leaving North Ridge, she had a health care management consulting firm. Well known as a speaker and consultant in the long-term care industry, she also served on numerous professional and community boards including the Governor's Task Force on Long Term Care, the Minnesota Board of Nursing and the Minnesota Center for Rural Health.

Yisehak Tura ('07) is the founder of the *Debre Selam Medhane Alem Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo* church parish nursing program. The program is a resource for its community that provides health screening, health education and referral services. Tura leads the program and coordinates volunteers and professionals from the community.

Segundo Velasquez ('92) founded *Mano a Mano* International Partners in 1994 to improve health care in his native Bolivia and has led the organization on a *pro bono* basis since that time. From "kitchen table" beginnings, *Mano a Mano* has grown into an organization that makes health care available to more than 700,000 rural Bolivians, builds water reservoirs and roads to increase economic well-being, and provides emergency air transport to remote regions.

Samuel Verdeja ('09) has a lifetime commitment to advance relationships between Minnesota's mainstream community and its Latino, especially Mexican, communities. He is the founder of the *Cinco de Mayo* celebrations on Saint Paul's West Side and recognized by many as the founder of the *Cinco de Mayo* movement. Verdeja is a trustee of the Metropolitan State University Foundation, a board member of Crime Stoppers of Minnesota and cofounder and chair of the Minnesota Latino Caucus. He is a U.S. Marine Corps Vietnam War veteran.

Jamie Williams ('97) works with youth and adults in Minnesota and nationally to build community, establish a family plan for child protection and help victims and offenders address crimes of severe violence. She is cofounder of the nonprofit organization The Restorative Way.

Pete K. Wong ('06) produces, edits, writes, directs and acts in movies and the theater. He has worked with youth as a coordinator, mentor and instructor with various schools and organizations, both locally and in Hong Kong. He interned as an assistant to film producer Bey Logan of B & E Productions and most recently as a teaching artist with the Children's Theatre Company's Neighborhood Bridges Program.

Jordan Ziebarth ('08) while working as a police officer for Cottage Grove responded to a call about an adult male who collapsed in cardiac arrest at his grandson's baseball game. Ziebarth arrived quickly and used an automatic external defibrillator. The man was transported to the hospital where he made a full recovery. Ziebarth is now completing paramedic training to be able to care for medical emergency patients while working as a police officer.