



**METRO STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

A member of Minnesota State

# LOWZZ



**Julie Bauch  
and Stevie  
Middlebrook '23**

**Working to improve  
access in our community**

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**Alumni give back  
during week of service**

**New spaces on campus**

SPRING 2024

Volume 16 No. 2



**HOUSTON PUZZLES**

Jerome McRoy '23  
Copic marker, ink, pencil, 9x12"



Photo by Andy King

# Office Hours

WITH GINNY ARTHUR //

Dear Alumni,

Fresh from another joyful Metro State University Commencement, I write to you filled with appreciation for all our graduates' accomplishments and optimism for their future accomplishments. This is an exciting time to be part of the Metro State community!

I was pleased to see many of you at the Breakfast at the Capitol, where we presented Sen. Sandy Pappas '86 with her well-deserved alumna of the year award. We were joined by five other legislators and had a robust discussion about critical issues facing our state. It was also a wonderful opportunity to thank our legislators for their support for our shared mission.

We are particularly excited about the North Star Promise Scholarship, funded by the legislature during the 2023 session. The new scholarship provides eligible Minnesota residents with a family Adjusted Gross Income of less than \$80,000 a path to accessible and affordable bachelor's degrees. I encourage you to share this opportunity with your family, friends, and colleagues who might benefit from the program. You and they can learn more about it at [metrostate.edu/northstar](https://metrostate.edu/northstar).

I am pleased to report that Metro State has continued to garner resources and advance partnerships to benefit our students who aspire to careers in cyber security. In February, Metro State received a \$640,000 grant from the Center for Inclusive Computing to increase degree completion for women enrolled in the undergraduate computer science program. This funding complements investments by the state and federal government to help students graduate with

the skills to obtain in-demand jobs that protect our digital infrastructure. With the signing of the Defense Appropriation Act in March, Metro State also becomes the recipient of a \$10.5 million appropriation to bolster our academic and research programs in cybersecurity. We are now the leading institution in Minnesota for this important work!

Eliminating financial barriers is one form of access, creating an environment and providing resources for students to thrive assures access that will translate to a student's success. In this issue you will read about two extraordinary members of our community, Stevie Middlebrook '23, a recent graduate of our Urban Education program, and Julie Bauch, a sign language interpreter, who has been helping students access all Metro State has to offer for more than two decades.

Finally, I share that the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board of Trustees has approved our renewed mission, vision, and values statements. My presentation was enthusiastically received by the Board of Trustees, and the importance of Metro State as a unique partner within the Minnesota State system was reaffirmed. Reflecting on their enthusiasm for our mission, it is a credit to your success and the impact that our graduates make after they leave Metro State. You are an ongoing working testament to our value, and I thank you for your partnership.

Sincerely,

Virginia "Ginny" Arthur, JD  
President

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Photo by Jeff Achen

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## VOLUME 16, NUMBER 2, Spring 2024

Metro State University *buzz* is published twice a year by Alumni Relations, University Advancement division for alumni and friends of the university. A member of Minnesota State.

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Greetings from the Metro State Alumni Association,

The 2023–24 academic year has been busy, and I am happy to update you on the Alumni Association Board of Directors’ progress over the past year and give you a preview of what to expect this summer and into the fall.

Last fall, we proudly awarded our inaugural Alumni Professional Development Scholarships to two deserving recent graduates. One recipient used the scholarship to cover the fees of professional membership in the Society of Human Resource Managers, while the other received support for renewing their Basic Life Support licensure and additional job-related licensure requirements. These awards, a testament to the foresight and dedication of past alumni board president Nancy Uden '88, past committee member Tom Krueger '17, and present members Shanasha Whitson '00 and Carol Njogu '11, have helped these alumni and strengthened our community.

Our board is committed to fortifying our alumni community through meaningful interactions, effective communication, and engaging activities. In 2022, we collaborated with the Alumni Office staff to extend the reach of the alumni magazine to all alumni. In 2023, we took a step further by conducting a readership survey to gather your valuable feedback on the magazine’s content, design, and overall appeal. We are excited to share that we are actively incorporating your suggestions into our future communications, ensuring that your voice is heard and valued.

You consistently show us that you want to learn more about advocating for your causes and organizations. We have also been gratified that many of you regularly sign up to advocate for Metro State with your local legislators. We are pursuing ways to help you grow and develop these skills through events, speakers, and training. Look for events and opportunities to get involved this fall.

We have also learned that you want to share your time and talents to support students and connect with your fellow alumni. In March, we hosted the first Metro State Alumni Week of Service. It was great to see alumni showing up to help students and their community at the blood drive and Student Parent Center Open House. We will work to keep that momentum rolling by planning a second week of service this fall to coincide with Fall Fest, the celebration for student organizations. Look for more details in an upcoming alumni newsletter and on the Metro State website.

We are also looking forward to bringing back a popular summer series of events we call Metro in Your Neighborhood. We are excited to get together over appetizers at locations around the Twin Cities. Look for details in the May alumni e-newsletter. I look forward to seeing you soon.

Sincerely,

Amanda Wong '17  
President, Metro State Alumni Board of Directors



Left and below:  
The Student Parent Center

Left: The Gordon Parks Gallery

## New spaces on campus

The spring semester saw some familiar faces in new spaces. The Student Parent Center and Food for Thought Pantry food shelf moved locations from St. John's Hall to a remodeled space in the Student Center. The on-campus bookstore moved from its location in the Library and Learning Center to a fresh space in the Student Center.

The new spaces are highly visible and easily accessible to students and community members who utilize the food shelf. The Food for Thought Pantry is made possible through a collaboration with community partner Good in the 'Hood. The pantry is open to all Metro State students and their families to access food and resources.

The pantry operates on a food choice model and students can choose their own food items. The pantry has a variety of options including rice, beans, canned foods, frozen meats, and other items. The new space allows expanded fresh food storage and refrigeration, and a walk-in freezer.

In March, the Gordon Parks Gallery also moved from the location it has occupied for 19 years on the third floor of the Library and Learning Center to a larger, more visible street-level location. The gallery held its grand opening on March 28 with the 2024 Student Salon. "This move will not only elevate the profile of the arts on campus but will also likely provide a larger viewing audience for the students' artistic achievements," said Gallery Director Erica Rasmussen.

## Metro State awarded grant to support degree completion for women in computer science

A \$640,000 grant from the Center for Inclusive Computing (CIC) at Northeastern University is enabling Metro State to increase degree completion for women enrolled in its undergraduate computer science program.

According to the National Science Foundation, in 2022, just 20% of computer science degrees in the U.S. went to women. At Metro State, that figure is currently 26.5%, up from the national average but still far below an equitable male-to-female ratio. Now, with the CIC funding in hand, Metro State computer science instructors are embarking on efforts to modify the school's current computer science curriculum and course structure and provide student tutors within the courses themselves.

"If we can make our computer science program more approachable and positive class results more achievable, we can provide a better overall Metro State experience to our female students," said Kyle Swanson, dean of Metro State University's College of Sciences, adding, "Our goal is to ensure women are not only fully represented in our computer science major but that they have the tools to thrive in the program and then go on to make meaningful contributions in the field of technology computing."

Metro State University is well known for its Office of Equity and Inclusion and its leading efforts to operationalize equity, inclusion, and anti-racism principles to improve student success. Through its Women's Support Services, Metro State provides resources and advocacy to address concerns that keep women from being successful both academically and personally. The work supported by the CIC grant is an example of the Women's Support Services in action.

Metro State anticipates introducing its revised computer science curriculum and course structure in Fall 2024. In the interim, the university is implementing extra academic support for students, including embedded tutors.

## Alumni week of service

The Metro State University Alumni Association partnered with the Career Center to host the first Metro State Alumni Week of Service. Throughout the week, alumni were welcomed back to campus to support students and learn more about getting involved. The collaboration was envisioned by Associate Director of Alumni Relations Josh Windham and Career Counselor Rachel Nihart to give alumni an opportunity to come together for meaningful activity to build fellowship, network, and learn more about what Metro State has to offer students today.

Activities included a partnership with the Student Nursing Organization to host an American Red Cross Blood Drive, an essential items drive for often-requested personal care and hygiene items for the Food for Thought Pantry, and an open house to tour the Student Parent Center's new location and learn more about their services.

"Volunteering is a wonderful way for alumni to get connected to the university and their fellow alumni," said Alumni Relations Director Kristine Hansen '07. "There are a lot of different types of volunteer opportunities at the university. We have alumni who serve as online mentors, speak on alumni career panels, help with student networking events, or support events as hosts. Alumni volunteers really add value to the student experience, and I often hear back that they enjoy the opportunity to connect with each other."

Check the Metro State events calendar later this summer for information about the Fall 2024 Week of Service. If you are interested in serving as a volunteer, contact Josh Windham at [alumni.relations@metrostate.edu](mailto:alumni.relations@metrostate.edu).

# Alumni spotlight

STEVIE MIDDLEBROOK '23 //////////////////////////////////////



## The next generation of teachers for the deaf

**By Belo Miguel Cipriani**

When someone has a wide range of interests, selecting a career path can be quite the journey. For Metro State alum Stevie N. Middlebrook, class of '23, choosing a major involved meeting professionals from several industries. "My journey of selecting my major was a long one," she said, "which is why I waited a little too long to complete school. I was contemplating between being a school social worker, personal trainer, or a teacher for deaf and hard-of-hearing kids."

While exploring the social worker and personal trainer options led to some great insights, in the end, it was motherhood that steered Middlebrook to her career path. "I was already working at a school as a paraprofessional when I was thinking of returning to school, and then after I had my son in 2016, it just clicked that I wanted to become a teacher, especially after being able to teach him myself," she said.

In addition to having her son be a catalyst to becoming a teacher, Middlebrook is quick to note that her own experiences with the education system also fueled her newfound path. "I did not have a Black teacher until I got into college," she said. "I also know there is a need for Black Deaf teachers, and I wanted students to have someone who looked like them as they grow up."

Energized by the company of kids, Middlebrook decided to major in Early Childhood Urban Education, which focuses on birth-to-third-grade instruction. The program had her taking courses in a wide range of topics, such as a course titled Biology, Race, and Racism, and another in children's literature; the latter being her favorite, as she loves to read chapbooks and perform songs in ASL.

"Jake Knaus was my favorite instructor because he was very understanding and supportive of me as a student and parent," she said. "He was inclusive and made sure to include important aspects of Deaf children and literature in his classes."

"While she was not a professor," Middlebrook continued, "Julie Bauch ran the interpreting program, and she helped give me so much access. She was patient and flexible, always willing to work around my schedule."

Along with the interpreting services, Middlebrook also credits her academic success to the Metro State Student Parent program. "They had many services to help serve student parents, and I truly appreciated the personalized holiday gifts they gave me and my son," she said.

In Fall 2023, Middlebrook received the prestigious President's Outstanding Student Award, a recognition that filled her with joy. "It felt amazing to receive the award because it was a long journey to get to where I am today," she said. "Throughout my college journey,



**Left:** Stevie and her son at the December 2023 Commencement ceremony. **Above:** Stevie accepting the President's Outstanding Student Award for the School of Urban Education.

I had to take time off several times because I needed to take care of my son's and my needs, to find stability in my life, find a safe home, and to heal from the hardship I was experiencing at that time. But receiving this award showed me that no matter what, if you persevere, you can still accomplish so many things. It is just a reminder that no matter how many people try to block your path and don't believe in you, it is up to you to pave through it and overcome all of the obstacles."

As the first Deaf student to receive this award, Middlebrook encourages students with disabilities to be proud of their identity. "Do not be afraid to advocate for yourself; be proactive in your needs, and educate others on your disability," she said. "Use the resources that Metro State provides; I promise that they will help you in any way that they can."

After graduating from Metro State, Middlebrook is now working as a first-year 2nd grade teacher at Metro Deaf School, which she loves. She also is happy to have more time for her hobbies, such as salsa dancing. Middlebrook is thinking about grad school, and her future is bright.

*Belo Miguel Cipriani is a blind award-winning author and prize-winning journalist. His writing has appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle, HuffPost, and Business Insider. When he is not writing or editing, he can be found playing with his guide dog, Limo. Learn more at [belocipriani.com](http://belocipriani.com).*

# Accessing community, building support

JULIE BAUCH, AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER //

By Matthew Spillum '06

**Y**ou may have seen Julie Bauch in action dozens of times, perhaps most prominently at a Commencement: standing at the edge of the stage, clearly and calmly signing the words of the featured speakers. For the hearing attendees, she is an indirect window into what Metro State means when it stresses accessibility. For those dependent on American Sign Language (ASL) communication, however, she and her fellow interpreters are a lifeline, an access point to the words of others. And at a university, there is no shortage of words to be interpreted.

More than twenty-five years ago, when Bauch became Metro State University's first (and at that time only) staff ASL interpreter, it was a far cry from the person who took "a couple semesters of ASL when I was doing my undergrad. I really enjoyed it," says Bauch, "but I was far too stubborn to switch my major, because it would take much longer." Still, that exposure stayed with her as an interest even after graduating and going into the profession of vocational rehabilitation. "I had

worked with some Deaf clients, and I realized, if they had access to communication, they could make decisions about their lives, and that was the point—I wanted to provide clients that access so they could do things for themselves."

Once Bauch made that decision, she returned for an additional degree from St Catherine University. She completed the Sign Language Interpreter program, "I was interested in what I needed to become fluent, since two semesters of ASL does not make you an interpreter, as Bauch notes: "around 90% of deaf students have hearing parents, meaning the birth of their child is the first time many of them have met a deaf person. Given that the percentage of parents that actually become fluent signers is not very high, a lot of deaf folks are experiencing what they call language deprivation." Breaking through that deprivation to empower people to access information and make life decisions "is really what motivated me to become an interpreter."

Originally Bauch wanted to teach Deaf students in a K-12 setting but realized that Deaf and DeafBlind students needed Deaf role models as teachers. She



Julie Bauch conversing with Jessica Eggert, a student in the College of Individualized Studies

realized that interpreting was a much better fit and never looked back.

Prior to arriving at Metro State, Bauch spent six years at Century College while finishing interpreting school and learned many of the other aspects of higher education accessibility. "I was the assistant director of the Accessibility Office and providing other kinds of support: alternative text formats, recording textbooks on tape so students could access them, and things like that. My position flipped to mainly interpreting when I started at Metro State."

Still, that broad background in accessibility services served Bauch well at Metro State, providing skills for her to help build the capacity of the interpretation team and the broader network in the community. Which, she notes, is becoming increasingly important, "One thing that really struck me recently is the results of a survey by the professional organization, Minnesota Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (MRID)—about 50% of working interpreters are looking at either leaving the field or retiring within the next five years. So, there is already a shortage. I feel that Metro State has been fortunate, with connections to a lot of interpreters, particularly with my serving on the statewide MRID and being involved in the broader community. I have a lot of good contacts, so we don't really experience the effects of this shortage, but that's because we have taken the time to build those contacts and I think that is a benefit to our students."

As an example of Metro State's networking prowess, Bauch points to a recent experience at a summit held by Interpreting Forward 2030 group, gathering stakeholders from across the Deaf, DeafBlind, state commission members, educators, and interpreters for the purpose of discussing improving interpreting services and accessibility at this challenging time. "When I looked around the room, I just got goosebumps," she says. "There was a recent student from Metro State there, other past students in important stakeholder roles and positions in the community. One was working as a Deaf interpreter. I saw so many graduates using their degrees, so many interpreters I've worked with."

One of the pipelines for this strong collection of connections in the interpreting community that Bauch highlights is an articulation agreement with Saint Paul College, bringing their two-year ASL Interpreting graduates to finish their degree in the College of Individualized Studies. Here, she says, those students can "finish their interpreting degrees and create something more, looking at social justice and access for the Deaf community. They can look at interpreting in theater or medical contexts, for example, really focusing on the area of their particular interest."

Bauch, who serves as an advisor for these students, focuses a lot of her efforts on building those crucial community connections for and with them. "I may not have all the answers a student is looking for, but

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12





Julie Bauch signing at Commencement

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

I usually know where to send people to find out. I really encourage interpreters to make connections to the community because that is how they get better. We often mentor interpreting interns from Saint Paul College and other universities with interpreter education programs, too, so when I see folks that interned here or finished their degree here out working in the community, man, that's powerful."

For all the growth of connections and community touch points, little of Bauch's work would have had as much impact without Metro State putting resources behind accessibility. "When I started, there was just a single director, and then me," she says. "Now, the Center for Accessibility Resources has Kristin (Burgess), the director, two other staff, and our three interpreters. We can collaborate a lot more with each other, with other offices around campus."

This ability to make the whole Metro State experience more accessible is the result of that combination of dedicated resources and institutional knowledge being brought to bear, for which Bauch must be given a great deal of credit. "What I love about being a staff interpreter is that I know the university, and I know what gives our students better access," she says. "When we pull in a freelance interpreter, they might not know

anything about Metro State culture and resources, and if the Deaf person doesn't bring their concern out or the hearing person doesn't recognize that need, our student might not get referred to where they need to go. And I realized that early on, like when I would go to interpret writing tutoring assignments—and English is a second language to a Deaf person, and they often write like someone who doesn't have English as a first language. So tutors would sometimes say they weren't sure what something meant, I saw that disconnect and could help back up and more clearly interpret what the student was trying to communicate by having the student sign in ASL what they wrote so I could voice it in spoken English for the writing tutor. Then the tutor can understand the student's point and can work with the student to make the concept clear in written English." Bauch's work with Tutoring and Testing Services led to creating a best practice of allowing longer tutoring session time slots for students needing interpretive services, and the ability to schedule regular sessions with the same tutor to provide consistency.

Kristin Burgess '11, Center for Accessibility Resources director, certainly highlights Bauch's wealth of experience and institutional knowledge. "Julie's wealth of experience as an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter has benefited many, many people over the years that she has been at Metro State," she says. "Her ability to effectively navigate multiple languages and cultures means that students, staff, and visitors can access a variety of spaces while at Metro. It is in large part due to Julie's skills and reputation within the Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard-of-hearing communities, Metro State has become a school of choice. Julie does a great job of building relationships with students so that she has a strong understanding of their needs and preferences. This helps her to coordinate interpreting services for those students that provide not only outstanding communication access but also consistency in service delivery. She is also an educator as she has helped many staff and faculty navigate new ways of doing their work to ensure that our Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard-of-hearing community members have equitable access. Metro State is fortunate to have Julie as a part of our team."

Over her years at Metro State, Bauch can point to many highlights. "When (Archbishop) Desmond Tutu was on



campus in 2008, I was able to interpret for him. Just last year, I had to work with the secret service to get background checks and clear interpreters working with Vice President Kamala Harris," While the rush of interpreting for important public figures is clearly exciting, she also points to the deeper, above-and-beyond work she has put in over the years that makes this job rewarding. "We have had Deaf students that are immigrants and they experience language challenges like their hearing peers that are immigrants. Some of the additional challenges include limited access to education and language in their country before moving to the USA, parents that don't speak English or sign American Sign Language or the sign language of their country of origin. To bridge that gap, particularly in literacy, I would at times literally go through paragraph by paragraph of a textbook to interpret assignments."

This in-depth connection has shown Bauch another aspect of the interpretation world: the cultural connection side of working with many Deaf and DeafBlind students. "We have some students who might not have a lot of experience working with interpreters or in a hearing institution," she says. "Maybe they went to the Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf in Faribault, or Metro Deaf School. On the other hand, maybe they were mainstreamed, and had just the interpreter they worked with and maybe one other student in the school, who was probably in a different grade. So I've realized we need to make time for these students to sit around and talk about what they are learning in their native language of ASL, because that's how we process things, and foster support relationships in and out of the classroom."

These challenges, Bauch notes, are exacerbated in a world of remote technology. "When we started using Facetime or Skype, we could have a dedicated tablet that students could contact interpreters with if they had a quick interaction that they needed support for, and that helped. Once the pandemic came around,

though, it was a steep learning curve for everyone. The spontaneity and access can be great, but a lot of Deaf folks really prefer in person—it is easier interpreting in person for sure."

Bauch's message to alumni is simple: pass on the good experiences you've had at Metro State, whether or not they required accessibility accommodations. "We have alumni that are coming back to campus to hold events in the Deaf community, we collaborate with the Minnesota Association of Deaf Citizens (MADC) to host events like Deaf Awareness Day, and Youth Transition Day for youth attending Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf, Metro Deaf School, and other students in mainstream education classes to give them

**We need to make time for these students to sit around and talk about what they are learning in their native language of ASL, because that's how we process things, and foster support relationships.**

**—Julie Bauch**

a picture of some possible next steps, show them how they can access services and empowering them to learn how to advocate for themselves." None of this would be possible without an institutional dedication to accessibility and the hard work of connection-building by dedicated staff like Julie Bauch making the experiences of Deaf, DeafBlind and hard-of-hearing students better. "I feel really lucky," she says, "that after this many years I still really like what I do."

# Ways to give

## The Metro Fund—helping realize potential



Over the course of several months, Metro State conducted a comprehensive review of its mission, vision, and values. Now the work begins to put the mission, vision, and values into action. The Metro Fund is the tool that empowers the university to achieve this work.

A gift to the Metro Fund creates meaningful experiences for our students and alumni. In January, Metro State hosted an Alumni Career Experience event where attendees connected with local employers, reviewed resumes, and received free professional headshots. In March, Metro State hosted a week of service. During this time, the university hosted a blood drive, an open house for its Student Parent Center, and donated essential items and gently-used clothing. In both instances, the Metro State community showed up and put our values into action.

Your gift to our university directly contributes to the education and empowerment of future leaders, innovators, and trailblazers who will solve tomorrow's challenges. This support drives progress in our society

by removing financial barriers for students who can strengthen their talents and reach their full potential. An opportunity exists to create real, tangible change in the lives of our students and, in turn, their communities.

More broadly, a gift to the Metro Fund creates a university where students embrace their strengths, gain critical knowledge, and create a better community for all of us. Your gift will help to amplify the voices of marginalized communities and drive systemic change and social mobility. As an alum, your contribution will advance causes that align with your values and priorities. Partner with us by making a gift that helps translate talent into success, transforms local communities, and supports social mobility.

Sincerely,

Will Ruckel  
Director of Annual Giving and Stewardship

## Amplify your impact!

Imagine the difference your gift could make when doubled by your employer. Participating in your company's matching gift program is an easy way to maximize the value of your gift without any additional cost to you. It's a win-win opportunity to leverage corporate philanthropy to support students.

Join us in shaping the future and leaving a lasting legacy of excellence. Together, let's unlock the full potential of our collective impact. Submit your donation to your company's matching gift program today and witness the profound difference it makes in the lives of our students and the vitality of our institution. To find out if your company will match your gift visit [metrostate.edu/give/ways-to-give](https://metrostate.edu/give/ways-to-give) and choose the matching gifts tab.

# President's outstanding graduates

Each semester, members of the faculty and academic advisors nominate undergraduate and graduate students from their respective colleges to be recognized at the President's Outstanding Student Award reception. The students celebrated their awards with family, friends, and the university community at a reception held on November 18, 2023, on the Saint Paul campus.



Photo by Craig Lassig

**Back row:** Provost Amy Gort, Kevin Day, Benjamin Hanson, Farris Hassan, Abshir Mohamed Fatule, Julius Mensah, Chris Buerkle, President Ginny Arthur

**Front row:** Andre Anderson, Ahou Konan, Brenna Kolstad, Stevie Middlebrook, Tim Mariette

### FALL 2023 RECIPIENTS

#### Undergraduate Degree Award Recipients

- Ahou Konan**, College of Management, Business Administration
- Andre Anderson**, College of Individualized Studies, Individualized Degree
- Benjamin Hanson**, College of Sciences, Computer Science
- Brenna Kolstad**, College of Liberal Arts, Social Science
- Tim Mariette**, College of Community Studies and Public Affairs, Social Work
- Julius Mensah**, College of Nursing and Health Science, Nursing RN to BSN
- Stevie N. Middlebrook**, School of Urban Education, Urban Early Childhood Studies

#### Graduate Degree Award Recipients

- Chris Buerkle**, College of Nursing Health, Doctor of Nursing Practice
- Kevin Day**, College of Sciences, Cyber Operations
- Abshir M. Fatule**, College of Community Studies, and Public Affairs, Advocacy and Political Leadership
- Farris Hassan**, College of Management, Master of Business Administration

## Cultivating growth

**Pam Hartley '97** became a Master Gardener as a second career. She has restored more than an acre of prairie at the home she shares with her husband. The flowers that bloom each year are the living testament to a gardener's care and her thoughtful investment in the health of our ecosystem. As an alum of Metro State and a donor Pam is helping students grow toward their aspirations and cultivate a rich ecosystem where we can all thrive.

### How did you learn about Metro State?

After moving to Saint Paul, I realized that to advance my career I had to have a college degree. I had almost three years of credits from prior studies. Going to Metro State was attractive because it was the only place that would accept my prior credits. It was a smaller school and that made sense too.

### Is there a class or faculty member that stands out to you looking back on your time at Metro State?

I was convinced I could not pass algebra. I remember my professor was really excellent and helped me become comfortable with math. He was very patient and answered many questions. Incredibly I ended up receiving an A and that grade really boosted my confidence!

### What was important about your Metro State education?

I was determined to finish my BA, but I couldn't be out of the workforce for long. I worked with an advisor, and the school helped put together a plan to finish my degree quickly.

### How did Metro state experience shape your career?

I was immediately hired as a Business Analyst, and the person who interviewed me said that he was impressed that I went back and completed my degree. I would not have gotten that position without my education



Pam Hartley in her garden

at Metro. My income immediately increased by 30%. Metro State was instrumental in furthering my career.

### What inspires you to give back to Metro State?

I feel like I was lucky to attend Metro, and it is rewarding to help other students achieve their goals. I intentionally left the requirements for the scholarship to be very open because each student has their own goals. Those goals vary from person to person and within the context of what is happening in the world around the student. I want low-income students to have the chance to live out their dreams.

### What impact do you hope your donations have on the university and its students?

I hope that my donations will help other students to pay it forward by helping someone else. I take personal satisfaction in knowing that this scholarship will grow for many years giving others an opportunity for growth and success.

*Last year the Pamela M. Hartley Endowed Scholarship helped students pursue their ambitions to become nurses, mental health professionals, and addiction recovery professionals while balancing work, family, and school. If you would like to explore ways that you can help students though an endowed scholarship, contact Melissa Musliner at [melissa.musliner@metrostate.edu](mailto:melissa.musliner@metrostate.edu).*

By Joshua Windham

### College of Community Studies and Public Affairs

**Damon Bitney '99**, Prior Lake, was recently promoted to deputy chief for the Bloomington Police Department. Deputy Chief Bitney joined the Bloomington Police Department in 2000.

**Todd Connaughty '09**, Winona, has joined the caregivers at Winona Health Psychiatric and Counseling Services, providing mental health therapy for people ages 13 and older. Connaughty has done extensive work with individuals who are LGBTQ+, those diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, people who have experienced trauma and those who have challenges with substance abuse.

**Lul Gatluak '13**, Saint Paul, published his new book, "South Sudan's Endless Sorrows," a comprehensive and extensively researched look at the complex history of South Sudan and its struggle for freedom.

**Tyler Gentry '18**, Cannon Falls, is currently the skills development specialist at the Minnesota Department of Human Services. Gentry is currently pursuing a master's degree in human services at Capella University.

**Saynab Jama '20**, Alexandria, Virginia, serves as a special assistant for boards and commissions in the Office of Presidential Personnel. Prior to this role, Jama served as

a health legislative intern for U.S. Senator Tina Smith.

**Matt Langer '00**, Saint Paul, recently accepted a position as director of global policing for the International Association of Chiefs of Police. Col. Langer has served with the Minnesota State Patrol for nearly 25 years.



**Ellen Paulseth '09**, Wyoming, recently retired as finance director for the City of Maplewood. Paulseth's career in public service spans 41 years for various cities and counties in Minnesota.

**Kristi Pogatchnik '15**, Saint Paul, recently became the development director at Girls on the Run—Minnesota.

**Whitney Ridlon '10**, Chisholm, recently became the community development director at Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation. Ridlon will oversee the Community Development team and the agency's work supporting the regions towns, communities, tribal governments, and nonprofits.

**Thi Synavone '20**, Savage, is the executive director of Standpoint, an organization focused on addressing domestic abuse. Synavone uses her background as a Laotian refugee to create safe space for women to talk openly about their experience with domestic violence.



**Samia Young '17**, Twinsburg, Ohio, has been selected to the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity's Class of Pathfinders for 2024.

### College of Individualized Studies

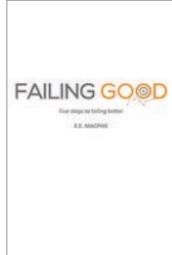
**Misty Coonce '06**, Saint Paul, was selected by Governor Tim Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan to serve as the ombudsperson for the Office of Foster Youth. As ombudsperson, Coonce will lead the office to investigate decisions, acts, and other matters related to the health, safety, and welfare of youth in foster care.

**Errol Edwards '14**, Saint Paul, was the winner of the 2024 Minnesota School Counselor of the Year Award. Edwards is the school counselor at St. Anthony Park Elementary School in Saint Paul. Each time he enters the school, Edwards reminds himself to focus fully on his students' needs, to help them reach their full potential.

**Mai Ker Hang '17**, Saint Paul, recently became the owner of Great Harvest Bread Company, after the previous owner decided to retire after 30 years. Hang is the first Hmong owner of a Great Harvest Bread Company franchise in the U.S. Hang began helping at Great Harvest during the 2020 holiday season.

Note: All towns are in Minnesota unless otherwise noted

# News and notes



**Kirsten Johnson '10**, Richfield, published her first book, "Failing Good: Five Steps to Failing Better." The book lays out a five-step plan to fail better, as applied to various life situations throughout Johnson's life. You can order the book on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, or any other bookstores across the country.

**Mike Langevin '89**, Clearwater, Florida, recently retired as a financial advisor for the past 20 years. Langevin has worked at Edward Jones, Wells Fargo Advisors, and E\*Trade. He was a 7-time recipient of the Twin Cities Five Star Wealth Manager Award.

**Robert Spottswood '87**, South Burlington, Vermont, will be retiring after many years as a psychologist. Spottswood has focused on relational therapy for children struggling with secure attachment. Spottswood is also a founding member of the international Dyadic Development Psychotherapy Institute.

**Carolyn Wiger '10**, Hugo, has a new podcast called, "Let's Get Tribal: A Survivor Podcast," about her experience as a contestant on the reality show "Survivor".

## College of Liberal Arts



**Nancy Bagshaw-Reasoner, '11**, Saint Paul, finished her novel, "Philip Roth Loves Me," a fictionalized memoir of the years 1964 through 1973, a period that resonated with Bagshaw-

Reasoner, reflecting our turbulent national condition today. The book is available on Amazon or anywhere books are sold.

**Edwina Dorbor, '21**, Minneapolis, is a contestant on season 28 of "The Bachelor" on ABC. Dorbor is a Liberian fashion designer, content creator, entrepreneur and owner of a lingerie and crochet business. She currently resides in Atlanta, Georgia.

**Patricia Kahmann, '98**, Minneapolis, published a memoir, "House of Kahmanns," about a lively family of a dozen kids whose family bonds are torn apart by sudden loss and separation. You can find the book online or anywhere books are sold.

**Lamin Sabally '10**, Brooklyn Center, recently graduated with a doctoral degree in education with a concentration in Higher Educational Leadership from Bethel University.



**Kirsten Solberg '07**, Medford, Wisconsin, published a fantasy novel, "Remnant: The Palimar Saga: Book One," a gripping adventure where immortals

walk among us, and every action carries weighty consequences. You can find the book anywhere books are sold.

## College of Management



**John Appleby '99**, Saint Paul, is the owner of Jaamber Jingles, a company that creates captivating jingles for clients in and

around northwest Wisconsin and the Twin Cities metro area. Appleby recently wrote and recorded a jingle for the Metro State Alumni Association. Listen for it in future alumni video projects.

**Sthitie Bom '99**, Saint Paul, has been recognized for 2024 Notable Women in Manufacturing. Bom has been a pioneer in the field of data and analytics, consistently driving transformative change in advanced manufacturing, through her work at Seagate Technology. In addition, Bom has contributed to multiple studies led by the National Academy of Sciences.

**Gretchen Kelly '95**, Marine on Saint Croix, was recognized as CEO of the Year by Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal. Kelly is the chief financial officer for Nystrom, Inc. Kelly has been instrumental in helping the company navigate pandemic challenges, from managing the increasing cost of raw materials to problem solving supply chain disruption.

**Nadia Mohamed '20**, Saint Louis Park, made history after becoming the first Somali immigrant elected as mayor of a U.S. city, and the first Black mayor of Saint Louis Park. Mohamed entered politics because she saw the need for voices like hers.

**Akinyi Williams '03**, Minneapolis, was recently featured in the Star Tribune highlighting her role as the Kenyan-born CEO of Cheyenne Mortgage Capital.

**Maisee Xiong '19**, Maplewood, was recently hired as director of personal trust at Capital First. Prior to joining Capital First, Xiong was the director of operations at First Trust Company.

## College of Nursing and Health Sciences



**Brett Anderson '14**, Saint Paul, was named to the 2024 Minneapolis/Saint Paul Business Journal's 40 under 40 list. Anderson leads Ecumen's integrated clinical, innovation, and operation areas, driving holistic leading-edge solutions for health and societal challenges in our communities.

Anderson joined Ecumen in 2014 first as a graduate school intern and then clinical director.

**Kathryn Sams '03**, Saint Helena Island, South Carolina, recently joined Beaufort Memorial's medical assisted therapy team. Sams is a board-certified nurse practitioner, and will engage patients in addressing physical, behavioral, and social issues related to substance abuse.

## In Memoriam

**Jamal Abdur-Salaam '12**, Minneapolis

**Verna Alt '91**, Minneapolis

**Robert Bauer '94**, Northfield

**Larry Beach '89**, Stewartville

**Patrick Beckermann '84**, Centerville, Ohio

**Marie Boler '76**, Saint Paul

**Shannon Buerger '03**, Wausau, Wisconsin

**Michael Busch '75**, Jordan

**Grady Butts '74**, Lakeville

**Rene Chamberlin '11**, Burnsville

**Joyce Connolly '76**, Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin

**James Crawford '74**, Lino Lakes

**Mark Dandurand '88**, Eagan

**Marilyn Eastep '92**, Minneapolis

**Rita Franchett '90**, Minneapolis

**John Hawthorne '92**, Saint Paul

**Richard Hayes '86**, Brainerd

**Roger Henningsgaard '83**, Bloomington

**William Huttner '76**, Bloomington

**Peter Jackson '18**, Cave Creek, Arizona

**Lorraine Jones '77**, Battle Creek, Michigan

**Kenneth Kortz '82**, Minneapolis

**Lois Kozberg '74**, Minnetonka

**Sue Laxdal '90**, Hilton Head Island, South Carolina

**Paul Livingston '78**, Canby

**Iлона McCauley '92**, Coon Rapids

**Helen Milne '76**, Smithfield, Virginia

**David Nelson '80**, Burnsville

**Catherine Odell '89**, Homosassa, Florida

**Therese Pendleton '07**, West Saint Paul

**Teresa Reynolds '90**, Shoreview

**David Smiglewski '17**, Granite Falls

**Robert Ulrich '81**, Chadwick, Illinois

**Nancy VanBenthuyzen '92**, Minneapolis

**Jeanne Walz '94**, North Branch

**Maude Ruth Watson '83**, Andover

**Ruth Williams Bennett '80**, West Bend, Wisconsin

**Phyllis Wilson '89**, Mahtomedi



## Share your news

Starting a business? Getting a promotion? Retiring? Share your big news with us, and you may see yourself in *buzz* magazine. Email your news item and a photograph of yourself to [alumni.relations@metrostate.edu](mailto:alumni.relations@metrostate.edu).

## For the benefit of others: Jeremiah Rotich '13

By Padra Lor '23

“Stand out, and do what is needed for the benefit of others,” is the advice given to alumni and students alike by Jeremiah Rotich '13, one of the helpful staff members at Gateway Student Services. As a member of the Gateway staff, Rotich's passion for helping others is utilized to the highest degree. As a graduate of Metro State with a master's in public and nonprofit administration, along with his recent completion of his doctorate program, Rotich's job allows him to aid in student success, something he finds deeply rewarding when he reflects upon his experience at Metro State and the abundant support he received, and he hopes to give back to Metro State.

Rotich hasn't only put his love for helping others into action at Metro State, but also in his home country of Kenya, where he is currently building a community center in his village. The community center will have a health clinic, library, fitness center, and computer lab for all. Most excitingly, the library has finished construction. Rotich started this nonprofit to give back, and though the library is the only thing in completion, the effects are already being felt. The community is excited about some young students coming by to help with construction by moving the bricks one by one, in



Jeremiah Rotich '13

anticipation of the completion of the community center. In addition, Rotich's funds for the community center are helping the nearby schools if there is a lack of resources, such as providing funds for exams and test papers, or providing girls with sanitary pads if their parents are not able to buy them for their children.

Rotich visits Kenya twice a year to oversee construction in person and provide feedback. In 2023, Rotich visited Kenya with a group of 14 volunteers from both the Maple Grove and Brooklyn Park rotary clubs. They were able to interact with students who are using the library and provide their support in any way possible during their trip.

There is still much construction to undertake but Rotich and all who are involved are excited for the outcome of this community center. Rotich has gotten lots of help in his life, and he hopes to give back, knowing that our individual actions affect those around us. He is extremely grateful for all the help that he has had when it comes to this project, from students at Metro State who help by donating the extra money they have, to the flexibility of his supervisor who knows how much this project means to him. Rotich hopes that his inspirational story is a call for all of us to do what we can to help others as that same love, support, and help will come back to you.

## Haute Dish

By Dina Inderlee '07

It's Tax Day, 2020. Due to a pandemic, I'm sitting in my pop-up office inside my home staring out my picture window. It's my first day of remote work. I'm mad, sad, and utterly unsure of what's happening, so I do something I've never done before. I start writing a story. It's a short story expressing my feelings about working from home and the adorable grey squirrel with no tail as he hops around the yard. Then I email this “Day 1 in Exile” diary entry to my coworker friends. A view from my window to share, connecting us while we're so far away from each other. The next day, I did it again, and again until it became a daily routine lasting longer than the pandemic, and catapulting my love of creative writing in which I received a bachelor's degree in December 2023.

Within a few semesters of starting my degree, I was encouraged by my creative writing professor to submit one of my assignments to *Haute Dish Arts and Literary Magazine* at Metro State. I thought my professor was insane. All I could think of is that my writing isn't good enough for publication in a magazine, but I did it anyway and it was accepted. My heart leapt as I jumped out of my seat and ran down the hall letting everyone within earshot know, “I'm a published writer!” It was a warm feeling only surpassed by the applause I received when I read the same piece at the *Haute Dish* reading a few weeks later.

So, what's *Haute Dish*? *Haute Dish* is a collection of stories, poems, and visual arts created by Metro State students, alumni, and staff. The *Haute Dish* editorial staff, made up of Metro State students and alumni, review each submission for publication. Every semester, as co-managing editor with Bryant Rooney '24, I get to read so many wonderful stories and poems, and view amazing photographs, paintings, and other visual arts. I see the emotions each artist puts into their work and the joy they bring to so many who read and hear the stories and poems read aloud. Creativity is abundant at Metro State.



Bryant Rooney '24

Everyone has a story. Imagine your story published and bringing joy to others. Consider being one of the students, alumni, and staff who submit works to *Haute Dish*. The submission window for the fall issue is open until August 12, 2024. Submissions are accepted at [hautedish.metrostate.edu](https://hautedish.metrostate.edu). The editorial staff and I look forward to seeing all the ways Metro State alumni express their creativity. Just look out your window.

### Excerpt from **A Tapestry of Resilience**

By Izzy Wagner

Memories, like petals, fragile and fair,  
Blossom in the garden of despair.  
Yet in the soil of sorrow, seeds of hope,  
A balm for wounds, a way to cope.

Through the darkness, resilience blooms,  
A testament to strength that grief consumes.  
For in the heartache, a sacred art,  
A healing rhythm, a brand-new start.



# From the Director

KRISTINE HANSEN '07 //

As President Arthur shared in her letter, Metro State University recently completed a deliberative, inclusive process to examine and restate the mission, vision, and values for the university. It has been gratifying work that brings focus to what is important and reestablishes our collective “Why.” Being firm in our purpose makes it possible for us to plan and holds us accountable to live up to our aspirations to operationalize our promise to students. All the values matter, and I would like to take a moment to call out one in particular: Transformation.

As an alum, the concept of transformation rings true. I have seen it in my life and in the lives of my fellow alumni. A week

doesn't pass when I don't talk to an alum who tells me about the transformation Metro State made in their lives. We articulate the concept in the mission, the vision, and as a distinct value. It is a constant and guiding principle of our work. One might say transformation is our North Star.

Examining the language more closely, “education as a catalyst for their personal transformation.” A catalyst lowers barriers to make it easier for new bonds and new substances to form. Lowering barriers leads to transformation. When you think about the barriers you have faced then think about the transformation when you have risen above, broken through, or found a way around that barrier,

do you see our values at work in your life?

Your life, work, and success are living examples of our values. Alumni are our “why,” and we are proud to have been part of your journey.

Take care,

Kristine Hansen '07  
Director of Alumni Relations

Visit [metrostate.edu/about/mission](https://metrostate.edu/about/mission) to read our mission, vision, and value statements and hear from alumni, students, faculty, staff, and community members about what Metro State means to them.

## Transformation: A Metro State University value

We accelerate social mobility and economic advancement of learners and graduates, their families, and their communities by providing a dynamic and affordable education that helps them achieve their aspirations. Learners see a Metro State University education as a catalyst for their personal transformation.

# FREE TUITION

is possible at Metro State University //

## North Star Promise Scholarship Program



Beginning in Fall 2024, the North Star Promise Scholarship program will provide eligible Minnesota residents a tuition-free path to a bachelor's degree. The North Star Promise Scholarship program is a “last-dollar” program, covering the balance of tuition and fees remaining after other scholarships, grants, stipends, and tuition waivers are applied.

### Eligibility

New and continuing students are eligible. Metro State anticipates approximately one in five of its current undergraduate students would be eligible under this program. To be eligible for the North Star Promise Scholarship program, individuals must:

- Be a Minnesota resident
- Have a family Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) as reported on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or Minnesota Dream Act Application below \$80,000\*
- Attend a Minnesota public higher education institution or Tribal College
- Not be in default on a state or federal student loan
- Be enrolled taking at least one credit
- Meet Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) standards
- Have not already earned a bachelor's degree

- Be enrolled in a program or course of study that applies to an undergraduate degree, diploma, or certificate

*\*AGI equates to an annual family combined salary of approximately \$100,000-\$110,000. AGI is used to refer to the line on U.S. taxes that will be used to evaluate for scholarship eligibility. Depending on a household's income exclusions from U.S. tax forms (such as standard or itemized deductions taken), a household or family income could be quite a bit more than its associated AGI.*

### How to apply

1. Apply for admission to Metro State University—you will need to be admitted to be eligible for the North Star Promise Scholarship program.
2. Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or Minnesota Dream Act Application.

There is no additional application beyond the FAFSA or Minnesota Dream Act Application. Metro State will assess your eligibility on a term-by-term basis and award North Star Promise Scholarships to all eligible students.

Visit [metrostate.edu/northstar](https://metrostate.edu/northstar) for more information on the North Star Promise Scholarship program.

Follow the Metro State Alumni Association on Facebook. [facebook.com/MetroStateAlumni/](https://facebook.com/MetroStateAlumni/)

Connect with us on LinkedIn. [linkedin.com/groups/12522694/](https://linkedin.com/groups/12522694/)



*Metropolitan State University,  
A member of Minnesota State*

# Spread the word Bachelor's degree. Tuition free.

The **North Star Promise Scholarship** program at Metro State University is a new opportunity for eligible undergraduate students to qualify for free tuition!



Find eligibility information at  
**metrostate.edu/northstar**