



Sustaining St. Olaf

Greg '82 and Nancy Clark Carlson '82 Advance the Mission of the College

BY SUZY FRISCH | PHOTO BY BILL KELLEY

GREG AND NANCY CARLSON credit St. Olaf with exposing them to a world in need. Through their work, volunteer projects, and support of St. Olaf, they are striving to do the same for future generations of Oles. Their philanthropic interests are varied — from health care in Nicaragua to environmental innovation to giving

to St. Olaf financially and through mentoring and internships.

“We want to be part of a solution to the problems of our world. That can mean empowered giving, when you give money to help people do their work because they can do it better than you, and engaged giving, where you get involved with the work personally. We like to do both,” says Greg,

who, with his brother Jeff '83, founded Carlson Capital Management, a wealth management firm now co-owned with their brother-in-law Justin Stets '85.

Greg and Nancy, who live in Northfield, hold a special place in their hearts for St. Olaf. Not only did they meet as first-year students and marry in Boe Chapel six days after graduation, but Greg also has a three-generation connection to St. Olaf. His mother, Carol Berkedal Carlson '54, and her five children with husband Robert “Jolly” Carlson, all attended St. Olaf. Greg and Nancy’s daughter Rebecca will graduate from St. Olaf this year, and daughter Elizabeth will graduate in 2014. Their oldest daughter, Katie, graduated from the College of St. Benedict.

Those deep ties to St. Olaf have inspired the Carlsons to give in numerous and generous ways to the college over the years. They have been stalwart donors to the college’s annual fund, Partners in Annual Giving, they have an endowed scholarship, and they have included support for St. Olaf in their estate plans.

“We view giving in this way to St. Olaf as empowered giving. We want to step up and give our resources for the college to use as it sees best,” says Greg.

Last year, the couple also began offering financial support to St. Olaf’s Leaders for Social Change summer internship program. Student interns partner with local nonprofits on a variety of issues, from poverty and youth empowerment to sustainable agriculture, while also receiving some college credit.

“We feel strongly about helping St. Olaf students. In this particular case, they get experience above and beyond the classroom setting and gain real life experience,” Greg adds.

The Carlsons’ passion for giving back was shaped early by three pillars that continue to guide them: loving parents, the church, and St. Olaf. Taking part in the college’s Term in the Middle East program as seniors also opened their eyes to global needs. Nancy, a former nurse, has been deeply involved with Interfaith Service to Latin America (ISLA), a nonprofit that partners with communities on health, education, and construction projects. She has traveled to Jalapa, Nicaragua, ten times with other volunteers to provide medical care and education.

After a few trips to Jalapa, Nancy approached St. Olaf with the idea of offering

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2009

Camryn Reynolds

is in her fourth production at the Minneapolis Children's Theatre Company, appearing in *Babe, The Sheep-Pig*. Camryn is one of two performing apprentices for the company's 2010-11 season. ■ **Mackensie Tappe** is a member of the University of Minnesota School of Dentistry's Class of 2014.



2010

Geoffrey Carlisle writes, "I'm growing to understand life in the south as a corps member with Teach For America in the Mississippi Delta. I teach seventh-grade science at Hazlehurst PK8 in a small, rural town." ■ **Andy Johnson** is living in Manhattan and working at J.P. Morgan Asset Management as an analyst in the Real Estate Investment Group. ■ **Lauren Shively** is in graduate school at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, working on her master's degree in church music with a voice performance emphasis. ■ **Stacie Theobald-Constantian** and **Peter Constantian** are serving in the Peace Corps' agriculture program in Ecuador. 🐼

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this volunteer work as a mentorship program for students with medical aspirations. Students would have an opportunity to shadow the doctors, dentists, and nurses volunteering with ISLA while also doing some volunteer work themselves.

In 2008 the first group of Oles spent their January Interim conducting health surveys of 200 Jalapa community residents. Nancy led a similar program for students in 2010 and is planning the 2012 program now. "These students are our future," says Nancy, adding that the experience has strengthened their awareness and understanding of communities and countries living in poverty.

Last summer the Carlsons purchased fifty acres about a mile from their home in Northfield with the idea of using it as a learning tool and community resource. They worked with the St. Olaf Center for

Experiential Learning to establish the Social Entrepreneurship, Environmental Design, and Stewardship (SEEDS) internship program, which gives St. Olaf students an opportunity to create and oversee three gardens. The produce was given to the local food shelf and sold at farmers markets. Students also raised chickens and pigs, feeding them damaged produce they couldn't sell or donate.

"One of my favorite quotes, from José Ortega y Gasset, is 'Tell me your landscape and I'll tell you who you are.' Your landscape defines you," says Greg. "We think of this land as a tool to accomplish something and to be a place of discovery and learning."

Greg also has turned Carlson Capital Management into a place of discovery and learning for St. Olaf students. The firm takes on numerous Oles as interns and hires others. Greg also shares his knowl-

edge and expertise with students by regularly guest lecturing at economics classes.

"St. Olaf really stressed the importance of having a valuable role in life," says Nancy. Greg builds on her thought: "I think you can get a great education and have a great experience at a lot of places. But St. Olaf is more than an education. It puts you with the right group of people, in the right mindset, and in the right space. And that's a space of living a life of purpose, one that's balanced, moral, ethical, and pushes you toward excellence. That's not something you can do by yourself." 🐼

SUZY FRISCH is a Twin Cities freelance writer and frequent contributor to *St. Olaf Magazine*.

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