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Our mission: Amplify and inspire, with personal stories and action steps, the leadership of powerful, everyday women.

Our vision: We all are parts of a greater whole. Our stronger future will be built from the collective energy of women who shift narratives to effect change.

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“We, this people, on this wayward, floating body
Created on this earth, of this earth
Have the power to fashion for this earth
A climate where every man and every woman can live freely.”
— Maya Angelou
Innovation in Storytelling
by Mikki Morrissette

What if we talked more about how much we truly depend on each other? What if we refocused our conversations and stories on the relationships that enable us to be a society?

When I was in middle school, we had a health unit about smoking. I wrote a letter to my dad, full of the dangers of smoking. I told him I wanted him to be around to see me as the adult I would become. He did quit, cold turkey. I was awed by the power of story to impact change.

That memory shapes a big part of my identity. It was a pivotal moment that whispered regularly to me as I matured, believing in my ability to effect change through words.

My dad died on March 4, 2020, at age 89. He had a long slide with dementia and a shorter struggle with congestive heart failure. In the end, everything he once knew about analytical chemistry, cooking, driving, fixing things, and even sometimes who he was talking to, was gone.

Yet what my dad could and could not remember was not the definition of who he was. Even though he had lost most of his own stories — the ones that gave him a sense of his individual identity — that did not change who he was to me, to my mom, to my kids.

It did not erase the intersecting moments he had with thousands of people over a lifetime, such as the employee he helped get U.S. citizenship, and the co-worker for whom he learned sign language. He continues to be the man whose support whispered me into writing to make a difference.

Our personal lives are just that. Not a story that begins and dies with one person, but a matrix of what we do, feel, and inspire. We are so much more than what we think we know. We extend far beyond individual bodies that are brief containers for our memories.

The Continuous Evolution

Many years ago, I was enchanted with the BBC show “Connections.” The message of the show: nothing about our modern world was created in isolation. One innovation leads to another to give us everything we could never replicate on our own. All that we are is the result of a web of interconnected events over time and space.

The show pointed out, for example, that were it not for the flooding of the Nile, and the intelligence that led to a calendar that could predict that overflow of water, and the subsequent invention of the plow, that led to a surplus of grains, which were stored in containers made by a potter’s wheel, our small villages would not have been able to grow into civilizations.

In other words, all of our stories are part of a continuous evolution together. Commerce, industry, technology, and political rivalries have largely been allowed to take over the storyline. We have devalued the human while glorifying the machinery, the capital, and the drama.

I believe we need innovation in storytelling. In these pages we amplify and inspire, with storytellers and narratives that lift us up into remembering that we are part of an expanding circle, not a single line.

In this April issue, we meet women in the arts and in STEM who are innovating in collaboration — not in competition. They are role models and mentors for one another. Some build partnerships to create solutions.

The women in these pages create a stronger world together.

In “The Year of 20/20 Vision,” Minnesota Women’s Press themes are focused on seeing long-entrenched issues in new ways, and offering action steps and education for change.

This month’s topic: How are women creating a new pathway to the future?
Our 35th Anniversary Book

On April 16, 1985, 40,000 Minnesota Women's Press newspapers were delivered to Mollie Hoben's garage in St. Paul for the first time. Volunteers were on hand to distribute “Volume 1, Number 1” to locations around the Twin Cities.

In the commemorative book “35 Years of Minnesota Women's Press,” we offer a glimpse at the rich history of Minnesota women and explore issues that have long affected us. We see how much has been accomplished, as well as equity that continues to be decades in the making. Contents include:

• Excerpts from a 1999 oral history project with 43 members of the founding team of the publication.
• Original essays from the four previous publishers and other long-time advocates and activists.
• The voices of current young women seeking multicultural curriculum, as well as coverage from decades ago, when Minnesota was to have become the first state to mandate guidelines for multicultural and gender-fair curricula.
• Reminders of optimism in the 1980s and 1990s around women's political leadership, which was supposed to bring us closer to 50-50 representation. We quoted Arvonne Fraser in 1986: “I remember a fellow in Washington who told me, 'You women are going to have to do it. Because we're all captured by our institutions, and we don't dare.'”

Four of the key issues listed by women at the time: pro-choice rights, passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, government-funded daycare, and comparable worth. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?
Anjali Donthi: Mental Health

Last year I was part of a team in Rochester that developed a mental wellness app for youth. Technovation brings technology and entrepreneurial programs to women like me, who are ages 10-18.

Mental illness is a rising issue in our community. After talking to people who are affected, I was able to see its impact. The app provides users with tools and resources, such as habit trackers and journals.

During the development process, we had many challenges with time management and working together as a team. Because we were able to talk through it and work it out, we ended up finishing strong. We are planning to work with our school district to release the app.

I have been involved in Technovation for five years. From team bonding to learning about aspects of coding and business planning, the experience is fun and hard work. I want to give back to our community as much as I can.

Innovators

commentary of everyday women about ingenuity and inventiveness

Mounica Kota: Mentorship

When I was younger, I knew that I loved biology, yet I never felt like I could contribute to the field. Until graduate school, I had no mentors to make me feel like I belonged. I am now driven to be the mentor that I never had, supporting underrepresented students in the process of scientific discovery.

I started working with Fostering Opportunities and Relationships in Science Education (FORSE) three years ago, guiding Dakota and Ojibwe middle schoolers in the development, implementation, and presentation of a novel science fair project. I learned quickly, though, that the most important thing I provide is faith in the students’ abilities.

One day I was working with a student who was having trouble spelling. He grew frustrated, saying that it didn't matter what he did because his work didn't mean anything. He said “this isn't real science!” I realized how strong his impostor syndrome was, and how much I recognized the feeling.

That student was working on a project assessing whether crystals improved people's moods. I pulled up research and showed him that scientists had studied this question before, and that learning the answer was important. When his results corroborated those of the studies, he was shocked.

At the science fair, he was beaming, presenting results and receiving validation that he clearly wasn't used to. The excitement in his voice at discovering he had done “real science” is burned in my memory. I told him what I had told him a hundred times before: that anyone can be a scientist. That time, I think he believed me.

Truthfully, the technical skills we teach may not stay with students. To me, it doesn't matter. What I hope remains is the knowledge that they are capable of producing meaningful work in an area they care about. It took years for me to commit to studying biology because of my crippling impostor syndrome. Mitigating it from an early age is critical to paving the way for coming generations of brilliant scientists.
**Itza Rosario: Teamwork**

I lead the Medtronic Brooklyn Center Supply Chain Planning team. When I think about women leading collaborative teams, the first role of a leader is to get everyone aligned with a vision as a shared driving force.

Women’s leadership styles are collaborative, inclusive, and consultative. We gain commitment by working toward a common vision, by actively soliciting and listening to employees’ ideas, and by creating a culture focused on ethical behavior, quality, and concern for individuals. We work to develop each member of the team and help them by providing mentoring, trainings, and recognition. We trust our team and gain their trust. We choose team members who bring purpose, passion, and commitment, even if they don’t think the same.

Having a collaborative team gives me the opportunity to continue developing myself as a leader in both the Hispanic Latino and Medtronic Women’s Networks. Being a professional woman, a mom, and a leader requires a lot of effort outside my comfort zone. No matter the goal, we all have the ability to reach a better version of ourselves as a leader, and as a human being.

**Michelle Pett: Radical Hospitality**

The first Mixed Blood Theatre show I ever saw was “Warp” in 1980. As a South Minneapolis teenager, my theatre experience consisted of seeing a play at Children’s Theatre with my Brownie troop. In contrast, Warp — a Black superhero fantasy — featured the estimable Warren Bowles in chaps. The spandex on that stage was mind-blowing.

I led a sheltered life and had never seen a scantily clad clad man before, and certainly not a multi-racial cast of young men dressed in Lycra. Mixed Blood welcomed me into a world of ideas and experiences.

Forty years later, I manage Mixed Blood’s Radical Hospitality — a program that breaks down barriers so everyone can enjoy live theatre. We have no-cost admission on a first-come, first-served basis to every performance; free transportation for people living with disability; a fully accessible building; mats and water bowls for therapy dogs.

I believe that empathy is like a muscle. You have to work it to make it stronger. Getting inside a play, seeing the story through the eyes of a character, has helped me build my empathy muscle. It has made my work and private life infinitely richer. A theater’s truest expression is the community created when everyone is let in — artists, audience, everyone.

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**Emily Liu: Science Bowl**

My interest in STEM began with my passion for animals in elementary school. At the Science Museum of Minnesota, I watched documentaries on Jane Goodall, built rafts to fly in the tornado simulator, and gathered nature to trade for rocks and minerals at the Collector’s Corner.

In sixth grade, I joined Science Bowl. I found the buzzer-style competition thrilling, and the gratification of answering questions, working with a team, and learning science rewarding. Soon, my desire to get better at Science Bowl led me to study science outside of school. I love watching YouTube series that present science in an engaging way and reading advanced articles and textbooks.

Learning from peers plays a big role as well. What I appreciate about our Science Bowl club is our desire to understand the answers instead of quickly moving through questions. We have conversations and don't only study alone. This is a more efficient way to make information stick, as well as build the team dynamic. We also present on the topics we find most interesting in order to cultivate an open learning environment.

Learning biology and chemistry has inspired me to pursue a career in health science in order to learn about and improve human life.

I want to see more female representation in the National Science Bowl. I want all girls to know that no one starts as a genius. I am grateful to be part of such a fun and intellectually stimulating community.

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**May Topic: Music & Movement**

How has music or movement inspired you?

Send up to 300 words by April 10 to editor@womenspress.com
Editor’s Note: Many events are postponed in April because of the social distancing required to curb the spread of COVID-19. Please check websites for these activities prior to attending to get up-to-date information.

How to Support Local Performers

Among the groups hit hard by the social distancing requirements of a pandemic are musicians and actors who earn money with performances in front of audiences. Live streams are being set up to offer some entertainment options.

City Pages created a guide to options for support, including:

- Donate through crowdfunding sites like Patreon.
- Buy merchandise from online stores.
- Buy album downloads from Bandcamp and other sites.
- Springboard has compiled resources for artists and has expanded its emergency relief fund. Donate at springboardforthearts.org.
- The Twin Cities Community Trust’s Entertainment Industry relief fund will disperse funds to members of the local music industry. twincitiesmusiccommunitytrust.org.

4/18 — Jennifer Egan: Reading & Conversation

Jennifer Egan, Pulitzer Prize-winning author and president of PEN America discusses her writing and work to protect free expression in the U.S. and worldwide. Free. 7:30pm. Coffman Union Theater, Mpls. Details: z.umn.edu/jegan

4/18, 20 — JustUs Health Opportunity Conference

The JustUs Health Opportunity Conference will explore equity issues regarding aging, HIV treatment and prevention, transgender health, and general LGBTQ+ health. Community Day $10-$25; Professional Day $75-$150. Multiple locations. Details: justushealth.org/OpportunityConference
**4/25 — Minnesota Black Rock Coalition**

Jazz punk group Black Velvet Punks, North Minneapolis hip-hop and punk rock group Blvck Madonna, post-punk rock group Hard Looks, and rapper deM atlaS present a night showcasing how Black soul and hip hop molds the roots of modern rock music. $15-$20; discounted tickets available for college students. 8pm. The Cedar Cultural Center, Mpls. Details: thecedar.org

**Right to Vote Exhibit**

To celebrate the 100 year anniversary of the 19th Amendment, the League of Women’s Voters Minnesota created a traveling exhibit to recognize the organization’s mission and history over the past century. The 12-panel exhibit has been traveling around the state. Some of the scheduled destinations in the coming months:

April 1-3: Goodhue County Historical Society, Red Wing  
April 1-30: Nicollet County Historical Society, St. Peter  
April 4-30: Roseville and Maplewood Libraries, Roseville  
April 6-26: Brainerd Public Library, Brainerd  
May 1-30: Nemeth Art Center, Park Rapids  
May 2-June 30: History Center of Olmsted County, Rochester  
May 3-23: Woodbury Stafford Library, Woodbury  
May 27-June 30: Stearns History Museum, St. Cloud  
June 2-30: Murray County Historical Museum, Slayton

Details: lwvmn.org

**4/26 — Feminist Authors**

Artist and writer Glenda Reed hosts a reading and panel discussion with feminist authors Ann Bancroft, V.V. Ganeshananthan, Carolyn Holbrook, and Ellie Krug as part of the Loft Literary Center’s Boundaries & Border Crossings series. $5-$10. 2-4pm. The Loft at Open Book, Mpls. Details: loft.org/events

**4/30 — Lynndelle Pratt**

Lynndelle Pratt, fiddler, singer, and songwriter, releases her debut album “Gathering Flowers,” motivated by her breast cancer diagnosis. All proceeds will benefit Firefly Sisterhood, a Twin Cities-based nonprofit that fosters connections between women with breast cancer and survivors. $10-$15. 7:30pm. Hook and Ladder Theater, Mpls. Details: thehookmpls.com/event/lyndelle-and-the-stellars

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**Look for the Women’s Press magazine here:**
- Votes For Women, Ja!, April 4  
- U of MN Women’s Center events  
- NAWBO-MN events  
- Women Entrepreneurs of Minnesota events  
- Business Development Mastermind Group events by Rich Chicks  
- Women’s Environmental Institute events  
- Second Saturday Divorce Workshop for Women  
- TeamWomenMN events  
- Women on Wednesdays – Women’s Center St. Cloud State University  
- Yoga One events – Alexandria

*Find out more about these and other events at womenspress.com*
focus best when I am endangering life or limb. Yoga does not zen me out, it makes me angry. For years, training in aerial circus was my calm. Over the past year, I have learned that playing with molten metal gets me to that tranquil state. Working metal is a bit like playing god. You take an immutable substance and bend it, curl it, or watch it become liquid. When it cools, it is once again immutable, but in a shape you chose.

First Sparks

The metal shop at the Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC) had been unused for several years when Heather Doyle was hired to teach a welding class in 2003. Doyle fell in love with fire in high school when she took an industrial arts class. While at MCTC, she met Victoria Lauing, who was running the continuing education program and had dreams of filling the vacant metal shop. Together, they decided to create a welding program. In a field dominated by men, Doyle’s presence as a teacher and leader brought more women and femme-identified people to her class.

Doyle and Lauing dreamed of a space that could uniquely serve the fire arts. In 2006, a group of neighbors came together to find a way to change the corner of 38th Street and Chicago Avenue, a notoriously rough area. Someone floated the idea of an arts center to fill the empty space and Doyle and Lauing pounced.

Now the Chicago Avenue Fire Arts Center (CAFAC) is housed in what was once the Nokomis Theater. The converted theater — one can still make out ‘Nokomis’ tiled on the gallery floor— has become a hive for industrial arts.

At any given moment, there might be a blacksmith working at a propane forge where the movie screen once stood, or neon tube benders in the old projection room, or a class of

A problem that has one person stymied can receive a boost from a new perspective. Any project can be more wondrous through collaboration.
welding students working bike parts, silverware, and bolts into sculptures where audiences once sat.

After four years of planning, the first classes offered in 2010 were in welding and blacksmithing, the things that Doyle knew best. Shortly after that, jewelry making crept onto the roster. Later, founders built out a room specifically for the noisy, dusty work of grinding and sanding metal, and constructed one space for enamel and repousse, and one for neon tube bending.

There are also classes in fire dancing, glass flame work, and metal clay. Now, four employees and a team of volunteers keep the building in a state of creative cacophony.

**Hands, Hearts, and Minds**

A loud, dusty, concrete room is not what people imagine when they think of places that recharge the spirit and focus the mind. But when I am staring at a heap of junk metal with a torch hot enough to turn steel to liquid, I can focus on the moment. Around me, I feel the heartbeats of other artists.

While working on welding a sleigh for moving maple sap, and a phoenix made of spoons and nails, I shared the space with a plethora of projects: an installation destined for the new public works building, an aerial apparatus, and several neon dolphins. When my deadline was looming, another welder offered to spend an afternoon working on my projects. I’ll return the favor when he needs it. I have already bought him a six-pack of beer.

Doyle and her team believe that collaborative spaces build artists. An artist working in isolation hits a point of plateau and can get stuck. Additionally, industrial arts have barriers to entry, with high equipment costs and safety precautions. In some cases, industrial arts cannot be practiced alone because large materials are impossible for one person to handle. CAFAC creates a space in which people can share equipment, expertise, and lifting.

**A Village**

In the wider community, CAFAC works to develop and install large-scale public art based on community conversations. Some current installations include a Prince tribute in Fairview Park (Purple Raindrop), benches throughout the Twin Cities, and a 170-foot decorative railing on the shore of Bde Maka Ska.

During the Fire Arts SPEAK project, youth who are in at-risk situations work together to create a piece of artwork in service of the community. In summer 2019, students welded five benches out of pieces of guns. All youth involved had been affected by gun violence.

The art coming out of CAFAC is, like the organization, something that can only exist in this time, in this place, in this community.

CAFAC has built a village.
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In my faith community, I struggled to reconcile how a majority of the church’s budget was devoted to the mortgage of a sprawling property — with tax exempt status — that was seldom used. One-third of giving in the United States goes to religious institutions. However, 75 percent of those funds are allocated to congregational upkeep, including properties and staff.

Unable to make progress towards better stewardship at my church, I decided to find a way to use church land to better meet community needs.

According to a 2018 study by Wilder research, 10,000 Minnesotans were homeless in 2018, and about a quarter of those homeless were not taking refuge in shelters. After six months of research, I was convinced that affordable housing for our most vulnerable populations is the most valuable thing that a faith community can do with its resources.

Many people who have experienced homelessness feel the system has failed them. The standard approach to homelessness — called Housing First or “providing four walls and a roof” and professional services — falls short. Homelessness cannot be eliminated with housing and professional help alone.

A Community First approach centers relational and social needs in addition to providing shelter. For people who have been homeless for upwards of ten years, that trajectory may have begun when they were living in homes of extreme abuse. When we can increase someone’s sense of social belonging in a stable environment, they are more likely to feel supported in the long-term.

I co-founded the nonprofit, Settled, with Gabrielle Clowdus. We are proposing a development we call Sacred Settlements, which includes low-cost rooming units in the form of tiny homes that will be built by volunteers and future residents on underutilized land of religious institutions. The homes will be fully furnished.

To keep costs low, they will not include plumbing, but rather a dry toilet and gravity fed sink. Common bathrooms, kitchens, and laundry units will be located a short distance away. Total development costs, including infrastructure, are a fraction of those for traditional affordable housing units.

The housing and development proposed is based on hundreds of hours of listening sessions from those with lived experience being homeless.

Faith communities can uniquely act as developers because of a little known law called the Religious Land Use Act. From our research, we have determined that the largest barrier to building more affordable housing is the Not In My Backyard spirit, which stifles proposed housing projects due to neighborhood opposition. The Act provides cities a defense if, after approving a development, they are sued by a third party resident of the area.

Currently, we are partnering with Faith Lutheran Church in Forest Lake to explore building our first Sacred Settlement on their property. We have a committed team of social workers, social scientists, lawyers, business strategists, designers, counselors, pastors, homemakers, home-builders, and those who have experienced homelessness themselves, collaborating to make this model become a reality.

Faith communities have the power to optimize untapped resources and fill gaps to influence one of the most intractable social issues of our day. Together we can rediscover the community that we need.

Anne Franz (she/her) has over 10 years of international consulting, corporate, and non-profit experience focused on leading change, strategy, and innovation in complex environments and systems.
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We are all drawn to something in our lives, although we may not know why. For me that has always been architecture. As a child, I found myself attracted to certain houses and neighborhoods, curious about their creators and why they took the form they did.

My plan to study architecture in college was derailed when my guidance counselor declared architecture an unsuitable field for women. Knowing little of the world — or myself — at the time, I accepted his pronouncement without question. Years later, I rethought the situation, earned my masters in architecture, and launched a career in research and writing. Through my work, I strive to understand architecture within the context of the lives and times of its creators.

In 2001, I met 88-year-old architect Elizabeth Scheu Close. For a year, I interviewed Lisl, as she was known, in the living room of the home she and her husband designed. With every conversation, I became increasingly aware I was in the presence of an extraordinary woman and resolved to document her life and career in a book.

Lisl designed more than 250 modern houses in the state and was the first woman to serve as president of American Institute of Architects Minnesota, later becoming the first woman to receive that organization's highest honor. Our wide-ranging discussions included specific buildings she designed. Her memory was sharp when asked why she wanted to be an architect and how she managed to become one at a time when women architects were almost nonexistent.

Lisl's childhood home in Vienna, Austria, was designed in 1912, the year of her birth, by progressive architect Adolf Loos. Living in the radically modern house convinced Lisl to become an architect — a bold decision given she could not name a single woman architect at the time.

The rise of Nazism and her mother's Jewish heritage forced the 21-year-old to leave Austria, alone, for the United States, where she continued her education at MIT. She was the only woman in her graduate school class.

The challenge of finding work during the Depression was complicated by her gender. One employer turned her down as a potential “distraction” in the drafting room. Another required her to pay for the privilege of working for him.

With unshakable self-confidence, she persevered, found a job, then another, and went on to establish the first practice in Minnesota devoted solely to modern design. Lisl did not view herself as a role model for other women in the field. But she did smooth the way.

As one woman explained, “I didn’t have to prove that women can be architects. Lisl had already done that.”
WHEN I WAS SEVEN, my dad hired someone to design our house in Brazil. She was young, and she seemed powerful to me. That was my first contact with a woman professional. I did not know what she did, but when she left, I told my parents that I wanted to be whatever she was.

My dad said, “She is an architect. To be an architect, you have to go to college, and people like us don’t go to college.” I told my dad I was going to go to college.

I started working full time when I was 13. I decided to go to secondary high school for drafting. I found an internship, and my boss taught me how to draft by hand.

In college, I began taking classes about society’s relationship to the built environment. I realized that architecture is a powerful tool; it has been used for centuries to make people feel powerful, or powerless. For example, cathedrals are specifically designed to make one feel powerless — like a little dot.

Even if an architect thinks they are not designing with social impact in mind, there will be an impact. I decided that I would be an architect who has an agenda of making people feel powerful.

Those who know how much the built environment impacts social behavior are often not at the table during the design process. Those are my people — people who grew up in the inner city and far away from where decisions are made. In college, I was conflicted because my professors offered me positions at their firms to design for the wealthy and powerful. I declined the offers and decided to be a voice for those under-represented.

“Affordable” Housing

After moving to the U.S. in 2008, I realized there has to be a more nuanced way to talk about affordable housing.

A housing unit can be labeled “affordable” if it is accessible to those who make 60 percent of the area median income (AMI). However, the real demand for housing is for those who make 30 or 40 percent AMI.

I believe it is the responsibility of a developer to determine residents’ economic situations and provide for that need. For example, the cheapest area to live in Minneapolis is the Northside. When developers decide to capitalize off a need for denser housing and demolish three or four $12,000 three-bedroom homes, those families that were displaced cannot come back and rent apartments because they likely won’t qualify. Instead, the new “affordable” housing may attract the recently graduated, likely Caucasian, and middle class.

New developments often don’t take into consideration how low-income people live in a village system in order to provide for childcare. When houses are demolished, it is often more than single families who are affected.

Architects, especially those from privilege, are responsible for thinking outside of their own experience.
We have to consider how a project will impact an area on multiple levels.

**Are We All Architects?**

When I began work in Minnesota, I realized that I was not being treated as an equal. I realized, after two jobs with similar issues, that it had a lot to do with my gender and my race.

I considered leaving my profession. But after I began meeting with women and POC architects, I was hearing the same stories. I knew that we had to create a community. I needed someone to believe me without question when I said that my idea had been ignored three times before it was accepted out of the mouth of a white male co-worker.

I co-founded the Minnesota chapter of the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA) in 2017. Around 20 Latino architects attended our first meeting. Everyone who walked in had the same emotional reaction. “Are we all architects?” It was an inspiring moment because we were not aware of each other in the field.

**Power**

Early on in my career, I designed the International Student Center at Northern Arizona University. It was important that the building acknowledged every demographic that walked through the door. I decided against flags or names of countries, which is too predictable, and chose instead to display untranslatable words.

We placed the words in staggered panels outside the building. The intent was to say: we are all different, but together we can make a beautiful composition. The design inspired people to exchange world views by explaining what the words in their language mean.

Every student, even those who spoke regional dialects, found an untranslatable word in their language. That was huge for them. It is a feeling I want to replicate in all my projects.

After moving to Minnesota, I designed the interior of the offices for Thor Companies, Minnesota's largest minority-owned company. That was the best job I've ever had. I felt comfortable to be myself, and I was given the benefit of the doubt when I made mistakes.

I named the conference rooms at Thor after influential African Americans. The company gave suggestions and voted. Each room included a paragraph explaining the namesake's influence. When we were moving into the offices, one of the movers brought his young son to help. He saw the names on the rooms and he started googling them. He said, “All these folks are Black.” He asked, “Who owns this place?”

We explained, “It's a Black man, and most of the other people who work here are Black.” He was impressed.

That, to me, is the most important job. Those conference rooms were a way of making him feel powerful.

I want to make people feel acknowledged and respected. That doesn't happen in most places for people like us, and that's the difference that I want to make.

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Damaris Hollingsworth (she/her) designs solutions that are deeply rooted in responding to community values and economic realities. She has an Architectural and Urban Planning degree from the Faculdade de Arquitetura & Urbanismo at University of Sao Paulo, Brazil and is a Registered Architect, a LEED accredited professional, and a TEDx Speaker.
Four STEM Transplants

Green Card Voices released a book about immigrants in Minnesota who are engaged in STEM careers. Here are four of them. Details: greencardvoices.com/stem-mn

I grew up in Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia. My aunt, who is a U.S. citizen, sponsored my dad and our family to come to the U.S. beginning in 1991. It took ten years for our names to get through the family-based immigration waiting list, and then longer to file additional paperwork and get a visa for U.S. entry. We came here in 2006. However, my youngest brother was not allowed to join us because the original paperwork was done before he was born. It was not until 2011 that our entire family was finally together — a 15-year process to immigrate to the U.S., which is not uncommon.

When we arrived, I remember thinking that I could be whatever I wanted. My parents owned a rice wholesale business in Cambodia, but they decided to come here because they wanted us to have better opportunities.

My interest in science first started when I was in high school...
I remember taking a biology class designed for ELL (English-Language Learner) students where I used a spinning device — now I know it is called a centrifuge — to get DNA out of my saliva. I thought that was the coolest thing and it sparked my interest in forensic science.

I decided to join the Army Reserves, hoping I could get some law enforcement experience and pursue a career in forensics. Eventually, I realized I wanted to use science to help make things better rather than catching criminals.

I served in the Army Reserves for six years. My experience there helped me realize that although I am a small Asian woman, I can do a lot. I can carry a gun and all the equipment. I can do long walks with 30 to 40 pounds of equipment on my shoulders. I am self-sufficient and have self-determination.

I attended the University of St. Thomas, where I majored in neuroscience. This led me to work at a lab investigating how environmental factors affect brain structure. I learned about the traces of estrogen in our water environments that link to a change in brain structure of animals. It helped me realize how our environment can affect our everyday life, shapes the way we are, and impacts our health. This was the beginning of my interest in public health and medicine.

I decided to apply to medical school during my junior year, but my grades in science were not competitive compared with pre-med peers. I struggled academically. I could not read textbooks easily because I did not understand enough of what was written. If I was having trouble studying for science classes, I didn't think I would succeed in medical school. But I got a lot of support from some of my teachers to apply for medical school, which was inspiring.

I do sometimes think about how my own social environment impacts the way I learn and the challenges I face now that I am in medical school. My ability to read and comprehend English has increased tremendously since college, but I continue to struggle with learning new vocabularies, pronouncing certain words, and forming grammatically correct sentences. I am self-conscious of this and have continued to work on it. This can be mentally draining, especially when there are added insults, like discrimination against my accent or gender.

Sometimes I wish I had grown up here instead of Cambodia. However, these experiences make me who I am. It impacts the way I interact with others and ultimately the way I treat my patients.

I took a trip to Cambodia to do a two-month surgery rotation because of my interest in surgical practice in low-resource settings. Cambodia is a low-income country, and requires a lot of support from the international community to help with its health care system. My goal is to do more — not just annual mission trips, but creating something sustainable that can help the Cambodians become more self-sufficient.

I am also interested in environmental sustainability and cost-effectiveness research. In our throw-away society, we sometimes think it is okay to have disposable waste. For me, it is important to think about how we can minimize our waste and its impact on climate change.

Hospitals are one of the major generators of waste in the U.S. The operating room contributes about 30 percent of that waste. Much of this hospital waste comes from opened but unused disposable items.

I worked with a team on streamlining surgical procedures in order to reduce waste in transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR), a minimally invasive procedure for patients. We learned that for some patients, the procedure can be done via sedation without the anesthetic gases, a more environmentally friendly approach.

In addition, certain surgery supplies are routinely set up in case of emergency but are thrown out without being used. Our team stopped routinely opening supplies until they were needed. We reduced more than 1,260 pounds per year of solid waste in the medical procedure, which saved more than $20,000 in operating costs, while continuing to provide safe and effective benefits to the patient.

When we think about innovation in healthcare, we often think about a grand idea that will revolutionize medicine. However, innovation can be as simple as thinking twice about the way we habitually do things.
Fadumo Yusuf: Mechanical Engineer

Her husband was sitting there laughing because he knew we were on two different systems: Celsius and Fahrenheit. The English system was the biggest culture shock to me.

From a very young age, my mom taught me that it was okay to be myself. It was okay to be curious, to have dreams, and to be a little weird. One day I got two rocks and a charcoal. I wanted to see how many small pieces I could break the charcoal into. My mom saw me sit outside in the sun, for what seemed like hours. She asked me what I was doing. When I told her what I was up to, she looked at me and said, “Let me know what you find out.”

This was my mom’s way of teaching me to embrace all aspects of my personality — including my relentless curiosity and weirdness.

When I was in high school, I had a teacher called Dr. Claire Hypolite. She has a Ph.D. in chemical engineering, but she chose to teach at that high school because she felt it is where she could make a difference. One day she came to me and said, “I’m starting an after-school program called ‘Invention Club.’ You can come and invent whatever you want, and I will give you resources.”

I said I could not, because my parents didn’t drive. If I missed the school bus, it was difficult for me to get home. Dr. Hypolite arranged for me to get transportation.

It was my job to cook at home. I would rather read and do school-related stuff. I felt I was wasting a lot of time. I wanted to invent a machine in which I could put all the ingredients, press a button, and in five minutes it would give me the food I wanted to make. After looking into it

There were a lot of opportunities [and] challenges. The idea that I could become anything I wanted to was mind-boggling to me. The idea that there are scholarships out there that are specifically tailored to help people that might not be able to afford school was incredible.
a little bit, I realized I didn't really have the skills to do that. But I read an article about women in remote areas who might not have access to devices to tell them they are infected with HIV. I told Dr. Hypolite, “I want to invent an HIV testing device.”

Dr. Hypolite introduced me to the field of microfluidics, where you can manipulate how fluids flow. She took me to labs and showed me how some people were doing research and using those devices. My idea was to make a device where your blood can flow through a series of channels, and as it flows through, things happen that can tell you whether you have HIV.

In the summer, Dr. Hypolite would sometimes meet me in downtown Minneapolis at Central Library. She taught me how to do research, how to read research papers, how to write research papers in MLA format.

She introduced me to the world of engineering and the medical device industry. I got my bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering. Dr. Hypolite opened my eyes to the endless possibilities in this world, and to the many different ways that I could make a difference and contribute to humanity.

I work in the medical device industry as a product and process development engineer, which is an interface between research and development and the manufacturing of medical devices. I work with a lot of people, taking concepts and turning them into technologies that can help people. I help get devices approved by regulatory bodies like the Food and Drug Administration. I take a design or concept and figure out how to make it. I sometimes test devices and write reports required by regulatory bodies.

The idea that I could become anything I wanted to was mind-boggling to me. The idea that there are scholarships specifically tailored to help people that might not be able to afford school was incredible. I applied to about 12 scholarships, and I ended up getting about seven of them. Not only could I study everything that I wanted, but there were people who were willing to give me money that they have worked hard for so that I can have a better future and get an education. To me, that was really amazing.

Appreciate the heroes in your life — those who uplift you, who encourage you, who show up for you, and who help you find and amplify your voice. Even more importantly, be a hero for someone else.

Fadumo Yusuf also writes Somali poems and short stories, is publishing a novel called “Ayan, of the Lucky,” and blogs at fadumoyusuf.com
Dalma Martinović-Weigelt: Water Protector

I had a nice childhood in Slavonski Brod. I grew up in a middle class family that took summer vacations on the Croatian coast.

I was in college in the early 1990s when the breakup of Yugoslavia led to war. I was lucky to be in Zagreb, which was not as impacted. My family, however, was on the border with Bosnia. There was a lot of uncertainty and not good times. But I think when you are that young, you feel invincible. Somehow, I cruised through those years more easily than I think I would have if I was older.

The year I graduated, 1995, was about the time the war ended. In terms of opportunities, there was next to nothing. My family’s savings, reserves, and middle class life prior to war had basically disappeared. I decided to go to the United States because I was familiar with the culture. I had been an exchange student in the U.S. in 1988–89.

My family likes humanities, and for a time my dream was to be a comparative literature scholar. My love of nature and biology made me want to be a scientist. When I was in the U.S. as an exchange student, I took chemistry, biology, and physics courses with high school teachers who left an impression on me. It is a whole different story to get engaged in the discovery process than to memorize facts.

My long-term plan was to win a scholarship, move to the U.S., and go to graduate school. There were all these last-minute expenses, which left me traveling to the U.S. with a very limited amount of cash. When I finally arrived, I was separated from my suitcase. In the 1990s, the chances of getting your suitcase back were small. I had packed only one suitcase — full of things you do not necessarily need but must have, like mementos and photographs.

Maybe the thing I gave up the most by never returning to my childhood home is a sense of clear identity. It is strange to go back to Croatia and be viewed as the “other,” when you are also the “other” here. You are in this in-between space — bizarre but liberating.

One of the challenges, if you are an immigrant, is that you have to have the visa for your next job lined up very quickly before your prior job has ended. You don’t have many choices compared to someone who has U.S. citizenship.

Through a series of windy paths and experiences, I attended the University of Minnesota. After my Ph.D. I worked as a postdoctoral researcher at the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine on a project with the Environmental Protection Agency. However, because I am not a citizen, I could not get a job there after my post-doctorate. The University of St. Thomas offered me a position, despite a six-month delay in my ability to get all the paperwork in place to start there. Not all organizations are like that.

My main contribution has been discovering methodologies to help protect the environment. I am very interested in water protection. A legislative commission of the citizens of Minnesota selects projects that target issues that are important to Minnesotans and natural resources. One of these projects relates to unregulated contaminants, and the other relates to how old oil spills are aging. We have funds to conduct research that will promote healthy drinking and surface water.

I find Minnesota to be a great place to collaborate.

In STEM it can be difficult to be self-confident because you are always looking up to people who know so much. It is important to build relationships because, ultimately, we function as a collective.

Dalma Martinovic-Weigelt is an environmental scientist.
I was born in Gujranwala, a small city near Lahore in Punjab, Pakistan, which is in the middle of the country. I grew up mostly in Lahore, the cultural heartland of Pakistan. My childhood was very happy, surrounded by family: a lot of cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. It was wonderful to grow up in that environment.

I was inspired to go into medicine by my grandfather, who was a physician. I heard all these wonderful stories about him, which may not have been true, but were inspiring nonetheless. The stories were that he was the only doctor in the village and that he could fix everything from severed heads to people with nerve disease.

Looking back, I see there is a lot that I left behind [when I came to the U.S. for education and work], but I did not realize it at the time. I was in my 20s, full of energy and excitement, and I felt like I could conquer the world. I took lots of exams to get into top-notch schools. I thought that after I did my education, the purpose was to come back to Pakistan and serve the people, but things changed.

I literally came to the U.S. with a suitcase and a few photographs of things I wanted to keep close. I remember saying goodbye to my family, and said, “I’ll be back very shortly.” I missed out on the childhood of my younger brother, who was eight years old at that time. Both grandmothers, who I was very attached to, passed. I never got to say goodbye.

I left behind a culture, and an identity. I knew where to go and who my friends were. I was very comfortable in that life, and I left all that to pursue a master’s degree in the School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins.

My passion for math and science inspired me. I thought I would integrate being a researcher into my work and take on all of Pakistan’s medical problems at a public health level. I came to Minnesota for research opportunities in the field of colon cancer. I stayed due to lack of opportunities for women in research and in gastroenterology in Pakistan.

I have found Minnesota to be very responsive and open to immigrants and new ideas. This was the only place where people would ask me, “Where are you from?” I would say, “Pakistan,” and they would say, “What city in Pakistan?” People here pride themselves on being very educated. Assimilating was not difficult.

Initially I was held back by my own fears and insecurities. There is a lesson in this. I have found that if you reach out, most of the time you get the answers you are seeking. There is a lot of help available, but you have to ask.

My work is divided into three parts: as a clinician, a researcher, and an educator in medical school. I am trying to understand how we can prevent colon cancer through diet and lifestyle, as well as what predisposes people to cancer. I also am studying the role of stool transplant in curing diseases.

Colon cancer is the third-most common cancer in both men and women, and the source of a large number of premature deaths. Improving screening is where my research is focused. I speak at national and international meetings in order to move this field of research forward with others.

I enjoy being a role model for young women in STEM, by encouraging them to follow their passions and not to be discouraged by rejections.

Aasma Shaukat: Cancer Researcher

I didn’t know the word grit when I first started but now I completely understand what it means. It is perseverance in the face of failure or rejection, and when one door closes you have to keep knocking until more doors open.
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Kate Brauman’s enthusiastic description of the work she has devoted her career to is deceptively simple: “Much of my life is focused on this: If you put stuff in the water, you end up with stuff in the water.”

After graduating from Columbia University with a self-designed interdisciplinary degree in science and religion, Brauman started work at a call center at the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). She realized she gravitated toward issues involving how we value the elements we take for granted — air, water, and energy.

A woman who had recently bought a farm, for example, called the NRDC and was upset because she found animal carcasses illegally layered into the water and soil. How could she clean it up, and who was responsible? Brauman was intrigued by the many pieces involved. “It’s not a problem that could be solved with a simple checklist,” she says.

Brauman recognized that she preferred to study how things work, and what questions need to be asked to get to actionable, relevant science. From that revelation, it was a matter of deciding how to specialize.

“I like streams much more than power plants,” she determined. “All are important as we face climate changes but working with water would make me much happier as a person. And, unlike medicine, no blood!”

After getting her Ph.D. from Stanford in 2010, which included dissertation research in Hawaii, she was invited to join the University of Minnesota Institute on the Environment, where she now leads the Global Water Initiative.

One of her passions is “Crop Per Drop” — how do we make most effective use of the water we have, especially in agriculture. “We cannot make more water, but we can share it in a bigger way by using it more effectively.”

In one study by Brauman, research determined that in certain parts of the world, 40 percent of irrigation water consumption goes to production of 20 percent of food calories. In old soils, for example, without access to mineralized fertilizers, plants do not get enough nutrients to grow prolifically and simply waste irrigated water supply.

Brauman points out that our aging infrastructure of municipal wells and sewage requires significant re-investment. In addition, “The health of our soil is paramount to keeping our drinking water as clean as possible in the first place.”

She says we “use up” more water in the space around our homes than in them, since the water we use goes back to the Mississippi through our sewers. Sprinklers are wasteful. Fertilized yards fill storm drains with chemicals that are not necessary. Water softeners also put a tremendous amount of chloride into Minnesota waters, which kills flora and fauna. “We could dial back on its usage.”
Brauman also wants Minnesotans to create stronger markets and connections that enable people to farm in different ways. “Agriculture requires a lot of knowledge, and connections that are complicated to develop,” she says. A hemp farmer has legal restrictions that limit access to supply chains. Hmong farmers have a hard time connecting to grocery stores or community-sponsored agriculture. “We need to help the bottom line in rural development so people can stay engaged on the land.”

**Collaborative Women**

Many of Brauman’s interdisciplinary teams consist of primarily women, both at the University of Minnesota and globally, including specialists in agriculture, physics, ecology, energy, decision sciences, and economics.

“I get to talk to everyone and see how different disciplines think about the world,” Brauman says. “What do policy makers need to know to make choices? What model can we build to get that information? It is about having an ongoing dialogue with many perspectives.”

Brauman enjoys working with women, she says. “The women work hard to make sure they understand what others are saying, and that they are communicating in a way that is clear. This is an integral skill in interdisciplinary research, which requires communication across barriers of jargon and ways of understanding the world that are deeply rooted in the disciplines we were trained in.

“It’s about getting to a place where we know enough about how the building blocks weave together,” Brauman says. “Otherwise we simply have blocks with no mortar.”

**Details**

- environment.umn.edu
- The 2020 State of Water Conference is scheduled for April 30 and May 1, at Mille Lacs Grand Casino. freshwater.org/state-of-water-conference

**Minnesota’s Impaired Waters**

Water quality in the state is impaired by sediment, bacteria, and toxic contaminants. Recent studies of Minnesota’s waters show that a wide variety of unregulated chemicals, such as pharmaceuticals, fragrances, fire retardants, and insecticides, are ending up in lakes and rivers. Many of these substances have properties that can interfere with the functioning of hormones in animals and people.

In a 2008 Freshwater Society report, the number of impaired lakes was 1,028, although over 80 percent of lakes, rivers, and streams had not yet been assessed. A draft of the 2020 report indicates that there are 5,774 impaired lakes in Minnesota.

According to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, “in general, Minnesota streams in the northeast part of the state are in better condition than elsewhere. Stream conditions — including the condition of fish and other organisms, and levels of nitrogen, phosphorus, and other pollutants — worsen as you move west and south in the state. Good progress has been made — mostly through improved wastewater treatment by cities and businesses — in reducing the levels of several pollutants in Minnesota waterways, including phosphorus, ammonia, and bacteria. Nitrogen is the key, high-volume pollutant in state rivers and streams and has been increasing over time. Chloride concentrations are also rising.”

Details: pca.state.mn.us
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Cinema has always called me, but it took many years for me to listen. My grandpa had a Polaroid and he made a lot of pictures, detailing the who, what, and where in tidy penmanship on the back. In college, I took a Film 101 class and used a wind-up 8mm camera to make short films. After graduation, I began my career as a photojournalist.

In 2006, I embarked on the creation of my first documentary feature, “The Fabulous Ice Age” took me eight years to produce. Becoming a filmmaker later in my career meant that I was learning all my firsts in a crash course. A 100-year history was hard to tell in 72 minutes. After working with two editors, and over many years, I learned a lot.

I met filmmaker Melody Gilbert at an event early in my transition from photographer to filmmaker. She cheered me onward in this first film process. When she later told me she was gathering 15 women filmmakers together, I wanted to join. If I had the opportunity to be with supportive women during that first film, I would have felt more free to confess my lack of experience and would have found my way sooner.

The night of our first meeting was magical. We sat on a roof overlooking the Minneapolis skyline with food and drinks to discuss our filmmaking obstacles and successes. We set our intention to support one another personally and professionally. We surrounded ourselves in a cloak of support — a union of sorts. It was a place of safety to share information, ideas, and dreams, and to plan ways of mentoring.

The Minnesota chapter of the Film Fatales was founded in 2017 by Gilbert and Kelly Nathe. Film Fatales is an international network founded by Leah Meyerhoff. Much like our own chapter, the organization started around a dinner table in New York, where Meyerhoff and her friends would gather to talk about their industry and to listen and support one another. It has expanded to become a powerful network of women nationally and internationally.

Each Film Fatales meeting is different based on the needs of the members. We always start with a check-in focusing on our most important task, challenge, struggle, or success. Then we help one another brainstorm by sharing opinions or contacts. Sometimes we show clips of our works in progress and help problem-solve.
Our perspective as women means that we are able to be open and vulnerable with one another. We all share a desire to create meaningful work that brings awareness, information, entertainment, or inspiration.

We all want to bring our films to a larger audience, have our voices heard, and to have the same economic support as men. We want fairness and parity in our industry. We want to empower young women in filmmaking.

Women comprise such a small number of the directors in America. Having the support of the Film Fatales gives us an umbrella to stand under. It provides support with practical things like project development, discounts on film festival submissions, and a national organization that helps to spread the word about our films.

This practical help is important, but the emotional support of being in a group makes me feel empowered. Many women have expressed frustration at facing #MeToo moments in their careers. Although that is not a huge focus in our group, we can help one another to stay strong in the face of a system that was built by men and still favors men.

Our Minnesota group has strengthened us, and partnerships have formed. Soon after our first meeting in 2016, I hosted director Dawn Mikkelson so she could catch an early flight. Two years later, she started planning a documentary about women in taiko arts called HERbeat. Her desire to have an all-women crew prompted her to ask me to be co-director and director of photography. I never imagined at that first meeting that we would one day make a feature film together.

The second documentary film of Keri Pickett (she/her) was “First Daughter and the Black Snake,” which follows Winona LaDuke and community efforts to keep big oil out of tribal wild rice territory.

Newer Member Maya Washington

Fellow Film Fatales member Maribeth Romslo cast me as an actor in her conceptual project, “Kitchen Dance.” The experience has motivated me to take on more conceptual and lyrical projects as a filmmaker.

The women in our local Film Fatales chapter are all doing important work and bringing different perspectives to the table. I am able to create from my own unique voice as a woman of color.

I am grateful that I have a sisterhood of supportive filmmakers who have been through the ups and downs that women and nonbinary directors face in the industry.

Details: filmfatales.org
Magic of Creation
submitted by Christine Utz

As an ambitious fourth grader, I set out to write the next Great American Novel. There was one problem: in my brief time on this earth, I had not gathered enough experiences to amount to a book-length manuscript. So I did what I thought was the next best thing: I imitated one of my favorite books: “A Wrinkle in Time.”

After submitting my tome, I felt certain that my teacher would have nothing but glowing praise to shower on my masterpiece. Instead, she called a meeting with my mother and pointed out that my story was almost exactly the same as Madeleine L’Engle’s. I had changed the names and species of some of the characters, but otherwise it was a faithful copy. That’s when I first learned about the concept of plagiarism.

When I think back on this embarrassing mistake, my response is not that I should have been more original or a better copy-cat. My take-away is that reading “A Wrinkle in Time” had such a powerful effect on me that I needed to understand how the author had achieved such magic. In reading L’Engle’s book, I discovered the possibility of creating new worlds.

As a stubborn weirdo myself, I related to Meg Murray’s character. Her growth on that magical journey gave me hope that I, too, could break out of my childishness and do great things. That’s the power of seeing yourself reflected in a story, and the power of being exposed to inventive women.

Flash forward about 20 years, and I now work in an environment where I am surrounded by books every day. This has led to life-changing discoveries of new writers that have become some of my favorites, like Jesmyn Ward, N.K. Jemisin, Carmen Maria Machado, and Jenny Odell.

Christine Utz (she/her) is a sales associate at Magers & Quinn.

Book Notes

Thanks to an affiliate partnership with Magers & Quinn booksellers, Minnesota Women’s Press readers who want to dive deeper into our monthly themes are able to place online orders that contribute a percentage of sales to our Storytelling Fund. Visit “Self: Books” at womenspress.com for articles that display the Magers & Quinn link.

“Headstrong” by Rachel Swaby
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“Alpha Girls” by Julian Guthrie
Four women who became stars in the male-dominated world of venture capital and helped create some of the top companies of our time.
Community Artists Awarded Grants

Forecast Public Art has awarded 13 artists $86,000 in grants to support statewide independent projects, development, and collaborative problem solving in community art, thanks to support from McKnight and Jerome Foundations.

Some of the 2020 recipients:

**Alyssa Baguss: Open Water Project** — 12 artist-led boat tours with visual, performing, and social practice art projects aboard the Minneapolis Water Taxi (Duffy Boat) on the Mississippi River in Northeast Minneapolis.

**Katrina Knutson: Cross County Arts** — build connections and relationships across Minnesota counties, bridge gaps between urban and rural communities, and promote public art and artists from smaller cities across Minnesota to create a mural in their town.

**Dyani White Hawk: Mosaic Mural** — creation of a mosaic mural for Seward Redesign at the Five Square building in Minneapolis. Last year White Hawk received a Forecast Professional Development Grant for residency in Munich, Germany, during which she learned about the process of mosaics.

**Missy Whiteman: Expanded Cinema Experience** — Coyote Way: X will be a new form of Indigenous storytelling with 360 VR, video synthesizer, projection, performance, and a live score, rooted in ancestral knowledge, cellular memory, and traditional stories.

**Camila Leiva Anderson: Aquí Estamos y No Nos Vamos** — a community-driven outdoor mural to be painted on the Azteca Restaurant on main street in Worthington. This immigrant-owned Mexican restaurant is a gathering site for the Latinx community. Anderson will lead the project with a group of Latinx youth.

**Kao Lee Thao: Illuminated Folktale** — an oversized lantern installation with projected Hmong folktales animated on the surface, presented at the Little Mekong Night Market.

**DejaJoelle: Healing With Dance** — a new dance technique to promote healing and self-love, as well as hosting three community events in which the practice will be shared and further developed.

**Margo Gray: Iron Range Auditory Exploration** — develop an app-based interactive audio experience for the Mesabi Trail between Grand Rapids and Ely, MN. This narrative journey will allow participants to see the places they pass through in a new way.

**Tori Hong: Coming Home** — traditional craft arts (paj ntaub and hanji) to explore what coming home means as a queer, second-generation American, for Hmong and Korean people who have historically been displaced by discrimination, genocide, and war, and as an adult renter in the face of gentrification.

Source: forecastpublicart.org
Grants for Pollinators

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources is accepting applications for the Lawns to Legumes program for Fall 2020 projects. This program aims to increase residential habitat for at-risk pollinators across the state by providing residents with workshops, free planting guides, and opportunities to apply for reimbursement for gardening projects. The application period will remain open through June 2.

Anyone who lives in Minnesota and has an area for outdoor planting can apply to be reimbursed for up to $350 in costs associated with establishing new pollinator habitat in their yards. Awardees provide a 25 percent match, which can include in-kind time spent planting or maintaining plants. Apply online: bluethumb.org

Details: bwsr.state.mn.us/l2l

Women’s Employment and Health

The 2020 Best and Worst States for Women were identified in a WalletHub report using 24 metrics and data from sources ranging from the Bureau of Labor Statistics to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Overall, Minnesota ranked second for women, behind Massachusetts. Minnesota’s rankings from Best (1) to Average (25) included:

- 1st: Unemployment Rate for Women
- 8th: Share of Women Who Voted in 2016 Presidential Election
- 11th: Women’s Preventive Health Care

Source: WalletHub

Recovery for Nurses

In February, Wayside Recovery Center launched the first mental health and substance use disorder outpatient treatment program for nurses in Minnesota. Nurses experience challenging work environments, with secondary traumatic stress, work-related injuries, and physical violence. The World Health Organization named 2020 Year of the Nurse and Midwife to “highlight the challenging conditions they often face, and advocate for increased investments in the nursing and midwifery workforce.”

Many nurses struggling with substance use disorder battle stigma, shame, and the fear of losing their license. While these concerns persist, the risk factors in nursing have only increased. Says Erin Murphy, former Executive Director of the Minnesota Nurses Association, “It is important that the system not toss people out because they are using but instead, we hold people and help them find their way back into recovery and back into practice.”

Source: WaysideRecover.org

Trauma and White Nationalists

YES! Magazine features an article about the transformation of Shannon Foley Martinez, a former neo-Nazi in Athens, Georgia, who now works to deradicalize people who are still in the movement.

As she wrote to one young white nationalist: “Most of my change in worldview had literally nothing to do with the ideology. It had to do with why the ideology was seductive and felt empowering to me in the first place. I needed an explanation for why the world seemed like a threatening and brutal place for me. I wanted to believe in something that felt like it mattered and was part of something bigger.

“After five years of that way of life,” Martinez continued, “I began to see how it really kept me looking at the world through victimhood, and that blaming/targeting Jews, blacks, and other races/ethnicities didn’t make me actually feel any safer or more empowered. It just kept my world really small and kept me focused on hurt and pain.”

In every case of nationalism she has ever encountered, Martinez said, she’s been able to identify some type of unhealed trauma. Deradicalization involves identifying the trauma, and finding new resources, behaviors, and networks outside extremist groups to meet those needs.

A report by New Jersey’s Office of Homeland Security Preparedness shows that more than half the suspects involved in 32 domestic terrorism incidents in 2018 were white supremacists. A report by the Anti-Defamation League concluded that right-wing extremists were responsible for all but one of the 50 domestic extremist-related killings in 2018.

Source: yesmagazine.org

— compiled by Mikki Morrissette
My Nontraditional Path
submitted by Renee Oelrich

Growing up on a farm helped me to understand that, more than a daughter or a granddaughter, I was a pair of hands. Chores needed to be done and it did not matter who did them, male or female. We were a team, and success meant seeing the number of tasks we had completed together.

I found out early on that I didn’t have the stomach to work in the medical or veterinarian fields, food sensitivities kept me from the culinary world, and working in a cubicle, staring at a wall all day, wasn’t something that sparked my abilities or creative energy. I need to be outside, working with my hands while seeing life around me evolve.

After high school, I started my journey in nontraditional careers — meaning jobs that are traditionally filled by one gender — as a dump truck driver. I hauled plenty of dirt and gravel. Afterwards, I decided to work filling vending machines.

This time, the early 1990s, was the start of government efforts to provide more opportunities for minorities working in careers that had many job openings but lacked workers. These kinds of jobs were not attractive to women, especially without benefits.

In 2001, I began my career as a water and wastewater operator. What I love most about this career is that I can use all my senses. The sights, sounds, and smells of the equipment will tell me a lot about the condition of the facility — each one has unique qualities with its own aesthetics.

My job includes many roles. I find myself performing the duties of a plumber, an electrician, a mechanic, a janitor, an IT technician, an administration clerk, a chemist, a biologist, a general engineer, a landscaper, a dump hauler, a snowplower, and a public relations expert. One really never knows when they are going to stumble upon their own hidden talents.

I use many nontraditional parts, tools, and equipment. For example, a typical syringe that a veterinarian uses to administer vaccinations is what I use to clean out the gunk of tubing. I use PVC piping for more applications around the plant than I use it for plumbing. Innovation means finding the products that will fit best, save time and money, and just plain work.

In 2018, I was part of a group that traveled to a small village in Guatemala to drill a well. The village was in a remote area, so getting all the equipment there took many trips. The equipment was not always in good shape. Our drilling rig cracked the hydraulics box, which leaked fluids. We used a bucket to catch the fluid and reused it to keep going. Then there was the fact that we might not even reach water because of the rocky soil. In the end, we hit water.

The seven of us women in the group were part of the drilling, but only minimally. There were numerous times I was tapped on the shoulder by a male to be relieved of the task I was performing.

Years ago, getting started in nontraditional jobs, I remember it being awkward because I was told I was “doing things with a woman’s perspective and not how the guys did it.” I was told to just do it their way. I went along with that thinking.

The truth is, however, there is no “women’s way” versus “man’s way” of doing things.

Finding the confidence to say that, while not being negative around co-workers, is an innovation technique in itself. I have had co-workers ask me if I was done with my monthly yet, or how long was I going to milk a broken nail. Sometimes I just had to grin through it.

I see one girl to every five boys who come through as interns. I want to bring awareness of this career to young women. Through a St. Cloud Technical College program, I encourage young adults into nontraditional careers.

We all bring our own talents to the duties of any job. I have incorporated respecting my co-workers into my role and try to set an example. If more women enter the field, they will create a more united coalition and productive atmosphere.

Careers are limited only by those who limit themselves.

In 2013, Renee Oelrich (she/her) won the Laboratory Operator of the Year Award given by Minnesota Wastewater Operators Association.
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Emily Torgrimson, executive director of Eat for Equity, harnesses the power of sharing a meal by encouraging and supporting sustainable community feasts.

Torgrimson was born in Minnesota, but at age three her family relocated to a refugee camp in the Philippines, where her parents worked as social workers. There she made friends from all over the world before moving to Hong Kong. Living abroad taught Torgrimson to be curious about other cultures, especially food.

As a college student at Boston University, she lived at a cooperative for undergraduate women on financial aid. Three times a semester, each resident was responsible for preparing a meal for 30 people.

After Hurricane Katrina hit, Torgrimson used her cooking skills to host a dinner to raise money for relief efforts. She prepared a pot of Jambalaya and invited everyone she knew; 100 people attended. She realized that food could be a form of social justice, and in 2006, Eat for Equity was born.

Torgrimson brought the nonprofit to Minneapolis in 2007, and the crowds increased with each meal. Eat for Equity has outgrown homes and now hosts events in locations like bridges, lakes, farms, and festivals, relying almost exclusively on volunteers to make the food.

Rustic menus are based on what is seasonal and abundant. It tends to be vegetable-forward and consists of foods that are easy for volunteers to prepare.

“The events that are most dynamic and diverse are those that feature a range of leaders and chefs,” says Torgrimson. “For example, with our Welcome Table series, each course is designed by a different cook, to reflect their family heritage and immigration story.”

Eat for Equity has raised $250,399 for Youthlink, Young Dance, and other local organizations that support relief and development efforts as well as inequities in health, the environment, education and opportunity.

For seven years, Torgrimson has been building a benefit corporation based on catering. Mecca Bos is the executive chef, and her menu focuses on locally sourced and organic food purchased from women-owned, minority-owned, and cooperatively owned businesses. It hosts cooking parties, during which people prepare feasts ahead of a wedding, baby shower, health crisis, or for a fundraiser.

“Something special happens when groups gather to prepare a meal,” Bos says. “When you get people working on a project with their hands, whether it is peeling carrots or prepping collard greens, you can go into a bit of a Zen state and start to talk without the pressure or anxiety of the face-to-face. Interesting conversations emerge.”

Adds Torgrimson: “We’ll help you figure out how to make a dinner for 150 people or how to make it fun instead of stressful. We want everybody to feel like they can bring their communities together around a celebration or cause.”

Rather than just breaking bread together, participants feel pride in preparing the food they share with one another. “I push back against the notion that cooking is only for professionals,” Bos says.
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We were sitting in a mosque in Mankato when an elderly woman came looking for $100. We looked at each other and could see panic because we could not afford to donate. That is the moment we decided to host an Eid fundraiser with a group of young people.

Moms donated their time. Businesses donated food and ingredients. We heard a lot about the struggles our Somali community was facing. As young adults, we wanted to do more.

Our first task was to reach out to every member of the local Somali community for a face-to-face survey. We wanted to understand more about the needs in the community. We invited people to coffee, or accepted invitations into their homes, and had conversations.

Modern surveys tend to be digital or written on paper. Yet members of our Somali community dislike impersonal communication. We are very communal people. Oral communication is how we share thoughts and ideas.

People shared their hopes, dreams, and struggles with us. We caught the pulse of the community, while strengthening our relationships.

In-person conversations make it easier to discuss sensitive issues. We were overwhelmed by our conversations — by the pain and suffering of those who do not know who to ask for help because everyone in their circles only speak Somali. More than 400 Somali people signed a petition to open an office representing the Mankato Somali community.

We decided to start the Bridging Somali Care initiative, in which we followed and tracked 50 individuals. We focused on reducing risk factors for diabetes, heart disease, and stroke, as well as a holistic approach to living. An exercise club, lifestyle education classes, and medication class led to a reduction in diabetes diagnoses and weight gain, as well as increased consumption of healthy food and daily physical activity.

Our youth program helps build leadership skills and increase financial literacy. Upon completion, one young person was able to use what they had learned to purchase their first car.

While completing the survey, we were not focused on the numbers or the bottom line. Rather, we put people and their needs first. Our advice to grassroots organizers is to value and utilize their diversity in serving their community. If there is a need, there is a way of filling it.

A few years ago, we would not believe it if someone were to tell us that we would become co-founders of a successful community-based organization.

We are grateful to reach so many people. We did not expect to have such a large impact in our community. The lives we have been able to touch give us hope. The Somali Community Barwaaqo Organization has come a long way from two broke girls sitting at a mosque.

Fardousa Jama and Hamdi Abdinoor (she/hers) are co-founders of the Somali Community Barwaaqo Organization.
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