

the Concordia Academy beam

SUMMER 2022



THE LIGHT STUFF

BEACON WOMEN SHINE BRIGHTLY
AS THEY MAKE A GLOBAL IMPACT

Melissa (Palmer) Hinnant ('98)
Owner and Founder of Grace & Lace

from the Principal

The *Beam*, CA's official magazine, is back! After a long hiatus (see below for some of what has been keeping us very busy), we are delighted to share this new issue. We have much to catch you up on!

The Lord continues to bless CA in amazing ways. We are so grateful to the Lord for his rich and various blessings, including the following:

- Enrollment has increased by 28% over the last five years. We had 307 students in 2021-2022.
- Last year's freshman class reached capacity; we capped it at 90 students.
- CA's Legacy Endowment has increased by more than 400% over the last five years. It is now well over \$3 million.
- Thanks to a great partnership with Concordia University, Saint Paul, we continue to offer more on-campus college classes than any other high school in Minnesota (over 90 college credits). Many of our students graduate having completed a full year or more of college classes.
- CA's ICE Lab (our digital technology lab) continues to expand.
- Our track was recently resurfaced. The baseball and softball fields have their own fences and new digital scoreboards.
- Our innovative Concordia Cohorts program was recently nominated for a national best practice designation. (See Concordia Cohort article on pg. 14.)
- This coming year, CA will be blessed with three full-time pastors on staff: Tim Berner ('85), Head of School; Lusienie Fofana, Head Custodian; and Andrew Asp ('09), Campus Pastor.

We are also thankful to the Lord for past blessings, people, and opportunities. Many of those past blessings continue to impact our alumni, who, in turn, are blessing the world! Our cover story (starting on pg. 6) shines the spotlight on five such alumni.

We truly have much to be grateful for!



Rev. Dr. Timothy Berner
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ASSOCIATION CHURCHES

Bethel Lutheran Church
St. Paul

Bethlehem Lutheran Church
St. Paul

Cross View Lutheran Church
Edina

Eastern Heights Lutheran Church
St. Paul

Emmaus Lutheran Church
St. Paul

Gethsemane Lutheran Church
St. Paul

Jehovah Lutheran Church
St. Paul

King of Kings Lutheran Church
Roseville

North Heights Lutheran Church
Arden Hills

Our Savior's Lutheran Church
St. Paul

South Shore Trinity Lutheran Church
White Bear Lake

St. Stephanus Lutheran Church
St. Paul

Trinity Hudson Lutheran Church
Hudson

Trinity Lone Oak Lutheran Church
Eagan

Woodbury Lutheran Church
Woodbury

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Beacon Highlights

YEAR'S BEST

Concordia Academy staff members honored for outstanding leadership and accomplishments

Four Concordia Academy staff members were honored to be named "The Best" during the 2021-2022 school year.

In the fall, Head Volleyball Coach Kim Duis ('89) was named the Section 4AA Volleyball Coach of the Year. Earlier in the season, she also celebrated her 250th career win. Coach Duis completed her 13th season as head coach and is a member of the CA Athletic Hall of Fame.

In the winter, Eric Schutte was honored as the 2021-22 Section 4AA Boys Basketball Coach of the Year. Coach Schutte has been a CA basketball coach for 24 years, including 19 years as head coach.

Cementing a three-season coaching award streak for CA, Marc Paul ('89) was

named the Section 4AA Track and Field Coach of the Year! With 28 years of experience as a track coach (including 27 as a head coach and 18 at CA), the Beacons had an incredibly successful season under Coach Paul's leadership (see "Right on Track" sidebar on pg. 5). Coach Paul is also a member of the Concordia Academy Athletic Hall of Fame.

Finally, at the Minnesota South District Lutheran Education Conference in October, Rev. Dr. Timothy Berner, CA's principal, received the Outstanding Administrator of the Year Award. The award included a monetary gift provided by the Lutheran Church Extension Fund.

Congratulations to these outstanding Concordia Academy leaders!



Kim Duis



Eric Schutte



Marc Paul



Tim Berner

SPRING MUSICAL HONORED BY HENNEPIN THEATRE TRUST

Following an incredibly popular run in March, the cast and crew of our spring musical, *Annie*, got one more chance to perform in June. Evaluators from Spotlight Education, a program of the Hennepin Theatre Trust, gave our overall production an "Outstanding" rating and invited students performed a medley from *Annie* at the Spotlight Showcase at the State Theatre in Minneapolis in June.



LESSONS FROM A LEGEND

In October, Tommy Kramer, a MN Viking from 1977-1989, spent time with players from both our high school and BEAMS middle school football teams. Our players (and coaches) loved hearing his stories, getting tips from him, throwing the ball, and even getting an autograph or two.



HOLIDAY CRAFT FAIR

The annual CA Holiday Craft Fair brought the Christmas spirit with over 1000 attendees, vendors, crafters, and volunteers who helped make this annual event an enormous success! Mark your calendars and join us for the 2022 CA Holiday Craft Fair on Saturday, November 12.



SHAKESPEARE ON STAGE

A royally good time was had at CA's fall production of *Twelfth Night*, by William Shakespeare. This trip to Illyria with Shakespeare's colorful cast of characters took place November 19-21.



LONG-AWAITED JOURNEY
 In December, Pastor Lusienie Fofana, CA's custodian, left on his trip to Liberia, during which he was able to see his children and grandchildren for the first time in over 20 years! The trip was made possible by funds donated by friends of CA in 2021.



1000 POINT CLUB
 In January, junior AJ Greene, became the 10th member of the Concordia Academy Boys Basketball 1000 Point Club! He entered that exclusive club with a 3-point shot that contributed to a Beacon win against St. Paul Academy.



VISION4LIFE
 Our annual Vision4Life days took place the first week of March and included service, seminars, and worship. Vision4Life is such an important part of the culture of CA, former staff and students often come back to be a part of it. This year, we welcomed back four beloved former teachers: Diane Bisping, Steve Dickhudt, Cindy Urban, and Bruce Urban.



BEACONS SCORE A NEW BOARD

In the dead of winter, Cemstone installed concrete footings that they donated for our new baseball and softball scoreboards. The scoreboards made their debuts at our spring home openers and significantly transformed the experience of watching Beacon baseball and softball.



CA CHOIRS HIT THE ROAD

Concordia Academy choirs were thrilled to finally be able to tour again, following a two-year Covid-19 hiatus. His People and Concert Choir traveled to St. Louis, Memphis, and Quincy, IL during spring break. The tour was filled with numerous performances and fun sightseeing, as well as the opportunity to connect with some Beacon alumni.

A GRAND DAY

Beacon grandparents fill the building with smiles, wisdom, and lots of love

What a blessing it was to welcome almost 200 grandparents to our campus in April for our first Grandparents Day since 2019.

The grandparents enjoyed a delicious breakfast and attended an assembly with music by CA's choirs. They also spent

time with their grandchildren, including worshipping together in chapel, exploring the building, and meeting their grandchildren's teachers.

It was a day filled with stories, laughter, love, and lots of Beacon Pride!



Above: Grandparents and grandchildren worship together in chapel.

Left: Luke Daenzer ('22) welcomed all four of his grandparents, including Lowell Beck (far left, CA '54).

Top: Our Upper Gym was packed for our special Grandparents Day chapel.

ZINTER WONDERLAND

Shaina Zinter amazes with a record-setting track and field season

In its 37th year of honoring the nation's best high school athletes, Gatorade announced on June 30 that Shaina Zinter ('22) is the 2021-22 Gatorade Minnesota Girls Track & Field Player of the Year. Zinter is the first Gatorade Minnesota Girls Track & Field Player of the Year to be chosen from Concordia Academy. The award, which recognizes not only outstanding athletic excellence, but also high standards of academic achievement and exemplary character demonstrated on and off the field, distinguishes Shaina as Minnesota's best high school girls track and field athlete.

This was fitting recognition at the end of a remarkable season that included a long string of accomplishments for Shaina.

- She broke her previous school records in the 200 (24.98), 400 (55.99) and 300 hurdles (42.38).
- She helped set a new school record in the 4x800 (10:09.45) with



Emily Erickson ('22), Grace Erickson ('22), and Jade Schutte ('26).

- At the Hamline Elite Meet (where all classes of athletes compete together), she took 1st in 300 hurdles, 2nd in the long jump, 3rd in the 100 hurdles, and 4th in the 100 meter dash.
- She took 1st at State in the 100 and 300 hurdles and the 200 meter. She also placed 2nd in the long jump. Shaina has state records for Class A in the 300 and 100 hurdles.
- At the NSAF Nationals, she took 1st in the heptathlon (5122 points) and 2nd in the 400 Hurdles (59.19).
- At the USATF Junior Olympic Nationals, she took 1st in the heptathlon.
- Shaina's 400 hurdles time is the second-best-ever from a Minnesota high school, and her 300 hurdle time is the third-best-ever from a Minnesota high school.
- Shaina's 800 time in her latest heptathlon was 2:10.47, which puts her in the all-time top 10 Minnesota high school girls.

Shaina was also an accomplished volleyball athlete at CA. She won a Class AA All-State Award and was invited to play in the All-Star Volleyball Game.

Finally, Shaina was CA's 2022 Athena Award Winner and was also named CA's Female Athlete of the Year. This fall, she will be competing on a track and field scholarship at the University of Wisconsin.

CONGRATULATIONS, CLASS OF 2022

On May 27, we celebrated the accomplishments of the Class of 2022 and offered praise and thanks to God for his love, grace, and faithfulness. The graduation of this year's senior class was filled with laughs, tears, words to remember, and lots of celebration!



Some of those words of wisdom came in speeches by Emily Erickson and Grace Erickson, twin sisters and co-valedictorians. It truly was a tie for this honor; Grace and Emily actually had identical GPAs through the hundred-thousandth decimal place!



THE STRENGTH OF CA
CA's year-round strength and conditioning program for boys and girls, run by graduates Baeza Tensaie ('13) and Bob Quast ('91), continues to be the bedrock of our athletic program. Since 2013, Concordia Academy has won 11 Tri-Metro and Skyline Conference Weightlifting Competitions, including the most recent one this spring. The program has also helped lead to numerous conference championships and the addition of 11 state banners to the gym wall. This summer, almost 150 students in Grades 6-12 are participating in weight training camps.



RIGHT ON TRACK

The Beacons had an incredibly successful track and field season last spring. Team accomplishments included the following:

- 1st Place Girls True Team Section
- 6th Place Girls True Team State
- 1st Place Girls Skyline Conference
- 1st Place Girls Section
- 2nd Place Boys True Team Section
- 3rd Place Boys Skyline Conference
- 1st Place Boys Section



THE LIGHT STUFF

Beacons are all about shining light. So it's no surprise that Concordia Academy is blessed with incredible Beacon men and women who shine as lights in the world through impactful business and humanitarian work. However, women have never been so qualified and had so many opportunities to make an impact as right now. So, we were delighted to sit down in conversation with five Beacon women to highlight career paths that, while unique, share similar spirits and ethics.

These women have tenaciously made their mark in various interesting and sometimes difficult circumstances. Martin Luther once described a farm girl milking a cow as the "fingers of God." Through her, God fed his people. We are so proud of these Beacons who are shining and honoring God through excellent work in their very different fields.

Melissa (Palmer) Hinnant ('98) Owner and Founder of Grace & Lace

Your professional story is kind of a twisty tale. How did you get to where you are now?


Well, I call Grace & Lace my accidental company, because I never started out with the intention of running a business.

Almost 11 years ago, I had an idea that I wanted to make a pair of boot socks that had lace across the top. Being from Minnesota, I wore boots a lot, and I was looking for a way to make a statement. So I made a pair of socks that took me five hours on my sewing machine. Since it took me so long and so much effort, I wore them everywhere. Everywhere I went, people would stop me and ask where I got them. When I would respond that I had made them, complete strangers would ask me to make them a pair. At the time, I had a small Etsy site where I sold baby clothes that I would make just as a hobby. My husband, Rick, recommended that I put a few of my boot socks

up for sale on that site to see if they would sell. I did, and they sold instantly. I didn't have enough experience to know that I could, or should, put a cap on the amount of items I could sell. Within two days, I had sold over 500 pairs of boot socks. Basically, it went viral! I didn't know what to do; I only had one pair, and they took me five hours to make! Rick advised me to do one of two things: he said I could either refund everyone and explain and apologize or find a way to make that many pairs.

I've always been the kind of person who makes the decision to figure out a problem or die trying, so I decided to follow through on the orders. I made a pattern and hired a bunch of stay-at-home moms and before we knew it, the socks were made. In the first month of business, we made \$60,000 in sales, and Grace & Lace was born!

Since then, we've been featured on *The Today Show*, on *Shark Tank*, and in various



Melissa Hinnant cuts the ribbon at the grand opening of an Angel House orphanage in India.



major publications. We've gone from making one pair of socks on my sewing machine in the corner of my bedroom in our townhome to a full line of women's apparel that we design, make, and sell.

Is there a pivotal moment that brought you to where you are now? Or was it really just the accidental sock?

You know, I say that Grace & Lace is just an accidental company, but I don't actually believe that. I feel like God knew that this was the plan and purpose for my life long before I was born, and so I end up taking back my own words. God had this for me; I just didn't see it coming.

I think it all really started with my desire to be a mom and have a family. Rick and I

had been married for a few years, and we had struggled to get pregnant. Finally, after trying for some time, I became pregnant. I was several months into my pregnancy when the doctor told me, "Melissa, within 24 hours you are going to give birth to your daughter, and she probably isn't going to survive." Talk about being plowed over! I was in massive shock. They rushed me into emergency surgery to try to stave off labor and save me and the baby. The surgery was successful, but I had to remain in the hospital for months afterward, just laying on my back, without the ability to even leave the bed. This could have sent me into a tailspin.

Instead, I asked the Lord what I could do at that time. I would do anything for that baby to survive, but I couldn't just lay there

on my back and watch TV for months. It was there that I found my love for knits and sewing. I was taught by my mom and grandma to knit, crochet, and quilt when I was young, so when I was lying there on my hospital bed, I started making baby blankets for other moms on that high-risk floor with me. When I think about where it really all began, it was there.

Unfortunately, weeks later, we lost our sweet Halle. Her lungs weren't developed enough for her to breathe on her own. When the nurse was wheeling me out to leave without a baby in my arms after all that time there, she said to me, "Melissa, never stop creating." And I found healing in that—in those words and in the act of knitting those blankets. At a time when we could have been

“At a time when we could have been angry and questioned God, we chose to believe that... something good will come from this horrible situation.”

Melissa Hinnant

angry and questioned God, we chose to believe that God has a purpose and plan for this; something good will come from this horrible situation. When you ask me about a pivotal moment, it was before the business, but it really was what set us in motion to where we are now. I believe God hasn't wasted that pain. He has worked so much good from that point in our lives.

Your life has taken so many turns. At CA, did you have a sense of what you wanted to do after high school?

You know, I didn't really know. I just knew that God had a plan. Right after high school, I did a one-year internship program where I served overseas for a Christian organization recruiting teenagers to go on short-term mission trips. I knew I wanted to serve, so I used that year to see if I could figure out where God wanted me. That's what brought me to Texas originally, and here I am 23 years later.

In that year after high school, I spent two months in India, working in a Mother Teresa Home with the poorest of the poor. They'd never seen white skin before. There were babies with bottles strapped to their skin because there weren't enough workers to feed them. It was at that point that I felt like maybe I was called to missionary work there, or at least to mobilize others to be there. Now, all these years later, through my work with Grace & Lace, we've been able to build and fund orphanages in India, and I have been able to literally rescue orphans off the streets there, 20-plus years after I felt that tug.

Talk more about that part of your ministry and how you have felt called to serve the people of India.

Well, shortly after Grace & Lace began, Rick and I realized that it wasn't just a hobby, but it was a legitimate income-producing business. I thought, "Hold on. I need to tie this back to what my heart beats for."

The year that the business started was the same year that a friend of mine started a non-profit business in India called Angel House. Angel House facilitates construction crews to build orphanages and recruits house parents through local churches, and this non-profit needed financing. It was really the perfect timing and partnership; it was such a divine thing! They are the hands and feet. We have built 10 orphanages to date. Some of them are very big; one of them is an actual home and school for 500 boys, but most are for 20-50 residents. They are called

Grace & Lace orphanages. They have house parents and private education.

We have also branched into what we call our Freedom Homes. To combat the sex trafficking trade on the Nepali/Indian border, we have literal teens on the ground scooping girls out of the sex trafficking trade as they cross the border. These girls are then placed in the Freedom Homes where they can live and be trained in a skilled trade like sewing, bracelet making, and hair cutting. In this way, they have a status and no longer have to be trapped in the sex trade.

So we have branched from the orphanages, but our mission has stayed the same: to restore and return dignity to women and rescue orphans. Eventually, our dream is to do this all over the world, but right now our main work is in India and Nepal.

What do you know now that you wish you would have known in high school?

About five years after I graduated, I wrote a letter to Coach Dickhudt, because to this day I attribute so much to what he taught me. He believed in me and spoke life into me. He taught me that whatever I set my mind to I could achieve. I get emotional thinking about this. When I wrote that letter, I thanked him because, to me, he was more than just a volleyball coach.

As a business owner now, those lessons from the court have stuck. I wish I would have appreciated them as a high school student as much as I do now. I remember getting so mad at him about having to run that lap in one minute and 18 seconds to make varsity. I thought I was going to die, but he would calmly encourage and tell me that if I believed it, I could achieve it. I can't tell you how many times in this business and through our struggles I've wanted to say, "I can't do this anymore. I just can't do it." I'm glad I know it now, but I wish I knew then that it was preparing me for something so much greater.

How did CA most impact your life?

I made lifelong friends at CA that supported me then and now. In high school, I felt like I had a place and a purpose. Not all high school students feel that way. Coach Dickhudt made a huge impact through lessons on the court that resonated throughout my life, in addition to many other teachers, like Pastor Berner and Mr. and Mrs. Urban, just to name a few. My years at Concordia Academy were life-changing, and I'm so grateful for my time there.



Melissa and Rick Hinnant appear with their Grace and Lace line on ABC's Shark Tank in 2013.



The Hinnant Family



Melissa Hinnant with Meredith Vieira and Barbara Corcoran

Read more about Melissa and check out Grace & Lace at www.graceandlace.com.

Adine Momoh ('02)

Partner, Stinson LLP

What do you do for work?

As an equity partner at Stinson LLP, I am a trial attorney focusing on bankruptcy, bankruptcy appeals, Ponzi scheme defense, and creditors' rights. I also co-chair the firm's national Estates and Trusts Litigation Practice Group, where I lead a team of attorneys in providing sophisticated advice and advocacy when disputes arise involving wealth management, wealth transfer, securities litigation, and tax strategy.

I work hard to put myself in spaces where I can better advocate for and understand my clients, their industries, and the statewide and nationwide business and political climates that impact their day-to-day. My clients include individuals and businesses (ranging from Fortune 500 companies to start-ups) in diverse industries, such as financial services and wealth management, health care, natural gas, medical gas, nonprofits and foundations, telecommunications and government contracts, as well as pro bono and low bono clients facing business disputes, criminal prosecution, housing, divorce and child custody, domestic abuse, habeas corpus, immigration, civil rights, and other issues.

How did you get to where you are in your career today?

Since the age of six, I knew that I wanted to be an attorney. As I grew older, I found I had the necessary skills to pursue that dream. I loved reading, researching, and writing, and I had a unique knack for being able to solve problems by thinking outside the box, spotting issues, and remaining focused. As an adult, I have honed another valuable skill: I know how to socialize well and relate to others, regardless of whether people look like me, think like me, or have my background.

As a six-year-old, I didn't know what kind of law I wanted to practice, but I knew if I did well in school, worked hard, and remained focused, I could become a successful attorney. I graduated as valedictorian from both Central Lutheran School and Concordia Academy. I also started working at 16, which helped me develop leadership skills and learn how to be independent, save, be resourceful, make relationships, and work in a team. My interest in business law developed in college, where I triple majored in Legal



“As a six-year-old...I knew if I did well in school, worked hard, and remained focused, I could become a successful attorney.”*Adine Momoh*

Studies in Business – Business Administration, Psychology, and Pre-Law. I chose Legal Studies in Business because it was a new program developed at the University of St. Thomas Opus College of Business in response to the Enron scandal. The goal of the program was to teach students that maximizing shareholder wealth does not have to be accomplished at the expense of acting ethically.

After receiving my bachelor's degree, summa cum laude, I received law degrees from William Mitchell College of Law, magna cum laude, where I served as the managing editor of the *William Mitchell Law Review*, and Georgetown University Law Center, with highest distinction. I also served as a federal law clerk for the Honorable Jeanne J. Graham of the U.S. District Court for the District of Minnesota.

How did your time at CA most impact your life?

High school is such a transformative period. My time in high school was unique not only because of what happened there personally but because of the events taking place in the world at the time. The Columbine High School shooting happened on April 20, 1999. I was a freshman, and I remember I was supposed to attend track practice. Practice was canceled. The evening was a challenging one, as I tried to sort out with my parents and my older

brothers what happened and what the tragedy meant. At that moment, I realized a school shooting could happen anywhere, which, as a 15-year-old, was hard to grasp.

Two years later, September 11 occurred. I was a senior, and my first class of the day was religion, which was taught in the auditorium. I remember Pastor Berner rolling in a television on a cart so we could watch what was happening, not knowing at the time that our country was under attack. Those are unfortunate flashbulb memories that I will never forget.

But there were also many good memories from my high school experience. I appreciate that I had support from my older brothers who set me up for success at Concordia when I started high school. Thanks to my brothers, I already had a few proud nicknames: “Momoh” or to some of the older classmates, “Little Momoh,” or “Momoh Child.” My parents were extremely supportive during my high school experience—driving me to and from school, showing up at choir concerts, track meets, and the list goes on. I am also thankful for the many great teachers I had in high school. I can't list all of them, but those who come to mind include Mr. Kuhlman, Mr. Kuseske, Ms. Nystuen, Mr. Vogel, Mr. Aurich, Ms. Sohn, Mr. Dunavan, and Mrs. Vomhof.

Deborah Dittberner MD, MBA ('82)

Regional Medical Director, Aledade

“Being at CA was a safe place for me to try everything, so it gave me the confidence to throw my hat in the ring for other opportunities.” *Deborah Dittberner*



What do you do for work?

I am a Regional Medical Director for Aledade in North Carolina. I was a Chief Medical Officer for Alomere, which is a medium-sized hospital in Alexandria, MN, that serves the surrounding lakes area. It has approximately 126 licensed beds and 100+ physicians and advanced practice providers, hundreds of nurses, and multiple outpatient clinics. I was there for 26 years as a practicing physician and eight years as Chief Medical Officer before I left for an opportunity with Aledade at a more national/regional level.

In the world of healthcare, we are trying hard to get healthcare costs down, or at least stop them from rapidly inflating like they have been. Aledade is working with third-party payers like Humana, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Medicare, Medicaid, and many others. Those payers work with the clinics, health systems, primary care physicians, and advanced practice providers, who, in this model, are paid more to keep their patients healthy, rather than a fee-for-service model. In traditional, fee-for-service health care, systems make more money if the patient isn't healthy, as they keep going to the ER and have long, recurrent hospitalizations or multiple procedures.

So it's kind of a preventative model?

Yeah. “Healthcare needs” are really a pyramid. The bottom of the pyramid is healthy people who go to their doctor once a year for their wellness visit. As individuals age or suddenly have medical issues, like cancer or another illness, they migrate to the top of the pyramid. We are now trying to focus more on the people at the top of the pyramid, not to keep them healthy, but to keep them “well.” A good example of this is a 76-year-old

patient of mine who was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. She had other medical problems, including asthma, high blood pressure, and macular degeneration. In the new model, I sat down with her in what we call “care coordination,” where a registered nurse (RN) is involved. I asked her, “How do you want your care?” This question begins a process of her being part of the decisions. This particular patient was able to tell us that she wanted to aggressively treat her cancer, and she also wanted to live as long as possible. She wanted ALL care available, and she wanted to be seen often by the same team so that she didn't have to explain herself to new providers in the ER or hospital recurrently.

We were able to accommodate her wishes by having her see me at least once per month and giving her an open line of communication with the same RN and care team members. Because of our team approach, we were able to take excellent care of her for almost three years with only outpatient care and no hospital stays, per her wishes. She, and many others like her, receive very complex care in an outpatient setting, which is really good for the patient.

So how did you get that experience?

I helped lead an accountable care organization across central Minnesota for CentraCare called Central Minnesota Health Network. This network included hospitals and clinics for CentraCare and Carris in the towns of Alexandria, Wadena, and Little Falls.

I also co-created complex outpatient care models for Alexandria and the surrounding area, and now I am doing that in North Carolina for Aledade. We call this new model of care “The Quadruple Aim.”

1. Lower healthcare costs.
2. Improve

3. Improve patient experience.
4. Keep the resiliency of healthcare workers going. Healthcare has changed dramatically in recent years; my job wouldn't have been a thing seven years ago.

What was your educational pathway to healthcare?

You know, I am the first person in my family to go into healthcare. I come from multiple generations of teachers and farmers. When I was at Concordia Academy, I was looking at nursing programs. After high school, I went to Gustavus Adolphus. In college, I was still planning on nursing, but they told me just to keep the door open. I was encouraged to take the chemistry and biology classes that the pre-med and physical therapy students took, rather than the nursing track science classes. So I did take those classes and loved them. That was that!

What did you love about CA?

One thing I loved was Mr. Kuhlman's math classes. They weren't titled; we just had Math 1, 2, 3, and 4. I didn't even know that I had been taught calculus. I know that when I got to Gustavus, I could do calculus, but with Mr. Kuhlman, it was just Math 4. I think that was neat.

I have another very vivid memory that, to this day, I recognize as a turning point in the way that I learned. It was with Mr. Aurich. I was in his sophomore American History class. I got a test back, and I didn't like the grade, so I went to talk with him about it. I sat down at my desk and I said, “I just don't get it. I studied and I studied.” He got up from his desk, you know, tall Mr. Aurich, 6'5” or whatever he is. He paged through my test, looked at me, and said, “Dittberner, you have to stop memorizing.

You have to understand things. You need to understand why it happened. You have to quit learning by memorization. Understand the why." And boom! I'll never forget that conversation. It was eye-opening and absolutely made me change the way I thought about learning.

What were you involved in at CA?

Gosh, that was another beautiful thing about CA! It was teeny weeny, so I was involved in everything, and that was the beauty. I was in choir and was the accompanist. I played the flute and the tuba in band. I played three sports. My passion was volleyball, which I also played at Gustavus. I ran track and played basketball as well.

How did your time at CA impact your life?

I think it taught me how to learn, and, as I mentioned, it was there that I discovered that I had to know the "why." Being at CA was a safe place for me to try everything, so it gave me the confidence to throw my hat in the ring for other opportunities.

You mentioned that your job "wouldn't have been a thing seven years ago." You are likely in a different place than you imagined when you were in medical school. How did you find yourself doing what you are doing now, as opposed to what you thought you would be doing when you were in medical school?

You know, that's an interesting question. Healthcare has certainly changed, and I think I just sort of followed the path. But I think I have always had leadership skills. At CA, I was president of the student body, and at Gustavus, I had a lot of leadership roles, as well as in medical school. When I came to town, I was one of the first female physicians, and it was tougher to take on leadership roles. When one of the Medical Directors for our clinic stepped down, I said, "I'll do it!" And then, when the Chief Medical Officer position opened up, I instantly threw my hat in the ring. I've always liked being part of the change and helping people understand what's happening; maybe that's the teacher in me.

So I guess where I'm at in leadership doesn't shock me. But healthcare is incredibly different from when I started. The Affordable Care Act has turned healthcare upside down. The reason it was 700 pages long wasn't because they were trying to be complex; rather, it was because they were creating a whole new kind of plan to keep people well. I knew that, to keep us afloat, we had to be a part of it. That I wasn't expecting, but I love it.

Stephanie Johnson ('82)

Italian Wine Editor, *Wine & Spirits Magazine*

What do you do for work?

I'm the Italian Wine Editor for *Wine & Spirits* magazine, a quarterly wine review. Though it's certainly available for the general public, its target market is wine buyers, sommeliers, and more serious, informed consumers.

I write profiles and pieces on all aspects of Italian wine. I travel to Italy four to six times per year, meeting with wine producers and learning about the history of the region where the wines are produced and about the producers themselves.

In your work life, how did you get to where you are today?

After CA, I attended St. Olaf College and majored in English. From there, I went on to work at West Publishing in the college textbook division. I eventually became an editor at West, but when the company was bought by Thomson Reuters, I moved to New York and took a job with Prentice Hall/Pearson Education.

I got married in 1999 and had three kids within five years. During maternity leaves, I began taking wine classes and found that I had a passion for it. I completed the multi-year diploma program with London-based Wine & Spirits Education Trust. Around that time, a friend of mine started City Winery, a wine bar, restaurant, and music venue in Soho. I began working with him to develop the wine program and stayed on as wine director for six years.

In 2013, I decided to combine my interests in wine and publishing, and took a job at *Wine & Spirits Magazine*. Within a couple of years I became the Italian Wine Editor.



“My encouragement would be to do your work and take steps forward, but continue always to pursue what you enjoy doing outside of work.” *Stephanie Johnson*

What is something from your time at Concordia that you really enjoyed?

My main activity at CA was sports. I played a lot of sports! I was in three sports a year, every year. I played tennis the first year, but they didn't have a tennis team after that year, so then I played volleyball in the fall, basketball in the winter, and softball in the spring. I enjoyed all of it! [*Stephanie was inducted into the CA Athletic Hall of Fame in 2016.*]

How did your time at Concordia Academy most impact your life?

While the sports were fun, they didn't impact my life so much as being in a school where I had to focus on my academics and learn how to study. I honed that skill at CA, and once I was in college, I could see that not everyone had that experience.

I think my time at Concordia impacted my career choice in a roundabout way. I remember sitting in Tom Kuseske's history class and studying the ancient Egyptians and ancient Greeks. I remember thinking, "It would be so cool to travel to those places." During my senior year in college, I had an opportunity to go to the Middle East and around the Mediterranean, including visits to Israel, Greece, and Italy. That trip was such a mind-expanding, eye-opening experience. I hadn't traveled out of the country before, other than Canada. It set me on a path to want to continue traveling and

learning about different parts of the world. Now, of course, I travel often to Italy. Thinking back, I was always so fascinated by history, and what I'm doing is a great mix of the things I love: travel, history, and writing. I'm working on a story that will bring me to Naples next week, where I'll visit the archaeological site of Pompeii and write about the city's many wine bars that existed at the time of the big Vesuvius eruption in 79 AD. So it does come full circle to those days in history class.

What do you know now that you wish you knew as a high school student?

I feel like most high school students feel a lot of pressure to target a career choice and plan their next steps based on that. They think they need to know what they want to do or be right out of school. I certainly fell into this camp. My encouragement would be to do your work and take steps forward, but continue always to pursue what you enjoy doing outside of work. I was taking wine classes for fun because I was interested in that, and then it turned into a job. That's not going to happen to everyone, but why not keep pursuing your interest?

You spend something like a third of your life working, and if you hate your job, that's a really big part of your life that is wasted. I would encourage students not to feel so much pressure to get a certain job; instead, focus on something that will bring you lifelong joy.

Amanda (Keiser '97) Brinkman

Filmmaker, Producer, and Speaker

What is your professional story? How did you get to where you are now?

I started my career on the creative/advertising agency side of the business. First, I worked at a PR agency in London, then I moved back to Minneapolis and worked for Campbell Mithun and then Fallon. I had the opportunity to work on incredible global brands like BMW, Reebok, Colgate-Palmolive, SONY, NYSE, Virgin Mobile and others. Then I moved to the corporate side. UnitedHealth Group recruited me to start their in-house marketing agency. This is when I began bringing the mission of my career to life, which is to make your customers' lives better beyond just selling them things. At UHG through creative approaches, we were helping people lead healthier lives. From there, I went to Allianz, an international financial services company, and created a new brand in North America, developing important programming

around fiscal literacy. Then, when our daughter was young and I wanted a little more flexibility, I went to General Mills as a consultant, where I helped them build out their content and publishing studio.

Finally, Deluxe called almost 9 years ago, and I was brought in as their Chief Brand and Communications Officer to help them overcome brand awareness issues. As we were about to celebrate our 100th anniversary, we were still known for our legacy as a check-printer and not for our newly evolved small business services. In an effort to create something that did something good for small businesses, on our way to achieving our business goals, I created an original TV show called *Small Business Revolution*, which was on Hulu and was nominated for an Emmy – twice! Each season we would revitalize a different community's Main Street through its small businesses. It was essentially a small

business makeover show, with heart. While the first five seasons of the show took place in different small towns across the country, for our final season we brought the show home to Minneapolis and St. Paul and featured all Black-owned businesses across the Twin Cities. Season 6 was grounded in a lot of community-listening and we are really proud of how it turned out.

Was there a specific CA teacher that nurtured your love of learning or positively impacted your life?

Yes! Ms. Novotny, who taught English. One day she took me aside and shared that she felt I had a lot of traits that would make for a good journalist. The next day, I cold-called the *Star Tribune*! (This is the blessing of youth sometimes; it didn't occur to me that that isn't *at all* how getting a job at a major newspaper works.) It just so happened that they had been talking about wanting to

start a youth column. I love how seemingly small things lead us to a specific place. I showed a certain skill set, which compelled Ms. Novotny to encourage me in a certain way. I was raised to advocate for myself and to believe “It never hurts to ask,” which compelled me to make a call. Then, somehow the right person at this large organization (who happened to know that they were looking at starting this column) answered the phone and directed me to the right person. It’s such a series of events that all needed to happen in just the right way at the right time. I call this “life constellations.” There are all of these little points of light, these times or moments and interactions that are like single stars illuminating. We may see that each thing is good or beautiful in the moment, but it’s not until we take a step back that we see the whole constellation and how all of those points worked together for the bigger picture.

So anyway, I was given the opportunity to work for this MN youth news column. I occasionally was allowed to miss class to go to press conferences. It was pretty cool, and even in high school I was starting to build my actual career and resume.

Coach Dickhudt was also amazing. I wanted to work hard for him. He had that effect, I think, on every athlete he coached. I was a B or B- athlete, but I worked so hard in the off-season to be an A. It built so much more character that way. I also really liked Mr. Kuseske and Mr. Kuhlman. There was so much talent in those two teachers! We were very fortunate at CA with the caliber of teaching, and I don’t know that we even realized it.

You do such interesting work. Did you know what you wanted to do while you were a high school student at CA?

Well, it’s crazy. I tell this story a lot, and it has everything to do with Concordia Academy. Growing up, I knew I wanted to do something that did good in the world. When you are growing up, though, you only see certain jobs, roles, or professions as inherently “good.” You have to work for a non-profit, be a teacher, or a nurse. So, I was thinking maybe a family counselor or something – but I was also so taken with design, film, and advertising, none of which fit into the “goodness” category. At that time, I was taking an AP course with Professor Noggle, and we were having a discussion about what you want to do when you grow up. I was sharing this particular struggle with him: I wanted to do good in the world, but I was so attracted to business, marketing, and advertising and didn’t know what to do with that. Without missing a beat, he said, “Amanda, if people who want to do good in the world don’t go into the business

“Kindness isn’t a weakness. It’s a superpower.”

Amanda Brinkman

space, how will ‘business’ ever get better?” For me, that was a huge paradigm shift! I have now spent my entire career pursuing this concept. How do we bring goodness to the business world? The power, resources, influence and reach of “business” is vast. And harnessed for good? Incredible. This was actually the topic of my TEDx Talk - “How all companies can Do Well by Doing Good.” It’s funny, I remember exactly where I was standing when he said that to me – Mr. Lark’s biology classroom – because it was such a defining moment in my life.

What a great story! Is that what put you on your trajectory to where you are now?

Oh yeah, absolutely. I’ve lived my entire life and career in pursuit of this. You know, not every role that I’ve had has allowed me to impact for good in the same way, it’s varied. And sometimes you are just being prepared for the next season, role or challenge where your real impact will be. However, this last role is the most perfect example of what I’m talking about. I had to have all of these other opportunities first, though, to be qualified for the role of Chief Brand Officer of this publicly-traded, Fortune 1000, 100+ year old company. It is interesting to look back and see how God prepares you and how each thing leads to the next. When I’m speaking at events, I talk about how we’re all on this planet for a reason. We all have different skill sets and passions. You’re good at things that I’m not good at, and I am interested in things that you have no interest in; then you mix in the influence of those who raised us, experiences that each of us carries, and every piece of our journey that leads each of us to where we are. Even if people don’t want to believe that our lives are by design, we have to live in a way that honors and uses each piece of that personal journey. If we do that, suddenly we have a calling.

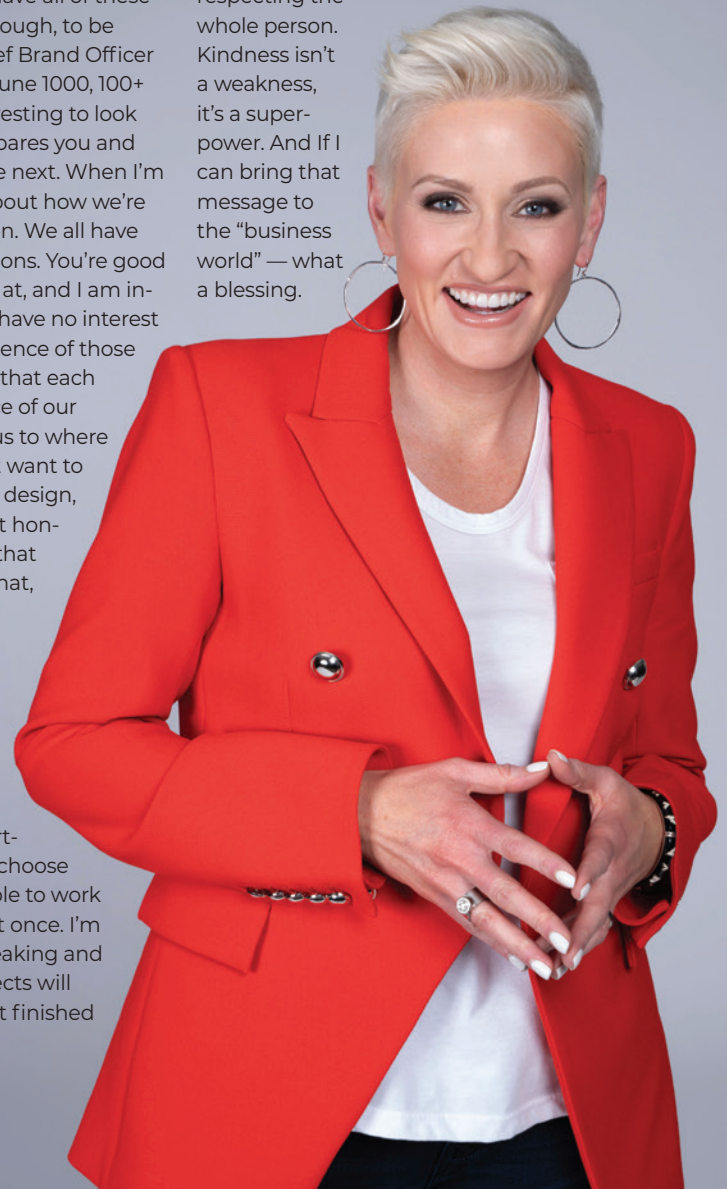
So what’s next?

My time at Deluxe and working on *Small Business Revolution* was incredible, and now I’m on to new adventures. I’m calling it a portfolio career. I don’t want to choose just one job; I want to be able to work on a variety of projects all at once. I’m going to focus more on speaking and film projects. The film projects will be very similar to what I just finished

doing, which is helping brands create long-form content that engages their customers in a cool way and stands for something, and somehow advances the global societal narrative and advocates for positive change.

It’s refreshing to see a business career so focused on encouraging “goodness.”

When I’m brought in to speak at big companies under this banner of “Do Well by Doing Good” at the company level, I also know that my audience is full of individuals who aren’t necessarily in a role where they feel they can invoke company-wide change. So I use that stage and that speech to encourage and affirm everyone in the audience around their ability to have individual impact. Anyone can be a force for goodness. How can you make a difference right now in the life of one person or a few people you come in contact with throughout your day? We are called to love one another. That means leading with love in every interaction. Loving, seeing, honoring and respecting the whole person. Kindness isn’t a weakness, it’s a superpower. And if I can bring that message to the “business world” — what a blessing.



COHORTS FEED STUDENT PASSIONS

CA's Concordia Cohorts program was recently nominated to the National Lutheran School Accreditation authority as a "Powerful Practice." "This program is something every school needs to know about and imitate," said Sean Martins, leader of a visiting accreditation team. If selected at the national level, CA may be asked to present these programs to national educational conferences.

CA launched its first cohort, a STEM-focused program, 10 years ago. Students who loved STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) were invited to join. This meant taking CA's most advanced Science and Math classes, maintaining a minimum 3.2 GPA in all STEM classes, completing a summer internship in a related field, and entering a research project in competition.

Since then, the program has expanded to include an Emerging Artist Cohort and a Humanities Scholar Cohort. While some requirements differ, all three cohorts share the original goal of feeding students' passions while helping them stand out to top universities.

The program has also expanded through our Cohort Conversations, which are

open to the entire student body. Most Fridays during lunch, a speaker from a STEM, arts, or humanities-related occupation connects with students through a presentation and Q & A time. Even though they are optional, many students choose these presentations over a leisurely lunch with their friends; attendance consistently averages 35 students or more.

Speakers (including some CA alumni) have included the director of 3M's Innovation Center, professional artists and musicians, a United Nations Emergency Relief worker, an organic farmer, a parole officer, a medical researcher, a genetic counselor, a police Chaplain, and a highly successful business entrepreneur. All speakers share their passion, details of their day-to-day work, and how they seek to honor God in what they do. One student attendee recently shared, "They opened my mind to a whole new world."

Indeed, this program is about opening minds, feeding passions, and preparing for the future. As a result, Concordia Cohort graduates have won contests and awards, earned significant scholarships, been accepted to top universities, and are enriching the world in powerful ways.



Cohort Conversation Speakers (from top): Linc Stine (Humanities), Marla Urban (STEM), Pastor Vue Lee (Humanities), Chris Fink ('96, Emerging Artist).

COHORT MEMBERS' WORK FEATURED AT PNC BANK



In June, the new PNC Bank in Roseville held an official grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony. Those in attendance were able to admire art by Grace Erickson ('22), Rachel Lane ('21), and Ethan Sorensen ('24), who all have artwork on permanent display in the bank.

In the spring of 2021, Roseville-area art students were invited to submit proposals for original artwork reflective of Minnesota that would be created for the bank. Four proposals were selected, and the students who submitted those proposals (including our three CA students) were commissioned to create the art that now hangs there. Throughout the creation process, the students worked with Christopher E. Harrison, who served as an Artist Mentor.

Congratulations to these Beacons for sharing their impressive talent with the Roseville community. And thank you to PNC Bank and their partner, Spotlight Education/Hennepin Theatre Trust, for sponsoring this opportunity.

Artwork by Rachel Lane (top left), Ethan Sorensen (bottom left), and Grace Erickson (near left) hangs in PNC Bank in Roseville.

Mission Advancement

I first walked through the doors as a freshman at Concordia Academy in 1995. I remember nervously standing at my new locker and watching the veteran students like they were celebrities. As an elementary student at Central Lutheran School, I had watched many of them perform in theater productions, sing with His People, or compete in sporting events. Suddenly, I was here and one of them. I was a Beacon.

Now, 23 years after my 1999 graduation, I'm back. I'm one of them, now as Director of Mission Advancement, still a Beacon, but looking at things from a whole different perspective. As my title implies, I will be helping to advance CA's mission—to lead, teach, and inspire students to become all that God would have them be. And what an exciting time to jump back in!

Though so much of what draws me back is the same about my alma mater, much has improved. There have been academic innovations, providing opportunities for students in the classroom that are exceptional in a school of this size. I'm impressed by what is offered to a CA student, opportunities like ICE Lab, a Robotics course, Concordia Cohorts and Cohort Conversations, and more than 90 college credits taught live on-campus!

Attending Concordia Academy was integral in my faith journey. I gained knowledge through religion (now theology) classes, but also every other class, because each teacher taught through the lens of being a Christ-follower. It has been exciting to see unique new programs implemented that complement the continued excellence in teaching and spiritual development: Family Life Groups, the Vision4Life service week, student-led Bible studies, and daily class devotions.

I have also learned that we just finished a five-year strategic plan with all goals met; we are in a financially stable place and enrollment has increased 28% in those five years. We are now at the start of a fresh five-year plan which feels like the perfect time to enter into this role as Director of Mission Advancement. What a mission to advance! What a story to tell!

One thing I love about working in advancement is that it's a two-way street. I get to tell this story of Concordia Academy, and I want to hear your story, too. Getting to know the individuals who are supporting CA, holding this school up in prayer, working the concession stands, and being involved in other ways, helps me to advance our mission in partnership with you. Knowing the alumni who are out there making a difference helps me to see how your story reflects CA. And if you feel called to financially support us, really knowing you helps me to understand where you'll feel best about your gift being used.

I'm looking forward to meeting you or reconnecting with you. Don't hesitate to reach out to me via phone or email, and don't be surprised if you hear from me to get to know each other over lunch or coffee.

Kristin (Breems) Rucks ('99)
kristin.rucks@concordiaacademy.com



LIVE AND IN PERSON!

Following a tremendously successful (but solitary) online auction in 2021, our beloved Dinner Auction came roaring back live and in-person on April 9, 2022. It was good to be back together, and "The Roaring 2020s" was a smashing success, raising just over \$75,000 towards the Legacy Endowment Fund.

This year's auction included a Roaring Twenties-inspired meal, live music by the Riverside Swing Band, games, silent

auction items, and a live auction, all in support of student scholarships. Thank you to all of the alumni, parents, students, staff, and friends of CA who helped once again make this the most fun night of the year at CA!

Whether you have yet to experience a Concordia Academy Dinner Auction or you're a seasoned veteran, make sure to mark your calendars for next year's event, scheduled for Saturday, April 22, 2023.





HONORING A LIFE CHANGER

Rick Kuhlman hung up his chalk and gave his final lesson on theorems and derivatives in May 2021. Mr. Kuhlman spent all of his illustrious 49-year career at Concordia Academy, teaching math, coaching baseball, serving as the senior class advisor, and becoming synonymous with the word "Beacon." Though CA has been blessed with many talented teachers and coaches, Mr. Kuhlman's dedication to Christian education, loyalty, humility, and passion for his subject genuinely stand out.

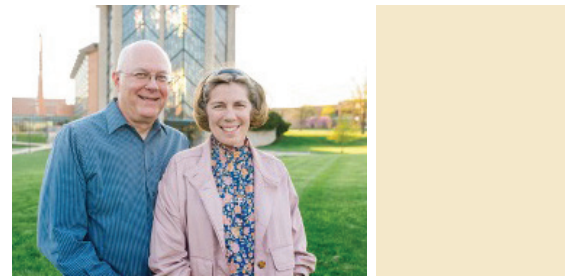
When Mr. Kuhlman retired, it was determined that there was no better way to honor him than to start an endowed scholarship in his honor. This \$4,000 scholarship will be awarded on merit to one incoming freshman, renewable

at \$1,000 per year, who shows significant talent and love for math. It will be awarded for the first time this fall thanks to the generosity of friends, family, and most of all, former students of Mr. Kuhlman who responded to the call for gifts that would go towards this endowed scholarship. With your generous support, we have raised close to \$40,000, but we would like to push our goal further to \$100,000 to sustain this fund.

If you would like to contribute to the Kuhlman Endowment Scholarship, please contact Kristin Rucks, Director of Mission Advancement, at kristin.rucks@concordiaacademy.com or 320-443-3430.

"My years at CA affected the rest of my life, and I am grateful for these blessings. Mr. Kuhlman was an awesome math teacher and baseball coach. His enthusiasm and high expectations inspired me to study engineering and play baseball at Valparaiso University. He helped lay my foundation for a challenging and rewarding engineering career in automation at Eli Lilly and Company. We support this endowment as it recognizes Mr. Kuhlmann's impact and will encourage students to pursue math-related careers. Thank you, Mr. Kuhlman!"

-John ('77) and Sara Krenzke



"I don't think all of us students (and parents) can thank Mr. Kuhlman enough for the high-quality Math teaching and good-natured Beach Boys' fun! His love for math was contagious, or at least made the subject more bearable for some. Class was both a joy and a challenge that stretched us and motivated us to achieve great things — both in and outside the classroom—inspiring many to pursue technical careers. The legacy continues to shine brightly!"

-Karel Kalthoff ('12)
Sr. Software Engineer,
Tandem Diabetes Care



from the Alumni Director

Hello, Beacon Alumni!

Is anything new happening in your life? I love getting updates about fellow Beacons, whether it's something major like a career change or addition to your family or something as simple as a change of address. It's easy to keep us in the loop by visiting www.concordiaacademy.com/update and filling out our Alumni Update Form.

We also love to share alumni stories with the CA community! There are some great ones in this issue of *The Beam*, but I know there are many great alumni stories we haven't heard about. Do you know about CA graduates finding great success in their careers? Or doing mighty things in ministry? Or making a difference through humanitarian work? Please let us know! Go to www.concordiaacademy.com/alumni/recognition.cfm and fill out the brief form so we can connect with those alumni and share their stories in upcoming publications or posts. You can also email updates to me at lisa.sell@concordiaacademy.com.



Finally, we love to welcome alumni back to campus. While you are always welcome to stop by and see the updates to our campus and visit with the Mission Advancement Team, be sure to mark your calendars for Homecoming 2022, taking place the week of September 19! As it gets closer, watch for updates at www.concordiaacademy.com and on our Facebook and Instagram pages.

Lisa (Kuseske) Sell ('99)
lisa.sell@concordiaacademy.com

Alumni Update Form



Alumni Recognition Form



SAVE THE DATE HOMECOMING 2022 SEPTEMBER 23

Watch www.concordiaacademy.com for details.



CA FLASHBACK



Years before “His People” hit the road and brought music to churches, schools, and venues in the Twin Cities and beyond, CA’s “Folk Group” shared music with the masses. The 1975-1976 group is pictured here.