

Six outstanding alumni have made their marks across the United States and around the globe, shining a light on what a St. Olaf education in action can do.

Lives of Worth and Service

By **Suzy Frisch** | Just as a diverse group of farmers, pastors, and businessmen founded St. Olaf College 135 years ago, the college is honoring a richly varied group of alumni for their lifelong achievements and professional contributions. This year, St. Olaf starts a new tradition of acclaiming its distinguished alumni on Founders' Day, November 6, 2009, extolling these six graduates as an integral part of college history and a testament to its tradition of excellence.

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD

Robert N. Munson '64

Maple Grove, Minnesota | Retired director of emergency services for the American Red Cross, Minneapolis Area Chapter of Agriculture

PHOTOGRAPHED BY TOM ROSTER

St. Olaf College attracted Robert Munson with its emphasis on Christian service, and his intention to apply these lessons professionally propelled Munson through four decades of helping others. His career culminated in directing emergency services for the Minneapolis chapter of the American Red Cross, and in retirement Munson continues a busy regimen of service to people and community.

The division that Munson headed for sixteen years provides 24/7 responses to local emergencies such as fires and storms, crises affecting military families, and services to international families separated by war and disaster. He led a staff of ten professionals and more than 300 volunteers, ultimately earning the Tiffany Award for employee excellence, the Red Cross's highest honor bestowed at the local level.

“We learned about service to others and servant leadership in our religion classes at St. Olaf. I think it’s one of the reasons I went into social work — to be as helpful as possible to our fellow human beings — and why I continue to volunteer today.”

In 1993 Munson became an international services instructor for the National Red Cross, creating an award-winning training module and teaching others about international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions. He traveled to Honduras for training to join its International Disaster Response Team, later applying that education domestically after September 11.



Munson spent nearly two months helping international families whose relatives died in the attack and coordinating memorial services in New York and Washington, D.C.

After graduating from St. Olaf, Munson served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Venezuela and then earned a master's degree in social work. He combined his love for Christian service with helping others during his twenty-year tenure at Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, where he encouraged volunteerism and community activism statewide. Munson also completed a six-year term as vice chair on the ELCA Board of Global Missions overseeing international missionary work.

Munson remains closely connected to St. Olaf College, serving as a member of his class reunion committee, a class fund agent,

and a class correspondent. He has guest lectured in the Department of Social Work, and he also has guided many social work students through internship placements.

Retired since 2006, Munson is an active volunteer. In this capacity he is a member of the Red Cross Disaster Mental Health team, a curriculum consultant, an instructor-trainer in international humanitarian law, and a disaster funding advisor for Thrivent Financial Services. He also volunteers for the Maple Grove Arts Council and Historical Preservation Society, and provides cardiac patient support at North Memorial Hospital. His church recently commissioned him as a Care Minister to help the pastoral staff counsel congregants in need of support. Munson also finds time to work on his Norwegian rosemaling painting. 🌹