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DEAR OLES,

This fall a remarkable event occurred in the life of our college: the selection of two St. Olaf seniors, Nicole Novak and Ishanaa Rambachan, as Rhodes scholars. This is truly a headline: competition for the Rhodes, the most prestigious postgraduate fellowship available, is fierce. No other liberal arts college saw two of its students selected this year; in fact, since 1996, St. Olaf has produced more Rhodes scholars than any other liberal arts college. I hope that in reading about these two remarkable young women you will take pride both in their accomplishment and in St. Olaf's extraordinary record in the Rhodes competition — a testimony to the quality of our students and the experience we provide them.

And speaking of awards, our profile of Susan Seacrest '75, one of six Americans to share the prestigious Heinz Award for the Environment and one of *Time* magazine's "Heroes of the Environment," teaches us how empowering citizens with knowledge can effect change. Seacrest's Groundwater Foundation — "nonpartisan, nonpolitical and nonadversarial" — helps people understand the impact of human activity on our water supply by making scientific findings available to them. Citizens then take that knowledge back to their communities, where change happens.

The St. Olaf faculty, students, and alumni engaged in studying the polar regions are similarly engaged in the work of providing all of us with the information we need better to understand the effects of human activity on our environment. In this International Polar Year, it is gratifying to look back to the decades of work on this subject at our college and to look forward to the results of the work being done now by Knut Christianson '05 and others. The decision by the National Science Foundation to fund a multiyear study by Oles of the Siberian Arctic region affirms both the importance and the quality of this work.

The interdisciplinary student-faculty journey that retraced Joseph Nicollet's 1838 expedition from Fort Snelling to Spirit Lake, Iowa, was engaged in this same work of helping us to understand the effects of human activity on our environment. On the banks of the Cannon River and in the archives of the National Herbarium in the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History and utilizing the insights of history, science and the arts, this group was able to capture changes to the landscape of southern Minnesota over the last 140 years. The information they have acquired gives us the ability to rethink our place in that landscape and our impact on it.

So the theme of this issue of the magazine is really the power of knowledge. The stories in this issue show how students, faculty, and alumni are creating and disseminating knowledge about the environment and our impact on it that can inform and shape our actions as citizens. It is the job of colleges to discover things and teach us about those discoveries in order to advance our lives and the lives of others and help us better understand ourselves. St. Olaf is living up to that responsibility. 🦁

*David R. Anderson*