



Michele Kelm-Helgen SP'77.



Pamela Ogren Johnson sp'80

Honoring Human Dignity and Spirit

By Nancy Crotti

When Pamela Ogren Johnson SP'80 graduated from St. Catherine

Foundation Builder

Minnesota Governor selects St. Kate's alumna to lead Vikings stadium

project.

By Elizabeth Otto

In June, Governor Mark Dayton appointed Michele Kelm-Helgen SP'77 chair of the newly created Minnesota Sports Facilities Authority (MSFA). The five-member panel will oversee the design and construction of the new \$975 million, 65,000-seat stadium in downtown Minneapolis, one of the biggest taxpayer-funded projects in state history.

Kelm-Helgen's role is to manage what she calls the "three-way dance" that considers the needs of the Vikings, the needs of the state and the city of Minneapolis, and the needs of all citizens as the football stadium is built.

Decisions include which firm will design and build the structure and what features the facility will offer. The MSFA also is charged with working out the details of the 30-year lease with the Vikings and eventually with operating the stadium as it hosts events ranging from high-school sports tournaments to monster-truck jams.

Perhaps the most important responsibility is to keep the stadium project on budget. Although Kelm-Helgen is a strong supporter of Minnesota sports, her role as chair of the MSFA is not as a sports fan first. "My interest and motivation is all about the project," she says. And her experience managing large-scale projects has taught her the value of thoughtful process.

One of Kelm-Helgen's first contributions was to add time for public comment at each stadium public hearing. "If people feel their voices are heard, that they've had opportunities to make their position known, then they will be more accepting of the final decision — even if they don't like it."

Kelm-Helgen has no background in professional sports. Indeed, her path to becoming the face of the new stadium-construction process is marked more by her openness to opportunities.

She chose to attend St. Catherine University because she wanted a strong liberal arts degree. Along with a major in philosophy from St. Kate's, she took political science classes at the University of St. Thomas.

After graduation, Kelm-Helgen worked briefly for Minneapolis Mayor Al Hofstede and then took a job at Control Data, where for 11 years she sold computer services and small-business development services to government. The travel demands interfered with her young family, so Kelm-Helgen took a position at North State Advisors, her father's lobbying and public relations firm, that offered a more flexible schedule.

Once her son and twin daughters were in school, Kelm-Helgen became involved with their Eastern Carver County school district. After volunteering to chair a citizens' committee that

University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in nursing in 1980, she planned to work for a year before pursuing a degree as a geriatric nurse practitioner. That's not exactly what happened, but Johnson doesn't regret it.

Johnson landed her first job at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., and never left, even while eventually studying for her Master of Science degree in nursing at the University of Minnesota. Now chief nursing officer for the entire Mayo system, she oversees approximately 13,000 nurses at the Mayo sites in Arizona, Florida, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Mayo Clinic encourages nurses to practice up to the full scope of their education, according to Johnson, who said her professors at St. Catherine University held their students to high educational standards.

"I left St. Kate's as a confident staff registered nurse, and I believe that contributed to my ability to be a confident leader," Johnson says. "The core of our nursing (education) at St. Kate's was relationship-based care, care that honors human dignity and the human spirit. That is a core value for me and one that we instill and support in our own nurses as they give care to patients and families here at Mayo Clinic."

Johnson returned to campus in May to address new nursing graduates.

led the district through a boundary-revision process, she was appointed to the school board to fill out a term. She spent a decade on the board, serving as chair for most of that time and overseeing the construction of a number of new schools.

When Kelm-Helgen's children were in college, she got a call from then state Senator Larry Pogemiller (DFL-Minneapolis), who chaired the education committee at the Minnesota legislature. They knew each other through her work on the school board.

"I'll never forget when he called me and said, 'I was just elected by the caucus to be majority leader. Why don't you come and be my chief of staff?'" she recalls. Kelm-Helgen was astonished, but her children eventually convinced her it was time to take a bold new step in her career.

More recently, she served as deputy chief of staff for Governor Dayton. Her experience working on the budget in the governor's office, combined with her experience managing projects and people, convinced Dayton that Kelm-Helgen was the right person to lead the MSFA.

She's convinced that her liberal arts education enabled her success in a career that has taken unexpected turns. "I always tell students: 'Have no fear,'" she says. "Initially, it's difficult to figure out exactly what your path is, but once you get out there in the world, you're going to be much better prepared to be the leaders and the managers."

"I told the students, 'Don't be so quick to have your whole career figured out,'" she says. "I came to Rochester. I didn't know a soul and my career path has taken me in directions I would never have imagined. St. Catherine prepared me well for all of the nursing roles that I have had. I'm really proud to be a graduate of St. Kate's."

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