

Sun Country seeks short-term state help to weather bumpy economic conditions, but it foresees brighter future after Northwest merger

If Sun Country Airlines can make it through the industry's tumultuous fuel-cost storms, its new CEO actually sees brighter skies ahead for the Twin Cities-based carrier, once the Delta-Northwest mega-merger takes place. But short term, the low-cost carrier says, it needs state financial help.

By KEVIN FEATHERLY

If Sun Country Airlines can weather the industry's increasingly tumultuous fuel-cost storms, its new CEO actually sees brighter skies ahead for the Twin Cities-based carrier, once the Delta-Northwest mega-merger takes place.

Although not everyone thinks as highly of the low-fare airline's prospects, CEO Stan Gadek considers the pending merger "a positive for Sun Country."

But first, Gadek and his Mendota Heights-based airline must deal with mounting operational losses.

They took a big step toward propping up finances Wednesday, when Sun Country executives and union members met with a group of state legislators to seek short-term financial relief.

The company hopes to build public support for a state aid package of "upwards of \$50 million" to maintain its current business model and help it cope with escalating fuel costs. The package could come in the form of such arrangements as loans or fee abatements from the Metropolitan Airports Commission, the company said in a prepared statement given Wednesday night to MinnPost.



ERIC MILLER, Reuters

A Sun Country jet taxis past a Northwest plane at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport.

Gadek told the Pioneer Press that legislators were receptive to the case he made.

"This is a situation that we have managed creatively so far with cutbacks, additional charter flying and capital infusions from our ownership, but we can't do it indefinitely," Gadek said in the company statement. "We believe it is in the best interest of Minnesota to help us sustain operations through this turbulent time and maintain a locally owned and operated airline. . . . We can continue doing that into the future — with some relief over the next 24 months."

Sun Country also argues that it provided "a \$225 million annual savings" to Minnesota in 2007 and provides 1,000 jobs.

"The current fuel price crisis, however, has stressed the airline, despite company-wide wage reductions, layoffs, vendor savings and development of new sources of revenue," the

statement said. Sun Country expects fuel costs to exceed its forecast by \$33 million, or 37 percent. "Every \$5 increase in the price of [a barrel of] oil increases Sun Country's annual fuel bill by \$4 million," the company said.

Sun Country lost \$8.3 million in the first quarter of 2008, according to data released this week by the federal Bureau of Transportation Statistics. That brings its net losses to \$43 million on operating revenue of \$243 million in the four quarters that ended in March. That compares to a net loss of \$15 million on \$229 million in revenue during the first quarter of 2007, according to BTS figures.

The airline's first-quarter operating costs rose to \$284 million in the quarter ending in March, about 16 percent higher than the same quarter last year, the BTS reported.

Overall, Sun Country saw operating losses of \$33.5 million in calendar year 2007 on revenues of \$238.9 million, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation's Office of Aviation Analysis. That resulted in an overall net 2007 loss of \$35.4 million.

Earlier this week, Gadek told the Star Tribune, "With oil spiking near \$140 a barrel, the situation continues to be a challenging one for airlines."

The airline recently made several moves to meet such challenges. In early April, the airline announced it was temporarily laying off 45 of its 156 pilots. (It has since rehired seven pilots to fly a newly leased 737-700 jet, with tentative plans to bring the rest back in November. Over the summer months, it is operating with just six jetliners, said Gadek, who joined Sun Country as CEO in March.)

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Getting to know Michelle Obama

By SUSAN ALBRIGHT

Prospective first ladies walk a superfine line. They must live in the background, but actively help the cause. Give rousing speeches, but say nothing that will hurt the cause. Show substance — but not too much, or they'll look as though they're trying to run the country.

Now that we're down to two candidates, attention is focusing on the two candidates' wives: Cindy McCain and Michelle Obama. This week seems to be Michelle Obama's while she "looks for a new introduction," as a New York Times headline put it Wednesday.

Early political attacks that variously questioned her patriotism or painted her as an angry black woman — combined with partisan analyses of everything from her Princeton senior thesis to her wardrobe — have led to this week's appearance on TV's "The View" and other efforts to meet Americans on her own terms.

So far, the consensus seems to be that her efforts are paying off.

'Poised and prepared'

"Political handlers call such high-profile appearances on shows like 'The View' 'make-overs,'" *Newsday's* Verne Gay wrote, "but Obama acted like someone who had nothing to make over. She was poised and prepared, and burnished her image and helped her husband.

"In sum, a slam dunk."

And, from the opposite coast: "The verdict: Michelle-O aced 'The View' test," the San Francisco Chronicle's Joe Garofoli wrote on SFGate.com.

"Even the Fox analyst on Shepard Smith's show said compared to Barack's horrid bowling stunt photo op, 'this was a 10-strike.'"

"So why should we care about 'The View,' the 11-year-old 10 a.m. chatfest around which is wrapped ads for Alzheimer's medication, Fiber One Yogurt and Kohl's?" he added. "Because



JASON REED, Reuters

US Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama (D-IL) and his wife Michelle.

polls say a lot of daytime watching suburban women and yes, men, are a bit slow to warm up to the Obama candidacy. And Michelle, in particular, has drawn some high negatives."

Images 'somehow symmetrical'

As the Times' Alessandra Stanley noted in "The TV Watch," "The amount of scrutiny the two spouses face is not commensurate — Mrs. Obama has endured far more virulent attacks by her critics — but it is somehow symmetrical. Mrs. Obama went on a popular television talk show to combat the notion that she is a little too authentic to be a first lady, while Mrs. McCain did it to undercut the image that she is too fake.

"Early on, Mrs. Obama was likened to Jackie Kennedy for her youth and fashion style, but lately, the strong and assertive African-American career woman is experiencing the kind of anti-feminist hazing that Mrs. Clinton endured in the 1992." And, it's worth noting, that similarly assertive first ladies Rosalynn Cart-

er and Betty Ford endured before Hillary Rodham Clinton.

So, walking the tightrope in a ready-to-wear dress, "Mrs. Obama made a point of showing her warmer, more personable side," Stanley wrote, "talking about her working-class parents and the joys of being the mother of two young girls, and even admitting that she serves bacon for breakfast and does not wear pantyhose, but she did not disguise her confident manner or her natural authority. Nor did she ever truly relax. When asked whether the reaction to some of her comments had led her to be more inhibited, Mrs. Obama replied somewhat stiffly, 'I think in this media age I have to be cognizant.'

"Mrs. Obama said she was taking some cues from Mrs. Bush. 'There's a reason people like her,' Mrs. Obama said. 'It's because she doesn't, sort of, you know, add fuel to the fire.'"

From Chicago to Princeton

From all accounts, Michelle Obama is indeed both assertive

and substantive. She grew up in Chicago, part of the city's black working class, and excelled at Princeton and Harvard Law. She became a lawyer, a hospital community-affairs director, a wife and a mother.

And now every word she utters, every paper she wrote, every suit or necklace she dons will be scrutinized as possible evidence of subtle messages, inner turmoil, you name it. Both she and Cindy McCain will be filling their speeches and appearances with purposeful messages as well — messages meant to be scrutinized — or at least digested:

As the Chronicle's Garofoli summed up Michelle Obama's signals on "The View":

"Other, seemingly vapid information that actually isn't: Barack eats bacon. Barack doesn't take out the garbage. Translation to Suburbia: Don't fear Barack. He's just like your husband."

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Solstice River dance to honor bridge victims



CAMILLE LEFEVRE

Since 1997, on the summer solstice, thousands of people have gathered on the historic Stone Arch Bridge in downtown Minneapolis for Solstice River, a participatory community event orchestrated by choreographer and dance therapist Marylee Hardenbergh.

The event features up to 40 performers placed on buildings, infrastructure and in the Mississippi River to encircle the site with color and movement — all designed to draw the audience's attention to the river environment.

Far below the bridge, on a jetty arcing into the river, dancers carry large colorful props resembling navigational signs. Kayakers zip across the water and twirl their paddles in unison, or circle motorboats on which dancers reach through space as their costumes billow in the breeze.

To the south, performers in yellow, red or blue unitards swoop and twirl with large gestural movements in Mill Ruins Park, and on the balconies of the Washburn A Mill and adjacent loft buildings. To the north, you might see a dancer on the volumetric tanks next to the St. Anthony Falls Laboratory.

Every year, Hardenbergh brings new components or cultural dimensions to the performance. This year's "Solstice

River XII: Bridging the Cycles of Life," which takes place on Saturday (June 21), will include the release of 13 white doves honoring the people who died when the Interstate 35W bridge collapsed last summer. Another addition is that a bagpiper will play a lament.

This performance will be singular, Hardenbergh says, because it commemorates the 125th anniversary of the Stone Arch Bridge and the 150th anniversary of Minnesota's statehood.

360 degrees of dance

"Who would have thought, back in 1997," she says, "that 'Solstice River' would become the annual performance event it has become, and that the landscape around the river would have changed so much that the performers now appear in places 360 degrees around the site?"

Through the years, Hardenbergh added Dakota performers to recite prayers, drum, sing and draw audience members into circle dances. She also placed performers on one of the grain silos, who unfurl the Dakota colors in long bands of color down the length of the concrete forms.

In 2006, she extended "Solstice River" into "One River Mississippi," a performance piece at seven sites along the river from Itasca to New Orleans. While each section was specific to the culture, history, and the natural and built environment of its site, the entire piece was performed simultaneously, with

"Solstice River XII: Bridging the Cycles of Life"

When: 8 p.m., Saturday, June 21

Where: Stone Arch Bridge, Minneapolis

Tickets: Free

shared music and movement connecting audience members, performers and the river across time and space. That year, Hardenbergh put dancers on the endless bridge of the Guthrie Theater.

Every year, six women (Hardenbergh calls them Women of the Waters) promenaded down the Stone Arch Bridge. The enormous lock gates dramatically open as the women walk out onto a 50-foot-high walkway. Here they move in unison with expansive movements of reverence and joy, then pour the water they've carried into the lock.

At dusk, a 1,200-foot-long swath of blue fabric is unfurled down the middle of the bridge. Hardenbergh and her bridge captains urge the audience to hold the river and ripple it into waves as children dart underneath. "I want two things to happen to the audience," says Hardenbergh of the performance. "I want them to feel more connected to the site and to each other."

A detailed program is handed out to the audience before the performance begins and tells viewers where to look, and when. "The audience walks up and down the bridge, and runs from one side to the next, to find

the dancers, and they hear the music and feel the rhythms," she explains. "All of this opens up the site 360 degrees, so people feel like they belong there."

The program includes information about the river, preservation efforts on its behalf, and how the individual can participate in keeping the river clean for future generations. Transformation is Hardenbergh's goal. She wants to change how audiences perceive the river and its industrial environs. And she wants to change how individual audience members see themselves in relation to dance and architecture, the natural and built environments, and place and community.

A survey conducted after the 2005 Solstice River indicated she has succeeded. Respondents reported that their understanding of the bridge's history, the river environment and the overall site were enhanced by attending the performance. Furthermore, 60 percent of respondents said the Stone Arch Bridge and Solstice River are now connected in their minds.

"The dance doesn't leave a footprint," Hardenbergh says. "It leaves lasting impressions."

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Joel Kramer, CEO and editor

Sun Country foresees bright future after Northwest merger

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The company says it is not considering such revenue-padding moves as charging people \$15 for carry-on bags, as American Airlines recently did. But it did announce last month that it would cut management salaries by 10 percent to offset fuel-related losses. Gadek is docking his own salary by 15 percent, a spokeswoman confirmed.

Sun Country also has undertaken a strategic shift since its purchase in October 2006 by Minnesota business magnate Tom Petters, several analysts point out. Post-bankruptcy, the carrier has focused on such high-traffic vacation destinations as Las Vegas and San Diego, as well as a lucrative side business in domestic military charters that, Gadek says, now makes up about 15 percent of its business.

Gadek upbeat about potential long-range impact of merger

Despite the current uncertainties, Gadek is upbeat about the long-range forecast for Sun Country. In an interview last month with MinnPost, he talked extensively about what the Northwest-Delta merger portends for his airline.

Like some others, he expects the post-merger Delta AirLines to shift its attention to the more-lucrative international flights, rather than domestic operations, leaving a bigger opening for Sun Country.

"I'm not saying that these large domestic airlines will stop growing domestically," Gadek said last month in an interview with MinnPost. "I just think that they're going to focus more on the routes and the markets that complement and feed their international services, as opposed to flying everywhere domestically."

At least two noted industry analysts see other reasons why the merger could help Sun Country soar, if industry-wide fuel-cost problems can be brought under control.

"In my opinion, this [merger] means nothing but good news," said Terry Tripler, a Twin Cities-based airlines consultant, by allowing Sun Country to market itself to locally based travelers as the sole remaining "hometown airline."

Stuart Klaskin, of Miami-based

KKC Aviation Consulting and Planning, agrees with Tripler's assessment. "In Minneapolis, as well as Detroit, Northwest really is seen with a lot of loathing among its constituents," Klaskin said. "I think there is an opportunity for Sun Country to capitalize on being 'not Northwest.'"

Many of Gadek's views contradict those frequently stated by Delta and Northwest officials, who stress that the merger is not driven by a desire to decrease capacity and maximize per-passenger profits. But that, Gadek argues, is exactly what the merger is about, because he believes Delta and Northwest must raise ticket prices to recover rapidly rising fuel costs.

"There are going to be fewer seats that they fly in the domestic marketplace as they merge the two companies together," Gadek said. Low-cost carriers like Sun Country will rush in to fill that void, he said. "I firmly believe that will happen."

Oberstar, others don't buy Sun Country scenario

Gadek's logic, however, flies in the face of some critics, notably U.S. Rep. Jim Oberstar, the powerful chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. At an April press conference in Washington, D.C., Oberstar declared the merger would be "the worst development in aviation history in the aftermath of deregulation in 1978." He said he would use whatever leverage he has to oppose the deal.

His biggest concern, Oberstar said, is that a Delta-Northwest merger would trigger a wave of industry consolidations and global alliances that would leave the world, in effect, with just three legacy mega-carriers.

"In the face of that economic power in the marketplace, the so-called low-fare carriers will not be able to compete," Oberstar said. Low-cost carriers cannot compete in the international flight market, he said, and they will be defeated by carriers that do.

"Southwest doesn't travel [overseas]," he said. "They're not competitive in the international marketplace, nor are the other low-fare carriers."

John Schadl, an Oberstar aide, acknowledges that Sun Country's

future can't be foretold. "All we can go by is what has happened since deregulation," Schadl said. "And none of the airlines that have started up since deregulation, that have tried to challenge the legacy carriers, have been able to do so successfully. None of them is in business today."

There are, however, clues to be gleaned from Sun Country's history, Schadl said. In the late 1990s and earlier part of this decade, Sun Country tried to compete directly at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport hub against Northwest as a regularly scheduled airline. Its reward was a Northwest-instigated fare war that ultimately drove Sun Country into bankruptcy in 2001. "It was not able to compete," Schadl said.

A local group of investors in 2002 bought the remaining assets and eventually brought the company back. Petters and a partner acquired it in 2006, and he became sole owner in 2007.

Analysts see positives for post-merger Sun Country

Despite all the challenges, some industry analysts lean more toward Gadek's positive outlook about his airline's prospects after the NWA-Delta merger.

Tripler, for example, sees value in Sun Country emphasizing its local roots. That way, he said, it will be able to take advantage of what he foresees as a public backlash against the new Delta, once Northwest is absorbed.

"People will say, 'OK, enough is enough,'" Tripler said. "Sun Country needs to make sure that everybody knows, at that time, that they are the last hometown airline. Then I think there will be that move toward Sun Country." (The airline, in fact, previewed its "Hometown Airline" marketing campaign as part of his Wednesday meeting with legislators. The campaign debuts today.)

The Miami-based consultant Klaskin agrees, adding that the future might be bright for Sun Country -- or at least its owners and managers -- in yet another way.

If it is able to maintain its current levels of service, and even grow over the next several years, Sun Country could position itself as an acquisition target for another legacy

carrier, or even a larger, low-cost carrier such as Southwest, he said.

"I think the low-cost carriers start to become very viable strategic alternatives to the larger carriers when they start to look at their consolidation possibilities," Klaskin said. "Most of the low-cost carriers, especially those that have been the second carrier in a legacy carrier's hub market -- exactly what we have now with Sun Country -- have a very discrete, but very loyal following."

Gadek won't argue against that latter point. The former CEO of AirTran Airways worked with Northwest for a dozen years beginning in the late 1970s, and has also put in time at six other airlines. None has had the following of Sun Country, Gadek said. "This is the first airline I've worked with where we get fan letters from our customers," he said. "It's just incredible."

Gadek, who in his first three months already has overseen a round of layoffs prompted by the spiraling fuel prices, said he is intent on preserving his airline's "small-company feel."

Indeed, when it announced its temporary pilot layoff, the company took pains to point out that it would continue to serve in-flight cheeseburgers.

Asked if he sees his airline as a target for acquisition down the road as Klaskin predicts, Gadek brushed aside the question. "Who can predict what's going to happen in this industry?" he said. "I will tell you what we're going to do, and that's continue to focus on the customer in building our reputation."

If, however, Sun Country is acquired in the future, it will only validate Rep. Oberstar's fears, said congressional aide Schadl. "That would be consistent with the trends that we're seeing," he said. "And it's consistent with what the congressman is afraid would happen."

Kevin Featherly, a former managing editor at Washington Post Newsweek Interactive, is a longtime Twin Cities freelance writer who lives in Bloomington.

The Daily Glean: Lost-and-found tale brightens the day

By DOUG GROW

For a day, at least one day, a story of the lost being found overwhelmed the dreary news of mayhem on every Twin Cities news outlet.

A cell phone call led searchers to Abby Flantz, 25, of Gaylord, Minn., and Erica Nelson, 23, of Las Vegas, hikers found just north of the boundary of Alaska's vast Denali National Park. The women had been lost for five days when Ellane Nelson's cell phone rang. Her daughter's caller ID showed up on the screen. "I was told her face looked like it had seen a ghost," a park spokesman told the Strib's Mary Lynn Smith.

Heard this story before? Sun Country Airlines, says it needs state help — upward of \$50 million — to maintain its "current business model." Sun Country CEO Stan Gadek met with several state legislators Wednesday. Next up, a meeting with the Metropolitan Airports Commission.

Justice still can be mixed with mercy. By telling one vet's near tragic story, PiPress columnist Ruben Rosario explains a new Minnesota law that encourages the criminal justice system to consider non-jail options when sentencing a vet who can show that combat-

related stress played a role in the criminal behavior.

Instant run-off voting is not to be confused with instant voting headache. But the PiPress' Jason Hoppin reports that St. Paul City Attorney John Choi believes the proposed (and improved?) voting system — which supporters want put on the ballot this fall for approval — may be unconstitutional. Meantime, Minneapolis is plunging ahead with the systems of ranking candidates that most of us sort-of understand.

Also on the subject of our democracy, MPR's Curtis Gilbert has an excellent report of how Republican presidential nominee John McCain will be able to ask supporters for \$50,000 at a fundraiser in Minneapolis tonight even though the gift limit allowed by law is \$2,300 during the primary process and an additional \$2,300 for the general election.

Need your daily fill of speculation as to whether Gov. Tim Pawlenty will be McCain's running mate? The Strib reports that the governor told the Eden Prairie Chamber of Commerce that "I haven't been asked and I don't expect to be asked." On the other hand, he also said, "I'm honored to have my name mentioned."

On the housing front, KSTP reports that police nabbed two boys — 14 and 9(!) — for setting fire to a vacant home in Northeast Minneapolis. On KARE-TV, there's a report on how Hennepin County will come up with \$1.25 million to help Minneapolis raze vacant houses, an open invitation to neighborhood woes.

Also on the subject of urban life: Strib reporter Anthony Lonetree writes of how St. Paul will try to control its robust pigeon population by mixing a contraceptive with cracked corn and grain atop downtown buildings. Animal and bird huggers have approved of the method. Interesting stat: One-third of the amount a bird eats ends up on sidewalks and park benches.

The Winona Daily News reports that state Department of Transportation inspectors found problems with gusset plates on Winona's Interstate Bridge two years ago but that nothing was done to tackle the problem. The bridge recently was closed, so inspectors could take a closer look. It's suppose to re-open by Friday afternoon.

This year, John Olsen will try to cover the 26.2 miles of this weekend's Grandma's Marathon on his own two

feet. Strib sportswriter Kent Youngblood tells of how Sue Olsen, an extraordinary ultra-marathoner was just two weeks from giving birth to her son, John, when she completed Grandma's 13 years ago. Now that he's 12, the beginning age limit for the marathon, John's eligible to enter the race. Mom plans to stick with her son, every step of the way.

The toughest part of Grandma's may be just getting there. An earth-scraping vehicle fell off the back of a truck that was crossing over I-35 near downtown Duluth, damaging a guard rail and the left lane of I-35. As a result, that lane of the northbound highway will be closed for six to eight weeks for repairs.

In sporting news, the Twins defeated their distant cousins, the Washington Nationals, for a second successive night and go for the sweep this afternoon. The Twins, once the Washington Senators, left D.C. in 1961 and were replaced by a new Washington team, which became the Texas Rangers. The Nationals, once the Expos, moved from Montreal to D.C.

Want to add your voice?

If you're interested in joining the discussion by writing a Community Voices article, email Susan Albright at salbright@minnpost.com.

COMMUNITY VOICES

World Refugee Day event to honor new Minnesotans' tenacity, generosity

By **HELGA LEITNER and CAWO ABDI**

In 2003, Abdurashid Ali was a part-time student at Minneapolis Community and Technical College with a full-time job when he first got the idea to build a library in his hometown of Garowe, Somalia. He felt that it was a way to remain connected to all that he was forced to leave behind when he fled his country in 1991. Though Minnesota became his adoptive home when he was granted asylum, his family and the life he knew remained in Somalia.

In the five years since he had that first idea, Ali has established Somali Family Services, a local nonprofit organization dedicated to serving as a bridge between Minnesota and the Somali community through civic engagement initiatives, establishing a sister-school relationship between MCTC and Puntland State University in Garowe and hosting an annual conference to promote intercultural communication. And earlier this year, Ali realized his dream and traveled back to Somalia for a ribbon-cutting ceremony inaugurating the first-of-its-kind Puntland Library and Resource Center.

What began as a project for Somalia has blossomed into a transatlantic partnership between Minnesota institutions and Somalis living globally. The Puntland Library and Resource Center has gained support from

Somali individuals living in the United States and Europe, as well as international organizations such as the United Nations Development Program, Counterpart International, Books for Africa and Diakonia of Sweden.

A story of struggle and survival

Behind the activist spirit Ali shares with his community and the world lies a deeper story of struggle and survival shared by some 40 million refugees across the globe, more than 80,000 of them in Minnesota. They carry with them the drive and ability that a person can only learn when confronted by the choice to stay and possibly die or flee and live.

Today's refugees are forced to leave their homes for a diverse set of reasons, including ethnic strife, civil war and other political upheavals; natural disasters; and famine and economic desperation. Often these phenomena are interconnected.

Refugees come from all walks of life. From the uneducated delta farmer to wealthy doctors and other professionals, events from politics to tsunamis can change lives in an instant, causing upheavals unimaginable to most Americans. Their plight is the focus of World Refugee Day, sponsored by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees. It will be observed on Friday at Minnehaha Park. (The day's free, public events

will begin at 2 p.m. and proceed through the evening; they will include cultural performances, speakers, food and an immigrant resource fair.)

Over the next year the University of Minnesota's Institute for Global Studies (IGS) is sponsoring a series of events that will illuminate the experience of Muslims in Minnesota. In collaboration with KFAI radio and MinnPost.com, IGS will be meeting Minnesota's newest refugees on Friday in Minnehaha Park to conduct oral interviews as the first installment of our project, Meeting Minnesota's Muslims. These interviews will be available via the KFAI and IGS websites, and will serve as an important resource on the experiences of today's refugees living in Minnesota.

As the year progresses, our programming will examine the experiences of not just refugee Muslims in Minnesota, but also those who have lived here their entire lives or immigrated through more peaceful channels.

A safe haven for the displaced

Minnesotans need to care about the fate of refugees. With the highest percentage of refugees among its immigrant population of any state in the nation, Minnesota has become a safe haven for thousands of refugees over the last few decades — most notably the Hmong, who

began arriving from Laos in the 1970s; and Somalis, such as Ali, who fled civil war at home beginning in the late 1980s.

In their time here, these communities have confronted major psychological and economic obstacles to reclaiming their lives, becoming valuable members of our society in diverse spheres of life; their ranks boast elected officials, business owners, nurses, and PhDs.

Refugees not only have the potential to enrich the communities they left behind, but have great potential to enhance our own community's vitality and diversity. World Refugee Day is an opportunity for us to get to know these new Minnesotans; we can all benefit from the tenacity and generosity they bring to their new home.

We hope you will show your support for this event and widen your horizons while still remaining within the borders of Minnesota.

Helga Leitner is a professor of geography and global studies at the University of Minnesota, with research interests in international migration/immigration, urban development, urban landscapes, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and society. Cawo Abdi is an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Minnesota whose work focuses on transnational migration, particularly in East Africa.

What began as a project for Somalia has blossomed into a transatlantic partnership between Minnesota institutions and Somalis living globally.

Want to add your voice?

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