

# TOMMIES

## IN OUR COMMUNITIES



**CHENGNY THAO '00**

Living in: Bucyrus, KS



### **A Journey of Leadership, Faith and Community**

For Chengny Thao '00, the University of St. Thomas was more than just a place to earn a degree—it was a transformative experience that shaped her values, leadership and purpose. As a first-generation immigrant navigating higher education without a clear playbook, she found a guiding light in the St. Thomas community, which provided mentorship, support and a strong foundation of faith and integrity.

Chengny's connection to the university runs deep, with one particularly magical memory standing out: "As I was walking under the arches to business class, my water broke. Later that evening, my daughter Belle was born. St. Thomas is truly magical."

Thao's journey at St. Thomas was made possible in part by scholarships such as the St. Thomas Traditions Scholar award, the Page Education Foundation Scholar program and the Phillips Scholar initiative. These opportunities instilled in her the importance of giving back, inspiring a lifelong dedication to service, civic engagement and empowering others.

Since graduating in 2000, Chengny's career has been a dynamic and impactful one, spanning business, community engagement and government. She has launched businesses, invested in franchises, thrived in management consulting, advocated for first amendment rights and led multi-billion-dollar organizations – all while remaining true to the core values instilled in her at St. Thomas.

"St. Thomas taught me to always have faith, push forward with confidence and be a champion for others," Chengny reflects. She continues to lead with purpose, integrity and strength, believing that leadership is about finding meaning, doing what is right even when it's difficult and uplifting others.

For current Tommies, she offers a powerful piece of advice: "You have the power to change this world! Each interaction, no matter how big or small, eventually leads to an outcome—so make it count. It's cool to be empathetic and kind people will always remember you for the way you make them feel, not how intelligent you are."

To those considering St. Thomas for their higher education, Thao's message is clear: "If you want to stand out as a leader, St. Thomas is where you will build character, integrity, and the moral courage to fight for goodness."

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### SOUND BITES

#### Why St. Thomas?

"I chose to attend the University of St. Thomas because I wanted a quality education built around strong values. As a first-generation immigrant, I did not have a playbook for success but instead relied heavily on the community to guide and mentor me. I felt St. Thomas was an extension of my family helping set the direction towards true north."

#### Scholarship Gratitude

"I received numerous scholarships to attend St. Thomas, including St. Thomas Traditions, Page Education Foundation and Phillips. These scholarships provided an opportunity for me to learn the true meaning of giving back. My service projects inspired a lifelong passion to help others succeed in the for-profit and non-profit sectors including driving civic engagement."

#### On Living the Mission

"My faith-based education at St. Thomas continues to shape how I lead teams:

- Lead with Purpose - find meaning in what you do
- Lead with Integrity - always do what is right even when it's difficult
- Lead with Strengths - identify strengths in others and build upon them."

#### Advice for Current Tommies

"You have the power to change this world! Each interaction no matter how big or small eventually leads to an outcome so make it count. It's cool to be empathetic and kind - people will always remember you for the way you make them feel, not how intelligent you are."

"Knowledge is Power - Don't be afraid to ask for someone's time, you'd be surprised how many people are willing to help you be the best version of you."

#### Words for Prospective Students

"If you want to stand out as a leader, St. Thomas is where you will build character, integrity, and the moral courage to fight for goodness."