

UNIVERSITY OF  
**RHODE ISLAND**

FALL 2023

MAGAZINE



*The Secret Life  
of Pit Musicians*

What goes on in the orchestra pit during a Broadway show? Two alumni musicians share their stories.



## FABRICATED MEMORIES

*Photography professor Annu Palakunnathu Matthew's project explores her childhood and her choices.*

"I was born in England, and lived there until I was 10," says photographer Annu Palakunnathu Matthew. "My memories of that place are tied to my father. He died young, from smoking, one year after we moved from England to India. 'Fabricated Memories' commemorates my father's twentieth death anniversary."

*Dad & Ajit* juxtaposes a photo of a taxi and driver created by Matthew in England in 1997 with a family photo of her father and brother. "I inserted the older photo to fabricate a memory that reflects my childhood."

Through 'Fabricated Memories' Matthew considers the void her father's death left and questions whether he would have supported her choice to become a photographer.

*Dad & Ajit* is the cover image of Matthew's book, *The Answers Take Time*, which surveys her career and work, often focused on themes of identity and memory and incorporating mixed media and manipulated photos. "My work is photo-based," says Matthew, "but I'm not a traditional photographer in terms of creating a picture and that being the end of the process."

As a teacher, Matthew "finds the ever-expanding digital toolbox exciting, offering new possibilities to get our ideas across. As technology develops, my teaching responds." She adds, "I want my students to be fearless about technology so they can nimbly adapt to what comes next. The arts and humanities, where we think creatively and learn to ask difficult questions, are critical for the future."

Matthew has exhibited around the world, including the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the Smithsonian, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the RISD Museum. 🌀

—Barbara Caron

### ***Dad & Ajit***

**By Annu Palakunnathu Matthew, Professor of Art**

From 'Fabricated Memories, 1997–2000,' a collection of Polaroid emulsion transfers on paper in a handmade accordion book. Edition of five. Each 6" x 4-1/2" x 220" book presented in a Chesterfield cigarette box.

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## 10 Changemakers

Two grad students launched a nonprofit, Colorful  
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## 60 Close-Up

Vietnam veteran Dave Zartarian '67, M.A. '72, is  
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COVER ILLUSTRATION: ANTHONY RUSSO  
PHOTOS, THIS SPREAD: ANG CAI; SATYA SULLIVAN; NORA LEWIS



## The Energy of a New Academic Year

*The fall semester—and the fall issue of the University of Rhode Island Magazine—bring energy, inspiration, and a sense of possibility.*

Another academic year is well underway, and our campuses are energized by new community members, new programs and initiatives, new seasons for athletics and the arts, and a sense of possibility that only the start of a new year can bring. I enjoyed meeting students and parents on a successful move-in day, welcoming international students, staff, and faculty on our lawn, celebrating with the community during Quad Fest, and cheering for our Rhody Rams in our first-ever Friday night home football game. Labs and lecture halls are alive with conversation, research, and innovation, and I continue to be inspired by the ingenuity and generosity of our community.

This new academic year has also been marked by incredible achievements, most notably a significant increase in state investment in URI—the state’s flagship research university. Together—students, staff, faculty, alumni, donors, and friends—we are successfully telling the story about the incredible work we do at URI, creating momentum and positioning the University as a driving force for economic growth and positive social, cultural, and environmental change. I believe that an investment in URI is an investment in the people, places, and programs that will have a powerful impact on the state, the region, and the world. We are Rhode Island’s university, and in the coming months, we will build on this momentum, generating new revenue, supporting efforts that enhance our research enterprise, and fostering opportunities for growth in all areas of the University.

The people and programs highlighted in this issue tell the URI story.

“Below Broadway: Pit Musicians in the Spotlight” focuses on two accomplished

URI musicians who make their living in the orchestra pits of Broadway’s theaters. They credit URI for instilling in them important aspects of their musicality and professionalism, and URI music faculty recall that, as students, the two had “similar gumption.”

“An Ocean of Data” documents the forward-thinking work of Lauren Decker, M.S. ’09, a Yup’ik Alaska native and the chief scientific officer for PolArctic, an ocean and data science company that uses artificial intelligence and machine learning to help businesses in the Arctic operate safely, profitably, and sustainably.

In “Bacteria and Algae and Toxins—Oh My” you will meet two URI pharmacologists whose marine and freshwater research is supporting the blue economy by helping aquaculture systems avoid toxic disease. They are also researching new pharmaceutical uses for bacteria and algae.

And as the College of Business celebrates 100 years of leading education and research, “Business for the Next Century” outlines the college’s focus on the future and on preparing students to make decisions and drive innovation in an unpredictable, ever-changing world.

I am inspired by the stories, the season, and a renewed sense of purpose and focus for the year—I hope you are, too.

Marc B. Parlange  
President, University of Rhode Island



### CHANGE OF SEASON

Andrew D’Aiello ’26 took this photo of the Hammerschlag Mall last year for SCM 105, Production and Presentation Fundamentals, a first-year communications course. D’Aiello says, “The assignment was to show a photo of something that indicates change, so there I was photographing the vibrant colors across campus.” D’Aiello is from Tarrytown, New York, and is pursuing two bachelor’s degrees in communication studies and public relations.

# Feedback

We welcome and encourage letters to the editor. Write to us at [urimag@uri.edu](mailto:urimag@uri.edu).

Visit us and comment online at [uri.edu/magazine](http://uri.edu/magazine).

## From the Editor

We heard from so many of you in response to the summer 2023 issue. This magazine is for you, and it's great to hear what you think.

I hope you enjoy the fall 2023 issue. A special thanks to the remarkably talented Anthony Russo '74 for the cover and cover story illustrations. If Anthony's style looks familiar, you may have seen his work here in *URI Magazine* over the years, or in *The New Yorker*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, or on a book jacket—his work has graced the covers of books by Isabel Allende, Michael Pollan, and others.

Thank you Anthony. URI is proud and grateful to count you among our alumni and we are honored to work with you and include your art in our magazine.

—Barbara Caron, Editor-in-Chief

## DEDICATION AND SERVICE

I want to applaud *URI Magazine* for the recent article ("All the Right Moments," summer 2023) highlighting the heroic actions of Brig. Gen. Elliott R. Thorpe '19. I was inspired to buy and read his book, *East Wind, Rain*. A true testament to his dedication and service to our nation.

Brig. Gen. Thorpe is one of hundreds of URI ROTC alumni who have helped shape world events. Many gave "the last full measure of devotion." I encourage *URI Magazine* readers to visit the ROTC Hall of Fame located on the bottom floor of the Memorial Union to learn more about our Rhody heroes.

—General Leon J. LaPorte '68

## AZALEA GARDENS ARE A FAMILY LEGACY, LOCAL TREASURE

The summer 2023 issue featured a photo, "Moon Gate," (page 52) taken at the Kinney Azalea Gardens in Kingston, R.I., by Ang Cai, Ph.D. '17. We listed Tony Faella '51 and Betty (Kinney) Faella, M.S. '67 as the proprietors. Their daughter, Helen, wrote to correct us. We apologize for the outdated information and appreciate the Kinney-Faella family for sharing this beautiful spot with the community.

The Kinney Azalea Gardens are now owned and run by me, Helen Faella Northup '84, and my husband, Jim Northup '83. My parents, Tony Faella '51 and Betty (Kinney) Faella, M.S. '67, are still active in the gardens.

We started a nonprofit, Friends of the Kinney Faella Gardens, to keep the gardens open to the public for years to come. The Kinney-Faella family has been funding it for many years through generosity and plant sales. It is time for the community to understand the progression of the gardens and help fund this local treasure.

—Helen Faella Northup '84

Visit [kinneyazaleagardens.com](http://kinneyazaleagardens.com) to learn more or support the gardens.

## GETTING TO KNOW MARY PARLANGE.

When the Parlanges came to URI, I remember reading about Marc, thinking that he was going to make a great university president. I didn't know much about Mary. I loved this article ("Summer on the Wild Side" by Mary Parlange, summer 2023). I liked the journal format (I've made many journals of my own as I've moved around the world), and the story showed Mary's sense of adventure. Mary Parlange is a breath of fresh air for our state.

Thank you so much for this issue of the magazine. Bravo! I have always loved URI for many reasons, but this issue really highlighted some of my favorite topics.

—Carol J. Craig, M.A. '03

## COMPUTER HISTORY LESSON

That "typewriter" in the lower picture (summer 2023, page 64) is not a typewriter. It's a computer terminal, specifically a DECwriter, and probably a DECwriter III. These were common computer terminals throughout the '70s and into the early '80s, and while they certainly wouldn't have been part of a typing class, they were almost certainly used at all levels of computing classes at the time.

—Stuart Gitlow, M.B.A. '06

## AN AMAZING RECONNECTION

The story by Norm Schoeler '71 about his reconnection with Barbara DeCubellis Taylor '70 (summer 2023) touched many readers who sent comments. This one sums them up perfectly:

"What a beautiful story!"

—Christine Boettger '95, M.A. '17

## THANK YOU, MASTER GARDENERS

A group of Master Gardeners based at East Farm has been assisting Professor Steve Alm ("For the Love of Honey," summer 2023) and his graduate students for years by constructing and maintaining various research areas and specialized gear in the ongoing pollination project. The close-knit collaboration has been most gratifying and educational for all involved.

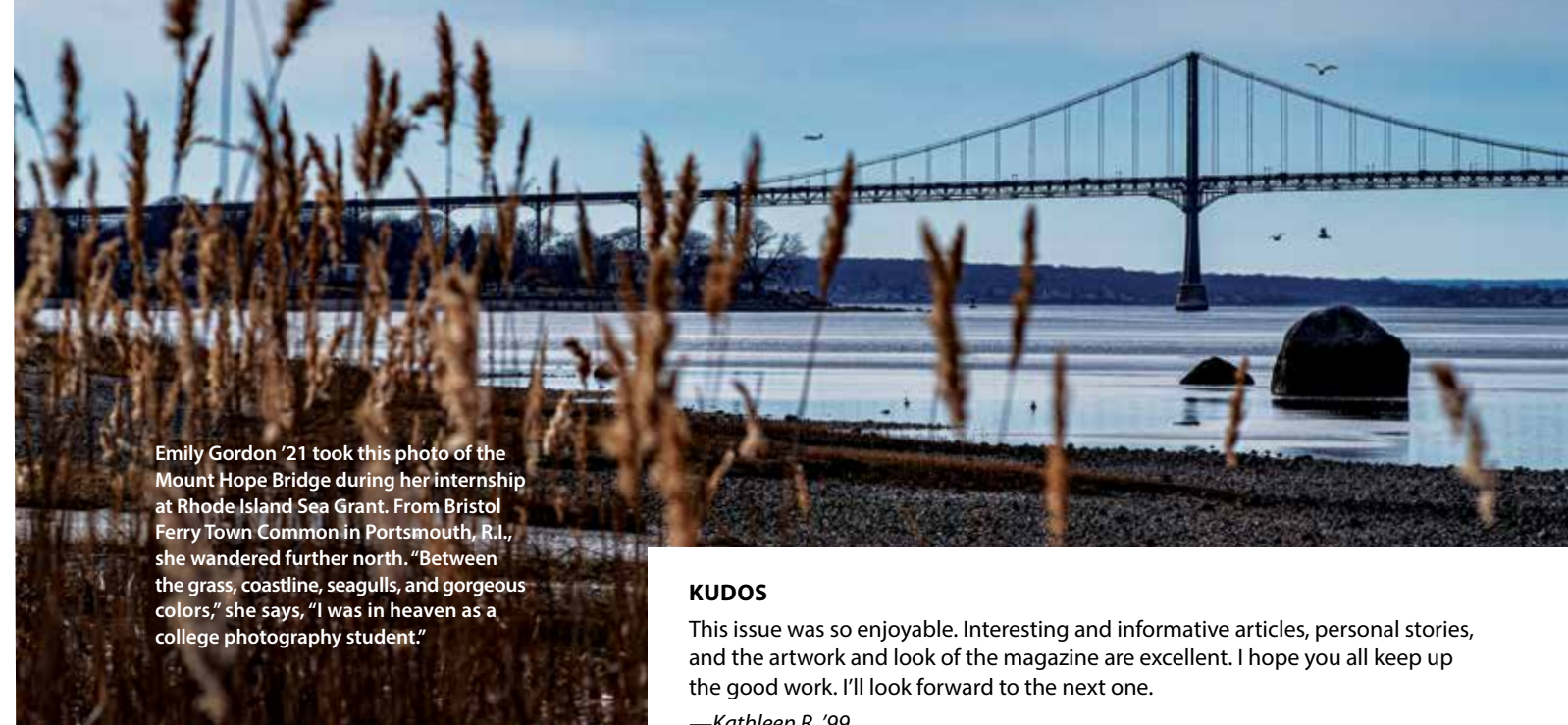
—Rudi Hempe '62, Master Gardener

## WE LOVE URI'S SHARK GUY

Many of you enjoyed the summer 2023 online story about assistant professor of biology Brad Wetherbee, "Take the Fork in the Road." Read the story at [uri.edu/magazine/sharkguy](http://uri.edu/magazine/sharkguy).

Another example of the talented faculty at URI and dedication to teaching and research. What an inspiring story—both personal and professional. Job well done, Dr. Wetherbee.

—Patricia Moore, M.B.A. '92



Emily Gordon '21 took this photo of the Mount Hope Bridge during her internship at Rhode Island Sea Grant. From Bristol Ferry Town Common in Portsmouth, R.I., she wandered further north. "Between the grass, coastline, seagulls, and gorgeous colors," she says, "I was in heaven as a college photography student."

## FEEDBACK GUIDELINES

*University of Rhode Island Magazine* welcomes letters to the editor addressing topics covered in the magazine. We do not publish letters containing obscenities, potentially libelous statements, personal attacks, or known false statements. All letters must be signed. Letters may be edited for style, grammar, typographical errors, content, and length. The submission of a letter to the editor does not guarantee its publication. Views expressed by readers in the Feedback section are their own and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the University of Rhode Island or *University of Rhode Island Magazine*. Please send letters via email to [urimag@uri.edu](mailto:urimag@uri.edu).

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## KUDOS

This issue was so enjoyable. Interesting and informative articles, personal stories, and the artwork and look of the magazine are excellent. I hope you all keep up the good work. I'll look forward to the next one.

—Kathleen R. '99

I was intrigued and alarmed by the realities revealed in the articles "Water Warriors" and "Water Detective." I live on the east end of Long Island and spend time on Martha's Vineyard—both locations are suffering the same plight as Rhode Island.

And I enjoyed the different but equally engaging articles about studying sharks and the chemistry and entomology professors collaborating for the health and sustainability of bee populations. The articles were so interesting that I wanted to come back to URI to talk to the people at the heart of those stories. And I wasn't even a science major! Now that's compelling storytelling.

Thank you for doing what you do—so engagingly. I look forward to the next issue.

—Linda Meise '73

## 1941: NUMEROUS WARNINGS WERE DISMISSED

In the lead-in to "All the Right Moments," (summer 2023) we incorrectly stated that Brig. Gen. Thorpe warned Washington, D.C., of the impending attack on Pearl Harbor in 1945. The year was 1941, not 1945. Our apologies, and thanks to Cheryl Madden '02 for the correction.

I believe the good Brigadier's warning was sent prior to the key 1941 date, not in 1945, as the article states.

As a Russian friend once warned, "You can start a war for the lack of a comma." He was correct, and to honor the memory of our military members who were sitting ducks that day, please let us, at a minimum, insist that key dates are correctly written.

By the way, J. Edgar Hoover at the FBI's main office also received warning of the exact date, time, and place of the anticipated attack. Unfortunately, Hoover was so xenophobic that he tossed the truth-teller out of his office.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt also was warned via Stalin, whose spy, Richard Sorge, accurately reported the date. But FDR made himself scarce that day, since it had been decided that our entry into the war had to happen.

How sad, yet true, that even the honored FDR is found to be "bloody to his elbows, and beyond," when you ferret into the actual wartime archival documents.

I recall taking Professor Emeritus Timothy George's Pacific War senior seminar at URI. Dr. George taught us using primary sources from both sides of the war.

—Cheryl A. Madden '02

Madden is an award-winning historian and author who specializes in Ukrainian history and holds the Order of Princess Olha Medal, a Ukrainian civil decoration, for her work on the Holodomor Genocide of 1932–33.

IN BRIEF



**NANOPARTICLES TARGET HARD-TO-TREAT LIVER DISEASE**

Nearly 30 percent of cases of hepatocellular carcinoma, the fastest-growing cause of cancer-related death in the world, have been attributed to chronic alcohol liver disease. Heavy alcohol consumption leads to fatty liver, hepatitis, and eventually cirrhosis, increasing cancer risk. But treatments for alcohol liver disease and associated fibrosis have proven largely unsuccessful due, in part, to the difficulty of targeting therapies to specific liver cells. Associate Professor Jyothi Menon (biomedical and pharmaceutical sciences and chemical engineering) is researching the use of nanoparticles as a carrier system to deliver anti-fibrotic and anti-cancer therapies to the liver. Menon received grants from the National Institutes of Health's National Cancer Institute and the Biden Cancer Moonshot, a program "to support early-career researchers and help build a cancer research workforce that better represents the diversity of America."

**URI SCHOOL OF EDUCATION IS NOW THE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

URI's former School of Education is now the Alan Shawn Feinstein College of Education. The college will expand programs for students and professionals, offer new degree programs, and continue a three-year trend of graduating the most teacher candidates in Rhode Island. The college's new degree offerings include a Bachelor of Science in environmental education, to give students immersive, hands-on learning experiences to lead a new generation to a more sustainable future, while exploring the interconnectivity of the world. "Our children deserve the best equipped educators that we can provide. There's such a joy to that hard work because when you watch children learn and grow, you are participating in the trajectory of the rest of their lives," said Danielle Dennis, dean of the college.



**STUDY SEEKS INSIGHTS TO HELP UNDERSTAND, TREAT, AND PREVENT DEMENTIA**

Professor William Van Nostrand (biomedical and pharmaceutical sciences and neuroscience), co-executive director of the George & Anne Ryan Institute for Neuroscience, is part of a team awarded a five-year, \$8 million grant from the Leducq Foundation. The international team will study brain clearance—the brain's process for flushing out toxins and harmful waste—as a contributor to cerebral amyloid angiopathy, a disorder that causes brain bleeds and commonly occurs with Alzheimer's disease. "I believe this collaboration will lead to important breakthroughs ... and reveal key insights as to why cerebral amyloid angiopathy and other dementias occur and how we can treat and prevent them," said Van Nostrand, who has studied cerebral amyloid angiopathy for nearly 30 years and recently co-authored key findings on the role of brain clearance in the disorder with investigators at Yale University.

**URI BOARD OF TRUSTEES WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS**

URI's Board of Trustees welcomed eight new members in spring 2023. Among them is former U.S. Congressman Robert A. Weygand, a former vice president and chief financial officer at URI. Additional new voting members are Maria Ducharme, president of The Miriam Hospital; Joseph G. Formicola Jr., developer and co-owner of the Coast Guard House restaurant; Monica Garnes, a division president in the Kroger Family of Companies supermarket chain; and Joseph F. Matthews, president of a 111-year-old Westerly machinery manufacturer.

Reva Goyal, a junior pharmacy major, and Melissa Sutherland, professor of nursing, join the board as nonvoting members, and Michael Grey, chair of the Rhode Island Board of Education, joins as an ex officio member.

NEWS TICKER



**OFFSHORE WIND IMPACTS**  
NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center and URI signed a five-year partnership to research how offshore wind energy development will affect marine ecosystems and the people who live near, or work on, the ocean.



**RECOGNITION FOR WATERSHED WATCH**  
URI's Watershed Watch program received the 2023 National Water Quality Monitoring Council's Vision Award, recognizing its long contributions to improving local water quality.



**TOP GRADE FOR URI TEACHER PREP**  
The National Council on Teacher Quality gave URI undergraduate and graduate teaching preparation programs an "A" for their rigorous reading instruction program. Nationally, only 23 percent of programs earned the top grade.



**PLASTICS POLLUTION FORUM**  
Scientists, policymakers, advocates, and business leaders from the European Union, Canada, France, Ghana, and the U.S. participated in a two-day Global Plastics Forum at URI in May. Focused on the growing problem of plastics pollution, the forum is part of URI's Plastics: Land to Sea research initiative.



**PARTNERSHIP BACKS AUKUS PACT**  
URI and Flinders University formalized a research and education partnership that advances the AUKUS security pact signed by the U.S., Australia, and the U.K. The agreement bolsters Australia's efforts to produce skilled workers needed to build up the country's undersea capability through the acquisition of conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines.

MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

You Can Quote Me



**On the premise behind LK-99, a possible superconductor material that scientists in South Korea say they have devised:**  
"The holy grail would be to get something that was superconducting at room temperature."  
—Leonard Kahn, URI professor of physics  
*Business Insider*

**On the difficulty of accurately assessing the prevalence of child labor:**  
"Child labor is hard to measure, and most estimates are terrible and should not be taken at face value. Governments don't want to report how bad child labor is because it makes them look bad."  
—Skip Mark, URI professor of political science  
*The Guardian*

**On the discovery, during the Ocean Race, of microplastics in waters across the globe:**  
"It's really concerning that we are finding microplastics in every sample, from coastal areas to the most remote regions of the ocean."  
—Victoria Fulfer, URI doctoral student in oceanography, who tested water samples collected at the Ocean Race  
*BBC*

**On her recently published study looking at microplastics and their impact on the body:**  
"The brain blood barrier is supposed to be very difficult to permeate. It is a protective mechanism against viruses and bacteria, yet these particles were able to get in there. It was actually deep in the brain tissue."  
—Jaime Ross, URI assistant professor of neuroscience and biomedical and pharmaceutical sciences  
*New York Post*



**On the increasing spread of ticks to urban and suburban areas:**  
"Because white-tailed deer increasingly are living and even thriving in populated urban and suburban areas, it allows for a high rate of tick reproduction. Places like Staten Island, N.Y., are completely infested with ticks."  
—Tom Mather, director, URI Center for Vector-Borne Disease  
*National Geographic*

MILESTONES

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO THE COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES!**

URI's College of Arts and Sciences celebrates 75 years of putting knowledge into practice. Founded in 1948, it is URI's largest college, with more than 4,000 students in its 58 undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

Get more news at [uri.edu/news](http://uri.edu/news)



## CHANGEMAKERS

## Toward a More Colorful Lineup

Graduate students and surfers Juliet “Satya” Sullivan and Lauren Zane want to see more women of color on the waves.

Lauren Zane watched the Matunuck, R.I., surf online from her home in California. It was pumping.

She was surfing within days of arriving in Rhode Island in the fall of 2021. That first day out was great—a couple of guys were open to sharing their spot. It doesn’t always go so smoothly.

Surfers share an understanding, a code: Respect each other and respect the ocean. But respect hasn’t always extended to surfers of color. It’s well documented that surfers of color have been targets of harassment and vandalism, friend and

fellow surfer Juliet “Satya” Sullivan says. And newcomers to a lineup can face “surf localism,” a territorialism around surfing spots, adds Zane.

“Here in Rhode Island, you need someone to open the gate for you,” Zane says. “Localism is real. Some guys think, ‘They’re gonna blow up my spot.’”

Zane is a Ph.D. student in the biological and environmental science program. She and Sullivan, a cinematographer pursuing her master’s in marine affairs, are the co-founders of Colorful Lineup, an organization serving women-of-color

surfers through online discussion, free surfing clinics, and gear redistribution. The organization’s name reflects their vision of a future where, instead of being the only women of color in a lineup of surfers, they’ll attract enough women to field a lineup of their own.

The idea for Colorful Lineup grew out of a course Sullivan and Zane were in together—MAF 500: Race, Gender, Colonialism, and Science—taught by associate professor of marine affairs Amelia Moore. They were introduced to ideas about how imperialism and colo-

nization influenced the development of science—and how that’s resulted in racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps in marine science, whose practitioners, historically, have been predominantly white.

The course got them thinking about the parallels between science and surfing. “We wondered why we see certain people surfing, and why we don’t see others,” Zane says. “We talked about experiences we’ve had in the water, and they were the same.”

“We’ve witnessed actual aggression,” Sullivan adds.

The pair started an Instagram account to celebrate women of color who surf and to talk about surfing in the context of income inequality, localism, coastal access, and structural racism. No one was talking about surfing in that context, Sullivan says. “We can show brown bodies in the water all we want but we want to offer a way for people to act.”

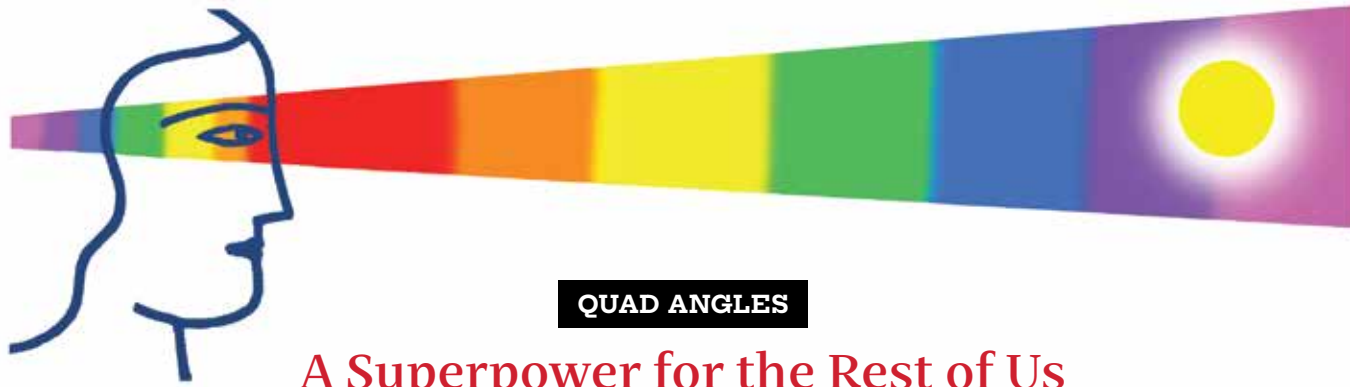
The first and primary action is to get more women of color surfing, the pair says.

Thus far, they’ve started an Instagram series—#WOCMakingWaves—featuring fellow surfers such as Jessica Malia Vandenberg, Ph.D. ’20, a post-doctoral research scholar at URI who is investigating how government solutions to plastic pollution perpetuate inequities and create new ones. And last spring, Colorful Lineup brought David Mesfin’s multiple award-winning 2023 documentary *Wade in the Water: A Journey into Black Surfing and Aquatic Culture*, to URI’s Narragansett Bay Campus. The film chronicles the 1,000-year-old tradition of Black surfing—and the racism surfers of color have endured.

Sullivan and Zane are optimistic and clear-eyed about the future of science and of surfing.

“It takes a long time to change a whole system,” Zane says. 🌊

—Marybeth Reilly-McGreen



## QUAD ANGLES

## A Superpower for the Rest of Us

By Ellen Flannery-Schroeder

*Psychology professor Ellen Flannery-Schroeder shares how she uses the therapeutic technique of cognitive reframing as a superpower. And the best part is, you don't have to live in the Marvel Universe to access it.*

I have a superpower. It's not superhuman strength, telepathy, or time manipulation, but it may be just as powerful.

My superpower is the ability to find the good in the bad. No matter the situation—positive, neutral, or downright awful—I focus on the positives. I shift my attention until it lands on something good.

One summer morning a few years ago, my family and I went out for breakfast at a popular restaurant. When we arrived, the line was long. As we waited to be seated, servers strode past with plates of eggs Benedict, pancakes, omelets, and sausage. The sweet smell of freshly baked cinnamon buns made our stomachs growl. After about 30 minutes of the food parade, our patience was wearing thin. But waiting and watching the food go by meant we saw just about everything on the menu, so when we sat down, I'd know exactly what I wanted to eat. When I focused on that, it was easier to wait.

Another example of how I've used the superpower: The day my teenage daughter hit a deer while driving, I was grateful she wasn't hurt. Maybe you've done the same thing in a similar situation. If so, whether you knew it or not, you were tapping into a powerful technique.

And here's another one: When it rains, I focus on how my allergies improve.

In truth, it's not always easy to access this superpower. There have been many times when I've tried and tried—and failed; and other times when I couldn't even muster the will to try. But usually, with a little time and distance from the situation, a good night's rest, or time with family or friends, I can find my way to the positives once again.

I recall the first time I saw this superpower in action. Years ago, when my father was hospitalized with a serious illness, my brother, living nearest to the hospital, became the messenger of all health updates. If you've been through a serious illness with a loved one, you know the path to recovery is full of ups and downs. With my dad, there were times when nearly every indicator was trending in the wrong direction. But my brother would zero in on a singular index of something going well and offer it to us as some sort of gift. It was a miraculous thing to behold.

In psychology, we refer to this as cognitive reframing or cognitive restructuring. It is the process of shifting one's perspective to see a situation in a different light. In therapy, we often encourage our clients to ask themselves, "Is there another way I can look at this situation?" or "What would I tell a friend if this happened to them?" Cognitive reframing can help shift one's mindset, providing opportunities for personal growth and change.

I have set out to hone this superpower in my children. Once, when they were younger, I offered them an assignment: Armed with a camera, capture something beautiful, special, even magical, in our

very ordinary and overgrown backyard. (I've often thought that photographers see the world a little bit differently than the rest of us—their eyes trained to find and capture the beauty of a seemingly ordinary moment.) The kids returned with photos of sun streaming through tree leaves, a tiny flower nestled in a dense clump of grass, the speckled back of a small bug, a fern unfurling itself to the world—things that would have otherwise gone unnoticed.

So, have my children fully mastered use of the superpower? Have I? No, not quite. We are still sharpening our skills. But I think we've developed some proficiency—enough to have learned that there is beauty all around us, even in the darkest places and times, and that where you place your focus makes all the difference. ☞

*Ellen Flannery-Schroeder is a psychology professor in URI's College of Health Sciences. She is the Dr. Glenda L. Vittimberga '88 Endowed Professor of Psychology, director of training in clinical psychology, and director of the Pediatric and Adolescent Anxiety Lab. She is a licensed psychologist specializing in parenting, childhood emotional health and wellness, and cognitive-behavioral therapy, with a special interest in childhood anxiety disorders. Flannery-Schroeder has worked with her students on research examining the role of emotional regulation strategies, including cognitive reframing, in childhood anxiety disorders, and she teaches her clinical psychology students how to use cognitive reframing with their child/adolescent clients.*



## GO RHODY

## Feeding Your Why

URI women's basketball coach Tammi Reiss on the mentor who made the difference, what turns individuals into teammates, and why she came to URI.

*Last year, Tammi Reiss led URI women's basketball to its first conference title. As her fifth season at URI gets underway, the two-time Atlantic 10 Coach of the Year reflects on the mentor who changed her life and how she defines success.*

## ON GIVING 110 PERCENT

When I was in the fifth grade, a teacher, Paul Tylawsky—we called him Mr. T—saw me playing basketball at recess, and he started teaching me things. He's 6-foot-7 and played semi-pro ball for the Boston Celtics. I loved it. So, I get to sixth grade, and he's my teacher. That first day I've got my ball with me; I'm ready to go to recess, and I say, "OK, Mr. T, let's go train." He says, "I'll train you, and you'll make a pact with me. You're a B student, and that's not good enough.

You get straight-A's and I'll train you every day."

Then he takes my ball, throws it in the closet, locks it. That first marking period, I get straight-A-pluses down the board. He opens up that closet, pulls the ball out, and from that day on, he trains me. I graduated valedictorian of my high school. He trained me my whole career through high school, college, and when I was in the WNBA. Mr. T taught me that with everything you do, you give 110 percent.

## WHAT GOES INTO COACHING AT URI

This isn't a uniform, cookie-cutter kind of university and neither is the team that we've assembled here. We have a diverse culture here, kids from different countries, religions, sexualities, political groups: It's all embraced in an environment that supports

individuality. I believe in that. You do, however, have to balance your individual beliefs with respect for the person next to you. So, how do we form a bond in an environment where a lot of us think and act differently? That's where coaching comes in. You have to have communication and understanding. To have a conversation and not a fight: That's how you build a team and get them very tight before you go to battle. My biggest challenge is to bond us together because if you're not bonded, then as soon as adversity hits, you splinter and break. I need to get us to a place where we'll go to war for each other. That's what true teams do. They form bonds.

## FEEDING YOUR WHY

For me, success is the accomplishment of an aim, of purpose. I came to URI because I wanted to be in a place where I could feed my why; that is, to mentor these young women to help them reach their dreams. Every day I am teaching my student-athletes how to become champions—in their behavior. My staff and I want to build that culture, to make them believe they are champions before they become champions. ☞

—Marybeth Reilly-McGreen





## WHY I TEACH

## All the Voices: Respectful Science and Scholarship

Associate professor of marine affairs Amelia Moore wants students to leave her classes with new vocabulary, new ideas, and new perspectives.

For Amelia Moore, teaching and advocacy are inseparable. “Everything I do now—all of my research, my teaching, my service, my academic practice, my life—is to work toward the goal of transformation.”

Transformation in this context is multi-valent. Moore seeks to expand her students’ perspectives to make them more informed and respectful researchers and scholars. In her own work, Moore seeks to expose bias in science while also restoring voices that have been ignored or nearly forgotten. This past summer, for instance, Moore, along with undergraduate fellows, graduate students, colleagues, and community partners, spent time on Block Island working on an ethnographic project, “Public Memory, Place, and Belonging: Unearthing the Hidden History of Racially Marginalized Populations of Block Island.”

One of Moore’s most popular courses is Race, Gender, Colonialism, and Science. She teaches both an undergraduate and a graduate-level version. In its earliest iteration, the course was called Social Studies of Science and it examined the historical and social context for the practice of science. But in recent years, the country’s increasing political polarization, ideological shifts, and violent rhetoric ignited the activist in Moore. “I needed to teach directly to an awareness of this context,” she says. “We can’t pretend that this rhetoric and biased practices aren’t causing real harm in the world or that they don’t need to be countered with real evidence, real scholarship.” Moore says.

Moore introduces her students to the ways in which colonialism, capitalism, and

nationalism have influenced the development of science and technology. Her process is collaborative; she encourages students to share their histories and perspectives, even if controversial. In this way, she says, “we learn about one another and from one another as we discover our own ways to relate to the course material and to the varied experiences of others.”

Graduate students Satya Sullivan and Lauren Zane met in Moore’s class. Sullivan is a cinematographer pursuing a master’s in marine affairs. Zane is a Ph.D. student in the biological and environmental science program. Both rank MAF 500: Race, Gender, Colonialism, and Science as one of their favorite courses. Sullivan calls Moore “an incredible voice,” praising her ability to lead students through the complex conversations that develop when examining the intertwining of history, intersectionality, civilization, power, and wealth generation.

For Zane, the course has shaped and changed how she views herself as a scientist. “My work in that class helped me think about creating a practice in which I can conduct science in a more just, equitable way.”

One of the perks of Moore’s position, she says, is to see ideas seize and propel students.

“It’s incredibly productive to think with students as they’re processing the course content in real time and applying it to their own professions and research and career development,” Moore says. “My goal is that my students leave my classes with a new vocabulary, new ideas, and their own perspective on the practice and history of science.”

— Marybeth Reilly-McGreen



## OFFICE HOUR

## You Won't Find this Economist in an Ivory Tower

Leonard Lardaro works with his feet firmly planted in the real world. The creator and producer of Rhode Island's Current Conditions Index, he teaches his students how to make sense of economic information.

Professor Leonard Lardaro in his Chafee Hall office on URI's Kingston Campus.

For URI economics professor Leonard Lardaro '73, teaching is all about grounding theory and analysis in the real world.

This comes naturally to Lardaro, creator of the Current Conditions Index (CCI)—a sophisticated economic forecasting tool that provides a snapshot of the current health of the Rhode Island economy. The index is used by legislators, real estate professionals, banks, and others to determine the health of the state economy and to plan accordingly. It's also used by the media as a counterpoint to the spin politicians put on economic news.

"He's been our go-to guy on the economy for more than 20 years," says radio talk show host Matt Allen of AM station WPRO in Providence. "He doesn't mind speaking truth to power—and he does it in a nonpartisan way. He's also a teacher, so

he's able to take complex issues and make them understandable to our listeners."

### A TEACHER FIRST

Given his prominence as a media expert, Lardaro enters the classroom with a unique brand of credibility. His goal is to train students to become discerning critics of economic information by providing them with the analytical tools they need to assess the quality of economic data and forecasts.

"I teach them how to analyze what they read and hear in the media," says Lardaro, who received his undergraduate degree in economics from URI and completed his Ph.D. at Indiana University, Bloomington.

He also teaches them how to look beyond obvious conclusions. For example, as we came out of the pandemic, the U.S. dollar was quite strong, but Lardaro

*Lardaro's goal is to train students to become discerning critics of economic information by providing them with the analytical tools they need to assess the quality of economic data and forecasts.*

warned that this wasn't necessarily a cause for optimism.

"You would think that's a good thing, having a strong U.S. dollar; but in a lot of ways, it was bad for our economy," he says. "Sure, it made imports cheap, but it also made our exports less competitive, which leads to slow growth. U.S. companies were making money overseas, but when they converted their profits to dollars, they lost money. That hurt the stock market."

Lardaro teaches students at the beginning and the end of their undergraduate careers. He lays the foundation for economic analysis in his macroeconomics class, then requires them to pull together all they've learned in his senior-year capstone course, in which students analyze an economic topic of their choice.

In addition, Lardaro teaches a class in econometrics—an upper-level course for which he literally wrote the book. *Applied Econometrics* is a college textbook that applies statistical methods to economic data for purposes of gaining an empirical understanding of economic relationships and forecasting economic trends.

"I teach them statistical reasoning," he says. "I use economic theory and

statistical methodology to teach them how to estimate critical relationships. This gives them the tools they need to discern a reliable forecast from one that fails to take into account all the factors."

### A MORE COMPLETE PICTURE

Accounting for all the factors is exactly what Lardaro set out to do in 1995 when he created the Current Conditions Index.

"I was the Rhode Island forecaster for the New England Economic Project, and at that time the state of the economy was gauged solely by manufacturing employment," he says. "So, I developed a broader-based methodology that considered a set of 12 economic indicators."

Those indicators include retail sales, new housing permits, unemployment, and manufacturing wages. The monthly CCI score consists of the percentage of the indicators that have improved compared to the same time the previous year. If more than six of the indicators have improved, the state has an expanding economy; if fewer than six have improved, the economy is contracting.

At the time of this writing, in the summer of 2023, the index indicated that the Rhode Island economy had been contracting monthly for more than a year. On a series of media talk shows,

Lardaro warned that the state was on the brink of a recession. That's not the kind of news politicians and business leaders want to hear.

"People ask me why I'm always so negative. They say, 'You've got to be more positive.' No, I don't. What they should be asking," says Lardaro, "is whether I'm accurate. I'm just the messenger."

### SEEING THE FUTURE

As the messenger, Lardaro believes it's time for the state to adapt to the competitive world of modern economic development.

"Rhode Island hasn't changed the way it's doing things in nearly 40 years when we switched from a manufacturing to a service economy in the late 1980s," he says. "We're not doing well, but it doesn't have to be that way. We can fix it."

Lardaro believes the first step is to professionalize economic analysis at the state level by creating a group of Ph.D. economists to advise legislators and other government officials about the economic feasibility of legislation and various development proposals.

"The state needs to develop a system of in-house due diligence," he says. "You want your electrical system installed by professional electricians rather than well-intentioned do-it-yourself types. It should be the same with the state's economy."

According to Lardaro, successful states have a team of economists within state government. For example, Massachusetts has the Executive Office of Economic Development, which has 13 separate offices that specialize in business development, tourism, international trade, and more.

Though his advice isn't always taken, Lardaro continues to produce his Current Conditions Index for free, as he has for the last three decades.

"I consider it my service to Rhode Island," he says. "It also fits well with what I teach in my classes, so my research adds authenticity to the way I teach students at URI." 🗨️

—Bill Ibelle

MOMENTUM

## Research at the Forefront

URI researchers are working across disciplines to help find answers and solutions to benefit all of us.



### CAUTION: ICEBERG AHEAD

Every year, about 40,000 icebergs ranging from about the size of a small school bus to the size of a small island nation break off from the Greenland glacier. Those icebergs can be a serious marine hazard for shipping vessels, as well as offshore oil and wind platforms.

A group of researchers received a \$1.5 million National Science Foundation award to develop a robotic system that can map drifting icebergs and measure surrounding water properties, which can change when the freshwater of icebergs melts into the saltwater ecosystem.

URI ocean engineer and assistant professor of oceanography Mingxi Zhou, oceanography professor Chris Roman, and alumnus Kristopher Krasnosky, Ph.D. '20, senior researcher in ocean mapping at the University of South Florida, are aiming to mitigate the risks posed by icebergs and to predict environmental changes such as sea level rise.



### KELP FOR THE OCEAN

22 million tons.

That's how much carbon dioxide from human activities (burning fossil fuels, deforestation, and pollution runoff) is absorbed by the ocean each day.

All that carbon dioxide is causing the ocean to become more acidic, which makes it harder for some marine organisms to form skeletons and shells and contributes to the dissolution of coral reefs, leading to cascading problems in marine ecosystems.

There is growing interest among the global research community in cultivating marine

microalgae (seaweed) to offset ocean acidification impacts. URI researchers, led by assistant professor of oceanography Hongjie Wang, found that during its rapid growth phase, sugar kelp increased water pH by reducing carbon dioxide concentration.

Sugar kelp, a seaweed native to the Northeast, prefers colder water and grows fast. That's why Wang's group focused on sugar kelp.

Wang runs URI's Ocean Carbon Lab, which looks at the drivers and impacts of ocean acidification, as well as ocean-based carbon dioxide removal approaches.

### A BETTER WAY TO CLEAN WATER

When ferrate (iron) absorbs light, it becomes a powerful oxidant, reacting with contaminants by snatching their electrons.

Associate professor of chemistry Dugan Hayes and associate professor of civil and environmental engineering Joseph Goodwill, along with Hayes' doctoral student Cali Antolini, are studying the use of ultraviolet and visible light, along with ferrate, to treat contaminated water.

The process, especially using visible light, which is generally less expensive and easier to

*“This is a clear example of taking fundamental knowledge and applying it in a meaningful way that improves people’s quality of life.”*

—Joseph Goodwill, Associate Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering

access than ultraviolet light, is a relatively simple and efficient path to advanced water treatment. This makes the process more accessible than other treatment options for rural and impoverished areas. Plus, a process requiring less energy is more sustainable.

“This is a clear example,” says Goodwill, “of taking fundamental knowledge in the chemistry field and applying it in a meaningful way that improves people’s quality of life.”

### FROM TRASH TO TEXTILES

Assistant professor of textiles, fashion merchandising and design Izabela Ciesielska-Wrobel is partnering with Robert Torgerson of Kestrel Innovative Fibers LLC in Wakefield, R.I. to examine how to convert ocean plastic waste into commercially viable textiles.

They are studying the conversion of ocean plastic waste into filament that can be used to make textiles. They are interested in questions like which materials are best used for making such filament and

whether garments created from the recycled filament can be recycled again—and again—to create a circular economy.

Kestrel is already engaged in this work commercially, but with Ciesielska-Wrobel, he can test materials and ideas to see what works.

Ciesielska-Wrobel says Torgerson brings her samples and then, “We test them,” she says. We “see what’s wrong, what wasn’t successful, and what worked. It’s a hands-on collaboration.”



### FACULTY BOOKSHELF

Elevate your reading list with these new titles by URI faculty authors.

Find more faculty titles, including textbooks, as well as alumni publications, at [uri.edu/magazine/bookshelf](http://uri.edu/magazine/bookshelf)



*Rehumanizing the Language Curriculum*  
Edited by Megan Echevarría, Professor, Spanish and Film/Media (2023)



*Digital Marketing Foundations and Strategy*  
Lauren Labrecque, Associate Professor, Marketing (2023)



*ChatGPT for Higher Education and Professional Development: A Guide to Conversational AI*  
Stephen Atlas, Associate Professor, Marketing (2023)



*Co-Constructing and Sustaining Service Learning in Graduate Programs: Reflections from the Field*  
Rabia Hos, Associate Professor, TESOL/Bilingual-Dual Language Education (with doctoral candidate Brenda Santos) (2023)

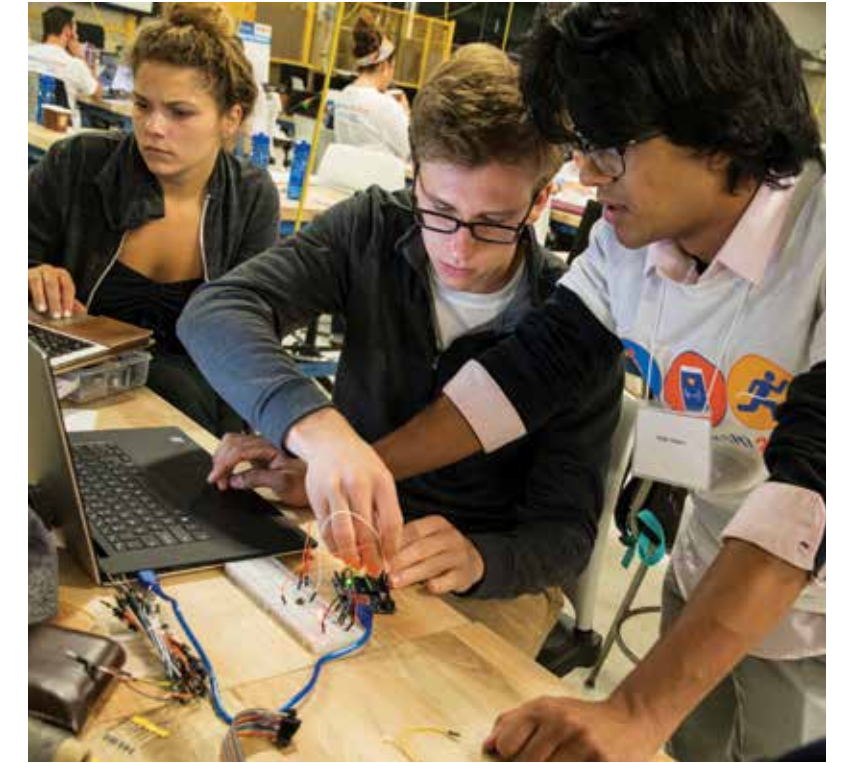


*De la comedia a que vamos / este ha sido el entremés: Estudios sobre el metateatro y la comedia áuria*  
Edited by Iñaki Pérez-Ibáñez, Assistant Professor, Spanish and Teacher Education (2023)



*The Fashion Reader, 3rd ed.*  
Edited by Linda Welters, Professor, Textiles, Fashion Merchandising and Design (2022)

For more on URI research, check out Momentum: Research & Innovation, the magazine of URI's Division of Research and Economic Development, at [uri.edu/research/momentum](http://uri.edu/research/momentum).



## It's About Who We Help

It is hard to believe that this is the last year of our campaign, *Big Ideas. Bold Plans.* When we started this ambitious journey six years ago, we never imagined that we would quickly surpass our original goal of \$250 million and set our sights on \$300 million.

As a new academic year is well underway there is no better reminder of the importance of this campaign than seeing students come back to campus and alumni reunite at receptions, lectures, and big events like homecoming.

We are charging toward our goal to raise \$300 million across five strategic categories that span the entire University. The contributions from alumni, parents, friends, corporations, and foundations so far have made a difference for students, professors, and facilities. The campaign has also brought to light inspiring stories from every corner of our campuses. Alumni who overcome challenges to realize their potential and launch careers that allow them to give back demonstrate the vital role of a state flagship university like ours. Students who intend to change the world offer promise for the future. And organizations that align their missions with ours create powerful partnerships with wide-ranging benefits.

We hope everyone who feels a connection to URI will find a way to get involved with the parts of the University that they care about most. Your time and interest can mean so much and inspire so many.

*Lil O'Rourke*

Lil Breul O'Rourke  
President, URI Foundation & Alumni Engagement

*Al Verrecchia*

Alfred J. Verrecchia '67, M.B.A. '72, Hon. '04  
Chairman of the Board, URI Foundation & Alumni Engagement

## Creating New Chances for Success

Karina Montilla Edmonds '92 recently created the José Ramón Montilla Engineering Scholarship as a permanent endowed fund. She named the scholarship to commemorate her late father and his commitment to education.

"While he never had an opportunity to go to school as he had to help support his family," said Edmonds, "he brought me and my five sisters to the U.S. so we could have educational opportunities. I credit my dad for my success, because had he not worked hard to immigrate to the U.S., my chances of success would have been incredibly low."

Montilla Edmonds majored in mechanical engineering and participated in student senate at URI before going on to earn her Ph.D. at CalTech. As an alumna,

she has served as a URI Foundation & Alumni Engagement board member and trustee and as a URI trustee.

"I am immensely grateful to URI for the solid education I received that enabled me to pursue my graduate studies. Along with this strong academic foundation, I made lifelong friends and developed a growth mindset. Serving on the Board of Trustees has been an amazing honor, and I was humbled to serve and give back to a community that has given me so much."

As for the scholarship, Montilla Edmonds was also motivated by someone else's act of generosity. "I received the inaugural Tommy Garrick Scholarship while I was a student, so I personally know how meaningful financial support is," she



said. "At a time when tuition continues to rise, URI is a great value for local and out-of-state students. I'm happy to create new opportunities for students to come here and find their own paths to success."

Endowed scholarships mean that every year, students will receive financial aid based on demonstrated merit and their potential to achieve in their field of study. Two new scholarships established during the campaign have already benefited multiple class years of hard-working students. The Thomas M. Ryan Scholars and the Alfred J. Verrecchia Distinguished Business Scholars are making their mark on URI and sharing their big ideas for the future.



**Joceline Rodrigues**  
*Thomas M. Ryan Scholar*

**Activities**

- Sociology and biology double-major
- Leadership studies minor
- Pre-med track
- Tour guide
- Academic Enhancement Center
- Peer Health Educator
- Speaks English, Cape Verdean Creole, Spanish, and Portuguese

**Getting the Scholarship**

I remember the day I got the scholarship, like all of the events that day, because honestly, I was so happy that I would be able to go to college and really achieve my dreams. I had always wanted to be a physician, but I didn't think I had the money to be a physician. Having the Ryan Scholarship meant the world to me.

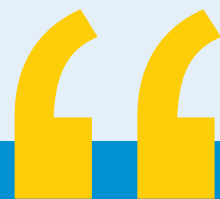
**Standout URI Moment So Far**

I went through the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) program here at URI, which allowed me to do some work at Brown. Through that experience, I learned to code, and I had this moment of thinking, 'Wow, I never thought I would be in a lab coding on a computer about neuroscience research.' I also got to run the process of setting up MRIs for different people and looking over the scans of their brains.

I also really enjoy tutoring. I've been able to help a lot of students not only with the actual academic portion, but being able to help them see that there are more paths out there.

**Goals as a Student**

I want to be involved in as many things as I possibly can, get to know more people, and help people on a similar academic track because I know that being pre-med is something that's very intimidating. I am working to become a physician, and I want to help address disparities in women's health. I also think about going into public policy to give us better equity in the health care system in the United States. I have a pretty open path.



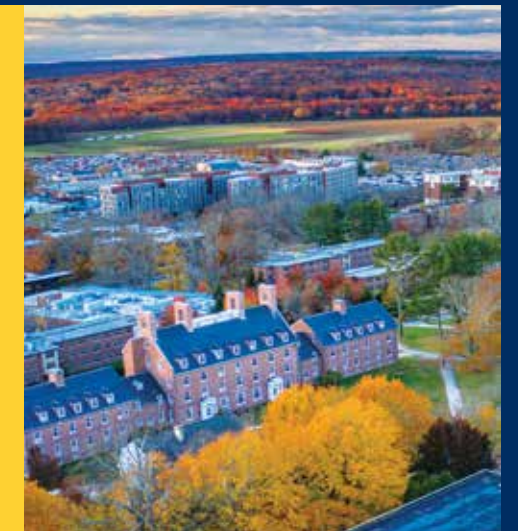
I remember the day I got the scholarship, like all of the events that day, because honestly, I was so happy that I would be able to go to college and really achieve my dreams.

JOCELINE RODRIGUES



Before I graduate, one of the biggest goals I have is to leave something here that future students could benefit from. I think that's one way I can repay what I was given.

BRANDON VELASQUEZ



**Brandon Velasquez**  
*Alfred J. Verrecchia Distinguished Business Scholar*

**Activities**

- Finance and global business double-major
- Italian minor
- Collegiate Capital Fund
- Theta Delta Chi
- Delta Sigma Pi

**Getting the Scholarship**

When I found out I got the Verrecchia Scholarship, it was a surreal moment. And I feel like ever since then, it's just been a dream, because it's an amazing opportunity to focus on my studies rather than worry about my finances. I think it was an opportunity to also have a great community the moment I arrived at URI. The community of the Verrecchia Scholars is a very tight-knit group, and we are all really good friends.

**Standout URI Moment So Far**

A great experience for me was the CEO roundtable. It was an opportunity to hear from two professionals, one in wealth management and one in startup venture capital. Learning about their experiences was incredible for us finance majors—to understand where they came from, how URI benefited them, and how we can use the resources here to advance our careers. It's also an example of how the business school offers us a great network of people that we can access at any time as long as we are interested.

**Goals as a Student**

Before I graduate, one of the biggest goals I have is to leave something here that future students could benefit from. I think that's one way I can repay what I was given. I'm also eager to advance my business career. I thought about my career as soon as I got here. So I'm trying a lot of different areas: accounting, portfolio management, wealth management, trading, and other topics. I try to get out there and talk to people who are in finance to get more of an understanding and find opportunities in the industry.



### A Healthy Respect for Education

Stedman Gyamfi-Darkwah '23 grew up in a home where health care was a valued profession. His mother is a nurse, as is his older sister.

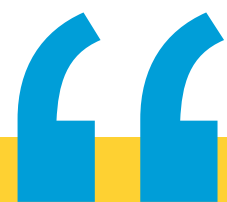
During high school, he transported patients to appointments and procedures around Rhode Island Hospital.

"I loved talking to the patients and trying to make them more relaxed and happy," said Gyamfi-Darkwah. "I decided a long time ago that I wanted to become a doctor so that I could help people in the best way possible."

Coming to URI was the first step in that journey, and the Talent Development (TD) program made that dream a reality.

"TD enabled me to attend URI," said Gyamfi-Darkwah. "Tuition expenses were hard for my family, and TD made it possible. The TD staff were incredibly supportive, and I gained strong leadership skills through my various activities."

Now he is applying to medical schools and working as a medical receptionist at Thundermist Health Center. His ultimate goal? Provide care for adolescents and young adults—and be a role model for them.



TD enabled me to attend URI. Tuition expenses were hard for my family, and TD made it possible. The TD staff were incredibly supportive, and I gained strong leadership skills through my various activities.

STEDMAN GYAMFI-DARKWAH '23



### New Grant to Build Bridges with High School Students

The Teagle Foundation has awarded URI a \$250,000 grant to implement the *Forgiveness is Freedom Academy: A Knowledge for Freedom Program* for Rhode Island's urban high school districts. The program strengthens URI's vital connection to the state and the local community.

The program includes a two-week summer residential experience seminar that pairs selected readings with the 2019 documentary film *Emanuel*, which examines a mass shooting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina in 2015. Students will apply their learnings in a year-long academic project where they will bring the concept of forgiveness to the local context of issues of injustice, inequality, and violence in their community. URI faculty and students will guide the high school students through the program.



"This program will support URI's efforts to develop meaningful partnerships with K-12 educators across the state so together we can cultivate students' interests in the humanities and ultimately encourage them to pursue a college degree," said Skip Mark, project leader, assistant professor, and director of the Center for Nonviolence & Peace Studies.

"This program will support URI's efforts to develop meaningful partnerships with K-12 educators across the state so together we can cultivate students' interests in the humanities and ultimately encourage them to pursue a college degree."

SKIP MARK, PROJECT LEADER, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, AND DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR NONVIOLENCE & PEACE STUDIES

## Life on the Water

Ken and Laura Kenerson met as students at URI. Now, the double-degreed alumni couple (Ken '71, M.A. '73 and Laura '73, M.P.A. '79) is contributing to the protection of oceans and marshlands by creating a new scholarship for marine affairs students.

The Kenersons have spent much of their lives on the Kingston campus, by Narragansett Bay, and around local marshland, living on Point Judith Pond in Wakefield for 40 years. From their home, they have a front-row seat to a diverse array of marine and bird life.

"It's hard for me to imagine anyone loving URI more than I do," said Laura. "It's been such an important part of my adult life, as it has been for Ken's and that of our children. Ken and I feel fortunate that we are able to pay it forward."

"Laura and I have always had a mutual love of the water, especially the ocean,"

It's hard for me to imagine anyone loving URI more than I do. It's been such an important part of my adult life, as it has been for Ken's and that of our children.

LAURA KENERSON '73, M.P.A. '79

said Ken. "Both of us grew up on the water and have been on the water—boating and fishing—our whole lives."

The Kenersons recognize the importance of marine ecosystems and have found a way to contribute to improvement and conservation while helping hard-working students complete their degrees and launch their careers.



## The Chance to Stay

During her first year at URI, Alicia Johnson '15 flourished. She loved her classes. She made lots of friends. And her view of her potential was expanding.

Entering her sophomore year, financial realities almost derailed her ambitions. Alicia sought help from URI staff and received support and scholarships that let her continue and eventually graduate.

"I am a first-generation college graduate," said Alicia. "I was raised in a single-parent household, and finances were tight. The scholarship I received turned my dream into reality."

Her education and experiences led to a job at Habitat for Humanity immediately after graduation. More recently, she returned to work at URI Foundation & Alumni Engagement.

Alicia's personal appreciation for the importance of scholarships inspires her to speak passionately about how each gift, of any amount, helps students.

93%  
toward new  
\$300M goal

*Big Ideas. Bold Plans. The Campaign for URI has made all of these things and more possible, advancing URI and creating new opportunities across five strategic areas:*

- Student Access
- The URI Learning Experience
- Transformative Faculty Leadership
- Innovative and Distinctive Programs
- Strategic Opportunities

But the work is **not yet done!** It will take everyone across the URI community working together to bring the University to the next level of educational and academic success.



\$66M

raised during the campaign to-date for  
scholarships and fellowships to help students  
cover the costs of attendance.

# AN OCEAN OF DATA

Alaska has 33,900 miles of shoreline, including this scenic section of Glacier Bay. PolArctic has designed an engine to measure and chart nearshore depths on the changing Alaska coastline.

**LAUREN DECKER, M.S. '09, A YUP'IK ALASKA NATIVE, IS CHIEF SCIENTIFIC OFFICER FOR POLARCTIC, AN OCEAN AND DATA SCIENCE COMPANY THAT USES ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND MACHINE LEARNING—INFORMED BY INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE— TO HELP BUSINESSES IN THE ARCTIC OPERATE SAFELY, PROFITABLY, AND SUSTAINABLY.**

By Alexander Castro

Lauren Decker loved bugs. Butterflies, beetles, ants, moths, cockroaches and other grubs. She loved them so much that she thought they'd be her life's work. She told her first-grade teacher she'd be an entomologist one day.

Childhood fantasies tend to lack in specifics, however, and Decker's dreams of entomology were slowly squelched. By the time she arrived at the University of Washington as an undergraduate, Decker realized the sheer variety of sciences she could study. Decker remembers thinking, "I don't know what kind of scientist I want to be now!"

You might say she still works with bugs, albeit not the squishy kind. Debugging is only part of what Decker does as chief scientific officer at PolArctic LLC. Working alongside the company's CEO (who is also her sister), Decker is in charge of programming sophisticated frameworks that map, model, and predict the ever-changing Arctic.

Coding can be demanding, solitary work, but it's a good fit for Decker: "I am very much a 'sit-in-my-office-and-program' kind of person," she says. "It's so ingrained. My dad's a programmer. I've been programming since I had to sit on his lap to reach the keyboard."



Lauren Decker, M.S. '09, is chief scientific officer at PolArctic LLC.





Fishing boats in Seward, Alaska. Seafood and fishing are vital to Alaska's economy. PolArctic recently secured a \$1 million NSF grant to forecast climate change impacts on fisheries stocks.

## POLARCTIC HELPS KEEP THE ARCTIC WORKING

So, what does Decker do in her office all day? “I’m doing exactly what I wanted to do in terms of AI (artificial intelligence) and machine learning,” she says. She’s coding new technologies for businesses, governments, and Indigenous communities to help decipher a capricious (and climate-ravaged) Arctic.

One hot product from PolArctic is the Ice3 Model, a neural network algorithm that can render high-resolution predictions about when and where sea ice will be present. Using historical data and trends, the algorithm helps determine where ice may break or freeze. It’s a valuable tool for trades like fishing. Crabbers, for instance, tend to congregate at the ice edge, where frost poses a tangible and present threat.

“You don’t want to be overwhelmed by it and have your crab pots frozen in,” Decker explains. Using Ice3, fishers can make smarter moves about where to set up camp. So, too, can ships or barges use Ice3 to help steer through narrow rivers to deliver heating oil and other supplies to Alaskan communities.

“Alaska is really on the edge of nowhere. We have to transport our seafood harvest and all resources tremen-

dous distances,” says Garrett Evridge, director of AFDF Startup Accelerator, an Anchorage-based program that seeks to supercharge Alaskan businesses in a sustainable way.

PolArctic is part of the AFDF Startup Accelerator portfolio of businesses, a group of 12 that includes similarly eco-oriented companies like Net Your Problem, a company that recycles fishing gear, to more traditional commodity producers like AlaSkins, a brand of dog treats made from dried Alaskan fish.

Evridge says the organization helps its cohort “engage with potential customers,” a role he’s happy to play when it comes to PolArctic: “I’m a fan and a supporter of PolArctic.”

John Farrell, the executive director of the U.S. Arctic Research Commission—and former associate dean for research and administration at URI’s Graduate School of Oceanography, Decker’s alma mater—is impressed with PolArctic, too.

He says, “I don’t often cross paths with two young female entrepreneurs who decide to strike out on their own and start up a company focusing on oceanographic and data science products for the Arctic region. That’s an unusual and rare combination.”

Evridge agrees: “As an Alaskan, I’m glad to know we have scientists like Lauren working on these challenges.”

## PolArctic Ice3 High Resolution Regional Forecast for Ice Extent



1 October 2020



15 October 2020



31 October 2020

PolArctic’s Ice3 algorithm forecasts when and where sea ice will be present. They incorporate historical data along with climate change variables and trends to determine where ice may break or freeze to help vessels determine sea ice risk along their routes. This example shows the predicted range of ice (in white) extending into the water in Baffin Bay—between the Canadian Archipelago and Greenland—in October 2020.

## NAVIGATING THE NEW ARCTIC

And there are challenges aplenty in the 49th state. Aside from the overarching damage inflicted by climate change, the economic ripples from more recent crises like the COVID pandemic and the Ukraine-Russia war have necessitated some heavy lifting when it comes to collecting and creating actionable data. Add to that the fact that the biggest state boasts 33,900 miles of shoreline, and it becomes apparent why Evridge says Alaska is “uniquely exposed to supply chain disruptions,” including everything from storms and seasonal ice to “geopolitical disruptions.”

“PolArctic is able to inject higher quality information into their system, so operators are able to make better decisions,” Evridge says.

Decker sees one big question hovering over Alaska, as well as parts of Canada: “How do we build our economy? We can’t just do resource extraction,” she says. “We have to start thinking about the green energy transition. So much of the diminished ice impacts are current. It’s not something we’re going to prevent, because it’s already happened. Learning to live with that, navigating the new Arctic, is just an entirely new field.”

Helping Decker navigate this brave, broken new world are AI-fueled processes of maritime modeling, database architecture, and a wide assortment of visualization and forecasting tools.

Robots may take over the world one day, but for now they’re the allies of data scientists like Decker, who notes that AI

was hardly on people’s radars when she started attending GSO in 2006: “There wasn’t a data science degree when I was going through school. It seems like a lot of tools and a lot more people are moving in that direction now.”

Her graduate work in physical oceanography still involved the same methods she uses today: data visualization, modeling, and, of course, programming. This skill set proved almost immediately useful: Decker defended her master’s thesis and interviewed for her first postgraduate job on the same day in 2009. Both went smoothly. Decker scored an oceanographer position at Applied Science Associates, a scientific data and consulting firm in Wakefield, R.I., only a mile from GSO’s Narragansett Bay Campus.

Decker was cozy in this role until she started getting calls—calls from her sister, Leslie Canavera. An Air Force veteran with experience in satellite technology, Canavera had a idea: *You love what you’re currently doing, but let’s apply it to the ocean, in the Arctic.*

“She started calling me every day. I would go on a walk and talk with her about it,” Decker says. “It took like a year for her to convince me.”

PolArctic is a neatly split venture, with Canavera handling the business end and Decker the science. Like many siblings, Decker and Canavera were close as kids, or, in Decker’s words, they were “make-snowmen-together kinda people.” Born and raised in Anchorage, Alaska, Decker and Canavera are both Indigenous; specifically, Yup’ik.

“So much of the diminished ice impacts are current. It’s not something we’re going to prevent, because it’s already happened. Learning to live with that, navigating the new Arctic, is just an entirely new field.”

—Lauren Decker, M.S. ’09, chief scientific officer, PolArctic



PolArctic leaders (and sisters) Lauren Decker (left) and Leslie Canavera were honorees at the 2022 Women in AI Awards. Here, they’re enjoying some downtime together in their home state, Alaska.

“PolArctic is uniquely positioned to play a role in our fisheries and in modernizing them by responding more effectively to climate change.”

—Garrett Evridge, director, AFDI Startup Accelerator



Lauren Decker gave a PechaKucha talk (a concise presentation style for telling a story using images) at the 2022 Arctic Frontiers Conference in Tromsø, Norway. Her PechaKucha—about herself, PolArctic, and AI—includes this photo of her great-great-grandmother, great-grandmother, and grandmother (the baby in the photo), along with her great-uncles, in Southwest Alaska.

### SCIENCE INFORMED BY INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Decker recently incorporated Indigenous knowledge of the best fishing spots into a training set for an AI model. This combination of ethnography and AI isn't a novelty, but it is a rarity in the AI sector, which remains largely white and male. PolArctic hasn't gone unnoticed in this regard. One example: the Women in AI Awards, where both members of PolArctic scored some honors in 2022.

Debates around AI have only intensified in the past year. Concerns over AI's sometimes-theft of intellectual property has migrated from art and design into higher education, where colleges are scrambling to reckon with the likes of ChatGPT and its ability to summon entire term papers on demand. If text generation provokes unease, one can only imagine the potential thicket awaiting researchers who want to feed Indigenous secrets to the ghosts in the machine.

“Doing it correctly is hard,” Decker acknowledges. “You can't go and ask someone you don't necessarily know where their favorite fishing spot is. It's sensitive information in terms of how you build on it and incorporate modeling for it.”

Her own Yup'ik heritage is one compass guiding Decker's sensitivity on these issues, but she also takes a cue from the

Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee (IARPC), where she was recently appointed “data management nonfederal co-lead.” Chaired by the National Science Foundation, IARPC brings together Arctic communities, researchers, and federal agencies with business in the chilliest reaches of the northernmost state. Their common goal? Ensure Arctic research is not just high-quality, but equitable, too.

IARPC touts the data management principles of “FAIR” (findability, accessibility, interoperability, and reusability) and “CARE” (collective benefit, authority to control, responsibility, ethics) with both acronyms advocating “nuanced approaches that protect private and sensitive data, [and] respect Indigenous data sovereignty and governance,” per the organization's website. “Traditional knowledge is in that zone of having to balance the two data management principles: of having it be open and of having the authority to control it,” Decker says.

In PolArctic's case, Decker sees this as a positive: “We might have Indigenous communities reach out to us and then we support them in developing something, like commercial fisheries.”

In other words: PolArctic's data can help Indigenous people not only protect their knowledge but put it to work in their own business ventures.



A barge navigating the waters in Southeastern Alaska. In 2020, PolArctic was awarded an NSF Small Business Innovation Research grant for coastline modeling and bathymetry. PolArctic is helping to chart the shifting Arctic coastline so big ships can navigate coastal waters safely.

### USING DATA TO MAP THE ARCTIC COASTLINE

The data PolArctic provides is dynamic and responsive enough for commerce and, in some cases, it's remapping areas that have never been friendly or easily accessible to humans.

Consider PolArctic's Coastline Evolution & Nearshore Approximation (CENA), an AI engine designed for nearshore bathymetry. It identified a previously unknown subsurface reef in Hudson Bay, Decker says, and it's also charted parts of Prince William Sound that hadn't been mapped since 1939.

“The Arctic coastline is poorly charted,” Decker says, explaining that big ships can't navigate it effectively. “With CENA, you can look at that really shallow range.”

The utility of CENA surely helped convince the National Science Foundation to award Decker and Canavera a Small Business Innovation Research grant (SBIR) in early 2020 for coastline modeling and bathymetry. Grant money in hand, Decker and Canavera went networking for PolArctic right as the pandemic emerged. Landing back in their West Coast headquarters of Seattle, the sisters found an airport full of people wearing masks. No need to recap the quarantine era, but for Decker it was “an excuse to program for six months.”

They initially thought PolArctic would work mostly with governments, but this hasn't been the case: “We've worked a lot more with business-to-business contracts,” Decker says, citing “an enormous gap” in data services for Arctic businesses.

Forecasting sea ice is a valuable form of prophecy for companies in the Arctic—

and the federal government is interested in PolArctic's capacity for this uncommon skill. As Farrell explains, “By securing support from the National Science Foundation, first through a Small Business Innovation Research grant, and more recently with a \$1 million award to forecast climate change impacts on fisheries stocks, PolArctic boosted its credibility and professional standing.”

The million dollar prize was awarded in January and comes attached to a Phase II continuation of PolArctic's original SBIR grant. The Phase I research, Decker says, used “satellite imagery to estimate remote shore depths,” which “NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) has a hard time doing, especially in the Arctic,” where the landscape itself tends to rebuff cartographic efforts.

### AN OCEAN OF DATA TO HELP FISHERIES

Phase II, meanwhile, applies the research to habitats just off the shore. It involves “agent-based modeling,” a method that follows multiple individuals of a particular species to better project a holistic understanding of entire ecosystems.

Decker says the target species to examine are crabs, cod, and possibly kelp: “Hopefully, Phase II will get us down to regular ocean depths,” where more of these creatures take up residence. The resulting data could help address and predict their presence (or absence) near and beyond the shoreline. Decker says this knowledge is desirable to fisheries, which benefit from knowing whether certain areas contain lucrative crops like scallops.

The ultimate idea is to manifest a “digital twin,” Decker says, or in other words, an ocean of data, with depths of information that parallel the ocean's own nuance and complexity. Decker's not exactly sold on the name “digital twin,” though, and she opens the floor to suggestions.

Regardless of the sobriquet, it's likely Evridge and PolArctic's other true believers will rave about the startup's latest venture. PolArctic, Evridge says, is “uniquely positioned to play a significant role in our fisheries and in modernizing them by responding more effectively to climate change.”

Indeed, it's mostly shipping and fishing companies that have come to rely on PolArctic—two powerhouse industries in such a remote, wet, and cold part of the world. Tools like Ice3 help relieve some of the anxieties that come with Arctic commerce.

There are other Arctic anxieties, too, most of them related to the fragility of the Arctic itself. By generating top-shelf, actionable data, PolArctic seeks ways for businesses to work sensibly and with minimal ecological impact.

“That's really our big thing: How do we do this responsibly?” Decker says.

In the Arctic proper, laws prohibit commercial fisheries, but fishing remains a plentiful, profitable trade in the subarctic. Places like Dillingham and Bristol Bay in Alaska have seen a recent crash in crabbing. But other fish are doing really well.

“Salmon has skyrocketed,” Decker says. “The ocean itself is becoming a really great place for salmon to thrive.”

The salmon are thriving. Lauren Decker is, too. ☺



# Below Broadway: PIT MUSICIANS in the Spotlight

*The musicians of Broadway's pit orchestras are seldom visible, but they are essential to the productions that bring audiences to live shows. Nick Jemo '06 and Jesse-Ray Leich '17 have made careers in that unique space, delivering music, energy, and artistry to help tell the stories we love.*

By Anna Vaccaro Gray '12, M.S. '16

Illustrations by Anthony Russo '74

**Act II** of *The Phantom of the Opera*—the longest-running Broadway production in history until its close in April—opens with the masquerade ball scene. The whole cast is on stage; the mood is jubilant, the lighting vibrant, and the costumes colorful. The characters are celebrating the presumed demise of the phantom, and their energy is explosive. When the phantom appears at the top of the stairs, crashing the party, the moment is jolting.

Essential to the scene is music—moving the plot forward, intensifying the experience, and communicating to the audience how the story is meant to feel. The music builds tension that erupts in triumphant glee, but then, when the phantom appears—terror. The orchestra creates an emotional climax, a trumpet bursts into a high C, and the mood changes starkly—without a word.

“It’s really fun,” says Nick Jemo '06, who played trumpet for *The Phantom of the Opera* from 2009 until its close, of the pit orchestra’s contribution to this sequence. “It’s demanding to play, but it’s the only time in the show when the musicians can let loose.”

“Dialogue isn’t needed for the audience to experience the emotionality of the scene,” adds Jesse-Ray Leich '17. “You feel it sonically through the music.”

So, while actors, dancers, and singers are in the spotlight, the people you don’t see—the musicians—make an equally big impact on a show’s resonance. Imagine that scene in *The Phantom of the Opera* with softer music, for example. It simply wouldn’t be the same rich experience.

Jemo and Leich are two of those artists you won’t see but will definitely notice. Graduates of URI’s music department with degrees in music performance and music education respectively, they are both working musicians in Broadway pit orchestras.



“You need to know your show well enough that when things happen, you can make smart decisions about how to recover and continue the show.”

—Jesse-Ray Leich '17

## The Secret Life of Orchestra Pit Musicians

As freelance musicians, Jemo and Leich play a variety of roles, from guest appearances in philharmonics to playing with other artists. There's nothing quite like Broadway, though.

They began like many other Broadway freelance musicians: Jemo by subbing and Leich as a member of a touring show. Jemo has played trumpet for *Mary Poppins*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Misérables*, *Evita*, *Bad Cinderella*, and *Sweeney Todd*. Leich has drummed for *Mr. Saturday Night*, *KPOP*, *é Juliet*, and the off-Broadway show *Titanique*. Regardless of the type of story, they say this kind of performance is singular. While much of what happens onstage is tightly choreographed, the musicians' world is different.

Playing in a theater pit is unique because musicians are usually

not visible to the audience. Depending on where the orchestra is located, what the conductor allows, and how often one's instrument is featured, musicians find creative ways to pass the time between active playing during a show.

Some do crossword puzzles or computer work, some play iPad air hockey, and some play pranks on each other. Leich says of playing for *Mr. Saturday Night*, “It was a musical comedy so there were laughs on stage, and plenty behind the scenes, as well.”

While working full time for *The Phantom of the Opera*, Jemo read about 20 books a year during live performances. “When you play the show hundreds or thousands of times, you can get completely lost in a book,” he says. “The second your brain hears your cue to come in, you just know. If it's a really good book or I'm in the middle of an intense paragraph, I can pick up my book during just 10 measures of rest and know exactly when to jump back in. It's muscle memory.”

There are also unexpected situations that arise during live performances. Leich has had his in-ear monitors cut out, cracked a snare drumhead, and seen a bat fly across the stage. Right before one of Jemo's big solos during *Mary Poppins*, the mouthpiece for his horn went flying just as he was raising it. Miraculously, it landed within reach, so he grabbed it, fixed the instrument, and completed the solo.

“You need to know your show well enough that when things happen, you can make smart decisions about how to recover and continue the show,” Leich says.

“When things go wrong, those can be the most entertaining moments,” Jemo adds. “They make things interesting. We play the same songs day after day, so those moments add levity.”

Since Broadway pit musicians play the same music night after night, personnel changes can provide a welcome disruption. When a musician has a full-time contract with a pit orchestra, they are allowed to take up to half of the shows off, and they get to choose a lineup of five subs.

Because of this, it's unusual to find an all-regular pit orchestra. While an office job with an ever-changing group of coworkers might prove challenging, in an orchestra pit it fuels a sense of creating something fresh each night. Each sub brings their own style and expertise; no two will ever play the same music identically. Jemo calls this the flavor each individual musician brings; Leich calls it the authenticity.

## From URI to Broadway

While they never crossed paths as students, Jemo and Leich recognize aspects of their musicality and professionalism that were instilled in them at URI, and they are remembered for having similar gumption. “They were both people who grew tremendously because they took advantage of every opportunity they could,” Mark Conley, chair of the music department, says of them. “We saw them grow exponentially as a result.”

Conley notes that URI's music department fosters well-rounded experience and training. The relatively small size allows meaningful connections between faculty and students to flourish, and students are offered a variety of ways to exercise different artistic muscles.

For example, Jemo became enthusiastic about the piano during his first year, and although he never planned to pursue it professionally, Professor Manabu Takasawa saw his enthusiasm and began weekly piano lessons. “We can afford to get to know each individual and teach on a one-on-one basis,” Takasawa says. “When you meet a student like Nick, it's incredibly rewarding.” Jemo played a Chopin piano piece for his senior trumpet recital encore and Takasawa was his accompanist. “I got to do a lot of things I wouldn't have otherwise if I hadn't

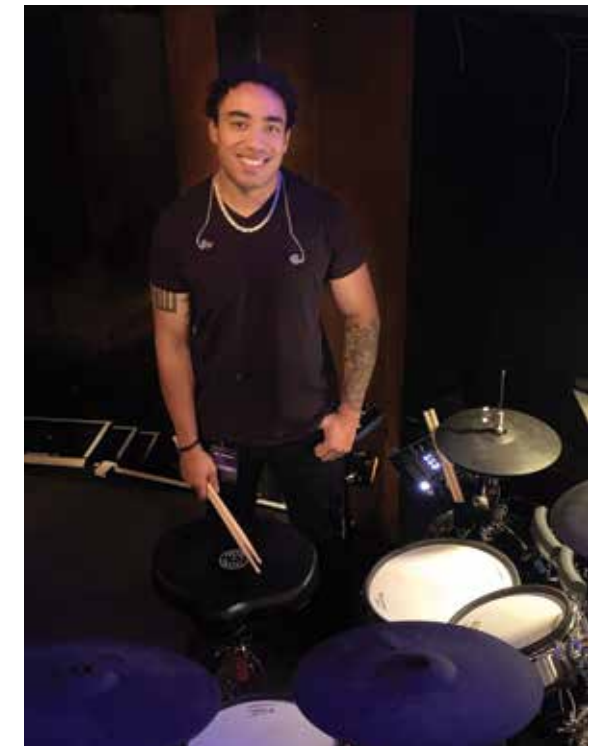
been nurtured like that,” Jemo says. “It was really special for me.”

When Leich became interested in a career on Broadway, he learned that a beloved professor, Susan Thomas, sometimes played in pit orchestras for touring productions at the Providence Performing Arts Center. His interest was piqued. Thomas did not have personal connections on Broadway but introduced Leich to another URI professor who did, Ted Mook. “It was awesome to hear his personal stories,” Leich says. “It was very generous of him to offer up his time, especially because I had never had him as a teacher.”

These experiences provided important lessons about working on Broadway, where everyone in the pit orchestra is a skilled musician and one's ability to get a gig often depends on being the type of person people want to call. “Part of musicianship is an ability to relate to other musicians and learn from them. If you're open to people and can speak their musical languages, you're going to be more successful,” Conley says. “One of the reasons they both have these careers is because they can do exactly that.”



Nick Jemo '06



Jesse-Ray Leich '17

## The Economic Story of Broadway

After an 18-month closure during the pandemic, Broadway shows reopened in September 2021. The industry still faces fallout, including lower ticket sales. Many shows are, at best, not recouping costs, and, at worst, closing their doors—even the ones that once seemed untouchable. *The Phantom of the Opera* ended its record-breaking 35-year run in April after more than 13,000 performances.

As part of cost-cutting, some producers are flirting with the boundaries of what constitutes



music, introducing the most significant threat to pit musicians: pre-recorded tracks in place of live musicians. A pre-recorded track only requires paying musicians once, after all.

While contractual protections remain for musicians, there are ethical and artistic concerns. “You go to live theater for everything to be happening in that moment—that’s the point,” Jemo says. “Pre-recorded tracks completely dismiss musicians as if they’re not part of live theater. It might cut costs. But at what cost?”

As both an art form and an industry, Broadway’s grapple with this tension is complex. “It’s definitely a new age in musical theater,” Leich says. “Many pop shows are happening now, and some are seeing great success.” Leich is currently drumming for *Juliet*, which presents a score of early 2000s pop hits from the likes of Britney Spears to Katy Perry, presented by Max Martin. “That production has done an amazing job of orchestrating the hit songs with a full live band in mind,” he says. “The big energy the band puts out is one reason the show is so successful.”

Not all pop shows have been as eagerly embraced, though. Leich also drummed for *KPOP*, which made history as the first Broadway musical centered on Korean pop culture, with songs from Helen Park, Broadway’s first female Asian composer. It tried to combine both live musicians and prerecorded tracks, and Leich was one of a three-person orchestra. “There weren’t enough musicians to output the energy you need for a live musical theater production, and, unfortunately, I think that is one of the big reasons it did not succeed,” Leich says. The show ended after 44 preview performances and 17 regular performances.

## The Kingston Chamber Music Festival Connection

Besides the fact that they’re both Broadway pit musicians, Nick Jemo ’06 and Jesse-Ray Leich ’17 have something else in common: They both earned scholarships from the Kingston Chamber Music Festival (KCMF) as URI undergraduates. Jemo was the first-ever KCMF scholarship recipient in 2004; Leich was a 2016 recipient.

Established in 1989 by David Kim, concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra since 1999, with the support of URI administrators, KCMF was the manifestation of Kim’s vision to bring world-renowned musicians to Southern Rhode Island for chamber music concerts at affordable prices.

The festival hosts a two-week series of concerts on URI’s Kingston Campus every summer.

Supporting rising young artists is integral to KCMF’s mission. The scholarship was established to bolster the relationship between the festival and URI. One music student at the sophomore level is selected by URI music faculty each year; a total of 21 students have received the award since its inception. “I am extremely grateful for organizations such as KCMF because they help shape musicians who truly want to pursue music as a career,” Leich says.

Learn more at [kingstonchambermusic.org](http://kingstonchambermusic.org).



“It’s hard to explain the energy shift from when we’re rehearsing to when the audience shows up and we can share the experience. It’s just so human.”

—Nick Jemo ’06

## Artistry and Shared Experience

The growing prominence—and skill—of artificial intelligence presents new concerns. While pit orchestras have not yet incorporated symphonic AI to replace human musicians, there are foreshadows of this technology: keyboards that can sound like any instrument and can be used to achieve a fuller sound. Their potential use is not necessarily wholly destructive, but it makes many musicians wary. “Getting rid of minimum requirements for the number of musicians in orchestra pits and using more keyboard players feel like the biggest threats to musicians,” Jemo says.

Electronic accompaniment might have a place in certain scores, but the possibility of a wider shift begs consideration about the role of music in a musical production: Should it be simply a sonically precise backdrop for the artists on stage? Or is it most resonant when it showcases the artistry of the musicians as an irreplaceable element in the experience of the show?

The tensions of this cultural moment illuminate a consistent truth: The stories we rely on for entertainment—whether streamed at home

or experienced live—rely on humans to write, edit, act, play, compose, and perform them. This essential creativity can never be rendered irrelevant because it’s fundamental to why we’re drawn to these stories in the first place: to connect with other people as we process and enrich our shared humanity.

“That’s what it’s about,” Jemo says. “Sharing your art with other people. It’s hard to explain the energy shift from when we’re rehearsing to when the audience shows up and we can share the experience. When we’re all sharing that energy, it’s just so human. We can be transported, absorbing what we are creating together in the moment.”

Whether or not we see the musicians, they help us make sense of the story. Their contribution provides the emotional impact that orients us within the highs and lows of plot twists, climaxes, and resolutions. A story without this emotionality is limited; a show without the artistry of live musicians is cheapened. They give us something essential to understanding. As Jemo says: “What words can’t say, music can deliver.”

# Business for the Next Century

Marking 100 years of leading education and research, URI's College of Business is focused on the future. Emphasizing innovation and interdisciplinary programs, the college is training leaders to succeed in a changing world and tackle tomorrow's challenges.

By Lauren Rebecca Thacker

In 1927, Andrew J. Newman, dean of the then-4-year-old College of Business at URI, took to the pages of the student newspaper to explain the college's shift from a focus on training to a more academic, big-ideas approach. "The first need of youth in preparation for a business career," he said, "is education of a broad and scholarly type." He added that "character" for those aiming to succeed in the business world was essential.

Today, Sean Edmund Rogers, dean and Alfred J. Verrecchia-Hasbro Inc. Leadership Chair, uses different

language to describe the college's educational approach, but the spirit very much remains.

"We're educating students and future business leaders who will change the world," says Rogers, "leaders with the knowledge to understand the greatest challenges and opportunities facing business and society, the skills to bring about positive change within organizations and in their communities, and the courage to make the right decisions."

The College of Business provides students with a framework for making decisions and driving innovation across a

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We're educating students and future business leaders who will change the world.



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Dean Sean Edmund Rogers

variety of industries in a constantly evolving business world. Things change in unpredictable ways: Who could have anticipated the abrupt transition to remote work in 2020? Business students at URI learn to put their knowledge to work and to become leaders in the ever-changing business world in Rhode Island and around the globe.

## It Starts with Ideas

With 80 faculty members who are experts in areas from supply chain management and accounting to finance and marketing, the college's academic strengths are, Rogers says, "top-notch."

"I came to URI because I saw something very special happening here and I saw a unique opportunity to be at the state's flagship business school," says Rogers, who joined the URI faculty in 2018 and became dean in June of this year. "It was one of the best career decisions I ever made."

Professor  
Douglas Creed



Assistant Professor  
Seray Ergene



## The Ram Fund

Expanding the scope of business education is important. But the basic building blocks are important, too. Students in the Ram Fund class learn about two of those building blocks—finance and investment—by managing real money.

URI's student-run equity fund is the ultimate hands-on training ground; students learn to analyze investments and manage portfolios under the direction of Michael Ice, senior lecturer in finance, who co-teaches the Ram Fund class in the College of Business with Deborah Imondi '82, M.B.A. '86, an experienced investment manager who chairs the URI Foundation and Alumni Engagement Investment Committee.

In 2001, the then-Alumni Association provided \$100,000 to start the fund. It has grown to more than \$800,000.

"Deborah and I guide, coach, and teach them," says Ice, who joined the URI faculty after 30 years on Wall Street. But, he says, the students make the decisions. They "walk away with the discipline to do the research, use the right models and tools, and make good risk-reward decisions."

The class is limited to 15 students, selected for showing the competency, interest, and willingness to put in the hard work and long hours. "Students will spend up to 30 hours a week outside of class in the trading room," Ice says. They learn technical skills and the ethics and responsibility of managing money, and get experience with research, decision-making, and presentations.



Al Verrecchia '67,  
M.B.A. '72, Hon. '04  
Former CEO, Hasbro

Douglas Creed, professor of management, and Seray Ergene, assistant professor of management and URI Coastal Institute senior fellow, are making strong contributions to that academic strength, both engaged in work that demonstrates the real-world implications of business research.

Creed has been known for decades for his work on marginalized groups and individuals engaged in institutional change efforts. He came to URI in 2004 after academic appointments around the world, with stops in the banking industry and at Yale Divinity School. His groundbreaking research on LGBT workers and efforts to secure benefits for domestic partners shed light on a pressing civil rights issue in the '90s; his current work on cities and systematic racism does the same today.

Ergene joined the faculty in 2018 after completing her doctorate in management with interdisciplinary training in feminist studies, political theory, sociology, and anthropology. Her research on sustainability and environmental justice helps her guide students to think about current social and ecological concerns and is relevant to students entering a wide range of industries.

## Building Blocks

Learning from expert faculty and collaborating with classmates, students learn the skills they need to make their way after graduation, whatever path they choose. Al Verrecchia '67, M.B.A. '72, Hon. '04, former longtime CEO of the global conglomerate Hasbro, which is headquartered in Rhode Island, says that business education is essential for success, whether a person wants to run a multinational toy company, open a pizza shop, or manage a newspaper. You might be the most innovative chef or incisive writer, but beyond those talents, leaders must understand matters such as how to manage inventory, navigate supply chain crises, run payroll, and build community relationships.

"The skills taught at the College of Business are building blocks. Without that training and development, people are going to struggle," Verrecchia says.

Undergraduate and graduate students alike receive an interdisciplinary education that emphasizes experiential learning and entrepreneurial thinking. Critical thinking and problem-solving are embedded in the curriculum.

Challenging coursework can lead to intellectual growth when students least expect it. Grace Legere '24 took a class on business law with John Dunn, a lawyer and associate professor. The course had a reputation for being challenging and she was intimidated. But Legere, a marketing major with a minor in criminal law, kept an open mind.

"I went into it with a positive attitude, and it turned out I loved that class. It's a tough subject, but Professor Dunn didn't overcomplicate things," she says.

Now in her senior year, Legere serves as the president of the Women in Business club. The faculty advisor is Ann-Marie Sacco, associate teaching professor of accounting.

"The club fosters a more equal corporate culture," Legere explains. "Our members work together to find our strengths. Professor Sacco has taught me so much about leadership. I couldn't have asked for a better mentor."

Members of the club put their skills in marketing, communication, networking, and event planning to work at an annual fundraiser, A Day for Ali, which is dedicated to the memory of Sacco's daughter and raises money for Boston Children's Hospital.

"We're very proud to be associated with this event," Legere says. "It's important that we can put what we are learning to use for something so meaningful."



Grace Legere '24

Verrecchia's observation that business education has broad applications holds true for Rachel Afua Ansong, M.B.A. '22, Ph.D. '22 (English literature/creative writing), and M.B.A. student Mike Molinski '19. Ansong enrolled in the part-time M.B.A. program to build her knowledge of marketing and advertising to complement her literary expertise.

After graduating, Ansong created a contest for Ghanaian poets—the Adinkra Poetry Prize—and founded a line of tote bags made in Accra, Ghana. The sales from the tote bags support the prize for the poetry contest.

"I use my business skills to raise funds and help spread the power of African poetry—part of my mission as a Ghanaian-American poet and scholar," says Ansong, who is now back at URI as an assistant professor of Africana studies.

Molinski earned his undergraduate degree in chemical engineering from URI and went on to work for AUDIANCE, a medical device battery startup. He was confident in the science, but then what?

"What I'm learning in the M.B.A. program gives me a solid foundation for making business decisions as well as engineering decisions," he says.

## Innovative and Interdisciplinary

We want Rhode Islanders to know how impactful the College of Business is," Rogers says. "We educate nearly 3,000 students a year and really leverage all of URI's strengths."

The College of Business joined forces with the Graduate School of Oceanography to create the country's first combined master's degree in business and oceanography. URI is the first school in the country to offer a professional master's in supply chain management and applied analytics and is rare among business schools in offering a business degree focused on textiles and fashion merchandising. Undergraduate and graduate students can pursue interdisciplinary degrees that support a range of interests.

One interdisciplinary initiative is Hacking4Oceans, a course in which

Rachel Afua Ansong,  
M.B.A. '22, Ph.D. '22



groups of students work with outside sponsors to develop solutions to ocean-related problems. Molinski enrolled in the class and was paired with another M.B.A. student and two undergraduates.

The group set out to address the problem of ghost gear: abandoned, lost, or discarded fishing gear left in the ocean that traps and harms marine life and is illegal to remove without the authorization of the state's Department of Environmental Management. The students developed a recommendation: Establish a permanent fund to underwrite official cleanup events during which the state allows ghost gear removal and disposal.

Molinski came to the problem equipped with his engineering background and the business knowledge he is gaining in the M.B.A. program. Both sets of knowledge provided important perspectives.

"I look at it as two sets of glasses that allow you to see the world differently. The M.B.A. has given me a new set of glasses to put on when I'm solving problems," Molinski says. "Sometimes things may work from an engineering standpoint but not from a business standpoint, or vice versa. Now I can have a clear picture of both."

**The M.B.A. has given me a new set of glasses to put on when I'm solving problems.**



Mike Molinski '19



Greg Ogiba '05,  
President, mike & mike's

## Corporations with a Conscience

**G**reg Ogiba '05, president of mike & mike's—a Canada-based importer and distributor of produce and healthy foods—was looking for a niche. In agribusiness, he found that niche.

As a student, Ogiba studied international business and Spanish, which led to a stint at a Spanish agricultural company.

“It really opened my eyes to how big the global food industry is,” he says. “Now, I’m proud to play a role in helping to feed the world’s population by delivering healthy and sustainable foods.”

At mike & mike's, Ogiba finds himself surrounded by people who share his pride. The company provides value for its consumers, and, he says, strives to create positive relationships with all stakeholders.

“We represent the growers and farmworkers who put so much effort and skill into their work, and I take it seriously that we’re the custodians of their products,” Ogiba says. He adds, “We all have to pay our bills. That’s an aspect of working. But another is that you can be part of an industry that is healthy, in more ways than one. And that’s pretty exciting.”

Also in the food business—and the relationship-building business—is Monica Garnes '94. As president of Arizona's Fry's Food Stores—a division of grocery giant Kroger Family of Companies, which ranks as one of the world's largest retailers—she has made a career out of seeing connections that others might miss, whether forging partnerships with local farms or taking a hands-on approach to hunger relief. Even in her leadership role, she considers herself part of a team, perhaps no surprise for the former URI student-athlete who was—and remains—one of the top scorers in URI women's basketball history.

In short, she sees how her work builds community.

“When I think of how grocery stores are at the center of communities, I think about how we can give people a sense of connection to each other,” she says.



**A URI business education is a value-add that improves students' opportunities and creates economic mobility.**



—Dean Sean Edmund Rogers

## The Future of Business Education

**R**ogers says, “A lot of institutions of higher education are out of reach for students. At the College of Business, we carefully and purposefully make sure that we are reaching into every corner of the state of Rhode Island.”

In-state tuition is one aspect of ensuring that the College of Business is accessible for a wide range of Rhode Islanders. Other aspects include robust admission outreach in high schools across the state and the University's Talent Development program, which supports admission for Rhode Island high school graduates with college potential who come from historically disadvantaged backgrounds. Studying business is a popular path for Talent Development scholars, Rogers says.

“When I talk to prominent College of Business alums and ask them to describe the college, they often use the business term ‘value-add,’” says Rogers. “It’s used to describe a process that makes something substantially better. A URI business education is a value-add that improves students’ opportunities and creates economic mobility. That’s why it’s incredibly important that our school is accessible for all Rhode Islanders.”

Creed and Ergene want to make sure their students are informed about current

trends in the business world while also encouraging them to consider new ideas or possibilities.

In one of her courses, Ergene asks students to analyze an industry that impacts climate change. Recently a group of students focused on the lithium mining industry, which produces lithium for the rechargeable batteries used in electric vehicles and solar panels, among other things. Most of the students, she says, went into the project feeling positive about the lithium mining industry's contribution to reducing carbon emissions. But as they conducted their research, the students realized that the industry perpetuates environmental injustice in historically marginalized areas where lithium is mined.

Ergene says, “I emphasize that strategic management is all about decision-making. There is no right or wrong answer, but decision-making has consequences for all stakeholders—not just shareholders. In my classes, I encourage students to think critically about the concerns and interests of diverse stakeholders, such as workers and farmers in supply chains, as well as consequences of business activities on the natural environment.”

Likewise, Creed encourages his students to consider the depth and breadth of challenges we face. His research, he says, has always been a bit out of the mainstream in the business world. But his focus on challenging institutionalized beliefs and considering marginalized perspectives is vital.

“A lot of students may think that they don't have a voice or that certain aspects of the business world are unchangeable. But my research shows them that change has happened,” he says.

Creed has high hopes for what business education can provide students.

“I want students to be realistic about the challenges we face. Certainly, some of them are so grave that looking them in the face can be paralyzing,” he says. “But I want students to be sensitive and aware of the world around them and to feel they can have some positive effect. History is being written and they can write it.”

*Editor's note: This story includes contributions from stories by Nicole Maranhans and Marybeth Reilly-McGreen.*



## Giving Students an Opportunity to Succeed

For this alumnus, philanthropy is important because he wants others to have the same opportunities he had.

**O**ver the years, Al Verrecchia '67, M.B.A. '72, Hon. '04, former longtime CEO of Hasbro, has given generously to URI, including \$15 million to the College of Business in 2019 as part of *Big Ideas. Bold Plans. The Campaign for the University of Rhode Island*. This gift created a scholarship for high-achieving students, a fund for students seeking competitive internships, a faculty chair—as well as a professorship in data analytics and artificial intelligence—and an emerging technology fund. Philanthropy is important to him, in part because he found remarkable support at the college during his own days as a student.

When Verrecchia was an undergraduate, he was married and had a newborn son. He needed a job that would get him some business experience while allowing him to complete his courses. He reached out to Bob Fell, an accounting professor who was also the controller at Hassenfeld Brothers, a toy company that made Mr. Potato Head and many other well-known toys and games. Fell hired Verrecchia, who was able to adjust his class schedule so that his daily classes ended by early afternoon. Verrecchia worked nights and weekends at Hassenfeld Brothers, which would become Hasbro, making it the equivalent of a full-time job.

“I worked hard and made the most of it,” Verrecchia says, “but I’ll never forget that someone gave me the opportunity. I know there are a lot of young people now who are working while they’re in school or hoping to contribute to their family business. I want to give them as much help as people gave me.”

—Lauren Rebecca Thacker





# Bacteria and Algae and Toxins—Oh My

Two URI pharmacologists are continuing the URI College of Pharmacy's tradition of marine research, expanding into freshwater systems—and wading right into the yucky stuff.

By Patrick Luce '99

In the 1950s and 1960s, pharmaceutical developers began to look at the ocean as a new field for discovery, intriguing then-University of Rhode Island College of Pharmacy dean Heber Youngken. He soon recruited noted marine pharmaceutical researcher Yuzuru Shimizu to lead the college's ocean research program and helped organize the first national "Drugs from the Sea" conference on URI's Kingston Campus in 1967.

URI's interest in marine pharmaceutical discovery has continued through the years and has expanded to include freshwater lakes and streams which, like bodies of saltwater, contain matter that can be both harmful and therapeutic, especially algae and bacteria. Pharmacy professors David Rowley and Matthew Bertin—both also oceanographers—are continuing the tradition, researching bacteria and algae. They are seeking new therapeutics as well as helping aquaculture systems avoid toxic disease.

"It's not unique, but it's uncommon" for oceanographers to populate colleges of pharmacy, Rowley says. "There is a long history at URI of marine pharmaceutical research spanning more than 50 years now. It's about both identifying harmful elements in the water and extracting molecules that may have therapeutic possibilities."

Both professors have made significant strides in developing new pharmaceuticals and protecting aquaculture systems like shellfish farms, which are vital to the local and national seafood industry. They are working to identify contaminants like domoic acid—a human neurotoxin that can be absorbed by shellfish and, in turn, ingested by humans—often found in algal blooms, and to predict those blooms. Rowley and Bertin aim to create an advance warning system for aquafarmers, so they know to harvest their crop ahead of a harmful bloom or to treat the shellfish with probiotic therapeutics, which the researchers are working to create.

Cunliff Lake is one of three bodies of water in Providence's Roger Williams Park that professor of pharmacy Matthew Bertin and his students have been monitoring for algae blooms. When blooms occur, Bertin's team harvests and tests the algae for toxins.



Algae blooms can produce a neurotoxin that is absorbed by oysters (top right) and other shellfish. Research being conducted by David Rowley (above) and Matthew Bertin could help predict those blooms, allowing aquafarmers to harvest their crop ahead of a harmful bloom.

“Aquaculture will be the way we produce seafood in the future, and one of the greatest impediments to aquaculture is disease.”

—David Rowley  
Professor of Biomedical and  
Pharmaceutical Sciences

## Protecting Aquafarms

Rowley is particularly interested in how bacteria interact with one another. Using a chemical language known as quorum sensing, populations of bacteria coordinate their activities to be more successful, essentially acting as single multicellular organisms. Bacteria can work together to cause an infection, for example, or, conversely, they can act as a probiotic that protects other organisms. Research on bacteria behavior has the potential to positively impact shellfish farming, which is a staple of the blue economy locally and regionally.

“We have pretty much exhausted the ability to harvest wild-caught shellfish and seafood,” Rowley says. “We have an expanding population of humans on the planet. If we’re going to meet future demands for seafood and protein production in general, we must overcome current limitations of agriculture and aquaculture. Aquaculture will be the way we produce seafood in the future, and one of the greatest impediments to aquaculture is disease.”

Rowley aims to protect shellfish farms from disease by isolating probiotic bacteria that can promote disease resistance. The microbiome of any organism is an important shield against infection. In humans, enhancing the gut microbiome by introducing probiotic bacteria can protect against more sinister pathogens, aid in digestion, and prevent disease. The same is true for marine creatures, including oysters like those found in the aquafarms that have become prevalent in Rhode Island and throughout New England. In addition to preventing disease, improving the microbiome of shellfish can improve the production of oyster seeds, leading to healthier, more prolific reproduction.

Rowley and his research team have discovered a probiotic bacterium that could protect shellfish farms from harmful pathogens. He is currently working with researchers in URI’s College of the Environment and Life Sciences and with biotech firm Kennebec River Biosciences to develop the bacteria into a commercial product.

“We’re trying to create a product that has beneficial effects—like kombucha, but for marine species,” Rowley says. “Hope-



fully, it will become a successful product that could benefit farmers and the entire shellfishing industry. That wouldn’t be possible without the ocean research we have engaged in over the years.”

## Predicting Harmful Algal Blooms

In addition to preventing disease, the URI researchers are also working to forecast harmful algal blooms that can produce domoic acid, with the goal of keeping the human neurotoxin out of the food supply. Bertin has partnered with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) on research in the Gulf of Mexico, where the blooms often thrive, as well as in Narragansett Bay. He is studying not only the harmful chemicals found in the algal outbreaks, but also the conditions in the water that cause them to bloom in the first place.

One way to predict the blooms, Bertin has found, is to monitor the levels of iron in the water. Iron travels across the Atlantic Ocean on winds from the Sahara Desert. The element, an important nutrient at normal levels, can lead to harmful algal blooms in the water when excessive concentrations are present.

“One of the biggest ways we can be helpful to the Rhode Island economy is by developing models for forecasting environmental toxins,” Bertin says. “If I raise mussels and oysters, and an algal bloom leads to my mussels testing positive for domoic acid, they cannot be used or sold commercially. If we provide better forecasting tools to give folks a heads-up that a bloom may be coming, or if we understand how to help the mussels or clams get rid of the toxin, that can be a cost-saver for the shellfishing industry.”



## Creating Human Therapeutics

The research Rowley and Bertin are doing goes beyond protecting shellfish; it can have direct human benefits.

In one study, Bertin has teamed up with biotech firm Biosortia Microbiomics to study the chemicals produced by algal blooms, which may hold a key to reducing neuroinflammation, a significant factor in the progression of diseases such as Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s.

Bertin and his team have isolated three chemicals known as micropeptides from Biosortia’s collection—which the company has harvested from natural events like algal blooms—that have shown as much as a 50 percent reduction in neuroinflammation in mouse cells, even in tiny doses. “We don’t actually know how they are working yet,” Bertin says of the micropeptides, which are chains of amino acids that play significant roles in vital biological activities. “Are they inhibiting something? Are they activating something? How are they reducing the inflammation?”

Cyanobacteria on Pleasure Lake in Roger Williams Park. Matthew Bertin is investigating the chemicals in cyanobacteria blooms, which may hold a key to reducing neuroinflammation, a factor in diseases such as Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s.



Matthew Bertin volunteered on a NOAA cruise to collect cyanobacteria. Here, he is spraying water to concentrate the cyanobacterial colonies in the codend of the net before processing and transferring them to preservation containers.”

## Monitoring Freshwater Resources

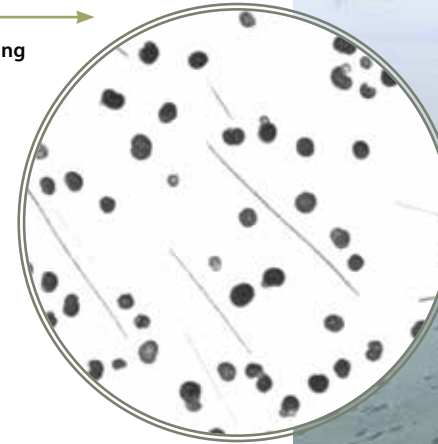
There are promising potential human benefits from chemicals in algal blooms, but more often the blooms are harmful to people, pets, and livestock, especially in freshwater lakes and rivers. Algal blooms often affect people by contaminating drinking water and placing a significant burden on local economies due to diminished recreational activity. The toxins can sicken pets and livestock that drink directly from the waterways and potentially pose a significant danger to people’s health.

Bertin is trying to mitigate the problem by developing a detection and monitoring system to protect the public, thanks to a \$400,000 research grant from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, a division of the National Institutes of Health.

Bertin and his team of three pharmacy students have been scouring lakes in Roger Williams Park in Providence—Pleasure Lake, Polo Lake, and Cunliff Lake—harvesting algae when it blooms on lake surfaces and testing it for toxins. The team partners with Biosortia, which has the capacity to access and harvest significant amounts of algae to study. Biosortia’s harvesting technologies enable researchers to evaluate aquatic microbial chemistry in its most natural state. The team has uncovered a surprising—and potentially alarming—number of new toxins in a short time.

“Just doing some cursory work, we found five new toxins. We think there are likely dozens,” Bertin says. “The Biosortia team led a study with help from my lab and found some extremely toxic molecules called cyanobufalins. They’re crazy toxic. One of the great challenges is that some highly potent toxins are difficult to access. Our lab, working with Biosortia, has found previously undetected elusive toxins. We really think there are many

Micrograph showing single cells and filaments in the cyanobacteria from Pleasure Lake in Roger Williams Park.



more. We’re trying to understand the full spectrum of toxins in these bloom events. Are we missing certain toxins that we need to be monitoring?”

Toxins abound in algal blooms; among the greatest dangers to people from such blooms is the effect the toxins can have on the liver. When the bacteria find their way into drinking water systems and are ingested, they can infiltrate the liver, causing damage, and even liver failure. The toxins can also cause skin ailments when people are exposed to the water and can even pose a threat if they make their way into dietary supplements, such as spirulina, which is made from blue-green algae. These threats heighten the need to know whether, and which, toxins are present.

Over the course of the two-year study, Bertin and his team have been collecting water from the lakes in Roger Williams Park once a week, or when conditions are right for an algal bloom, often in late summer and early fall, indicating that water temperature may play a role. They strain the water through various size filters to extract different organisms for study. As the team discovers new toxins, they are categorized so they can be monitored in waterways and alerts can be issued when those toxins are present in the water.

“Many organisms are in the algae. We are trying to isolate the many kinds of bacterial organisms and determine which organisms contain which toxins,” Bertin says.

Bertin’s team plans to discover and categorize the full community of toxic bacteria found in algal blooms and document the effects those toxins have on the human body.

“We want to know what the toxins are, how to detect them, and how to monitor them,” Bertin says. “We also want to know



A severe cyanobacterial bloom on Pleasure Lake. The bloom covered the entire lake in a thick surface mat.

how these toxins work together. Do they all combine for a bigger dose? Do they act separately inside your body on different systems? We are trying to understand the full breadth of the impact these blooms might have on human health, especially as they become more common, due to how humans manipulate the land and water resources.”

## Looking to the Future

An increasing human population needing ever more water and food resources, combined with a warming climate that can exacerbate harmful events like algal blooms, makes research projects like Rowley’s and Bertin’s critical. Oceans and freshwater systems, Rowley says, are ripe for exploration that aims to find new molecules and produce new therapeutics, and we still need to learn more about how to predict harmful algal blooms.

“This research is important; it’s about making sure our communities are safe from harm, and our economies are not impacted adversely by things like algal blooms,” Rowley says. “Especially on a planet with a changing climate, we need to be more proactive in identifying the triggers that lead to algal blooms, and we need to be able to predict them.”

“We’re trying to understand the full spectrum of toxins in these bloom events. Are we missing certain toxins that we need to be monitoring?”

—Matthew Bertin  
Associate Professor of Biomedical and Pharmaceutical Sciences

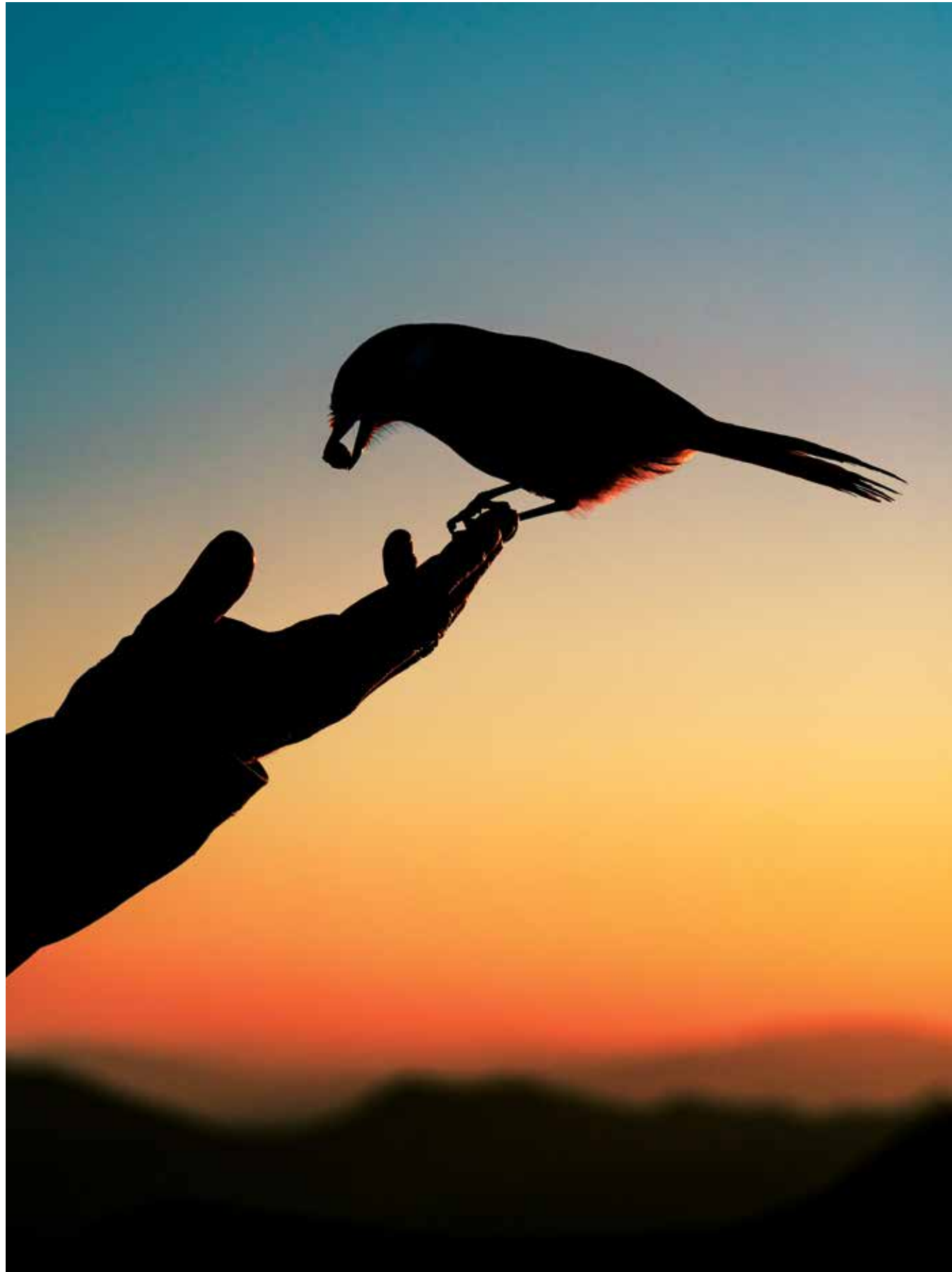


Raw water collected from the lakes in Roger Williams Park. The green color is due to cyanobacteria in the water.

Finding out is the next step. The team is using cell imaging and assays to visualize the effect the chemicals have. One possibility involves proteases, which are naturally occurring proteins in the body that break apart other proteins, often causing inflammation in a human cell. “If you can inhibit that protease by introducing small molecules like micropeptins,” says Bertin, “you can mitigate that inflammation process.”

Bertin’s team will next look at the effect the micropeptins have on human cells and seek a way to transport molecules into the brain to treat neurological disorders, a challenge because the molecules are often too large to easily slide through the body’s natural blood-brain barrier.

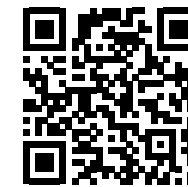
“We’re going to try to determine how they can be transported into the brain. There are tunnels in human cells that act like gates, letting certain molecules in,” Bertin says, noting he plans to further investigate a transportation mechanism during a separate study later this year, focusing on a different class of chemicals known as microcystins, produced by freshwater cyanobacterial blooms. “Brain cells have a barrier to keep unwanted molecules out, so getting them into the brain is generally difficult in pharmacology.”



**CLASS NOTES**

Let your classmates know what you're up to. Reunions, gatherings, career or academic updates, weddings and birth announcements, retirements, exhibition openings, travel, or your favorite URI memories.

Submit notes and photos by email to [urimag@uri.edu](mailto:urimag@uri.edu) or online at [alumni.uri.edu](http://alumni.uri.edu).



**LET'S KEEP THE RHODY NETWORK STRONG**

Would you take a moment to update your information for URI's alumni database? Thank you!

Visit [alumniportal.uri.edu/update-info](http://alumniportal.uri.edu/update-info).

**SCENIC ROUTE**

**GRAY JAY AT SUNSET**

**James Carlson '16** (engineering) was on an overnight autumn backpacking trip with friends when he took this photo of a Canada jay, also known as a gray jay, on the summit of Mount Carrigan, a 4,700-foot peak in the White Mountains in New Hampshire. "We were hanging out on the summit fire tower when some gray jays got friendly with us and were circling our spot. One landed on my friend's hand for a split second," says Carlson, "just long enough for me to snap this photo."

Follow James on Instagram [@iamjamescarlson](https://www.instagram.com/iamjamescarlson)

**CALLING ALL ALUMNI PHOTOGRAPHERS**

Share your photos with your classmates and fellow Rhody alumni in URI Magazine. Send photos, along with background (the story behind the photo), to [urimag@uri.edu](mailto:urimag@uri.edu) and we will consider all submissions for publication in future issues of URI Magazine.

**1975**

**F. Randy Vogenberg** was appointed to the editorial board for the Journal of Clinical Pathways. He is responsible for participating in peer reviews along with establishing a new column on transformative employer trends for this journal. The inaugural column on the Employer Commercial Insurance Landscape was published in June 2023. He authored a second column in August 2023 on gene and cell therapies: Changing Employer Plans to Optimize Patient Outcomes.

never yielded much to be proud of. I credit professors Richard Vangermeersch and Joseph Matoney, who did not make things easy on me but are largely responsible for my successes professionally. I was fortunate to run into Professor Vangermeersch (on left in photo) serendipitously, while visiting campus over the summer a couple years ago. The selfie certainly doesn't do either of us justice, lol!"

**1980**



**Christina Allen** wrote to share the news that her oil on paper painting, "Let There Be Light," is in an exhibition at the North End Gallery in Leonardtown, MD. Maryland Poet Laureate (2004–09) Michael S. Glaser wrote a poem, "Still Life in a Cool Brick Room," which was inspired by this painting.

**1977**



**Lester "Vin" Murray '77, MCP '89** writes, "Go Rhody! I resumed my artistic efforts after retiring from a 30+

year career in public service (planning positions in North Kingstown, Warwick, East Greenwich and South Kingstown)."

**1979**

**Kevin Collins** (below, right) writes, "After 45 years of compliance and audit for several Fortune 500 multinational companies, I finally retired and am splitting my residences between Florida and Colorado. I'm saddened to see the number of my classmates who are deceased. I regret having not been more involved with extracurricular activities at URI but my challenges to maintain focus on studies had to be my priority. Prior to attending URI, my studies

**1983**



**Hon. Maureen Maigret, M.P.A. '83** was elected to the board of directors of CareLink, a nonprofit



healthcare network of post-acute and community-based providers serving older adults and adults with disabilities. Maigret is a former R.I. state representative (1975-1984) and current chair of the state Long Term Care Coordinating Council's Aging in Community subcommittee.

GOOD MEMORIES

**Ellen Pratte '77** shared this photo and the following note: "Although I support the building of the new arts center, I must admit that the old building holds good memories. I didn't major in fine arts, but I took art history classes here and attended some gallery shows, all of which I greatly enjoyed. In 2016, I had a photograph accepted into a juried show that was exhibited at this building and it was a full-circle moment for me."



1984

**Dawn Mattera Corsi** (electrical engineering) won the editor's choice award for contributing to Jack Canfield's latest best-selling book, *The Keys to Authenticity*. Mattera Corsi is a motivational speaker and author. According to a press release, her chapter, titled "Five Keys to a Dolce Vita in Your 50s and Beyond," played a pivotal role in the book's rapid ascent to bestseller status. Her insights and guidance offer readers tools for unlocking success in their personal and professional lives.

1985



**John A. Stoukides** was appointed chairman of medicine at Roger Williams Medical Center. A graduate of URI's College of Pharmacy and 2017 College of Pharmacy Distinguished

Achievement Award recipient, Stoukides has practiced medicine for 33 years.

1987



**Robert Leach** was elected to the board of directors of CareLink, a nonprofit healthcare network of post-acute and community-based providers serving older adults and adults with disabilities. Leach is vice president/senior relationship manager at HarborOne Bank in Providence.

1988

**John Gautreaux** writes, "URI history is strong in the Gautreaux family. Raised in Rhode Island, five of Larry and Annette's seven children graduated from URI with degrees from several of URI's colleges. This tradition continues with granddaughter Emily Gautreaux '22 (daughter of John '88, not pictured in photo below)."



Left to right: Michael Gautreaux '71 (engineering), retired owner of commercial insurance agencies living in Greensboro, Ga.; John Gautreaux '88 (finance), financial advisor living in South Kingstown, R.I.; Nancy Harritos, M.S. '90 (nursing), primary care nurse practitioner living in Warwick, R.I.; David Gautreaux '73 (theater), actor/director living in Los Angeles, Calif.; Russ Gautreaux '77 (natural resources), retired U.S. Forest Service associate living in Libby, Mont.

1994



**Dana M. Horton, Esq.** will serve as secretary of the Rhode Island Bar Association from July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024. She has been a member of several Rhode Island Bar committees and has been a member of the RIBA executive committee for the past three years. She also serves on the local advisory committee for the United States District Court for the District of Rhode Island. She is a partner at Robinson & Cole LLP in Providence, R.I., where she focuses her practice on complex insurance litigation and commercial disputes. She has been honored by her peers with recognitions in Rhode Island Monthly, Rhode Island Lawyers Weekly, and The Best Lawyers in America®, and was named Mentor of the Year by Robinson & Cole LLP in 2021.



Mittens visiting URI's Narragansett Bay Campus

**Keri Newman** works for the Coastal Resources Center at URI's Graduate School of Oceanography and is currently a student in URI's MPA program. She also runs Twisted Orca, an organization that teaches children about marine life. She writes, "My goal is getting children in RI excited about the whales and marine life that surround our beautiful state. Currently I am doing community outreach in the New England area with 'Mittens,' a life-sized replica of a minke whale seen off the coast of Maine in 2022. Free materials for teachers and families to learn about ocean life, including free courses on the marine life found in New England, are available on my website [twistedorca.com](http://twistedorca.com)."

1995

**Peter E. Dahl** writes, "I retired from the U.S. Marine Corps in June 2023 as a Lieutenant Colonel after 25 years of active-duty. I am a combat veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) with seven years of international service to Japan, ROK, Thailand, Philippines, Ghana, Kuwait, Qatar, Germany, and at sea aboard naval vessels. Other assignments included Headquarters Marine Corps (Pentagon), White House, Marine Barracks Washington D.C., and at NATO's Supreme Allied Command Transformation. Along the way I continued my education at U.S. Marine Corps Command and Staff College, U.S. Marine Corps Expeditionary Warfare School and U.S. Army's Advanced Logistics Management College. It has been an

honor and privilege to serve alongside the diverse, hard-working, and patriotic group of men and women of every background who voluntarily serve our nation in unity."

1996



**Aimee Couto** was named 2024 Rhode Island Teacher of the Year. She teaches first-grade at Whiteknact Elementary School in East Providence. Couto earned her bachelor's degree from URI in fine arts. She was honored at a ceremony at her school.

2003



**Nicole J. Benjamin, Esq.** will serve as president of the Rhode Island Bar Association from July 2023–June 2024. She has served on Bar Association committees and as editor-in-chief of the *Rhode Island Bar Journal*. She is a shareholder at Adler Pollock & Sheehan P.C. in Providence, R.I., where she focuses on complex commercial litigation, defense of products liability claims, and appellate advocacy. She has been recognized for commercial litigation work by *The Best Lawyers in America* and Champion of the Year by the U.S. Small Business Administration for his contributions to help small businesses as they emerge from financial challenges brought on by the pandemic. Richmond (above, second from left) joined BankNewport in 2017 as vice president, branch sales manager at the Bank's Portsmouth, R.I. office and was

Rhode Island Bar Journal Lauren E. Jones, Esq. Writing Award.



**Reza Clifton** was selected for an artist residency on Prudence Island with Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NBNERR), which is a part of a national network focused on coastal and estuarine stewardship. The program enables selected artists from varied disciplines to stay on Prudence Island for 4-day periods to work on creative projects and to learn about the history and ecology of Prudence Island. Clifton was also selected by Creature Conserve as part of a program in which she will be paired with a scientist to help her build acumen related to marine biology. Clifton writes that both experiences "will support me with a poetry and multimedia project called, 'I Am Salt Water.' I also started a creative writing MFA program at New England College. It is a very exciting time for my writing and artistic work."



**Jon Richmond** was named the R.I. Financial Services Champion of the Year by the U.S. Small Business Administration for his contributions to help small businesses as they emerge from financial challenges brought on by the pandemic. Richmond (above, second from left) joined BankNewport in 2017 as vice president, branch sales manager at the Bank's Portsmouth, R.I. office and was

2004



**Garrett Sullivan** was elected to the board of directors of CareLink, a nonprofit healthcare network of post-acute and community-based providers serving older adults and adults with disabilities. Sullivan is executive director of Saint Antoine Community in North Smithfield, R.I.

2006



**Debbie Sullivan, M.M. '06**, plays piano and sings in a jazz trio that has played at the Dunes Club in Narragansett, R.I. every summer for the last 18 years. The Dunes Trio also includes alumnus Paul Mason '84 (above, right) on drums and Tom Charlap on bass. Debbie played piano and sang in a rock band in high school. She studied music in college and after completing her master's degree at URI, Debbie began teaching music in the Cambridge (Mass.) public school system. She says, "Living a double life as teacher and musician is fulfilling, but challenging. I'm grateful that I've had the opportunity to use my musical ability in two very different capacities."

2007



**Jordan (DeVita) Bouclin** (above, right) was awarded Defenders of Animals 2023 Humane Heroes Award in August 2023 alongside fellow recipient Smithfield councilman and former state senator John J. Tassoni (above, left) who put forth the strongest municipal animal-protection ordinance in the state. Jordan was recognized for her work as founder and executive director of Rhode Island Pet Network, a 501c3 nonprofit that supports animal

rescues, shelters, and struggling pet owners through networking, fundraising, media relations, event collaborations, and other advocacy. Jordan has also amplified the efforts of Defenders of Animals, which for more than 40 years has protected the rights of both companion animals and wildlife through education, legal, and legislative activism. Jordan had a 16-year career in tech public relations and is currently Vice President of PR at SVM Public Relations and Marketing Communications. She started Rhode Island Pet Network to use her communications expertise for animal welfare in RI and beyond. More at [ripetnetwork.org](http://ripetnetwork.org).

2016

**Andrew R. Morin** joined the real estate practice group as an associate in Hinckley Allen's Hartford, Conn., office. The firm says, "Andrew brings a wealth of experience in land use and environmental law, having previously served as an associate at Halloran Sage. His expertise and commitment to providing strategic solutions aligns with

Hinckley Allen's client-driven approach to delivering exceptional service. We are proud to have Andrew join our team and look forward to the value he will bring to our clients."

2017



**Serena Barton-Zainyeh** (above, right, with partner Mercedes Matos) is excited to announce the opening of Earthtones Metaphysical Shop at 103 Wickenden Street in Providence, R.I. Initially launched as a pop-up vendor at flea markets, the business is Providence's only queer, black, woman-owned metaphysical shop. It offers a curated selection of ethically sourced crystals,

incense, tarot decks, local art, organic herbal blends, and more, many of which are from R.I. small businesses and artists. They are committed to inclusivity and representation of LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC communities.

2018

**Michael E. Camal** was a finalist for the 2023 Samuel J. Heyman Service to America Medals (Sammies) in the Emerging Leaders category for leading and expanding a government campaign to help aviation personnel identify potential victims of human trafficking and report their suspicions to law enforcement. The Sammies, or the "Oscars of government service," recognize America's outstanding public servants. Camal says, "These accomplishments were made possible from my beginnings at URI studying sociology with a minor in leadership studies. My URI mentors guided me through several internships and motivated me to pursue a career with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. I am forever grateful!"

ALUMNI HAPPENINGS

50<sup>th</sup>  
REUNION  
Class of 1974

50<sup>TH</sup> REUNION—CLASS OF 1974  
May 17–18, 2024  
[alumni.uri.edu/50threunion](http://alumni.uri.edu/50threunion)

The Class of 1974 50th Reunion committee is planning a fun weekend of activities in May. We hope to see many classmates back in Kingston!

GOLDEN GRAD WEEKEND  
May 31–June 1, 2024  
[alumni.uri.edu/goldengrad](http://alumni.uri.edu/goldengrad)

Alumni who graduated 50 or more years ago are invited back for our annual reunion weekend!



GLOBAL GATHERINGS

In April, URI Global Alumni Ambassador **Attila Balogh, M.B.A. '22**, organized a dinner with alumni and current students from URI's Executive M.B.A. Program in Budapest, Hungary. Twenty attendees gathered for camaraderie, networking, and sustenance—lots of smiles all around!

Global alumni ambassadors like Attila serve as contacts for alumni, faculty, and students who travel or live in their region. They plan events, attend college fairs, and talk with prospective students and families. The Rhody family is global!

For more information, visit [alumni.uri.edu/alumni-central/groups-communities](http://alumni.uri.edu/alumni-central/groups-communities)

Below: **Dominic Rogerson, M.B.A. '22**; **Attila Balogh, M.B.A. '22**; and **Tamas Szabo-Herkely, M.B.A. '22**



ENGAGEMENTS,  
MARRIAGES & BIRTHS

**Courtney Afonso '13** and **Andrew Blajda '13** were married on October 3, 2021 in South Deerfield, Mass. They welcomed sons Orion in June 2020 and Ludwik in April 2022. Last spring, they cheered on Rhody basketball at UMass! (1)

**Luisa (Ciullo) D'Alessandro '91** and **Jules D'Alessandro '88** were married on July 15, 2023 at Quidnessett Country Club in North Kingstown, R.I.

**Jodi Gold '11** and **Steven Guglielmo '13** were married on November 13, 2022 in Quincy, Massachusetts. (2)

With hearts full of joy, **Edward A. Lombardo '99** and **Katie Kleyla '09** announce the birth of their son, Luca Edward Lombardo. Luca was born in Providence on March 23, 2023 weighing 8 lbs., 2oz. Katie and Eddie were married during the pandemic in a small, intimate ceremony on May 1, 2021 at the Providence Art Club and celebrated with a full reception on September 3, 2021 at the Roger Williams Park Botanical Center. (3)



YOUR STORIES

That One  
Mentor Who  
Points the Way

A former URI communications staffer remembers his mentor, Tom Falciglia '45.

I remember Tom Falciglia '45 as a wonderful mentor and one-of-a-kind friend. And it was through Tom that I met my wife, Christine (Tina) Stuczyk Petrosemolò '69, M.S. '73, who graced one of the (then) *URI Alumni Magazine* covers during the time when I edited the publication from 1969–72.

In 1968, Tom was serving as alumni director at his alma mater and was hiring a

staff member as magazine editor, a job that had been coordinated by the publications office and Polly Matzinger.

I was four years out of Springfield College with a master's degree from UMass and had held short-lived, uninspiring jobs in the corporate and education worlds. I was hungry to start a real career in higher education and I think Tom saw that. I was a writer with no magazine editing experience, but Tommy saw something in me he liked and hired me.

For three years, we worked together on fundraising, reunion, and marketing projects that I was excited to help with as I learned the business, all the while editing the magazine, which we published every other month. I worked with supportive colleagues including Charlie Hall (development), Jim Leslie (public relations), Jim Goff (film and media), Bob Izzo (photography), Carol McCabe (communications), Matzinger, and others in what today would be called a PR/marketing office.

In just three years under Tom's tutelage, I was ready for my next step and accepted the University of Massachusetts' alumni director position. It was a transitional era at UMass and the position was nowhere near as fun as working for Tom. But with Tom's guidance, I had learned the higher education business well and my career blossomed and led to stops at Franklin and Marshall, Dartmouth, a fortune 500 company, and Fairleigh Dickinson, where I finished my career as chief communications officer and assistant to the president.

In everyone's career there is the one mentor who points the way, and Tom did that for me. Sadly our paths had not crossed for 30 years when someone forwarded his obituary a few months back. I stopped then, took a deep breath and let memories from those years wash over me. I took a moment to say out loud, "Thanks again, Tom. You started me on my way. I'll never forget you." ☺

—Arthur Petrosemolò



IN MEMORIAM

Gennaro Perrotti '44  
 MaryRuth (Demers) Cayer '47  
 Mildred (Heyman) O'Gara '48  
 Thelma (Sanders) Susewind '48  
 Gloria (Ferri) Aubin '50  
 Charles Barker '50  
 Helen (Smith) DuPont '50  
 Annette (Silverman) Pomerantz '50  
 Daniel Bolhouse '51  
 Ruth (Darling) Hastings '51  
 Sylvia (Pockar) Ackerman '52  
 Margaret (Feeney) Farrell '52  
 Kenneth O'Brien '52  
 Roger Plante '52  
 Barbara (Amber) Schwartz '52  
 Jane (Campbell) Smith '52  
 Harold Redlich '53  
 Mary (Trainor) Ingle '54  
 Sally (Loxley) Knowles '54  
 Albert Soforenko '54  
 Barbara (Joy) Hackett '55  
 William Carcieri '56  
 Suzanne (Heller) Delsack '56  
 Marilyn (Law) Fiddes '56  
 James Cahill '57  
 Arthur Post '57  
 Robert Stewart '57  
 James Davey '58  
 Robert Mairs '58  
 Libera (Luciano) Hogberg '59  
 Roy Richards '59  
 Frederick Taylor '59  
 Mary Lou (Hawkinson) Tucker '59, M.A. '79  
 Carola Von Kapff '59  
 Anthony Croce '60  
 Leo Mailhotte '60  
 John Merolla '60  
 Jordan Richman '60  
 Marcel Scarbel '60  
 Howard Brynes '61  
 Roberta Gallshaw '61  
 Robert Silvestre '61, Ph.D. '68  
 Daniel Viccione '61, Ph.D. '71  
 Patrick Brady '62  
 Kathleen Goodwin '62  
 Bruce Menzies '62  
 John Newcomb '62

Nancy (Bradshaw) Harter '63  
 Thaddeus Kiska '63  
 Cosmo Manfredi '63  
 Allan Rydberg '63  
 Jeff Archer '64  
 Frances (Stanley) Calamar '64  
 Warren Conway '64  
 Stanley Jennings '64  
 Ramesh Nayak, M.S. '64  
 Ara Dermarderosian, Ph.D. '65  
 Raymond Durand '65  
 Janet Latham '65  
 Richard Phillips '65  
 Richard Wroe '65  
 Dianne (Sperling) Ricci '66  
 Frances (Palumbo) Driscoll, M.A. '67  
 Susan (Lockwood) Krohner '67  
 Thomas Mulvey, M.A. '67  
 Valerie (Wood) Benker '68  
 Nancy (Whitman) Mann '68  
 Richard Pinelle '68  
 Peter Tancredi '68  
 Glendon Tremblay, M.S. '68  
 Mitchell Krzyzek '70  
 Georgina (Corbett) Lacy '70  
 Susan Nunes '70  
 Tovia Siegel, M.L.S. '70  
 Barry Barovick '71, M.A. '74  
 Robert Bates, M.P.A. '71  
 Florette Brill, M.L.S. '71  
 Michael Cavallaro '71  
 Judith (Salemi) Hoover '71, M.A. '75  
 Michael James '71, '73  
 Bonnie Kilroy '71  
 Thomas Petronio '71  
 Lois (Blum) Reitzas, M.L.S. '71  
 Kathryn (Galbraith) Walsh '71  
 James Wardle '71  
 Richard Desilets '72  
 James Drury '72  
 Doreen (Gauthier) Ezovski '72  
 Joan Fogerty '72  
 Frank Marcou, M.B.A. '72  
 Allan Pronovost '72, M.S. '77, Ph.D. '79  
 Concetta Russo '72  
 James Silva '72  
 William Carey '73

Francis Mahoney '73  
 William Parker '73, M.S. '75  
 Gail (Whitney) Allen '74, M.P.A. '14  
 Ellen (Dziedzic) Downes, M.P.A. '74  
 Anthony Giarrusso '74  
 Juing Ou, M.S. '74  
 Bette (Lamm) Dana, M.A. '75  
 Stephen Molnar '75  
 David Osborn '75  
 Barbara (Macrae) Brown '76, M.A. '80  
 Helene Gersuny, M.A. '76  
 David Brown, M.L.S. '77  
 Gregory Fales '77  
 Joan (Hurley) Kirker, M.A. '77  
 Suzanne (Patnaude) McBride '77, M.A. '95  
 Aspasia (Sfougaris) Tsonos '77  
 Thomas Burns '78  
 Theodore Del Donn, Ph.D. '78  
 Paul Field '78  
 Richard Karlen '78  
 Samra (Stallman) Pease '78  
 John Staskiewicz '78  
 George Veyera '78  
 Lawrence Hunt '79  
 Valerie Meunier, Ph.D. '79  
 Anna (Friedman) Prager, M.C.P. '79  
 Betty Richards, M.C.P. '79  
 Frederick Stevenson '79  
 Jeffrey Wells '79  
 Gilbert Barden '80  
 Penelope Hope '80, M.A. '93, Ph.D. '99  
 Evelyn Lepere '80, M.L.S. '81  
 Ellen (Otrando) McGill '80  
 Steven Silverman '80  
 Diane Silveria Andrews '81  
 Valerie Simpson, M.L.S. '81  
 Richard Klenkel '82  
 Carolyn Traxler '82  
 Joyce Walker, M.B.A. '82  
 Elizabeth (O'Regan) Bailey '83  
 Cynthia Rotondo '84  
 Paul Dauk '85  
 Anthony Guglielmi '85  
 Jacquelyn (Harris) Anderson '86  
 Mary Malcolm '86  
 Robert Rettew, M.L.I.S. '86

Michael Counnas '88  
 James Landry '89  
 Thomas Saari '89  
 Frank Hopton '90  
 Susan Rotch, M.L.I.S. '90  
 Dorothy (Fieler) Wise, M.L.I.S. '90  
 Bettina Letcher, Ph.D. '91  
 James Winn, M.L.I.S. '92  
 Katy (Kelloway) Johnson '93  
 John Kiddon, Ph.D. '94  
 Ibrahim Abdul-Matin '99  
 Linda (Lecuire) Davis, M.A. '99  
 Patricia Hessler '99  
 Jerry Bernardini, M.B.A. '00  
 Amy Kobayashi '02  
 Ryan Mc Donough '05  
 Gregory Barner '07  
 Shannon Capodilupo '10  
 Maribeth Redman '11  
 Mikalai Zhukavets '12  
 Dharam Ablashi, Hon. '18

FACULTY AND STAFF

Stanley Barnett, professor emeritus of chemical engineering  
 Barbara (Macrae) Brown '76, M.A. '80, professor emerita of dental hygiene  
 David Maslyn, faculty emeritus and former dean, university library  
 Nancy Potter, Hon. '67, professor emerita of English  
 James Prochaska, professor emeritus of psychology  
 George Veyera '78, professor of civil and environmental engineering

In our last issue, Anita (Joly) Easterbrooks '52 was incorrectly included on the In Memoriam listing. Our sincere apologies for this error.

YOUR STORIES

A Remembrance of Friendship

Dean Copans '99 and Ibrahim Abdul-Matin '99 served as president and vice president of the URI Student Senate. After graduation, they took separate paths, but reconnected through a chance reunion 10 years later. When Abdul-Matin died in June at the age of 46, Copans shared this remembrance of his remarkable, wise, and compassionate friend.

I don't know if there is any way to adequately summarize him. Ibe was one of the first people I met when I arrived at URI in 1995. I had enrolled very late in the summer and was placed in temporary housing at Weldon where Ibe was living. I think we met on my first or second night on campus.

It was an interesting dynamic. Ibe was a black Muslim from New York, and I, a white South African Jew. We became fast friends and were close throughout our time at URI. In spring of our sophomore year, we ran as a ticket and served as president and vice president of the Student Senate.

After graduating, we didn't do a great job of staying in touch. Randomly, sometime around 2009, my wife, Amanda, and I were enjoying a day at Stinson Beach (Calif.) when Amanda pointed to someone about 20 yards away standing in the water and said, "That looks like Ibe." Sure enough, it was him!

Ibe had lived in Oakland for a year or two after graduation. He was back visiting

and just wanted to see the beach; we didn't usually go to Stinson Beach. It was completely random. After that chance reunion, Ibe and I connected once or twice a year. Recently, we spoke more regularly, and I am incredibly thankful that we got to spend an afternoon together with our families last year.

At URI, Ibe was a presence. He was energetic, outgoing, and incredibly intelligent. He was probably the most popular member of the community. He knew just about everyone and was well-liked. He was a student-athlete, leader, and role model. He was passionate about poetry and would often compete in poetry slams and open mic nights.

In addition to being the student body vice president, Ibe was a 3-year letterman on the football team and served as captain in 1999. He was a finalist for the NCAA National Scholar Athlete of the Year in 1998 and was our senior class graduation speaker.

After URI, Ibe served in various community-oriented roles including as director of community affairs for the NYC Department of Environmental Protection. More recently Ibe was a leading environmental activist and a published author.

Ibe was just an incredible person all around and, even though we did not see each other often, his passing has had a huge impact on me. ☹

—Dean Copans '99

*Ibrahim Abdul-Matin '99 was the author of Green Deen: What Islam Teaches About Protecting the Planet, co-founder of the Brooklyn Academy of Science and the Environment, author of the "Brooklyn Bedouin" blog, a regular contributor to WNYC radio show The Takeaway, and a board member for numerous organizations.*



PHOTOS: COURTESY DEAN COPANS

HONORING MAYA ANGELOU

When poet Maya Angelou died in 2014, Ibrahim Abdul-Matin '99 wrote "Six Things You Can Do To Honor Maya Angelou" for *Thought Catalog*. In the article, he shared the story of bringing Maya Angelou to URI with Dean Copans '99:

I met her majesty once. I was a student at the University of Rhode Island and it was the mid-1990s. At the time our campus was convulsing from a series of race and class charged incidents. I was the vice-president of the student senate and the president, a guy named Dean Copans, and I were elected on a slogan of "Unity is Strength." We meant it. He was Jewish, I Muslim; he White, I Black. He was from South Africa, I was from Brooklyn. The slogan fit and our landslide victory ushered in the first non-Greek ticket in the school's history.

We genuinely did want to bring the campus together. We agreed that we wanted to bring someone to campus that everyone could respect, that all could look up to, someone that would inspire the campus to be better than we were. So on January 24, 1998, we welcomed Maya Angelou to our campus.

— Ibrahim Abdul-Matin '99

Read the rest of Abdul-Matin's article at [thoughtcatalog.com/?p=342277](http://thoughtcatalog.com/?p=342277)

CLOSE-UP

## Courage of Conviction

A dedicated alumnus is seeking a Medal of Honor to recognize a fellow Ram's bravery under fire.

For many, Vietnam is a chapter in the history books. Not so for veteran David Zartarian '67, M.A. '72.

Zartarian sports a URI hat. He rifles through a stack of papers, evidence of his efforts to get Col. Francis J. Cuddy Jr. '66 a posthumous Medal of Honor (Cuddy died in 2008 after battling cancer). The medal is the highest award for military valor, given to a person who distinguishes themselves by showing courage and honor in action, at risk of one's own life, going above and beyond the call of duty.

Since its inception in 1861, a total of 3,536 medals have been awarded, and getting someone the award posthumously is no small feat.

But Zartarian is determined. He's compiled the copious necessary documents and submitted them through U.S. Sen. Jack Reed's office for consideration, a process that could take years. "They told me it could take two to four years," Zartarian says. "I wrote back and said, 'I hope it's closer to two because I just turned 78!'"

His effort to get Cuddy recognized was sparked when Zartarian read an article about a reconnaissance patrol—code-named American Beauty—in which actor Jimmy Stewart's stepson, Marine 1st Lt. Ron McLean, was killed.

♦♦

It was June 8, 1969. Zartarian, an Army lieutenant, was posted in the U.S. mortuary in Da Nang, Vietnam, a post he held for just three days. The bodies arrived, each with an escort and a bag of personal belongings—lives summed up in photos and mementos.

Zartarian recalls three notable casualties that day: Lt. Sharon Lane, a nurse and the only American servicewoman killed directly by enemy fire in the Vietnam War; Lt. Col. Don Bartley, a chaplain doing a TV segment, whose transport hit a land mine; and McLean.



"This was big news. Everybody was talking about McLean because he was Jimmy Stewart's stepson," Zartarian says. "I was only in the mortuary for three days, but those were three of the most eventful days of my life."

♦♦

As Zartarian read the story about McLean's platoon, a name, buried deep in the article, tugged at his memory: Frank Cuddy. "I remembered him from URI," Zartarian says.

Cuddy enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps after his high school graduation in 1958. He came to URI in 1962 with the rank of sergeant. "URI," Zartarian notes, "was his ticket to officer candidate and flight school." Cuddy played football for the Rams from 1962–1966 and went on to become a storied helicopter pilot.

After Cuddy's death, a fellow pilot said of him, "The greatest of the great has left us. How is it possible for this mountain of a man, whom I called a friend, to have succumbed to cancer when he conquered everything else? How sad that we have lost one of the greatest Marines of the Vietnam War."

In his 39-year military career, Cuddy earned some 60 awards and medals and flew nearly 1,000 combat missions in Vietnam.

But it was the American Beauty mission that tied Cuddy to McLean—and stitched a thread through time to Zartarian.

♦♦

The American Beauty mission began on June 6, 1969, when a helicopter dropped McLean's platoon onto a hilltop in the demilitarized zone. By June 8, the team was pinned down in a trap and McLean was dead.

Cuddy, who had assisted in the rescue of a downed medivac crew under heavy fire just three days earlier (for which he later earned the Silver Star), was flying back from a mission in Laos when he learned that a recon patrol was in real trouble.

He swooped down, along with other Huey helicopters, and provided gun cover while Boeing Vertol CH-46 Sea Knights attempted to rescue the beleaguered soldiers. After repeated attempts and failures, the squadron regrouped. Cuddy defied orders, flying back to aid and provide cover for the embattled platoon amid blinding gunfire. He was wounded and his helicopter took 20 rounds, but the platoon survived, and he made it back to base camp. The platoon was then extracted, along with McLean's remains, by a land rescue.

In recounting his decision, Cuddy said, "In the Marine Corps, it's ingrained that you don't leave dead and wounded. To leave them out there was to let them die."

♦♦

For this heroic rescue attempt, Cuddy was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the highest award for heroism in an aerial flight.

But to Zartarian, Cuddy's bravery in the face of annihilation deserves more. "I believe—and the facts back it up," says Zartarian, "that without Cuddy's courage, sense of honor and brotherhood, exceptional skills and knowledge, and perseverance, the young marines and their scout would not have survived."

—Grace Kelly

Read the article by Jeffrey Grosscup that sparked Zartarian's mission at: [www.historynet.com/jimmy-stewarts-stepson-ambushed-in-dmz](http://www.historynet.com/jimmy-stewarts-stepson-ambushed-in-dmz).

RENAISSANCE RAMS

## How a Librarian Landed the Cover of a Chemistry Journal

Librarians know a lot about a wide variety of topics. But Lisa Villa, M.L.I.S. '95, took her polymath tendencies to the next level. The English major/librarian got published in a chemistry journal—as a writer AND an illustrator. Her topic? The underrepresentation of Native American talent in STEM fields.

Lisa Villa, M.L.I.S. '95, is a digital scholarship librarian at the College of the Holy Cross' Dinand Library. She was the featured cover illustrator and author of an accompanying editorial for the journal *Environmental Science and Technology Letters*. One of Villa's colleagues spotted the call for entries and Lisa saw an opportunity to showcase Native American, First Nation, and Indigenous chemists, something she's interested in both personally and professionally. She was honored to have her cover and editorial featured.

To create the illustration, Villa used a design tool called Canva. She obtained digital photos of the chemists depicted and composed her cover illustration using Canva and its editing features.

"Several prominent chemists," says Villa, "who are also strong advocates for increasing the number of Native American/First Nation scientists, are working diligently to raise

awareness of these issues and attract interest in scientific fields among members of their community. They acknowledge how cultural beliefs may often be in contention with scientific conversations and have been working to engage and encourage Native American talent in the STEM fields." Villa adds, "There are many people who deserve to be showcased, but for this cover design, time, space, and available photos limited the selection."

Villa is working with one of her colleagues to create a display featuring biographies and scholarly articles by the scientists depicted on her cover. The display will also include articles about the lack of representation of Native Americans in STEM, along with names of scholarly professional associations for Native Americans in STEM.

They are also proposing a presentation with the same theme.

Villa hopes that her work will help get recognition for these chemists and other



Villa's cover illustration. Clockwise from top right: Joslyn Lee, Fort Lewis College; Dawn Pratt, askenootow STEM Enterprise Inc.; Naomi Lee, and Jani Ingram, Northern Arizona University; Erik Sorensen, Princeton University

Native scientists, as well as raise awareness of professional societies and the growing body of literature specifically addressing issues of Native American/First Nation/Indigenous representation in scientific fields.

Villa notes, "I guess it is a testament to my liberal arts undergraduate and URI GSLIS education that an English-major-turned-librarian is published in a chemistry journal."

—Barbara Caron

Read Villa's article, "Celebrating Native Chemists and Encouraging More Native Talent in STEM" at [pubs.acs.org/](http://pubs.acs.org/).

SPOTLIGHT

## Aria Mia Loberti '20 Stars in Netflix Series

*All the Light We Cannot See* premieres November 2 on Netflix.



Aria Mia Loberti '20 has the lead role in Netflix's limited television series adaptation of Anthony Doerr's Pulitzer Prize-winning 2014 novel, *All the Light We Cannot See*, which will be released on the streaming service on November 2. The series, directed by Shawn Levy, also stars Mark Ruffalo and Hugh Laurie.

Loberti, a newcomer to acting, has been an advocate for the rights of blind

and low-vision people on other stages—such as the Rhode Island State House, the United Nations, and the TEDxURI stage—for many years.

Loberti plays Marie-Laure, a blind teenager in Nazi-occupied France during World War II, who is trying to survive the war's devastation.





**BOOKSHELF**

Check out the latest books by alumni authors—and share your recently published (within the last two years) book at [uri.edu/magazine](http://uri.edu/magazine). Or send a cover image, along with author, URI grad year, book title, and year published to [urimag@uri.edu](mailto:urimag@uri.edu).



*Day of Small Things: The Minor Prophets of Israel*  
Joseph B. Conti '73 (2023)



*John Dewey, Albert Barnes, and the Continuity of Art and Life: Revisioning the Arts and Education*  
David A. Granger '88 (2023)



*Small Steps...Big Changes: The Personal Stories of a Life Coach!*  
Dale (Nieforth) Brown '68 (2021)



*An Afternoon Tea Journal*  
Tonia Marcaccio Matthews '76 (2021)



*The Anvil of an Angry God*  
Bob Scappini, M.A. '95 (2023)



*The Haunting of Oxford Library*  
Robert James Racicot, Ph.D. '97 (2023)



*Strictly from Hunger*  
Jennifer Field Litt '78 (2022)



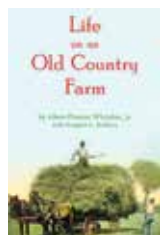
*My Great Life with a Perfect Wife: A Memoir*  
Clement Vaughn Smith III '76 (2022)



*Vision-Quest: A Saga of the Sixties*  
Paul Palul Rideout '62 (2023)



*A Journey from Sunshine to Shadow*  
Paris L. Bump '53 (2022)



*Life on an Old Country Farm*  
Stephen Robbins, M.L.I.S. '84 (2023)



*Followed: The Content Creator's Guide to Being Seen, Facing Judgment, and Building an Authentic Personal Brand*  
Amanda Bucci '15 (2023)



*The Unintended Heiress*  
Colleen Coyne '78 (2023)



*Bewept*  
Colleen Coyne '78 (2023)

**PLAYLIST**

Listen to the latest records by alumni artists—and share your recently recorded music. Send an album cover image, along with your name (and

band/group/artist name, if different), URI grad year, album title, year released, and where/how listeners can find your record (in stores, on Spotify, Bandcamp, etc.), to [urimag@uri.edu](mailto:urimag@uri.edu).



**Eva Conti '83**  
*Music for Eva: Suite for French Horn and Jazz Piano*  
By Tomoko Ohno, featuring Eva Conti, French horn (2022)  
Available on iTunes and Amazon

**AUTHORS**

**Retirement? What Retirement?**

Julien Ayotte '63 has made a second career out of writing novels—eight in the last 10 years, in fact.

Julien Ayotte '63 has heard lots of advice about how to write. He doesn't listen. "There are people who say, 'You should write a page a day; that way you'll have a 365-page book done within a year,'" he says. "That's a lot of crap. There are some days where I can't pick up a word; I don't know what to say. So, I say nothing. But there are other days when I write 15 or 20 pages."

This approach has served Ayotte well. Since 2013, he's published eight books featuring mysterious circumstances that take characters from rural Rhode Island to the galleries of the Louvre or to a villa in Turks and Caicos. He writes his drafts by hand, compiling pages in three-ring binders before typing them and sending them to, as he calls them, his harshest critics—his wife, Pauline, and their three children. Depending on how you look at it, writing his first book took 10 years—or nearly 30.

The Woonsocket, R.I., native started the book that would become *Flower of Heaven* in 1986, during a relatively slow period in his career in legal administration and business education.

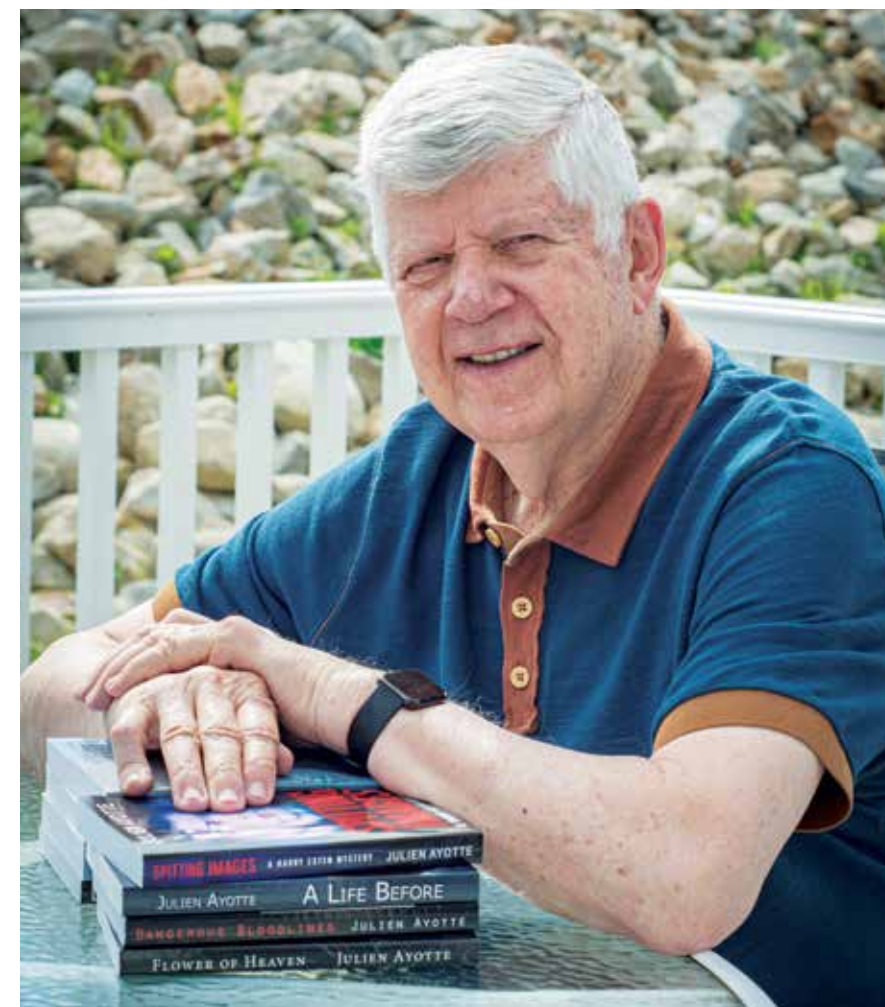
"I have no idea why I picked up a pad back then," he says. "I just started writing a chapter here and a chapter there."

When he began a demanding job at a law firm in Providence, the pad went into a desk drawer. Ayotte focused on his career and family until his retirement in 2001.

He was cleaning out his desk, where he found a long-neglected handwritten draft; something stopped him from tossing it. He photocopied the pages and sent them to his oldest daughter.

Ayotte remembers, "I asked her to take a look and tell me if it was worth pursuing or if I should just throw it away. She came back and told me, 'You have to finish this!'"

It took more than a decade of research, revision, and more feedback from his wife



and children for Ayotte to publish *Flower of Heaven*, a thriller featuring a Rhode Island priest, a Parisian gallerist, the twins born from their long-secret affair, and a worldwide cast of royalty and government agents.

Not long after, he heard from fans asking what was next. So, he began writing and publishing at a more rapid pace, starting with a sequel, *Dangerous Bloodlines*, followed by others in quick succession.

*Code Name Lily*, Ayotte's only work of historical fiction, holds a special place for the author. The idea for the novel came to him when he read an obituary for Micheline Dumon-Ugeux, a Belgian nurse and member of the resistance during World War II. Along with other resistance members, Dumon-Ugeux, whose code name was Lily, helped hundreds of British and American airmen escape to Spain.

Ayotte, 81, became interested in Dumon-Ugeux partly because his mother was born in Belgium and was nicknamed Lily. He says the nurse and resistance member was his favorite character to write.

"You can't make up a story like that," he says. "This is real. I was just in awe of her."

When Ayotte published *Flower of Heaven* in 2012, *The Providence Journal's* Bill Reynolds wrote that the book was "a fast-paced global thriller that would make a great movie." Could that be next for Ayotte?

Perhaps. Now, he is hard at work turning his novels into screenplays and uploading them to a site where industry professionals can review unproduced scripts. He's had a lot of hits, and he's feeling good about it. And, of course, ideas for his next book are percolating. But where that book will take readers, he can't say. That's just his process.

"I can't tell you what I'm going to write tomorrow," says Ayotte. "I can't tell you until tomorrow night, when it's done." 🗨️

—Lauren Rebecca Thacker

For more about Ayotte and his books, visit [www.julienayotte.com](http://www.julienayotte.com)



**CAPTION THIS**



**Photo Caption Contest**

Do you have a funny idea for a caption for this photo from a vintage URI yearbook? Email your caption to [urimag@uri.edu](mailto:urimag@uri.edu) or respond at [uri.edu/magazine](http://uri.edu/magazine).

**Submit entries by January 15, 2024**

**SHOOT**

Well, shoot. We don't have a lot of information about this photo from the University Archives. It's undated and labeled simply, "Archery-Athletics."

Nevertheless, you, Rhody readers, submitted a lot of fun and creative captions. Many, including one of our runners-up, tapped into the news stories about spy balloons earlier this year. And there were a handful of seagull/clam cake captions, including the one below. How very Rhody of you!

**SUMMER 2023 WINNERS**

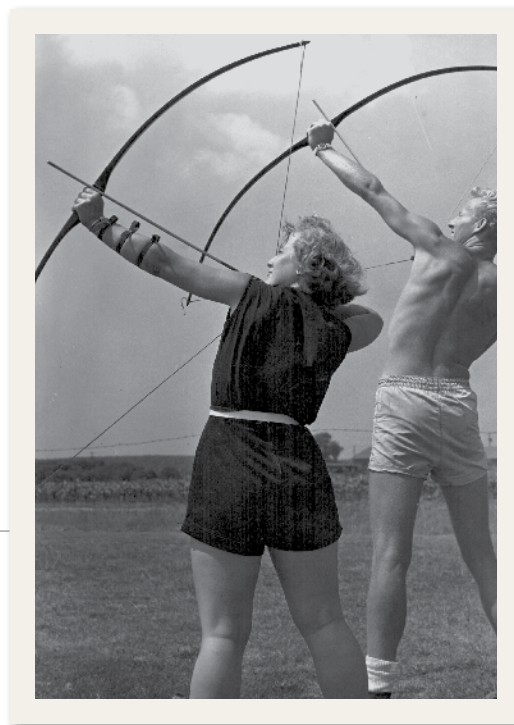
**WINNING CAPTION**

"URI's crack anti-UFO battalion springs into action."  
—Carl Lindstrom, M.S. '89

**RUNNERS-UP**

"That'll be the last time they try to fly a spy balloon over URI!"  
—Brad Sherman '88

"This ought to teach those seagulls not to steal our clam cakes and french fries again!"  
—Alex Larson '77



**SHARE YOUR VINTAGE URI PHOTOS!**

Would you consider sharing some of those vintage photos for the photo caption contest—or just for fun?

If so, we'd love to consider sharing your photos in URI Magazine. Please scan or take a good-quality photo of your snapshot and mail to [urimag@uri.edu](mailto:urimag@uri.edu).



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Their dreams hold a promise for tomorrow.

Your gift to RhodyNow, whether it is scholarship, Students First Fund, immediate use, or your favorite college, club, or program, can make those dreams a reality.

Every gift, of any size, makes a difference.



**GIVE TODAY**



**PICTURED**

## GOLDEN HOUR

Matthew Meigs '20 captured this image of his cousins, Maddie, Lizzie, and Andrew, in a "spontaneous sprint into golden hour." It was featured in a recent exhibition at Westerly Camera and Darkroom. The 16" x 20" silver gelatin print he made sold early on opening night.

"I shot this photo in summer 2021 on Central Square in Lynn, Mass.," says Meigs. "We took the kids on a walk to Lynn Beach, where I walked with a camera almost every day during the pandemic, sometimes making pictures, sometimes not. The kids' energy really changed the scene for me, so I shot a few rolls along the way. This was the second-to-last frame."

Meigs is a Local 600 camera loader, photographer, and filmmaker in Providence, R.I. His interest in photography started from skateboarding—a world where creative self-expression in many forms, including photography and videography, thrives. Meigs' interests, including music, often weave together in interesting ways.

Follow Matthew on Instagram @mattmeigs