



UNIVERSITY OF
RHODE ISLAND

SPRING 2024

MAGAZINE

**RIVER
STATE**

In the Ocean State,
Rivers Matter.



SIGNS OF SPRING

The flowering crab apples on the north side of Roosevelt Hall on URI's Kingston Campus add campus color each spring. Here, the daffodils are taking their turn in the spotlight, and the crab apples are just about to flower.

The building was named for first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who came to URI for the building dedication in 1938 and is said to have planted the first of the now-iconic flowering trees.

Read about Roosevelt and her visits to URI on page 62.



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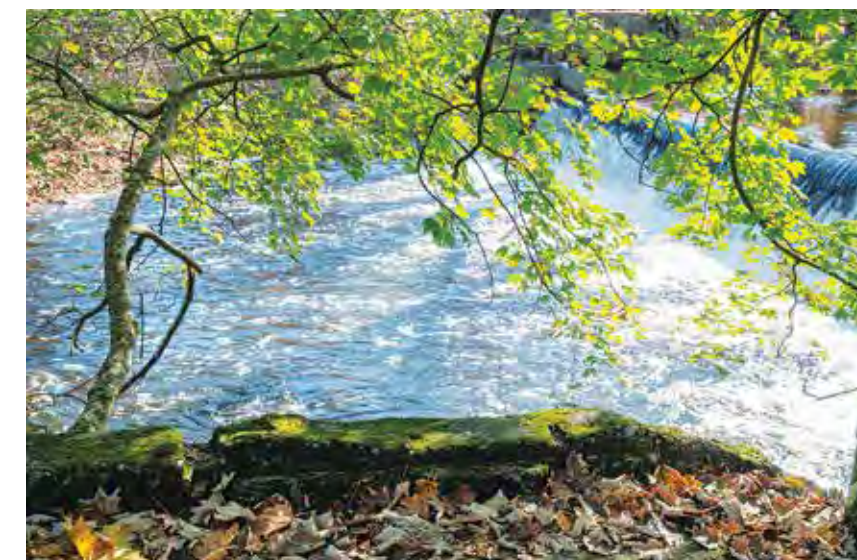
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62 Famous Footsteps
Two visits from the namesake of Roosevelt Hall—legendary first lady, diplomat, and human rights advocate Eleanor Roosevelt.

The tapestry depicted in the background is a part of the collection at the Cape Verdean Museum in Pawtucket, R.I. It was woven at the Centro Nacional de Artesanato in São Vicente, Cabo Verde, by João Silva. Part of the 1995 Smithsonian Folklife Celebration of Cape Verde, it was donated to the Cape Verdean Museum.

On the cover, "Glen Rock Reservoir" by Damian Marc. The reservoir divides the Queen and Usquepaugh rivers in West Kingston, R.I.



30 One Water
Rivers are just as important as coastlines in the Ocean State. And as URI researchers are quick to point out, it's all one water—it's all connected. Read about URI's efforts toward understanding, managing, and protecting the state's rivers and waterways.

14 River Stories
An essay by English and writing professor Heather Johnson about how she became hooked on rivers, plus a primer on her course, River Stories, (page 15) with a self-study guide that just might get you hooked on rivers, too.



Professor Heather Johnson on the Quad among a display of plastic bottles placed by students in her River Stories course. They collected signatures for a Rhode Island bottle bill; the bottles helped draw attention to the issue.



“URI’s greatest asset is its people.”
—Marc B. Parlange

An Inspiring University Community

President Marc Parlange reflects on the power of URI’s community and looks ahead, sharing his vision and hope for our future.

The new year is well underway, but I want to take a moment to share my gratitude and my hope for our community in the coming months.

As our campuses filled with life after winter break, I was reminded of our purpose as a university and how fortunate I am to be a part of URI. I am proud that we embrace diverse perspectives and experiences, challenge ourselves to find solutions to some of the most pressing issues of our time, and seek opportunities that empower us to continuously grow and evolve in response to the world around us.

This semester, a year after launching our strategic plan, I am focused on the ambitious goals we set for ourselves, and it is my hope that we can begin to reach them, together. The important work we do with the state, our region, and the world is a top priority as we advocate for increased investment in the people and programs that make URI unique; break ground on the construction of state-of-the-art facilities on our Narragansett Bay Campus; and help grow life sciences in Rhode Island.

The well-being of our community remains paramount, and it’s imperative that we foster an environment that prioritizes mental, emotional, and physical health, with a renewed focus on initiatives that promote a sense of belonging and inclusivity.

We welcomed the arrival of three new deans in the colleges of nursing, pharmacy, and health sciences, furthering a culture of collaboration and innovation across our divisions, departments, and colleges.

And finally, we will ensure the long-term health of our university by committing to strategic financial practices and celebrating reaching our \$300 million goal for our capital campaign thanks to the hard work of so many across our campuses and the generosity of many more in our community.

The stories in this issue highlight just some of the people and the work being done already in many of these focus areas. A feature on the importance of rivers in Rhode Island touches on the integral role URI plays in managing and protecting some of the most important parts of the state’s economy and identity. A story on one of URI’s paleontologists centers on how we are supporting social justice in secondary education. A feature on URI’s Cape Verdean Students Association shows the distinctive impact of the Cape Verdean community on URI’s history and culture. And finally, two alumni who lost their son to mental illness share their critical mission to support those in need of mental health care.

URI’s greatest asset is its people, and I am grateful for and inspired by the contributions of every member of this community.

Marc B. Parlange
President, University of Rhode Island



HOPE

Ryan Frankel '23 (German, political science) took this photo at Camp Cronin in Narragansett, R.I. during the pandemic. Frankel says, "Camp Cronin was a peaceful place where I could go to take my mind off things and just relax, watching the waves crash. During the pandemic, the message of 'hope'—that despite uncertainty, things were going to get better—meant a lot. It also really embodies Rhode Island, a place that remains hopeful about the future."

We welcome and encourage letters to the editor. Write to us at urimag@uri.edu
Visit us and comment online at uri.edu/magazine



REMEMBERING IBRAHAM ABDUL-MATIN '99

I am stunned in hearing of the passing of Ibe ("A Remembrance of Friendship," fall 2023). He was a great friend to my son and to myself. You made the world a little better, Ibe.

—Gail Rashed Faris, M.A. '73, M.S. '96



MEMORY LANE

This photo (Hammerslag Mall by Andrew D'Aiello '26, fall 2023) brings back memories of my nightly trips after dinner from Fraternity Circle to the library to study engineering. I went 3–4 times a week, as studying at the frat was not productive. Walking back to my room through the mall was a great feeling.

—Steve Eustis '78

BRINGING WOMEN OF COLOR TO THE WAVES

"*Toward a More Colorful Lineup*" (fall 2023) elicited many notes and comments, including these:

Two inspiring pioneers! A credit to our community. Keep on keepin' on.

—Phil Aaronson '67

Wonderful! Keep up the great work!
—Michele Crowley '99

Great stuff, Zane and Sullivan. Yeah, our color should not determine our life and how we live it. Rooting for you both.

—Emmanuel Oyewole, URI graduate student in marine affairs

SOCIAL SNAPS



@universityofri

REVOLUTIONIZING DEEP-SEA RESEARCH

An interdisciplinary multi-institute team led by Professor Brennan Phillips developed tech to capture biological data from fragile marine organisms to enhance our understanding of the deep-sea ecosystem.

More at uri.edu/news/2024/deepseagenomes



@urinursing

NURSING PLEDGE

Congratulations to the newest URI nursing students, welcomed during the semi-annual White Coat Ceremony.



@alumniuri

MEET ME ACROSS THE POND!

Making connections all over the world! Great to have some of our global alumni meet up with students traveling in London and Paris during a Winter J-Term trip with the Department of Textiles, Fashion Merchandising and Design.



Mary Ann Mazzone was selected "Ram of the Game" at the Jan. 27 women's basketball game against UMass. From left: Athletic Director Thorr Bjorn, Mazzone, President Marc Parlange, and Rhody the Ram.

BEHIND THE SCENES

BELOVED STAFFER HONORED

If you've visited the Alumni Center on Upper College Road, you've probably met office assistant coordinator for the URI Foundation and Alumni Engagement Mary Ann Mazzone.

Mary Ann works at the front desk, greeting visitors, helping with events, and often becoming "Mama Mazzone" to the students and young alumni who work in or frequent the building. Her "special ones," as she calls them, often return to visit and are always met with a hug.

Mazzone was selected "Ram of the Game" and honored at center court in the Ryan Center during the Jan. 27 women's basketball game against UMass.

Mazzone has worked as part of URI's alumni engagement team for 21 years. She was nominated for the "Ram of the Game" honor by the URI ROTC Department and ROTC Alumni Chapter. They wrote, "Mary Ann interacts with alumni, friends, and students daily, always willing to assist."

In their nomination, they lauded Mazzone's long-standing work assisting with ROTC events, including the annual golf tournament. "Mary Ann's work has gained her the admiration of the ROTC cadre, cadets, and alumni."

Congratulations, Mary Ann! And thank you for your years of service and dedication to URI students and alumni.

—Barbara Caron

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.

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From the Editor

As we get ready to send this issue to print, it's a cold February day. But it's sunny and dry, unlike the wet and stormy weather we've seen quite a bit of this winter. Our cover story about Rhode Island rivers and the URI scientists who are working to help us understand and manage them seems particularly important after a season marked by significant coastal and river flooding in Rhode Island and beyond.

But this story only scratches the surface. There are many people, lots of research, and many parts of the story we simply couldn't include here. There's more to tell and more to come.

And that's the nature of what we do here at *URI Magazine*. The URI students, alumni, staff, and faculty featured in each issue are always an inspiring few who represent the many members of our community who are helping, thinking, creating, and making the world better—in big ways and small—every day.

—Barbara Caron, Editor-in-Chief

IN BRIEF

NEW DEANS OF HEALTH SCIENCES, NURSING, AND PHARMACY

URI has named new deans to its colleges of nursing, pharmacy, and health sciences. Danny Willis, a nationally respected education leader and practitioner, will lead the College of Nursing. Kerry LaPlante, an internationally recognized expert in antimicrobial resistance and infectious diseases, assumes leadership in the College of Pharmacy. And noted health education leader, scholar, and pediatrician Patrick Vivier will lead the College of Health Sciences. All assumed their new roles in January.

"The University of Rhode Island is enhancing the health of individuals and

communities locally and globally," said Barbara E. Wolfe, provost and executive vice president for academic affairs. "We are excited and pleased to welcome these three health-care leaders to their new roles and look forward to furthering our work and enhancing the positive, lasting impact of our faculty, clinicians, and researchers on the health and well-being of people of all ages."

Willis served as dean of the Saint Louis University Trudy Busch Valentine School of Nursing before joining URI. LaPlante, a department chair and professor of pharmacy at URI, becomes the first female dean of the pharmacy college and its eighth dean overall. And Vivier, previously a member of the Tufts University School of Medicine senior leadership team,



Clockwise from top left: Nursing Dean Danny Willis, Pharmacy Dean Kerry LaPlante, and Health Sciences Dean Patrick Vivier



served as interim chair of the Tufts public health and community medicine department; director of the public health program; and professor of public health and community medicine, and pediatrics, before joining the University.

NEW VICE PRESIDENT FOR COMMUNITY, EQUITY AND DIVERSITY



Markeisha Miner, an accomplished student services leader and experienced litigator, joined the University in January as vice president for community, equity, and diversity. She previously served as senior associate dean for student services and dean of students at Cornell University Law School.

URI President Marc Parlange praised Miner's leadership, tireless advocacy on behalf of students, and dedication to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Miner says she looks forward to partnering with the URI community "to build on the important work already being done at URI to promote inclusion and belonging," adding, "Together, I am confident that we will cultivate community, enhance equity, and demonstrate diversity as outlined in the robust strategic plan."

URI EDUCATION PROFESSOR TEAMS WITH PBS KIDS

Sara Sweetman, URI associate professor of education, and the creators of the Emmy-nominated PBS Kids show *Elinor Wonders Why* are enlisting Elinor, a curious little bunny, and her friends Ari and Olive to help break down barriers that girls face in maintaining interest in STEM disciplines.

Thanks to a \$3.4 million grant from the National Science Foundation, Sweetman will work with creators Jorge Cham and Daniel Whiteson to develop eight new 11-minute episodes of the popular animated show with the goal of improving boys' and girls' perceptions of female scientists and increasing their understanding of mixed-gender collaborations in STEM.

The Naturalist Peter Paton, professor and chair of URI's Department of Natural Resources Science, was honored by the Rhode Island Natural History Survey as a top naturalist in Rhode Island. Paton, shown here at Napatree Point in Westerly, R.I., has led the longest-running bird-banding operation in North America at the Kingston Wildlife Research Station for the past 30 years. In addition to his research, he teaches popular field courses in ornithology, wetland wildlife management, and management of migratory birds.

Read the full story at uri.edu/topnaturalist

Get more news at uri.edu/news



NEWS TICKER



ENHANCING ATHLETICS

URI has launched a major fundraising initiative to enhance athletics facilities and advance championship-caliber programs. The multiyear effort aims to raise \$20 million, to build on \$65.8 million in funding included in Rhode Island's 2024 state budget.



GOING GOLD

URI's chapter of the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society was inducted into the Circle of Excellence, with a Gold Honor Distinction, one of only 325 chapters nationwide to receive the commendation. Founded in 1897, Phi Kappa Phi is one of the most renowned multidisciplinary honor societies in American higher education.



VA RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

A new partnership will spur collaborative research among URI, the Providence VA Medical Center, and Ocean State Research Institute Inc., a VA-affiliated nonprofit research corporation. The agreement will expand the College of Pharmacy's already robust research program and establish a URI research hub in the capital city.



RHODE ISLAND STATE CRIME LAB RECOGNIZED

Dennis Hilliard, director of the Rhode Island State Crime Lab, was recently honored by the Henry C. Lee Institute of Forensic Science with the Distinguished Forensic Scientist Award and by the Northeastern Association of Forensic Scientists with its Meritorious Service Award.



FALL COMMENCEMENT

On Dec. 16, 2023, URI celebrated a commencement ceremony in the Ryan Center for its undergraduate and graduate students who completed their degree requirements during the fall semester. President Marc Parlange and other officials offered words of encouragement and praise for more than 400 graduates and their families and friends.

MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

You Can Quote Me

Discussing a recent URI study he co-authored, which found extensive microplastics pollution stored in the surface sediments in Narragansett Bay and the role of education in reducing it:

“You hear about reduce, reuse, recycle, I think the ‘refuse’ is one thing that we don’t discuss enough. Just try not to accept plastic. If you don’t need a straw or you don’t need an extra spoon, don’t take it. Think about the second life of things.”

—J.P. Walsh, URI professor of oceanography and Coastal Resources Center director

The Boston Globe

Commenting on the sharp uptick in the number of workers who went on strike in 2023—more than 500,000, nearly three times as many as in 2022:

“This is a demonstration of the anger that American workers have about their position in the economy.”

—Erik Loomis, labor historian, URI professor of history

ABC News

Commenting on the roughly 6-mile-wide asteroid that collided with Earth approximately 66 million years ago, collapsing the food web and wiping out dinosaurs:

“To shut down an entire global ecosystem is truly astounding.”

—David Fastovsky, URI professor emeritus of geosciences

Mashable

On his suspicion that PFAS, also known as forever chemicals, may throw off the human endocrine system, disrupting metabolism and potentially affecting the body’s ability to maintain a stable energy balance:

“Obesity is an epidemic. And we can’t explain it by lack of physical activity or changing habits.”

—Philip Grandjean, M.D., URI adjunct professor of pharmacy and URI STEEP Research Program co-director

The New York Times Magazine

Discussing a United Nations-backed report she co-authored, which found that invasive species harm ecosystems and cost the global economy \$423 billion a year:

“There are many hitchhikers and stowaways, but there are also many intentional introductions. So, some species have been introduced because of their perceived benefits.”

—Laura Meyerson, URI professor of natural resources science

PBS NewsHour

On the claim that volcanic activity, not human-driven climate change, is responsible for Antarctic ice melt:

“The evidence we have shows that volcanism cannot be solely responsible for the melt that we observe around Antarctica.”

—Brice Loose, URI associate professor of oceanography

USA Today



GO RHODY

Trent Baltzell on Sustaining a Championship Culture

Trent Baltzell '14 was a champion URI student-athlete. Now back at URI as head coach for men's track and field, he and his team are carrying forward the team's winning tradition.

Not much has changed for URI men's track and field since Trent Baltzell '14 first sat in Mackal Field House with Coach John Copeland on a recruiting visit 15 years ago—and that's a good thing.

"This was definitely the style of program I was looking for," Baltzell says. "I wanted a place where I would have teammates who were supportive, but that also had a winning culture. It was a no-brainer for me coming in."

It worked out. As a student, Baltzell was part of seven Atlantic 10 team championships. One of URI's best multi-event athletes, he was a five-time individual champion, winning the decathlon in 2011 and both the heptathlon and decathlon in 2013 and 2014. He remains URI's record holder in the decathlon.

Baltzell returned to URI as an assistant coach in 2019 and has sustained that championship culture. The team won an indoor A-10 title in 2020 and an outdoor league title in 2021. In July 2021, Baltzell was elevated to head coach following Copeland's retirement.

Since then, Baltzell has won four consecutive A-10 titles (2022 and 2023 indoor/outdoor championships), three New England track-and-field titles, and a New England cross-country title. He was named A-10 track-and-field coach of the year in 2022 and 2023.

"I tried to make as few changes as possible. Coach Copeland worked hard and left the program in great shape. He put me in a great position."

The keys for Baltzell are having the right staff and maintaining relationships throughout his roster. He believes that because he trained in multiple events himself, he is better able to relate to all his student-athletes.

"I don't coach every single guy on the roster because we have position groups," Baltzell says. "But I have a pretty solid connection with everyone on the team."



Baltzell's first hire was Brian Doyle, who coaches distance runners and sprinters. Since Doyle's arrival, the Rams have won the 2023 New England team title—the program's first since 1952—and placed seventh at the 2023 A-10 championship, URI's highest finish in 23 years.

Baltzell also kept Ben Carroll, who has coached the throwers for 14 years, producing 26 individual conference champions.

"Hiring the right people is something I am proud of," Baltzell says. "Brian was the perfect fit. There are not a lot of guys who can coach distance and sprints. He has done an incredible job."

"And Ben has more regional qualifiers and Atlantic 10 champions than any other group since he started. Retaining him has been huge. The consistency he brings is important."

The program will soon be getting an outdoor track-and-field complex, thanks to \$65.8 million in funding for the state's capital improvement plan, which will also

upgrade URI's football, soccer, baseball, and softball facilities. While URI's overall track-and-field success has not been hindered over the years—thanks to the indoor Mackal facility—getting an outdoor track will have a major impact.

"We will be able to host high school championship meets, as well as our own championship meets and invitationals. That is good advertising for the program," Baltzell says. "We will have camps and host the Special Olympics. This will draw more people into South County and heighten awareness of the program, which always helps with recruiting."

While Baltzell had always had an eye toward returning to URI, it happened sooner than he expected.

"I was at Assumption for four years," Baltzell says. "I really enjoyed it there. But I knew URI was a place I wanted to come back to eventually. It happened sooner than I ever thought it would, and I am super thankful for that."

—Shane Donaldson '99

MOMENTUM

Research at the Forefront

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

WHY DOES STROKE INCREASE THE RISK OF ALZHEIMER'S?

A \$413,729 National Institutes of Health grant is funding a study on the link between stroke and Alzheimer's disease.

Studies have established that stroke can double the risk of Alzheimer's disease and dementia, but researchers don't yet understand why. On a \$413,729 National Institutes of Health grant, Claudia Fallini, an assistant professor of cell and molecular biology at the Ryan Institute for Neuroscience, is investigating this connection.

Ischemic stroke, caused by lack of blood supply to the brain, accounts for 87 percent of all strokes and is ranked by the

World Health Organization as the second leading cause of death worldwide. While ischemic stroke causes inflammation in the brain and other pathological changes associated with Alzheimer's disease, it is unclear exactly what mechanisms are involved to trigger these changes.

"There is a knowledge gap around which cellular pathways cause or contribute to dementia after a stroke," says Fallini. "It is important to bridge this gap in order to understand how stroke affects your risk for developing Alzheimer's disease and finding potential ways to mitigate that risk."

One area of interest is the actin cytoskeleton, which plays a critical role in various cellular functions and has long been

a focus of Fallini's research. "Ischemic stroke has been shown to induce drastic changes in the actin cytoskeleton," says Fallini. "One of our questions is to look at how some of the changes we see in this pathway after a stroke could make surviving brain cells more vulnerable to age-related stressors or other factors linked to Alzheimer's disease."

She hopes the project will lead to new therapies as well as improved stroke outcomes. "If we can identify what's happening in the brain after a stroke that causes or contributes to dementia and Alzheimer's disease," says Fallini, "we have a better chance to intervene."

—Nicole Maranhas

BETTER OUTCOMES FOR POST-STROKE PATIENTS

Two URI biomedical engineering professors are developing a device to help patients with post-stroke rehabilitation.

In URI's Department of Electrical, Computer, and Biomedical Engineering, professors Reza Abiri and Yalda Shahriari are building a robotic platform that can help post-stroke patients perform needed rehabilitation and regain motor skills, including critical daily functions like reaching, grasping, and holding on to items.

They received a \$460,000 three-year grant from the National Science Foundation for their work on the new device, which will monitor the muscle and brain activity of the user and include a closed-loop feedback system.

The user-centered robotic device they are developing could also be used by patients in their homes, leading to better integration of physical therapy into daily life.

The professors are also working with Mariusz Furmanek, an assistant professor of physical therapy and affiliate member



Above, Yalda Shahriari (left) and Reza Abiri in the Translational Neurobotics Laboratory. At right, the device they're developing to help patients recovering from strokes.



of URI's Interdisciplinary Neuroscience Program, and are consulting with stroke specialist and Massachusetts General Hospital neurologist David Lin.

—Kristen Curry '92

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

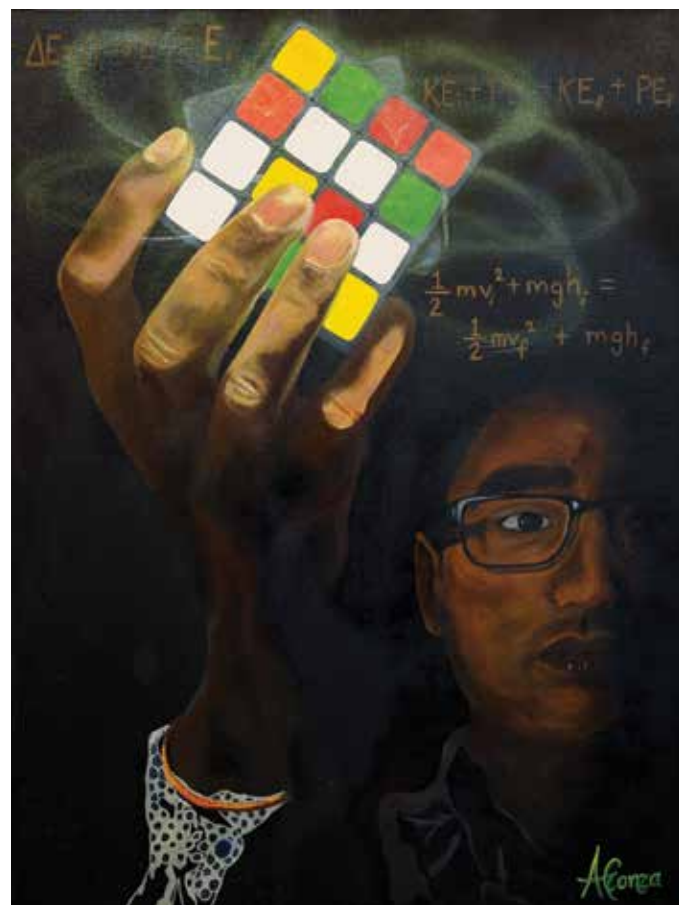
RHODY SCHOLARS

Faces of Honors

A new Honors Program installation of student portraits by alumni artist AGonza graces Lippitt Hall on the Kingston Campus.

Lohith Chatragadda is a sophomore from Lincoln, R.I., who is majoring in neuroscience and microbiology. AGonza says the formula depicted in his portrait is the formula for the conservation of mechanical energy, which illustrates how energy changes, but also symbolizes the mind-set he brings to his studies.

Lina Al Taan Al Hariri is a senior who is majoring in gender and women's studies, global language and area studies, and international studies and diplomacy. Originally from Syria, Al Hariri and her family fled Syria when she was 11 and settled in Cranston, R.I. Al Hariri was awarded a 2023 Truman Scholarship, a prestigious graduate fellowship for public service leadership. URI's 16th Truman Scholar, she was chosen from 705 applicants from 275 institutions.



Stephen Coutu is a senior psychology and English major from North Kingstown, R.I. He is a nontraditional student who transferred to URI from CCRI and found a home in the Honors Program. For his portrait, AGonza was inspired by an hourglass tattoo on Coutu's arm. Her portrait of Coutu, she says, conveys hope.

Thelma Iheanacho is a sophomore majoring in pharmaceutical sciences and French. She is from Nigeria and plans to transfer into the pharmacy program. She loves butterflies—something she has in common with AGonza—so that shared interest features prominently in the portrait. "This is [Thelma's] cocoon phase," says AGonza, "but watch out when she blossoms!"



The URI Honors Program commissioned artist AGonza '16 to create portraits of four honors students. AGonza's work was unveiled at an event in October 2023 in Lippitt Hall on the Kingston Campus, where the portraits are now on display.

Honors Program director Karen de Bruin says the goal was to create modern murals in a historic building. "We wanted to create an inclusive environment, one that shows the personality and authenticity of our students."

Providence based artist AGonza is a painter and muralist who works mostly in acrylics. She says she connected personally with each student before picking up her paintbrush. She asked each student to bring something that holds meaning for them. "It's my best small collection of art, I think."

—Kristen Curry '92



QUAD ANGLES

The Language of Rivers

By Heather Johnson

English and writing professor Heather Johnson delves into the origins of her preoccupation with rivers, their language, and our relationship with them.

In a new edition of its dictionary for young children, the *Oxford English Dictionary* several years ago decided to remove words related to the natural world to make room for words like laptop. Words that would be lost would include *heron, herring, kingfisher, minnow, newt, otter*. River words.

I have a passion for the language of rivers. I think this may stem, in fact, from a moment of silence one summer, decades ago, in Ireland, where I grew up.

I was staying on a cousin's old river barge, winding through the loughs, or lakes, of the River Shannon. One night, very late, a friend and I had set out from the barge, in complete darkness, in a small wooden boat, to row to the closest village pub. We set our bow in the direction of a tiny dot of red light. It must have been a Sacred Heart flame, just visible through open church doors at the end of the village street.

Through the dark air and the dark water, we rowed in silence. The oars dipped into the brackish water. A hard pull. Then a coasting. I remember the creak and groan of the oarlocks, the splash and drip of the strokes. There must have been some moonlight: The gentle swell seemed edged in silver. No words between us.

But unspoken words came nonetheless: *the dark mutinous Shannon waves*. The final words of James Joyce's story "The Dead" in which "snow was general all over Ireland ... falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves."

That night we reached a landing spot among the trees, tied up, and the pub admitted us after closing hours. It had felt like a secret communion with the River Shannon, which takes its name from *Siannon*, a goddess in Irish mythology whose name means "possessor of wisdom."

I didn't know it until recently, but since that night, I have been following rivers.

Once, riding a train across America, I stared through the window at the Colorado. The train tracks hugged that river through narrow canyons where bald eagles fly. At the river's bend, the train would lean, tilting us toward a view of the rushing waters and, as we climbed into the Rockies, angled shapes of floating river ice.

When I drive I-90 westward through Massachusetts and New York, I feel a kind of resistance each time I cross a bridge, wanting to acknowledge the river flowing beneath. I hear myself saying aloud a litany of names: Quaboag, Chicopee, Connecticut, Housatonic, Hudson. Ancient rivers.

Māori people teach respect for rivers as living forces. New Zealand set a precedent several years ago when it passed a law granting personhood to the Whanganui River. Our lives are intertwined with rivers; we sustain each other.

This respect and understanding are what I hope to impart to the students of River Stories, a URI honors course. Our class went kayaking together on the Pettaquamscutt River last fall. We floated on the calm water, watching the cormorants, their wings stretched wide toward the low pink sun.

And words arrived, *dark mutinous Shannon waves*. I suppose it's a kind of offering, a modest silent prayer, to a life force as powerful and majestic as a river. 🌀

Heather Johnson is a professor in the departments of English and Professional and Public Writing and the director of Writing Across URI, which supports faculty and student writing. She also teaches and advises in the Honors Program.

SYLLABUS

River Stories

Professor Heather Johnson's students examine rivers through history, culture, literature, and ecology. And they gain firsthand knowledge of rivers by going straight to the source.

Students in Heather Johnson's honors class, River Stories (HPR 412), learn about rivers not only from books, but by paddling them in kayaks and taking river-boat tours. They walk along riverbanks and learn from conservationists, scientists, and others.

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

Field experiences are essential. "We need to be on the river, to feel its tidal pulls and touch the cold water, so that we are not learning about the *idea* of a river but about a tangible life force," Johnson says. "One of the best moments last semester was on a kayak trip to the Pettaquamscutt River (also known as Narrow River). The sun was setting, and everyone grew quiet. Being on the river fosters that kind of connection."

Johnson takes her students to Rhode Island sites to experience physical and visceral connections to rivers, but the course also provides national and global perspectives. Students also learn from guest teachers like Lorén Spears '89, Hon. '17, director of the Tomaquag Museum in Exeter, R.I.

"In documentaries about U.S. rivers, students learn about the impacts of 20th-century power projects," says Johnson. "And on guided walks with Lorén Spears, they learn about the significance of rivers for the Wampanoag and Narragansett, from pre-colonization to the present day. Her stories of respecting all life in rivers contrasts with industrial-age narratives of 'improvement' with their casual disregard for the cultural histories and environmental well-being of rivers."

RIVERS HOLD MEMORIES

"The idea that rivers have memory guides this course," Johnson says. "We read a piece ("Mississippi Drift," see the self-study guide, right) about the Mississippi River and the tension between romanticizing rivers and seeking to know the reality, which is not always a pastoral, pretty scene.

"Toni Morrison wrote about the memories held in rivers, and we see this in stories of towns flooded by dam projects across the U.S.," Johnson says. "I visited just such a man-made lake in California this past summer: A power company diverted a river to flood the land, displacing the Maidu inhabitants. The lake today may, at first glance, seem appealing as a place for recreational boating, but its depths tell a story of loss and injustice."

ACTIVE LEARNING

"In this class," says Johnson, "I don't lecture. We walk, kayak, read, and discuss."

Students in Johnson's fall 2023 class even became activists, placing more than 3,000 plastic bottles on the Kingston Campus Quad to call attention to the impact of plastics on rivers as part of a petition drive to support a Rhode Island bottle bill. The students collected more than 500 signatures.



Students in the honors course River Stories visited URI geoscientist Soni Pradhanang's river simulation table.

THE TAKEAWAY

"This course helped me improve my creative writing," says Livi Donatelli '23, a neuroscience and psychology major. "I never had a class that had such interesting excursions. We kayaked and walked the Wood and Saugatucket rivers."

English major Jack Wholey '23 says, "The class was imaginative and tied together effectively. On the first day of class, Professor Johnson said, 'When you drive over a bridge spanning a river, don't just notice the glint of light reflected off the water. Take time to learn about the river's culture, its history, the culture of the people who have lived along its banks, its ecology, and stories.'" 🌀

—Dave Lavallee '79, M.P.A. '87

Rivers: A Self-Study Guide

- READ**
- *Dart*, by Alice Oswald
"I love this book of poetry," says Johnson. "It is devoted to a single river in England and captures all of the voices, human and nonhuman, that make up the riverscape."
 - "Mississippi Drift: River vagrants in the age of Wal-Mart," by Matthew Power, *Harper's Magazine*, March 2008. harpers.org/archive/2008/03/mississippi-drift
- WATCH**
- *DamNation: The Problem with Hydropower*, by Patagonia Films explores the history of dams in the U.S. Watch at youtube.com/@patagonia
- GO**
- "Visit your local rivers and spend time slow-looking," Johnson says. "Many New England towns have a 'friends of' the rivers association, and that's a great way to get involved in river stewardship." In Rhode Island, the Rhode Island Rivers Council, rivers.org, is the umbrella organization for the state's 11 river councils.
 - Participate in a river cleanup.



SARAH NICKFORD '23

We Are Not Done Yet

Like any journey worth taking, the campaign has brought URI to new places and inspired new ideas. We have come so far over the last several years thanks to the generosity and Rhody pride exhibited by alumni, parents, friends, and corporate and foundation partners. By working together, we have helped students achieve ambitious goals, we have ventured to new parts of the world, and we have expanded our programs and facilities. At the start of the spring semester we were 97% of the way to our \$300 million goal...but we are not done yet.

As we think about the campaign reaching its end this summer, we realize that so many of the gifts and initiatives during this effort are only the beginning—scholarships that set students on a lifelong path, research funding that will make future discoveries possible, program staff to bring critical training to a national scale. This has been a truly comprehensive effort, building on our strengths in the blue economy, bridging the arts with the sciences, and giving our student-athletes the best chance to succeed.

Thanks to visionary gifts across five strategic areas, URI as a whole has reached a new level and earned global recognition. Those five areas are *Student Access*, *The URI Learning Experience*, *Transformative Faculty Leadership*, *Innovative and Distinctive Programs*, and *Strategic Opportunities*. Building on these pillars, we are truly excited to think about the possibilities ahead, and we know that our University will only continue upward from here.

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

Alumni Couple Propels Ocean Research

Lauren Baker-Hart '81, P '18 and Jay C. Hart '82 M.B.A. '85, P '18 have made a gift that will significantly advance ocean research at URI. The Hart Family Faculty Fund in Ocean Engineering provides wide-ranging benefits that will help the University to attract and retain top-tier faculty, support graduate students, and facilitate new research. The Harts are designating \$1,000,000 for these purposes to the College of Engineering, while they are also providing funding for immediate needs to RhodyNow: College of Business and RhodyNow: College of Engineering, in the amount of \$125,000 each.

This significant gift reflects their commitment to ocean health, and it underscores URI's strengths as a driver of the blue economy, where multiple fields intersect to support environmental interests and economic growth in marine affairs. The Harts' gift also supports each of their colleges, with Lauren as an engineering alumna and Jay having earned his undergraduate and graduate degrees in the College of Business.

"We saw this as a way to contribute to a topic that matters to individuals and communities around the world," said Lauren. "We are confident in our University's track record and in its potential to continue making important breakthroughs."

"We wanted to give a boost to URI's impressive research in an area that we believe in," said Jay, "and at the same time, we know how important it is for the colleges to have flexibility with immediate-use funds. The University's advances in ocean science are truly impressive, and I look forward to seeing how far they can go."

The Harts have been actively involved alumni. Lauren is a member of the Women's Philanthropy Circle and the URI Foundation & Alumni Engagement Development Committee, and Jay is a member of the URI Foundation & Alumni Engagement Investment Committee and Board of Directors.



ISABELLE EPSTEIN



I see this role as a natural evolution of my belief in the power of journalism as a civic system. It's critical to engage with communities in ways that give them insight, knowledge, and wisdom about the world around them. Journalists need training to fulfill that civic duty.

FARA WARNER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, METCALF INSTITUTE



New Executive Director at Metcalf Institute

The Metcalf Institute has recently welcomed as its new executive director Fara Warner, a veteran journalist, editorial director, and educator with expertise in climate and environmental communications. Succeeding Sunshine Menezes, Ph.D. '05, Warner seeks to build on the Institute's well established leadership in providing professional development for journalists, scientists, and science communicators.

Warner's experience with internationally recognized publications as well as climate-focused organizations clearly aligns with the work of the institute, and her belief in the essential public role of journalism matches the mission as well.

"I see this role as a natural evolution of my belief in the power of journalism as a civic system," said Warner. "It's critical to engage with communities in ways that give them insight, knowledge, and

wisdom about the world around them. Journalists need training to fulfill that civic duty." She added that training in climate and environmental science is a particularly acute need.

In its 25-year history, the Metcalf Institute has earned global recognition in training more than 3,500 communicators and developing programs to bring leaders in journalism and climate and environmental science together. Warner sees opportunities to scale up and expand that reach. In addition to educating individuals, developing new strategic partnerships could allow the Institute's knowledge to benefit institutions and larger systems.

"If we can change the way that whole organizations cover what's happening with our climate," Warner said, "they can offer better and more inclusive coverage that gives the public a sense of agency and a sense of urgency."

Along with its significant external reach, the work of the Institute is true to the core of URI's identity as a land- and sea-grant public institution. It ties together the arts and sciences, with a view to understanding our world and helping our community.

"I've never found a place with such harmony between journalism and science," said Warner, "which are two of the most important systems that need to work together and bring people together for collaboration."

The Metcalf Institute relies on philanthropy to advance its vital work. Warner's appointment was made possible by a generous gift from Charlotte Metcalf, which is being matched by the URI College of the Environment and Life Sciences.



A Scholarship for Home-Grown Engineers

Five students this year have benefited from a unique scholarship focused on engineering students from Rhode Island. The Jonathan K. Farnum Scholarship benefits applicants from the Blackstone Valley area, which includes Central Falls, Pawtucket, Cumberland, and Lincoln. The scholarship assists students with costs of attendance, including tuition, fees, and room and board.

"I am tremendously grateful for receiving the Farnum Scholarship," said Victoria DeLaCruz, one of this year's recipients. "It lifted the weight from my parents' and my shoulders and allowed me to focus on my education without constantly worrying about the financial burden."

The scholarship bears the name of the first president of the Simon W. Wardwell Foundation. The foundation supports organizations and activities involved with studying, planning, designing, developing, and improving the operations of Rhode Island non-profits, including educational institutions. It is named for industrialist and inventor Simon W. Wardwell who founded the Wardwell Braiding Machine Company, which is still in operation today, in Central Falls in 1911.

Alumnus Gives Athletics Initiative Major Boost

URI Athletics is picking up momentum in an initiative to raise \$20 million for facilities upgrades that will span multiple sports. One of the early lead gifts comes from Thomas J. '74 and Catherine F. Drury, totaling \$1 million.

"We saw this as an opportunity to be part of something big," said Thomas (Tom) Drury. "We want to help URI student-athletes get ahead, and this moment of support from the state and focused attention from other alumni seemed like just the right time. We need to show the world of college athletics what URI can do."

Drury was an accounting major at URI and went on to earn an M.B.A. at the University of Wisconsin. He was a founder and CEO of Hydrofera, LLC, a company that develops

and sells advanced wound dressings that stimulate the healing process.

His long-term success at the company is rooted in a deeply personal story. A desperate father called the company offices one day—his young daughter had a condition that doctors had agreed would result in leg amputation, and the family was scrambling for other treatment options. Drury and his colleagues jumped into action, orchestrating product delivery and an expert clinical team to quickly treat the girl. It worked. Drury remains close with the family to this day. The experience stuck with Drury as "a testament to the human spirit" and an example of what people can do when they use whatever resources they have to help others. The product is known as "Hydrofera Blue" and it is used to successfully treat the wounds of millions of patients worldwide today.



We saw this as an opportunity to be part of something big. We want to help URI student-athletes get ahead, and this moment of support from the state and focused attention from other alumni seemed like just the right time.

THOMAS J. DRURY '74



Basketball Player, Business Leader, Benefactor

Monica Garnes '94 found herself back on a URI basketball court, this time not as a student-athlete, but as a benefactor unveiling a renovated space. She had on a pair of URI-branded Nikes customized for the occasion.

The Monica Garnes '94 Locker Room in the Ryan Center has been completely renovated and named in honor of Garnes for her support of the program. Her gift of \$125,000 to the locker room renovation is part of a committed effort to provide a dedicated area for the team to prepare for practice and games, as

well as a players' lounge to unwind and build team camaraderie. For Garnes, this is an opportunity to be part of the program's past and future.

"Playing for URI was such an important part of my experience here," said Garnes, "and it continues to be something I channel today in my career as an executive at a Fortune 100 company. My time playing for URI was where I learned about teamwork, grit, and dedication. It's helped me in all aspects of my life and I'm grateful to be able to support today's athletes who lead with heart and integrity."

Throughout her career, Garnes has demonstrated expertise in business management and leadership, rising to the role of president of Fry's Food Stores in Arizona. Along with several volunteer roles at the University of Rhode Island, she is a member of the Women's Philanthropy Circle, was the former chair of the College of Business Advisory Council, and was recently named to the University Board of Trustees, an honor reserved for exceptionally successful and dedicated alumni.



Alumni with a Long View

The campaign has driven alumni participation to new heights and has raised awareness about new ways to get involved. The Oliver Watson Society (OWS), a group of alumni who have chosen to give to URI through their wills, retirement funds, or other financial assets, established a new ambassador role in 2022 that has helped volunteers forge new connections.

The inaugural ambassador was Jim Hopkins '62. Hopkins, who has devoted his talent and resources to his alma mater for decades, worked with staff in this role, met alumni at events, and shared his own experience of giving and remaining actively connected to the University.

"I like the idea of leaving an ongoing legacy for something I believe in," said Hopkins. "I have included specific URI endowments to receive funds from my estate so that projects and programs that matter to me will continue to be funded after I'm gone."

I'd like to see more alumni add URI to their estates so that we can create an even stronger, more vibrant University for students to attend."

TONY BRAZ '83, AMBASSADOR, OLIVER WATSON SOCIETY

After a two-year term, Hopkins is passing the torch to Tony Braz '83, a political science major at URI who went on to earn a J.D. at Duke University.

"I'd like to see more alumni add URI to their estates so that we can create an even stronger, more vibrant University for students to attend," said Braz. "I am very proud of this University and grateful for what it has done for me. Being the OWS Ambassador is another way to give back."

The ambassador shares their experience with fellow alumni, speaks at events, and can show those who are interested in unique giving options how to take the right steps. As with so many alumni groups, the OWS helps to raise visibility and strengthen the sense of community among Rhody Rams.



Fund Fuels Growth in the Political Science Department

The Dr. Alfred G. Killilea Endowment in Political Science was established by former students in honor of former URI professor Al Killilea. The fund recruits quality, highly accomplished faculty to the political science department. In the last five years, thanks in part to new contributions from alumni, the College of Arts and Sciences has hired five additional faculty members. Faculty members receive \$5,000 a year for three years to jump-start their research.

Support from the fund has been vital to recruiting and retaining top faculty and has allowed them to pursue innovative research. In recent years, the political science department has seen an impressive period of growth with increased enrollment. Hiring will be even more critical over the next three to four years as the master's in international relations continues to grow and the college expands the work of the Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies.

"Professor Killilea inspired, encouraged, and challenged his students during his time at URI," said Bruce Wolpert '75. "As someone who directly benefited from his teaching, I am proud and honored that this endowment continues his legacy of excellence at URI and benefits so many students."



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.



\$69M

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

Cape Verde Connection

Rhode Island is home to one of the largest populations of Cape Verdean Americans in the U.S., and many have found a second home at URI. For over 30 years, the Cape Verdean Students Association has celebrated this unique culture. A strongly connected multicultural and multigenerational network, the group brings a distinctive positive impact to the URI community and beyond.

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



URI's CVSA executive board, clockwise from top: Diana Lopes, Alice Hafashimana, Leam Lima, Christian Mestre, Angelina Gomes, Paulo Mendes, Eliana Brito, and Lucas Furtado. Not pictured, Charline Reis.

Lima, a junior, says he found belonging in CVSA. "I was raised in Cape Verde and when I got to the U.S. it was hard for me to connect with people at first." Now he sees value in teaching others about the Cape Verdean lifestyle through CVSA.

I

t's a chilly Wednesday night, but the atmosphere in URI's Multi-cultural Student Services Center is heated. Three organizations—the Cape Verdean Students Association (CVSA), LatinX Student Association (LSA), and Student Alliance for the Welfare of Africa (SAWA)—are engaged in a fierce competition: the battle of the playlists. Nine rounds are divided into categories from moody music to party music. Each group presents a selection, hoping to win “best song” and accumulate points.

Students holler and laugh, their energy as palpable as the bass thumping through the stereo. Even the walls seem to pulsate in participation. For the last round—hype music—students from CVSA play the song “É Pa Pila” by MC Acondize. As the Cape Verdean-born hip-hop artist raps in Kriolu (Cape Verdean Creole), everyone in the room gets up to dance.

This night—people coming together to celebrate, educate, and share traditional music; where cultural pride is tangible, and differences are as joyfully revered as similarities—is a fitting snapshot of CVSA's presence within the URI community.

Cape Verdean Students Association

Founded in 1988 by the late Antonio “Toney” DaMoura '92 and Alex Fernandes '92 with the mission of “promoting and illustrating the history of the rich culture of Cape Verde to the student body, faculty, and administration,” URI's CVSA was the first of its kind in the country.

Currently run by a democratically elected group of students consisting of President Paulo Mendes, Vice President Lucas Furtado, and an executive board



The CVSA made you a playlist on Spotify! Go to University of Rhode Island Magazine's profile, open the CVSA playlist, and put on your dancing shoes!



The Praia lighthouse on Cape Verde's largest Island, Santiago.

of six, CVSA boasts a large membership and a wide range of programming. While the association primarily serves URI's substantial population of Cape Verdean Americans, it's open to all students.

Mendes, a secondary education major whose parents were born in Cape Verde, is a charismatic leader. Gregarious and motivated, his enthusiasm is infectious. Furtado, a double major in computer science and French, was born in Cape Verde, moved to the U.S. when he was 17, and has a quieter demeanor. Insightful and driven, his passion for CVSA is equally apparent. Their leadership dynamic is complementary as they prioritize creating a space for Cape Verdeans to center their heritage while inviting everyone to experience the vibrant culture.

CVSA's weekly meetings range from fun to informative—usually both at once—including game nights focused on the archipelago's 10 islands; lessons on Kriolu, the native language derived from Portuguese and African dialects; and batuku, a traditional dance. “After every meeting we have a dance session—even when it's not organized,” Mendes says.

CVSA also offers a variety of supports to its members. “We want to provide resources, such as how to pay term bills or find a career specialist to get an internship,” Furtado says. “We want to educate

our members on everything available to them at URI.”

Their focus is partially informed by disruptions resulting from the pandemic. Among other factors, the prolonged period of canceled in-person gatherings led to shifts in student life and have necessitated a new kind of leadership.

“Their passion has been revitalizing the group,” says Kristy Embrack Searles, a marketing and event coordinator for URI's Center for Career and Experiential Education who serves as CVSA's advisor. “They're finding the balance of what works between remote resources, in-person activities, and campus-wide events; and they're making meaningful connections with the broader Cape Verdean community in Rhode Island.”

As part of such efforts, they are intentional about collaborating with other multicultural organizations on campus. “If we all work together, we all blossom,” Mendes says. In December, a Winter Wonderland event included a gingerbread house competition, cookie decorating, ornament making, and photos with Santa and was well attended by students from other groups such as LSA and SAWA.

Broader statewide initiatives are also being developed, including internships and volunteer opportunities at the Cape Verdean Museum in Pawtucket, R.I., the first museum in the country dedicated to

Cape Verde



celebrating the history and culture of Cape Verde and Cape Verdean Americans.

“We really want to give back to the community and support the whole Cape Verdean population in Rhode Island,” Mendes says.

For some members, CVSA is the one place on campus where they feel like they don't have to explain themselves. For others, it provides cultural connection.

“I didn't grow up speaking Kriolu,” says junior health sciences major Angelina Gomes, noting that she often felt something was missing in terms of understanding her roots. “When I came to CVSA, they said, ‘We'll teach you.’ I finally found the place where my culture was celebrated.”

Diana Lopes, a second-year health sciences major, grew up in East Providence surrounded by Cape Verdean culture; her parents speak only Kriolu at home. She felt unmoored at URI before joining CVSA. “Being at a predominantly white institution, I felt adamant that I had to find my people,” she says. At CVSA, she felt at home.

Sophomore business major Christian Mestre says, “I want people to know about the culture and understand its impact. A lot of people don't realize how significant Cape Verde has been to American and world history.”

While CVSA programming and events are focused on Cape Verde, Mendes notes

the importance of honoring the mixture of subcultures most students experience. “It's at the forefront of my mind to acknowledge all the cultures people are coming to the group with,” he says. “I want to make sure I learn about them and give them the spotlight at times, too.” This helps students embrace the inherent complexity of identity and find more ways to learn from each other.

One People, Many Faces

Nestled in the Atlantic Ocean off the northwestern coast of Africa, Cape Verde is a cluster of 10 islands with a combined land area only slightly larger than the state of Rhode Island—the size being the only thing about it that is relatively unremarkable.

“Cape Verdean identity is like fruit punch, where many fruits mix together to create something delicious.”

—Lucas Furtado, Vice President, URI Cape Verdean Students Association

“Its positioning is its gift and its curse,” says Sara Monteiro '08, co-chair of URI's Alumni of Color Network and former member of CVSA, of how Cape Verde has proven pivotal both logistically and culturally.

Portugal claimed the uninhabited islands in 1456, and for over 300 years the archipelago was a hub for the transatlantic

trade of enslaved people from all over Africa. During the Spanish and Portuguese inquisitions, it was a place of refuge for Jews and other victims of religious persecution. As commercial routes expanded, Cape Verde became a bustling trading port and coaling and resupplying stop connecting Africa, America, Brazil, and Europe.

The amalgamation of different groups coming together as one people began to shape a singular Cape Verdean ethnicity—one that is both diverse and distinctive. “Cape Verdean identity is like fruit punch, where many fruits mix together to create something delicious,” Furtado says. “Lots of little pieces from different countries come together to create one beautiful culture.”

Droughts beginning in the 1800s prompted Cape Verdeans to seek opportunities off the islands, and many came to New England for maritime industries. Rhode Island is now home to one of the largest populations of Cape Verdean Americans in the country (estimated to be 18,000), second only to Massachusetts.



A CVSA T-shirt shows CVSA's mission, along with the 10 Cape Verde islands and 10 stars representing the islands on the country's flag.

“No matter how many generations removed you are from being born there, you still have that communal tie to home.”

—Bobby Britto-Oliveira '06, M.S. '11

“We were the very first Africans to arrive in the United States outside of slavery of our own accord,” says Joe DaMoura '00, brother of CVSA founder Toney DaMoura. Joe is a former member of CVSA and is president of the Cape Verdean Museum. “Cape Verdean pride and culture have been important parts of building American culture.”

Proximity to the islands is not necessary for members of the diaspora to experience a strong relationship. Political scientist Abel Djassi Amado has researched and written extensively on Cape Verde. The former URI lecturer, currently a Simmons University faculty member, says no matter where they live, Cape Verdeans have one thing in common: longing for home. Even those born in the United States—like Mendes—echo this sentiment because of how families instill tradition

through food, language, music, and dance.

“No matter how many generations removed you are from being born there, you still have that communal tie to home,” says Bobby Britto-Oliveira '06, M.S. '11, assistant director of URI's Multicultural Student Services Center and co-chair of the Alumni of Color Network. An avid attendee of CVSA events in his time as a student, he has served in an administrative support role to the group since 2012. “Establishing that pride is important. It gives you the connection you don't always have in everyday meetings and classes as a student from the African diaspora at a predominantly white institution.”

“It's about preserving culture and not assimilating,” adds Monteiro. “Groups like CVSA are byproducts of our vision of staying true to our authentic selves.”

Reach Forward, Give Back

For a student association to stand the test of time—through changes in leadership, cycles of students coming and going, and a global pandemic—is no small feat. For CVSA, its strength is in its roots.

URI's Talent Development (TD) program was established in 1968 to recruit Rhode Island high school graduates from historically underserved groups, and it works closely with high schools that have large Cape Verdean populations. Toney and Joe DaMoura, Mendes, Furtado, and many other CVSA members came to URI through TD.

Karoline Oliveira '94, M.S. '03, who, as a student, was one of CVSA's first secretaries, is now vice president of the board of directors for the Cape Verdean Museum. “TD gave us a place to explore what we wanted for ourselves, what we wanted in a classroom, and what we could do about it,” she says. “We found a community that strengthened us and empowered us to use our voices in other spaces.”

In November 1992, four years after CVSA was established, student leaders—including Malcolm Anderson '94, Oliveira, the DaMoura brothers, and others—formed the Black Student Leadership Group (BSLG). They conducted a nonviolent takeover of Taft Hall in an effort to improve racial tensions on campus.

It was a significant moment in URI's history and one with lasting impact. While it was not the first protest focused on the campus racial climate, it was notable in its scope.

“The students felt strongly that they were advocating even for identities they did not share,” says Searles of the 14 action-

able demands that the BSLG developed and fought for through the protest. “The fact that there is now an Africana studies major; a prominent Multicultural Student Services Center; an Office of Community, Equity and Diversity—these were all seeds that were sown by the BSLG.”

These initiatives are essential for the well-being of various marginalized groups and vital components of a thriving university. The threads that weave through the BSLG's vision, DaMoura's mission in establishing CVSA, and the longevity of the group are reflective of what Cape Verdean culture prioritizes as a whole: the belief that community, celebration of identity, reciprocity, and diversity are strengths to be protected and cultivated.

There are many ways to measure the success of a program like TD, including

how many students it brings to campus. But the power is really in the unique perspectives and contributions each student brings, enriching the URI community in immeasurable ways. Such diversity and inclusion efforts are not a zero-sum game; it is a multiplication of value that we all benefit from.

“We recognized that we may not be there to experience the results of our advocacy,” Oliveira says of the 1992 events. “But we needed to leave the University better, stronger, and more inclusive for people who came after us.”

Mendes and Furtado are two who have benefitted and continuing this cycle of reaching forward and giving back—honoring those who came before while paying it forward for future generations—shapes their vision as leaders of CVSA. “Seeing this wave of students become

torchbearers to carry on this legacy is inspiring,” adds Britto-Oliveira.

A country with a singular—at times tumultuous—history creating a people who feel united despite, or perhaps because of, immense differences is a reminder that while race is a construct, ethnicity is a story. “Cape Verdeans have much to teach us about their interdependent transnational society, their community-based culture that spans borders, and the beauty in their acts of survival,” a sign in the entryway of the Cape Verdean Museum reads.

“We're all different, but we still come together at the end of the day as one country,” Furtado says.

“We're a glimpse into what the future could be,” DaMoura adds. ☺

Author's note: Cabo Verde has long been called Cape Verde in English-speaking countries. In 2013, its government requested that the official Portuguese name Cabo Verde no longer be translated between languages. Because this article focuses on the Cape Verdean Students Association, a group that was named in 1988, and individuals who use the terminology Cape Verde and Cape Verdean colloquially, we use that wording here.



PHOTOS: NORA LEWIS

A Cape Verdean Legacy

It is impossible to celebrate CVSA and URI's vibrant Cape Verdean community without acknowledging the late Earl N. Smith III '89, former member of both CVSA and the Black Student Leadership Group and assistant dean of the College of Arts and Sciences from 2007 until his death in 2022. A proud Cape Verdean American, he was a champion of many multicultural initiatives on campus.

Smith and Abel Djassi Amado—former lecturer at URI, now at Simmons University—developed and directed a study abroad program in Cape Verde, first taking students to the country in the summer of 2010. While there, students engaged in service-learning opportunities,

visited historic sites, participated in educational sessions, and—Smith's favorite activity—learned local fishing techniques for catching marlin and tuna. For many student participants, it was their first time visiting the homeland of their parents and ancestors.

The program has been paused since 2020 when travel was disrupted due to the pandemic. “Several parts of the University are coming together to rebuild it now, including Africana Studies, Talent Development, and the study abroad program,” says Catherine John-Camara, chair of URI's Department of Africana Studies. “It's a need, that's for certain.”

—Anna Vaccaro Gray '12, M.S. '16



ONE WATER



Opposite page, the Woonasquatucket River flows over the dam at Rising Sun Mills in Providence. This page, Mallard ducks on the banks of the Woonasquatucket. Inset, the remains of a sluiceway that once controlled the flow of the river.

WHY RIVERS MATTER IN THE OCEAN STATE

Rhode Island's rivers are as important to the state's history, economy, and identity as the ocean waters they flow into. Long plagued by pollution and neglect, rivers have been the focus of revitalization efforts, and URI has played an important role. The future of our rivers—and all our waterways—depends on how we manage, protect, and respect them.

By Dave Lavallee '79, M.P.A. '87

On a bright, fall day in the Olneyville section of Providence, the Woonasquatucket River roars over a dam that once powered the National and Providence Worsted Mills. The former textile mills now house stylish apartments and commercial spaces, including a cafe and yoga studio. Alongside the river sit the hulking, rusted remnants of the sluiceway that once controlled the flow of water to the mills. A fish ladder, completed in 2007, allows 40,000 herring to return upstream each spring for spawning, a rite once prevented by the dam. On the opposite side is the popular Woonasquatucket River Greenway Bike Path, which follows the river from Johnston to Providence.

But the scene on the banks of the Woonasquatucket wasn't always so idyllic.

"I moved to Rhode Island in 1988 and began work as a summer intern at DEM (R.I. Department of Environmental Management)," says Alicia Lehrer, M.S. '93, executive director of the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council. Lehrer earned her URI graduate degree in natural resources science and developed the bacterial testing program for URI's Watershed Watch volunteer water monitoring program.

"The river was right outside my office door, and my coworkers took me outside to see it," Lehrer recalls. "They said, 'This is the Woonasquatucket. It is really contaminated. Don't go in there.'"



Above, Field's Point in Providence is one of Rhode Island's two largest wastewater treatment facilities. URI oceanography professor Chris Kincaid has worked with the Narragansett Bay Commission, which owns and operates the facility, since 1988 to measure and reduce nutrients in the water that comes out of treatment facilities. Engineering professor Vinka Oyanedel-Craver assessed the baseline level of microplastics contamination at the facility. At left, Alicia Lehrer, M.S. '93, executive director of the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council.

“There is really no comparison to the water quality now,” she says. “Until 2015, we had a lot of problems, including sewage from 19 combined sewer overflow pipes along the river.”

THE NARRAGANSETT BAY COMMISSION

Combined sewer systems collect rainwater runoff, domestic sewage, and industrial wastewater in one pipe. Sometimes, during heavy rainfall, the runoff exceeds the pipe's capacity and untreated water flows into nearby water bodies.

Thanks to the Narragansett Bay Commission, which owns and operates Rhode Island's two largest wastewater treatment facilities—Field's Point in Providence and Bucklin Point in East Providence—combined sewage overflow has been greatly diminished. Three major commission projects are noteworthy—a below-ground, 65 million-gallon, 3-mile tunnel that captures and holds sewage for treatment at Field's Point; a system of near-surface pipes along



Ashton Mill on the Blackstone River in Cumberland, R.I., produced muslin from 1867–1935, when it shut down during the Great Depression. The mill building now houses luxury apartments.

“Once rivers are loved and revered, investment follows.”

—ALICIA LEHRER, M.S. '93
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
WOONASQUATUCKET RIVER
WATERSHED COUNCIL

the Seekonk and Woonasquatucket rivers to intercept overflows; and a 2.2-mile, 65 million-gallon tunnel to hold overflow before it gets to the Seekonk River. The commission broke ground on the last of these in 2021. By the completion of the final phase, combined sewage overflow discharges to the rivers are projected to decrease by 93%. Additional projects have reduced nitrogen loads from the Field's Point and Bucklin Point facilities by 83%.

URI oceanography professor Chris Kincaid has worked with the commission since 1998, measuring and modeling the Seekonk and Providence rivers and upper Narragansett Bay, particularly for hypoxia, or low levels of dissolved oxygen. Hypoxia is caused by excessive nutrients, like nitrogen and phosphorous, that lead to aquatic plant blooms and fish kills, like the one in August 2003 on Greenwich Bay, when a million dead fish washed ashore.

“There is a balance,” says Kincaid, who has collected 1 billion data points from the

Seekonk and Providence rivers and the upper bay. “If you don't have enough nitrogen, you starve the things that live in the water. But if you have too much nitrogen, you get a bloom of phytoplankton, algae, and grasses. When that material dies and settles to the bottom, detritivores, the organisms that break down the dead material, suck all the oxygen out of the water.”

“After the Greenwich Bay fish kill, there was a rallying cry that this couldn't happen again, but let's make sure we understand the problem,” Kincaid says. “One of the first things that happened was treatment plants started using three-stage treatments to remove nitrogen from wastewater.”

“Narragansett Bay has one of the most extensive data sets in the world for coastal plumbing, or how water moves and flushes,” says Kincaid. “One of the reasons is the Narragansett Bay Commission's support of science, data, and sound modeling. We have been working to balance ecosystem health with eco-

nomics health, and to do that you need huge amounts of data to build accurate ecosystem modeling tools.

“Our most recent bay circulation models, improved through years of trial-and-error validation steps with data, show that managed nutrient reductions have been successful,” Kincaid says.

His simulations indicate that rivers and offshore intrusions—rather than sewage treatment plant inputs—now have the greatest impact on nutrient levels and blooms in the Providence and Seekonk rivers and in the upper bay.

“Before the 2003 fish kill,” says Kincaid, “treatment plants were discharging at 20 milligrams per liter concentrations for total nitrogen; now the concentration is 5 milligrams per liter coming out of the pipes.”

Such efforts have had significant positive impacts. “Recently, we collected data that showed swimmable water quality at Riverside Park, which is in the heart of Olneyville, a heavily industrialized area,”



The Blackstone River runs through the northeastern corner of Rhode Island and was once referred to as the hardest working river in America because it was home to hundreds of mills. It was also one of the most polluted rivers in the nation. Remediation efforts have made the river cleaner and more hospitable for people and wildlife.

says Lehrer. “The water is not consistently clean enough for swimming, but this was kind of like a miracle.”

A cleaner river has led to almost \$1 billion in investment along the Woonasquatucket’s banks. Such developments as the Foundry Campus—a mixed-use property including residences and offices located in the former home of machine tool manufacturer Brown & Sharpe—now dot the river.

“Once rivers are loved and revered, investment follows,” says Lehrer.

RIVERS FOSTER CIVILIZATION

The region’s Indigenous people have long “loved and revered” local rivers.

Lorén Spears ’89, Hon. ’17, executive director of the Tomaquag Museum and a citizen of the Narragansett tribal nation, says, “We used rivers for transportation to trade and visit with other people. Food sources such as fish, turtles, and mammals were harvested from the rivers and

their banks. We harvested plant matter like bulrush. Its seeds and roots are edible, and we wove stalks of the plant material for mats in our homes.”

The rivers allowed people to move from their winter homes to their summer homes. “We stayed in inland longhouses in the winter, and during the spring and summer we used the rivers to get to our homes near the ocean,” Spears says.

“This traditional ecological knowledge—including food, medicine, technology, and spirituality—of the rivers and other waterways is passed down to our people today,” says Spears. “We share this knowledge through tours at the Tomaquag Museum.”

URI associate professor of geosciences Soni Pradhanang, who takes an interdisciplinary approach to her work on managing water resources and protecting ecosystems, echoes Spears on the centrality of rivers in the lives of ancient people.

“Human civilization owes its start to the rivers of the world,” Pradhanang says. “You can’t irrigate with seawater. It’s no coincidence that the great Mesopotamian and Egyptian cultures developed along the Euphrates and Tigris rivers and the Nile.

“And ancient people lived in or near the rivers’ floodplains,” Pradhanang adds. “When the rivers flooded and receded, they deposited beneficial soils and sediments on the land that the people farmed.”

RIVERS AS ECONOMIC ENGINES

But centuries later, rivers became the engines that transformed Rhode Island into one of the richest states in the nation, as Samuel Slater and other industrialists built water-powered mills on them. Rhode Island’s rivers powered manufacturing giants including Fruit of the Loom, U.S. Rubber, and some of the biggest names in jewelry manufacturing.

The cost, however, was great as rivers became polluted with waste from inad-



Elizabeth Herron ’88, M.A. ’04, director of URI’s Watershed Watch, on a pedestrian bridge that crosses the Saugatucket River in Wakefield, R.I.

quate sewage systems, residential cesspools, and toxins from the mills. The dams built to control water flow to the mills prevented migratory fish from returning to the rivers to spawn.

The revitalization of the state’s rivers in the past half-century is due in large part to the Clean Water Act of 1972, which, according to Elizabeth Herron ’88, M.A. ’04, director of URI’s Watershed Watch, required mills to pay for their pollution. The act empowered the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to implement wastewater standards for industry and made it unlawful to discharge pollutants into navigable waters without an EPA permit.

Herron, like Lehrer, observes that the economy is strengthened when rivers, along with their affiliated ponds and surrounding lands, are clean.

“Canoeing, kayaking, fishing, and other recreational activities have increased because water is cleaner,” says

Herron. “People are buying and renting boats, kayaks, and fishing gear.”

And the state’s bike paths, several of which run along rivers, including the Blackstone, Woonasquatucket, Pawtuxet, Ten Mile, and Saugatucket, “have led to more businesses that recognize the beauty and value of the bike paths and rivers,” Herron says. “Along the Washington Secondary Bike Path near Route 117 in West Warwick, ice cream and breakfast places have oriented their stores to take advantage of the bike path and the nearby Pawtuxet River.”

And cleaner rivers are not just good for business. “Eels, herring, eagles, beavers, otters, egrets, herons, and mink have returned to the rivers,” Herron says, adding that there are more trees lining rivers across Rhode Island today than there were 100 years ago.

“Forests and their accompanying leaf litter slow and filter rainwater as it moves to lakes, ponds, and rivers,” Herron says.

URI ENGINEERS AND SCIENTISTS HELP ESTABLISH CLEANER RIVERS

URI’s involvement in revitalizing the state’s rivers goes back decades. Raymond Wright, emeritus dean of the College of Engineering, worked closely with the EPA on a comprehensive report in 2001 after 10 years of study, showing the Blackstone River’s water quality had improved greatly. His Blackstone River Initiative report has been used as a model for other river studies. Wright conducted studies on the levels of nutrients, like phosphorous and nitrogen, as well as heavy metals like mercury, chromium, and lead in many of the state’s rivers.

“We collected data, which agencies like the EPA and DEM could use to develop regulations and water quality standards,” Wright says.

“Ray was a great supporter and mentor to me,” says Vinka Oyanedel-Craver, associate dean for research and professor of civil and environmental engineering—and one of the principal investigators with URI’s Water for the World Initiative. “I inherited his lab when I started at URI.”

One of her newest research projects involves working with the R.I. Department of Transportation (DOT) on street sweeping. Oyanedel-Craver calls the project a “nonstructural alternative” to addressing pollution in storm runoff.

“We are looking at the amount of dust and sand on the state’s roads and analyzing what is in those materials that could enter rivers, streams, and the bay,” she says. “DOT came to us for assistance in determining a schedule that would help reduce the load of pollutants entering bodies of water in an effective and economical way.”

She says sources of contaminants on the state’s roads include car exhaust particles and materials from tire and brake decay.

Pradhanang also notes Wright’s influence. “When I led the Scituate Reservoir safe yield research in 2017,” she says, “I contacted Ray to learn about the Scituate reservoirs and their hydrodynamics. He is rich in information and is always eager to talk about science related to rivers and reservoirs. The background he provided helped us with our project.”



Samantha Jackson '22, director of education for the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council and Captain Joe Walkden, M.S. '98, on the Blackstone Valley Explorer Riverboat.

Wright's late colleague, professor emeritus of chemical engineering Stanley Barnett, and former chemical engineering research professor Eugene Park, Ph.D. '94, received the Narragansett Bay Commission's 2011 Pollution Prevention Environmental Merit Award for their work on finding sustainable, cost-effective solutions to environmental problems.

Barnett and Park helped Rhode Island businesses reduce and prevent pollution for 25 years and served as pro bono engineering consultants to more than 500 companies. They worked closely with the DEM, Narragansett Bay Commission, and the EPA to resolve pollution problems in industries such as metal finishing, textiles, and auto body repair.

A MORE SUSTAINABLE APPROACH TO TEXTILES

Textile mills and other factories were prime sources of river pollution, but URI textiles professor emeritus Martin Bide conducted research to help the industry

reduce pollution. Now, Professor Karl Aspelund of URI's Department of Textiles, Fashion Merchandising and Design aims to work with a still-thriving—albeit, smaller—textile industry to reduce pollution.

"I am planning a long-term, multidisciplinary project that will, if successful, create a model for how to run a textile manufacturing operation with a minimal ecological footprint," Aspelund says. "A textile mill in nearby Massachusetts has agreed to open its doors to us completely so a team can conduct business and engineering analyses and assess the mill's wastewater treatment and environmental impact. It will be broad research that will also look at the sociological impacts on the community."

The team will work on a manufacturing model that puts less waste into the air, water, and landfills and fewer plastic particles into the environment. Aspelund says it's a winning proposition for the mills, including the handful of textile operations still running in

Rhode Island, because they could end up with a model for how to "continue to manufacture for generations to come in a way that is ecologically sound."

Aspelund's project will include scientists who investigate groundwater and soil contamination. "This team has already developed an interesting way of using plant life, mainly trees, as biofiltration devices," says Aspelund. "We're hoping to get them in there to check the state of the soil and water around the plant, and to then work with local flora to clean the area—and keep it clean."

IN THE BLACKSTONE VALLEY

The 48-mile Blackstone River, which runs from Worcester, Mass., to Pawtucket, R.I., was once commonly referred to as the hardest working river in America because it was home to hundreds of mills.

Pollutants from the mills and other sources had, for many years, turned the river into an open sewer. The river was acidic—harmful for the ecosystem. "But

now the water quality has improved greatly," says Samantha Jackson '22, director of education for the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, adding that it has "a perfect pH, between 6 and 7."

"I take a lot of seniors, people in their 80s and 90s, out on the river for tours, and they tell me you couldn't go out on the river when they were young because it smelled so bad," says Jackson, who leads tours on the Blackstone Valley Explorer riverboat. "The river was so polluted, and you couldn't get a canoe in the river because there was so much trash. The seniors tell me the river ran from pink to purple and red to orange depending on the dyes being used in the textile factories."

"Our boat captains have been with us a long time, and they are seeing more and more wildlife, such as great blue herons," Jackson says. "I saw a mated pair of eagles fishing in the river in Pawtucket."

Central Falls Landing, a public space and dock where the tourism council is located, has become a gathering place where people launch canoes and kayaks. Like the Woonasquatucket, a prettier and cleaner Blackstone has spawned businesses like Shark's Peruvian Cuisine, a bustling restaurant with an outdoor seating area overlooking the river.

ONE WATER

Researchers and advocates, whether talking about rivers, streams, harbors, or the ocean—all emphasize a critical point: All water is connected.

"Water is a big repository," says Oyanedel-Craver. "Everything we use, from plastics to fertilizers, shows up in the water—including medicines. I learned from a mentor that everyone is downstream, and there is only one water."

"Rhode Island is called the Ocean State," says Herron, "but we have to remember that anything that enters the rivers winds up in the ocean."

Jackson makes that point when talking about the 19 dams along the Blackstone River. "They can't be taken down because that would release poisonous sediment containing a variety of toxins into the river, and then, eventually, into the bay."

"People should stop thinking, 'seacoast, oceans, rivers, streams,'" says Jackson. "It's one water, one ocean." 🌊



Andrew McNulty, M.E.S.M. '22, takes soil samples for a 2021 Department of Natural Resources Science project that mapped hundreds of acres of wetlands along the Pawcatuck River, which flows from Worden Pond in South Kingstown, R.I., to Stonington, Connecticut. Below the Blackstone River flows over a dam between Lincoln and Cumberland, R.I.



“People should stop thinking, ‘seacoast, oceans, rivers, streams.’ It’s one water, one ocean.”

—SAMANTHA JACKSON '22
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, BLACKSTONE
VALLEY TOURISM COUNCIL

WORKING FOR RHODE ISLAND RIVERS

By Dave Lavallee '79, M.P.A. '87



ON THE MAP

URI researchers are a force for good when it comes to Rhode Island's rivers—from the Blackstone to the Saugatucket. Here's a look at some of that work and where it's happening.

1
WHERE: Blackstone, Pawtuxet, Pawcatuck, Saugatucket, and Seekonk rivers; Newport Harbor
WHAT: Long-term testing for nutrients (phosphorus, nitrogen) and heavy metals (mercury, lead). Collaboration with EPA on a 2001 report on Blackstone River water quality improvements.
WHO: Raymond Wright, emeritus dean, College of Engineering
IMPACT: Results used by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and R.I. Department of Environmental Management to set water quality/pollution standards.

2
WHERE: Blackstone River, Roger Williams Park, Flat River Reservoir, Worden Pond, Belleville Pond, and statewide
WHAT: The first systematic baseline assessment of plastic waste in the state's freshwater systems, including a focused study on the Blackstone River.
WHO: Sarah Davis, Ph.D student; Andrew Davies, professor of biological sciences and oceanography; Coleen Suckling, assistant professor of fisheries, animal and veterinary science; Elizabeth Herron '88, M.A.' 04, director of URI's Watershed Watch.
IMPACT: This survey will facilitate research and management to reduce plastic waste in watersheds and drinking water.

3
WHERE: Blackstone River
WHAT: A student-led project produced a report on improving river access for the city of Woonsocket.
WHO: Will Green, professor emeritus of landscape architecture
IMPACT: The report supports active redevelopment efforts aiming to improve access to and from the river at city parks including Thundermist Falls and River Island Park.

STATEWIDE

WHAT: Some 350 URI Watershed Watch (WW) volunteers gather water samples from 220 locations statewide, including rivers. Samples are analyzed and recorded by WW.
WHO: Elizabeth Herron '88, M.A.' 04, director, URI Watershed Watch; student lab technicians
IMPACT: WW has 35 years of water-quality data, which is used to monitor conditions and trends, and is used by researcher partners to encourage sound management programs.

4
WHERE: Seekonk River and Henderson Bridge Corridor
WHAT: Student-led projects on natural restoration and filter systems for land along the Seekonk River in East Providence and Providence, as well as alternative river crossings, and improved river access.
WHO: Will Green, professor emeritus of landscape architecture
IMPACT: The students and the project's clients—the Seekonk Riverbank Revitalization Alliance and the planning departments in Providence and East Providence—received the 2020 student award from the American Planning Association's Rhode Island chapter.

5
WHERE: Providence and Seekonk rivers, Upper Narragansett Bay
WHAT: River modeling and data collection showing how nutrient levels, rainfall, water temperature, and flow impact estuarine ecosystems. Assessing impacts of natural versus human nutrient inputs, and remediation successes.
WHO: Chris Kincaid, professor of oceanography
IMPACT: Data gathered since 1998 has informed Narragansett Bay Commission decisions regarding sewage treatment infrastructure and processes.

6
WHERE: Chipuxet River, Field's Point Wastewater Treatment Facility (Providence)
WHAT: Assessing microplastics and microfiber contamination in small water utilities and private wells.
WHO: Vinka Oyanedel-Craver, associate dean of research and professor of civil and environmental engineering
IMPACT: Determined the baseline levels of microplastics contamination in Field's Point Wastewater Treatment plant and URI Kingston Campus water wells.

7
WHERE: Scituate Reservoir (Gainer Dam)
WHAT: Assessing the dam's ability to withstand seismic activity.
WHO: Aaron Bradshaw, professor of civil and environmental engineering
IMPACT: The Scituate Reservoir supplies drinking water to 60% of the state. Bradshaw's analysis suggested the dam could withstand seismic activity at the levels most likely to occur in the region.

WHAT: Historical and material research on antique quilts Rhode Island.
WHO: Professor of textiles, fashion merchandising and design Linda Welters and Margaret Ordoñez (emerita)
IMPACT: Their book, *Down By the Old Mill Stream: Quilts in Rhode Island*, documents their research and details about R.I.'s textile industry and rivers.

8
WHERE: Pawcatuck River (Potter Hill Dam)
WHAT: Researching the potential hydrogeologic impacts of removing Potter Hill Dam, the last dam left intact on the Pawcatuck River.
WHO: Soni Pradhanang, associate professor of hydrology and water quality and Thomas Boving, professor and department chair, geosciences
IMPACT: Potter Hill Dam is in disrepair and is a barrier to fish passage. Removing it and returning the Pawcatuck River to its natural flow could have positive environmental impacts, while a dam failure may affect properties and businesses up- and downstream. This research will look at the big picture and make recommendations for maximizing benefits and minimizing potential damages.

9
WHERE: Saugatucket River
WHAT: Student-led projects on improving river access and providing green infrastructure.
WHO: Will Green, professor emeritus of landscape architecture
IMPACT: The project led to a historic renovation of Saugatucket Park in Wakefield and continues to be used by the town for planning purposes.

10
WHERE: Pawcatuck River
WHAT: Identifying sources of PFAS and researching river dynamics from source to estuary.
WHO: Rainer Lohmann, professor of oceanography
IMPACT: Data identified waste lagoons as a key source of PFAS that end up in the river.

11
WHERE: Scituate Reservoir, Pawtuxet River watershed, Wood Pawcatuck watershed, salt ponds, and statewide
WHAT: Developing models that predict how watersheds, rivers, and groundwater react to flooding and storm surges.
WHO: Soni Pradhanang, associate professor of hydrology and water quality
IMPACT: Models have led to better management of the Scituate Reservoir, reduced flooding downstream, and more accurate evaluation of the impact of storm surges on groundwater wells.

WHAT: Collaboration with the URI Center for Pollution Prevention to help companies reduce and prevent river pollution from 1987–2012.
WHO: Eugene Park, Ph.D. '94, and the late Stanley Barnett, professors of chemical engineering
IMPACT: Resolved many pollution problems for industries like metal finishing, textiles, seafood processing, and auto repair.

What Does Social Justice Have to Do with Evolution?



Integrating Racial Justice Into Your High-School Biology Classroom: Using Evolution to Understand Diversity
David Upegui and David E. Fastovsky (2023)

Designed as a practical manual for teaching concepts of equity through evolutionary biology, the book offers context on the historical relationship between science and racism and includes lesson plans and classroom exercises.



Every-thing.



Award-winning Central Falls High School biology teacher David Upegui, Ph.D. '21, teamed up with URI paleontologist David Fastovsky to write a book aimed at helping teachers incorporate social justice into the biology curriculum.

By Dawn Bergantino '94

David Upegui, Ph.D. '21, was conducting public health research at Brown University with plans to pursue his Ph.D. in epidemiology. When his son was born with Down syndrome in 2004, his plans changed. The son of a teacher, Upegui grew up valuing academic achievement but began to shift focus from his own development to that of his son. He began taking courses in education to help ensure he provided his son with the best set of opportunities he could.

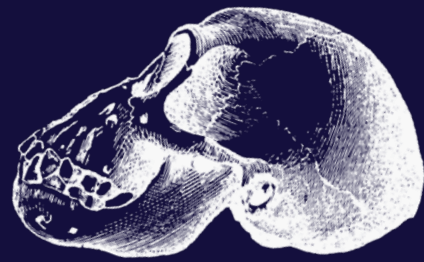
In 2010, then-U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's efforts to remake failing schools resulted in the wide-scale firing of teachers in school districts across the country, including Upegui's alma mater, Central Falls High School, which made

national news when it fired all of its teachers. That's when Upegui felt a calling. He took a significant pay cut and put his plans to get a Ph.D. on hold to return to Central Falls as a high school biology teacher.

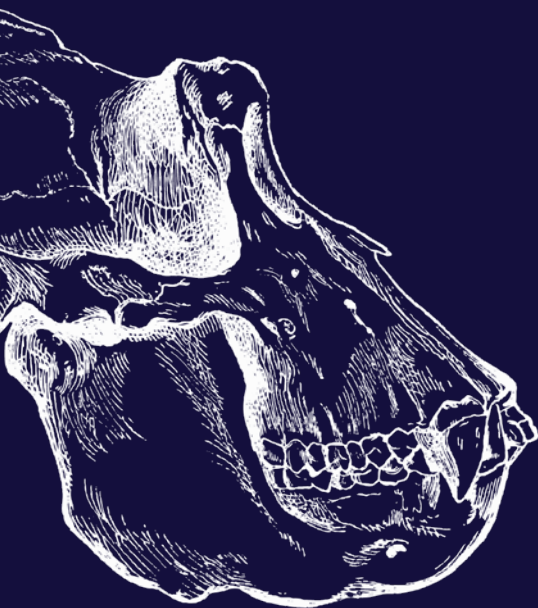
Upegui explains his decision, quoting Gandhi: "One has to speak out and stand up for one's convictions. Inaction at a time of conflagration is inexcusable."

And the now-award-winning teacher has done just that. Just a little over a decade later, Upegui has not only earned a Ph.D., fulfilling a promise he made to himself and his first mentor at Brown not to let this mission-driven adventure derail his own education, but he has also coauthored a book—





Central Falls High School (CFHS) made national news when it fired all of its teachers. David Upegui felt a calling and changed his career path to teach biology at CFHS.



his first academic one—that could very well change the way we think about and teach high school biology.

The book, *Integrating Racial Justice Into Your High-School Biology Classroom: Using Evolution to Understand Diversity*, details how, at points in history, science has been used to reinforce racism. The book provides a blueprint for integrating the study of racial justice with evolutionary biology in the high school biology curriculum. And, importantly, it is also a model for using rigorous science education to help liberate and personally empower students.



“To understand why this is so powerful, you really have to know who David Upegui is and what he has done,” says Upegui’s coauthor David Fastovsky, a URI professor emeritus. He is “a Latino whose

mother kept her family alive by cleaning hotels, but who ultimately found his calling and became as good at what he does—teaching science—as the very best in America.”

The son of immigrants, Upegui moved to the United States from Colombia when he was 10. While he had taught intermittently at the college level, the thought of leaving Brown to teach high school was unnerving. He was encouraged by his mentor, the late Professor Tom Lasater from Brown University, to follow this path to which he was so strongly drawn. But they agreed he had a responsibility to himself, his family, and his community to earn his Ph.D.—even if it was not in epidemiology.

In the fall of 2010, Upegui began teaching high school science at Central Falls High School. While the large classes and lack of resources typical of an urban school district were challenging, he found



David Upegui (left) and David Fastovsky in Upegui’s Central Falls High School classroom. They wrote and received a grant to purchase the skulls.

no lack of talent or eagerness among his students. Early in his teaching career, he helped one of his students successfully apply to Brown University’s Program in Liberal Medical Education, an eight-year combined bachelor’s-M.D. program. The excitement surrounding the young man’s acceptance into the program buoyed the entire community.

There were acceptances to other highly respected colleges and universities. Yet, at the same time, there were students who felt discouraged from pursuing their ambitions, believing themselves inherently unable to achieve.

While working to dispel this belief among his high school students, Upegui found himself teaching a URI course on evolutionary theory for practicing teachers. That’s how he met Fastovsky, a renowned paleontologist and professor of geosciences in URI’s College of the Environment and Life Sciences. After

putting Upegui through his paces to assess his knowledge of evolutionary theory, Fastovsky struck up a conversation with Upegui about how science should be taught.

That led to more conversations and eventually—at Fastovsky’s urging—they wrote a successful grant proposal to the Paleontological Society that would enable Upegui to acquire animal skulls for his Central Falls students to study.

Upegui recalls that Fastovsky asked him, “What’s one thing—as a high school teacher—you’ve always wanted to do, but couldn’t?”

And Upegui had an answer. “One of the things I’ve always wanted to do is have my students work with actual animal skulls and figure out, based on the morphology, how they evolved and what the connections are between different animals.”

“So, we wrote the grant. And we got the grant. And we got the skulls. And I

thought to myself, ‘Yeah, I mean, the skulls are just the beginning, but I need you,’” Upegui says, referring to Fastovsky, who was integral to that first success.



From there, Fastovsky began visiting Upegui’s high school classroom. Upegui says, “He is truly a brilliant human being, but he is also very down-to-earth. When he came to Central Falls to speak to my students, he would speak to them in Spanish—and you could see their faces light up. He has this charisma about him. And I started noticing that something else was happening.”

Upegui knew he was working with smart, talented students—some of whom were hesitant to reach too high. But what he began to notice was how positively his students were responding to Fastovsky—he saw their promise and he didn’t look at

“Who is to say that in front of me right now, I don’t have the next Albert Einstein or Sonia Sotomayor?”

—David Upegui, Ph.D. '21



them any differently. “Education should be about increasing students’ ability to make decisions that positively affect them and the people they care about—not just about content delivery,” he says. “I feel very strongly that our students will have to learn to deal with the problems that they will, sadly, inherit—a hotter planet, an overpopulated planet, a planet full of political strife.

“Undereducating any of the students I have in front of me doesn’t just rob them or their community, it robs humanity,” continues Upegui. “Who is to say that in front of me right now, I don’t have the next Albert Einstein or Sonia Sotomayor? And Fastovsky understood that from the very beginning—so not only did he come with the content knowledge, but his visits were full of that demeanor and approach. He got it.”

In 2015, Upegui began a joint URI/Rhode Island College doctoral program

in education at URI’s Alan Shawn Feinstein College of Education and asked Fastovsky to be his major professor—even though Fastovsky was in a different college. Though not something that commonly happens at the graduate level, Fastovsky accepted, and the two got to work right away.

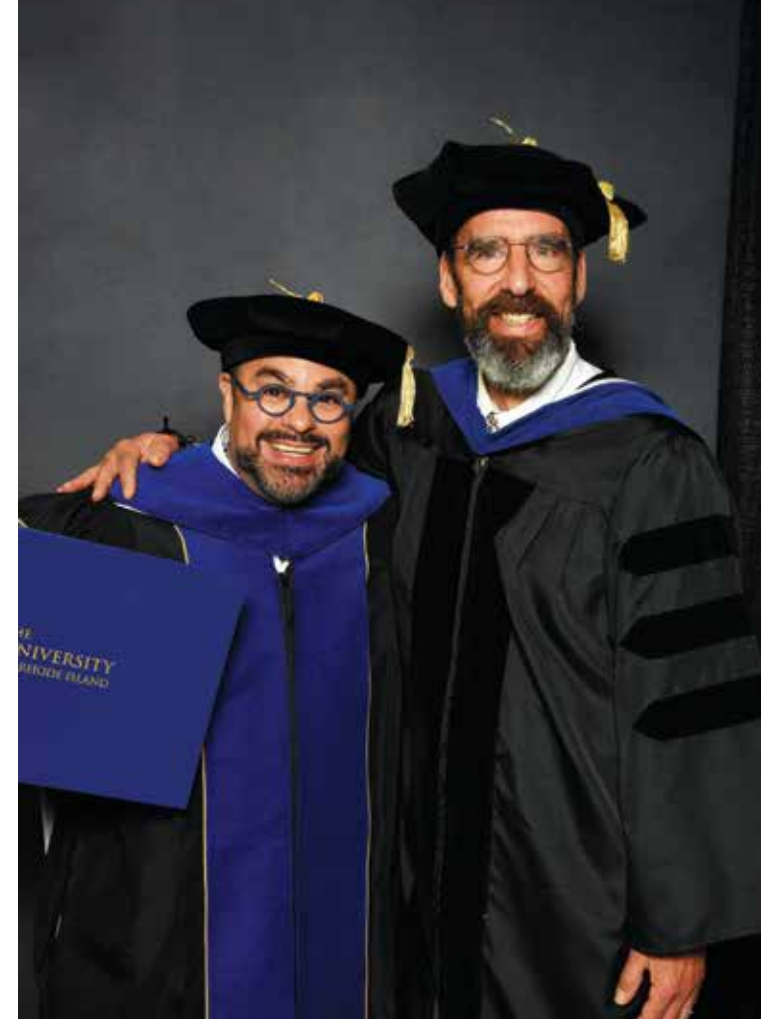
“He asked me to read a lot—both about evolution and about American history,” says Upegui. “We exchanged a lot of information.”

As they worked together, Upegui shared his experience as a high school teacher—not just the challenges he faced in a cash-strapped, urban school district, but also the highs and lows of working with truly exceptional students who he felt had been conditioned to feel “less-than” because of the color of their skin or the neighborhood in which they grew up. He felt strongly that evolutionary biology—which clearly shows there is only

one human species and no genetically meaningful human subspecies—had a role to play in dispelling these myths and empowering students.

“I don’t know how else to put this,” says Upegui, “but learning about evolution and the fact that humans are one species, that we are all related to each other, that those phenotypical differences among people are not related to intelligence or capacity, is a way to take action against the social injustices of our world.”

If science is the answer, he also points out that at periods in history it has been part of the problem—citing the work of scientists like Carolus Linnaeus, whose development of scientific taxonomy is often cited as having laid the groundwork for racism in science, or Louis Agassiz, whose theories about polygenism have sometimes been used to support scientific racism—as examples. Upegui notes that science requires interpretation and is, therefore, susceptible to



David Upegui (left) with his major professor, David Fastovsky, at Upegui’s graduation. He received his doctoral degree in education from URI in 2021.

human error. Historically, he says, practitioners of racism have sought to root their political and social agendas in a scientific foundation. Teaching students about these transgressions motivates and sparks their inquisitiveness.

At first, he and Fastovsky tried to incorporate these ideas into an editorial that was submitted to several science-education publications. Fastovsky says, “It was very enlightening and, regrettably, disappointing. The editors either couldn’t understand the message or watered it down so that it was no longer what we were trying to say.”

While the time they spent discussing and refining their ideas didn’t result in a published editorial, it did lead Upegui to the idea that became the basis of his dissertation: Incorporating social justice into the high school biology curriculum is not only effective in inspiring students to learn, it is a moral imperative.

“The first part of his dissertation was like a manifesto,” says Fastovsky. “It was about

how science has been oppressive at points in history—and why oppressive science is not good science. And, actually, good science—far from being oppressive—is liberating. And I said to him, ‘Forget about the dissertation, we’re writing a book.’”



While Upegui did finish the dissertation, the duo also forged ahead with turning it into a book. The book builds on both the history and moral imperative and incorporates lessons from educators already integrating social justice into high school biology classrooms.

Upegui, whose students are primarily from minority communities and are often the sons and daughters of immigrants—or immigrants themselves—sees firsthand the empowering effects of teaching evolution and racial justice.

“Once students understand evolution and that we are all connected to everything on Earth, that we all descend from a

END GAME

How many did you guess correctly? The skulls pictured on the back cover are:

- | | |
|------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Gorilla | 5. Human |
| 2. Marten | 6. Squirrel |
| 3. Cat | 7. Gorilla (juvenile) |
| 4. Horse | 8. Lion |



small stock of humans that arose in Africa, and that skin pigmentation patterns are related to UV radiation and have nothing to do with intelligence—building that understanding and knowing science is about empowerment,” he says. “And learning the scientific method—the idea of doing research and really thinking about it, is useful in other places. So, it’s not just in the classroom that they are going to use this ability to discern and to organize their data. Engaging in evidence-based argument is going to be helpful no matter what.”

Fastovsky agrees. “One of the things we’ve learned in this, and that I’ve said for a long time, is that the critical thinking required for doing science is the exact same critical thinking that is required for doing anything else. If you can get people to think about what they do and why they do it—and get them to think critically—well, you just might come up with some solutions to currently intractable problems.

“Kids at this age are very smart and they’re very open. And what they are open to are solutions to some of the obvious problems they are encountering in life—but they aren’t so jaded yet as to believe there are no solutions,” asserts Fastovsky, adding, “David Upegui will tell you that the solution to the problem is education—and I think that has to be right.”



Their Mission: Mental Health Support with No Handoffs

Steve and Jill Miskelley founded Be Better; after losing their son to mental illness in 2020. The organization is focused on providing immediate and ongoing support, navigation, and education for people in need of mental health care—and for their families and communities.

By Lauren Rebecca Thacker

If there is one thing that Steve Miskelley '93 and Jill Miskelley '93 want parents to know, it's this: "You know your kid better than anybody. If you see that they need help, advocate for them. It doesn't matter how successful they seem or how high functioning they are. Success can't heal what's inside."

Steve and Jill's story started when they met at URI Orientation. They were both members of the International Engineering Program's (IEP) inaugural class. The new program allowed students to earn dual degrees—a B.S. in engineering and a B.A. in German (it has since expanded to offer five other languages). Despite the fact that neither knew a word of German, Steve and Jill decided to go for it. Many German companies were known for their precision engineering, they reasoned, and the opportunity to have an engineering internship in another country appealed to them.

Pursuing the same program meant they would be spending a lot of time together, though the reason that their schedules ended up so synced still causes a light-hearted disagreement.

"It was not by design," Steve says. "Jill will tell you I was too busy having fun to make my own schedule."

Laughing, Jill says, "That's exactly what happened! Back then, all the courses were on paper and you registered by standing in a long line. I skipped an orientation mixer so I could review the course catalog and figure out my schedule. When the morning came and it was time to get in the registration line, Steve hadn't picked any classes. So, I let him copy my schedule, and we ended up in all the same classes for our first two years."

Pursuing the dual degree, not to mention undertaking an internship entirely in their non-native language, was a lot of work. But Steve and Jill stuck with it and completed the program. They married and settled in Holland, Mich., where they raised their children, Chelsea and Ian.



Steve and Jill Miskelley with a photo of their son Ian. They founded *Be Better*; in Ian's memory.

“We don't hand people off, we follow up.”

—Steve Miskelley

Working hard toward a goal became something of a family trait: Chelsea is in medical school and, before his death, Ian was one of the nation's top-ranked swimmers and studied at the University of Michigan.



Ian also lived with depression, which began when he was around 11 years old. Jill says his struggles made Ian especially compassionate and that coaches and teammates often remarked on his habit of checking in on someone who might be having a tough day. Ian—and his family—worked to manage his mental health care, but they often faced gaps in care or roadblocks to treatments. He died by suicide in 2020.

After Ian's death, Steve and Jill were determined to create something meaningful in his honor.

They met Michael Brashears, a psychologist with extensive experience in clinical and family psychology. They were impressed by his caregiving skills and connected with him over shared experiences: Like them, Brashears has New England roots and knows what it is like to lose a loved one to suicide.

As time passed, Steve says, “We started to get more energy and even became a little excited about the idea of building something. The three of us got together and laid out a vision for what we wanted to do. The first thing we knew we needed to do was fill the gaps in a system that is fragmented. When we sought care for Ian, we found a series of hurdles and handoffs.”

Together, Steve, Jill, and Brashears founded *Be Better*; to provide education and support for individuals in need of mental health treatment and, importantly, their families and communities.

People who contact the nonprofit will get a callback within hours and can receive therapist recommendations, treatment suggestions, and general guidance. Brashears does not provide diagnoses but can make assessments and call on his decades of experience to answer questions. *Be Better*; will even provide transportation to appointments if needed.

In addition to one-on-one support, *Be Better*; offers virtual support groups for adults, young adults, and teens, as well as an educational series on topics including athletes and mental health, navigating the mental health system, and supporting a loved one with mental illness.

“We don't hand people off, we follow up,” says Steve. “We check in regularly, asking ‘Are you getting what you need?’ or ‘Is this therapist a good fit?’ With Ian, we didn't have someone shepherding us through this whole process. Providing that for others is the single most important piece of work we're doing right now.”



Jill imagines what it might have been like for their family if an organization like *Be Better*; had been available.

“There were so many times I would drop Ian off at swimming and know that something was wrong,” she says. “I'd wonder, ‘What's the right thing to say? What's the wrong thing? Am I just overreacting?’ Or his medication would be increased and I'd see it wasn't working, but there was no way to follow up with the doctor for weeks. *Be Better*; can act as an objective resource for answering questions and making connections, for everyone involved in care.”

The whole-family approach is reflected in all aspects of the organization. Ian's older sister, Chelsea Garcia, contributes to *Be Better*; while she is in medical school, and the organization's name comes from a eulogy that Steve's brother gave at Ian's funeral.

“He said, ‘Ian made us better by knowing him. That was his greatest superpower.’

So *be better*, make his memory matter,” Steve says. “So, that became our rallying cry. We're trying to make things better for people who are struggling and families trying to navigate the medical system. We included the semicolon in the name because for people in the mental health community, it's a significant symbol for mental health awareness and suicide prevention.”



After a career in education, Jill devotes her time to *Be Better*; Steve works in technical sales and calls on his engineering experience every day.

“The IEP has been the primary driver of my career,” says Steve. “I worked for German and Austrian companies, and speaking German gave me a lot of credibility and the opportunity to connect culturally with my colleagues. Especially in technical discussions, being able to communicate exactly as you want is so important.”

When they were in college, Steve and Jill were busy with academics, internships, and activities, including Greek life. That's why, for Jill, the memories of downtime together stand out.

“We were stuck in the computer lab all the time,” she remembers. “But I think our favorite place to go was the Quad. We'd just sit on the benches and laugh together.”

Steve and Jill laugh when they talk about Ian, too, remembering his sarcastic sense of humor and how he'd watch *Family Guy* and poke fun at his family's Rhode Island accents.

“He was compassionate, kind, humorous, and unapologetically himself,” Jill says. “We recently went to an event with his team at the University of Michigan, and one of his coaches said that as many times as Ian got knocked down, he'd get up—again and again. Thinking of that, some days, helps me get through what we're doing.”

“Ian's perseverance is what drives us,” says Steve. ☺

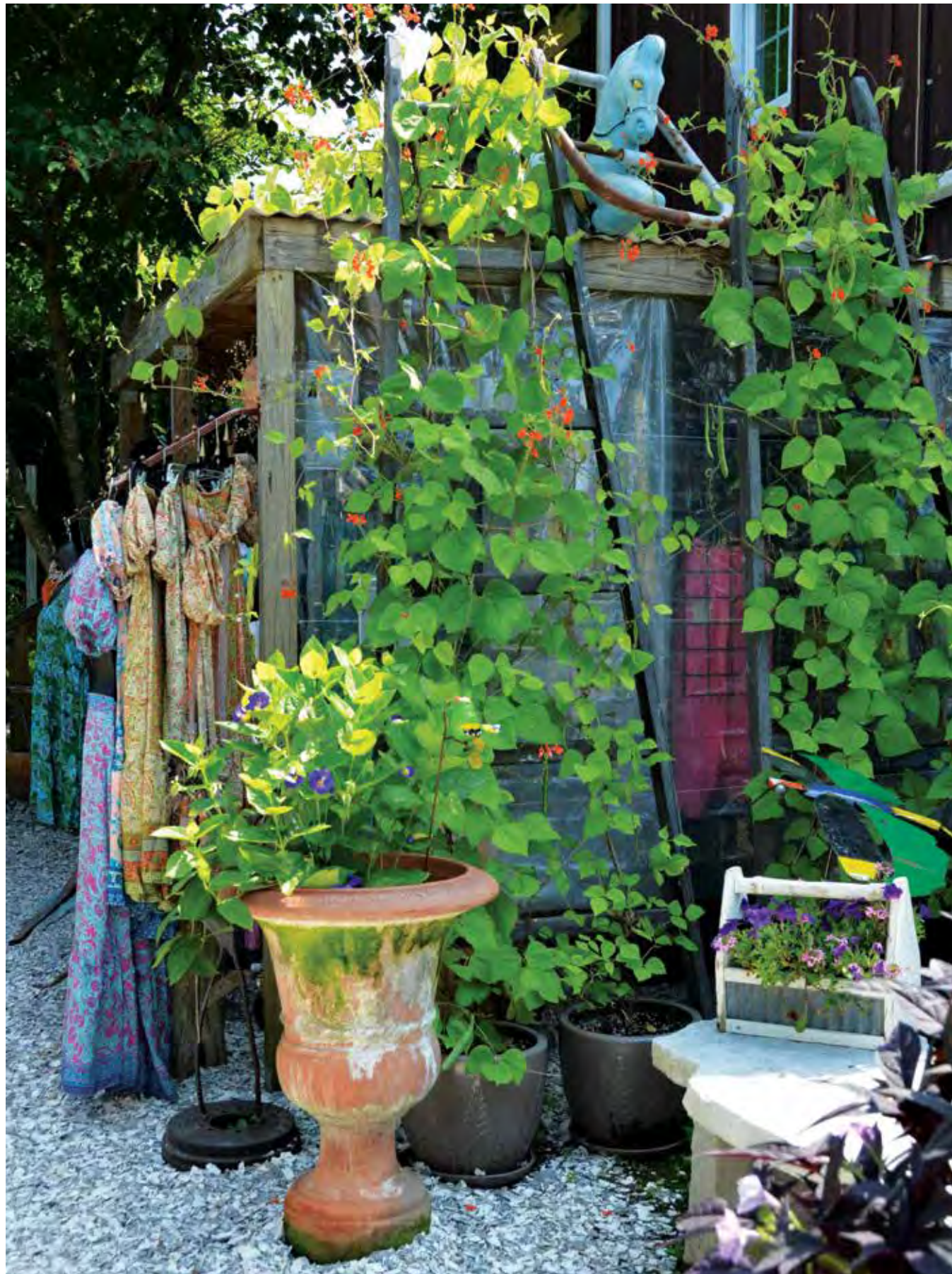
The Semicolon

Grammatically, a semicolon implies a continuation, rather than an end. It has been adopted, often as a tattoo, to represent hope, strength, and solidarity in the face of suicide, depression, and other mental health issues.

Ian Miskelley had a semicolon tattoo on his wrist, and for the Miskelleys, it was important to incorporate the symbol into their organization's name. “We are striving to *Be Better*; to make Ian's memory live on and continue what he was working towards.”

If you are in crisis, please call, text, or chat with the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at **988**, or contact the Crisis Text Line by texting **HOME** to **741741**.

To learn more about *Be Better*; visit bebetterholland.com.



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 or online at 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.

SCENIC ROUTE

THE FANTASTIC UMBRELLA FACTORY

Opposite page: **Ellen Pratte '77** shot this photo at the Fantastic Umbrella Factory in Charlestown, R.I., which, as Pratte says, is "much-loved by URI students." It is 20 minutes from URI's Kingston Campus and is a fun retail spot with beautiful gardens, lots of chickens roaming freely, and even an emu.

After completing her bachelor's degree in psychology at URI, Pratte received a master's degree in clinical psychology from UMass Dartmouth and worked for most of her career as a case worker for the state of Massachusetts in the field of mental health. For the last decade, she has been pursuing photography and has participated in many juried gallery shows.

Pratte, who lives in Portsmouth, R.I., says, "I visit the Fantastic Umbrella Factory every summer. It maintains its hippie vibe with its beautiful gardens and rustic buildings where you can buy blown glass, jewelry, clothes, penny candy, etc."

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 and we will consider all submissions for publication in future issues of URI Magazine.

1961



Lynda Wells was recognized in 2022 by Marquis Who's Who for excellence in alternative medicine. After URI,

Wells earned a Ph.D. in biology, leading to a 26-year career as a certified nutrition specialist and founder of Wellspring Integrated Health Care. There she harnessed her expertise in alternative medicine and nutrition to provide natural therapies for emotional problems as well as various autoimmune, gut, allergy, and inflammatory disorders. Now in retirement, she plans to share her approach to natural health care through written works.

1974

Bob Lorentson has published his second collection of humorous and thought-provoking essays and stories. "YOU ONLY GO EXTINCT ONCE (Stuck in the Anthropocene with the Pleistocene Blues Again)" not only shows us the natural world, but how hysterically far from the natural world humans have come. Sometimes, when you find yourself at an evolutionary dead end, all you can do is laugh.

1977



Michael Morrow was recently named the non-executive chair of the board of Cabot Corporation, a

global chemical company based in Boston. He is also the chair of the Financial Accounting Standards Advisory Council, an advisory group to the Financial Accounting Standards Board. He and his wife Carole split their time between Roswell, Ga. and Nantucket, Mass.

1982

Kevin Murphy Jr. is joining the board of directors for Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island. He and his wife Joanne recently established the Joanne H. & Kevin L. Murphy Jr. '82 Endowed Scholarship Fund to support a full-time sophomore, junior, senior, or graduate student in the College of Business who has demonstrated superior academic achievement and substantive academic, volunteer, and/or work experience in sustainability and environmental issues.

1971

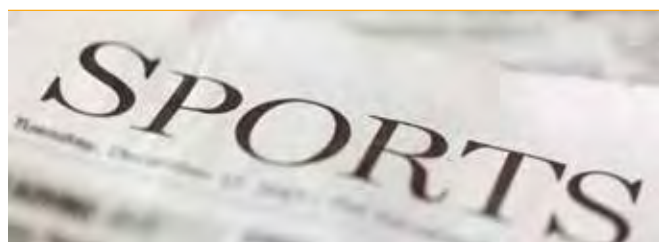
John Boulmetis '71, M.A. '73, was inducted to the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame in Oct. 2023. Located at the University of Oklahoma, the hall of fame honors leaders in continuing



IN THE BAND

Scott Travers '18 and **Samantha Hackenson '19** represented Rhode Island in the 400-member Band Directors Marching Band, which participated in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in November 2023. Travers is music director at St. Michael's Country Day School in Newport, R.I., and Hackenson is a music teacher for North Providence (R.I.) Public Schools. Both are active in several local bands and music organizations.

David Sousa retired after 34 years as a professor in the Department of Politics and Government at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Wash. He won multiple teaching awards and co-authored a book published by MIT Press that won a prize from the American Political Science Association. He plans to continue writing and hiking and traveling the American West and the world. At home, he'll read, play music, and hang with his partner of 34 years and his new retirement puppy, Hazel.



SPORTSWRITERS OF THE YEAR

Two members of *The Providence Journal* sports staff were named Sportswriters of the Year by the National Sports Media Association. **Eric Rueb '03**, who has worked for *The Providence Journal* since 2018, was named Rhode Island Sportswriter of the Year. **Jacob Rousseau '19** was named Vermont Sportswriter of the Year. Rousseau worked at Vermont's *Burlington Free Press* until January 2024, when he joined the *Providence Journal* sports staff.

1983



Alan Steinman, M.S. '83, (botany) was appointed to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Science Advisory Board (SAB) Ecosystem Sciences and Management Working Group, one of five working groups that compose the SAB. Steinman is the former director and currently the Hunting Research Professor at Grand Valley State University's R.B. Annis Water Resources Institute in Muskegon, Mich.

1997



Kerri E. (Kaletski) Lanzieri of Smithfield R.I., was recently selected as the 2023 School Social Worker of the Year by the Rhode Island chapter of the National Association of Social Workers. She was honored at the annual awards celebration in Nov. 2023. She and her therapy dog Gillette work with students in the Cranston Public Schools.

1998



Kerri (Hopkins) Friel '98, M.A. '05, was elected in July 2023 to the board of directors of the Dental Assisting National Board (DANB), the national certification board for dental assistants. Friel and the other directors will guide DANB on advancing its strategic initiatives, including addressing the dental assistant workforce shortage and other issues critical to the profession.

Jayne E. Pawasauskas, Pharm.D. '98, joined the board of directors of PACE-RI, a nonprofit health plan for adults 55 and older who have chronic or complex health needs and wish to remain living at home. Pawasauskas is a clinical professor at the URI College of Pharmacy. She is also a pharmacy clinical consultant at Baxter Palliative Care, an institutional review board member at Kent Hospital, and a consultant on a research grant at the University of Massachusetts School of Medicine.

2001



Jessica L. Reiner (chemistry and chemical oceanography) of Milford, Conn. has worked as a research chemist at the National Institute of Standards and Technology in Charleston, S.C. for 15 years.

2007

Paige Leddy '07, M.A. '21, was a 2023–24 national Milken Educator Award recipient. A former second grade reading teacher, Leddy now serves K–4 students as a reading specialist at Richmond Elementary School in R.I. She will receive a \$25,000 cash prize from the Milken Family Foundation. Leddy earned a bachelor's in elementary education and psychology in 2007, a master's in reading in 2021, and a graduate certificate in dyslexia knowledge and practice programs.

2009



Maria T. Carroccia '09, M.A. '12, joined PayPal as a senior business program manager, focusing on process

improvements and efficiencies for the Global Merchant Services team. Her diverse experience in education, finance, and program management in the technology sector brings a unique perspective to ongoing initiatives that impact consumer and merchant experience. She will help shape the future of PayPal by exploring prudent approaches to the use of generative AI to drive seamless interactions between consumers, independent merchants, and enterprise users. She also joined PayPal's Unity ERG, a community for women and allies, to continue her mission to make the workplace a welcoming and equitable environment for all women regardless of location, ethnicity, marital status, or parental/caregiver status.

2014



Akos Antwi was recognized as a young innovator in behavioral health by *Going Digital: Behavioral Health Tech*. Antwi was a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner at Butler Hospital and Rhode Island Hospital for nearly a decade before opening her own clinic, Revive Therapeutic Services, with her sister in 2021. Revive is a treatment-focused, outpatient mental health facility based in Providence, R.I. The clinic is a culturally diverse facility with providers of different ethnicities and ages, many of whom are multilingual.

Nicole Amoyal Pensak, Ph.D. '14, (clinical psychology) specializes in treating adults with postpartum anxiety and depression. She has published numerous articles in peer-reviewed journals and has received 15 grants recognizing her scholarly research. She serves on the Expert Review Board for Parents Magazine and has a new book coming out this spring, *Rattled: How to Calm New Mom*

Anxiety with the Power of the Postpartum Brain. You can watch Nicole's TedXBethesda talk, "The Power of the Maternal Brain" at [youtube.com/watch?v=GXM2BIBxEcc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXM2BIBxEcc).

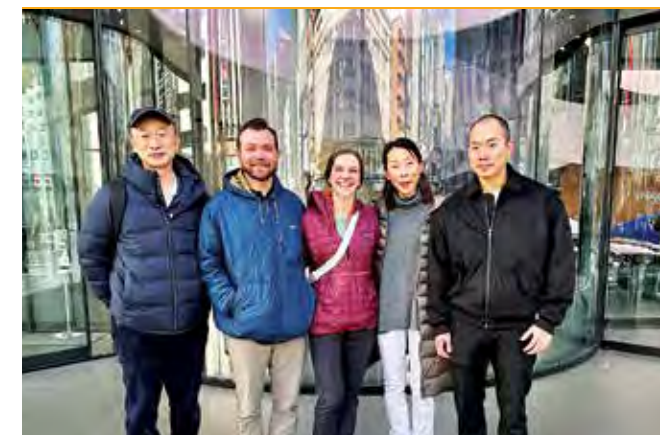


ENGAGEMENTS & MARRIAGES

- 1. Matthew Murphy '18** and **Lindsay Sammis '19, M.B.A. '20** were married in Narragansett, R.I. on Oct. 21, 2023. They are both former URI athletes turned big fans.
- 2. Serena (Burt) Macari '15** and Anthony Macari III were married on October 26, 2023.



BIRTHS & ADOPTIONS



GLOBETROTTING RAMS

On a recent trip to Japan, **Matt Nota '17** (second from left) and **Callie (Cashin) Nota '22** (center) met up with **Harry Kinoshita '86**, the URI global ambassador for Tokyo (far left) along with Harry's wife and son.

Nolan Michael Handwerk was born on Oct. 30, 2023 to **Morgan (McGowan) Handwerk '09** and Michael J. Handwerk.

College of Pharmacy alumni **Grant Hamel, Pharm.D. '17** and **Megan (Wilks) Hamel '20, Pharm.D. '20** welcomed their second son, Alden Matthew Hamel, on Nov. 27, 2023.



50th REUNION Class of 1974

ALUMNI HAPPENINGS

50th REUNION - CLASS OF 1974
May 17–18, 2024
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

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

HOMECOMING WEEKEND
October 25-27, 2024
alumni.uri.edu/homecoming

Come home to Kingston in October! Reconnect with friends and celebrate what you love about URI at the homecoming football game, Rhodyville Block Party, reunions, and more.



RENAISSANCE RAMS

Author, Athlete, Soldier, Doctor.

After an injury derailed his plans to play professional football, the military opened new paths for John Gouin '83.



Dr. John R. Gouin '83 grew up in Woonsocket, R.I. A high school and college athlete, he attended URI from 1971–75 and aspired to an NFL career until an injury threw him off course. He left school, angry and struggling, and proceeded to make “a series of bad choices.”

When it became clear to him that he needed to rethink his path, he decided to join the U.S. Army. His Special Forces A-Team unit had one medic but needed another. He agreed to take on the role, and the other medic trained him. Those two decisions were life-changing.

“The military,” Gouin says, “can make or break you. I’m grateful for what it did for me.” He says he came away “changed and committed to my education.” He returned to URI in 1980 to finish his degree.

Gouin received his doctor of podiatric medicine degree from Scholl College and completed three years of post-grad surgical training in Chicago. He has lived in

Corpus Christi, Texas, and practiced podiatry with Corpus Christi Podiatry for 30 years. He is the chief of podiatry at the VA clinic in Harlingen, Texas.

He served his country honorably for nearly 36 years and retired in 2012 as a colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve. His last assignment was as commander of the 228th Combat Support Hospital in San Antonio, Texas. He was awarded the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal for Service during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2005, and the Order of Military Medical Merit. He is Special Forces-qualified and is a distinguished military graduate from URI’s ROTC program.

Gouin was a member of the 1973 URI football team, which was the first American college football team to play a game in Europe—they prevailed over the U.S. Air Force All-Stars in a Thanksgiving Day matchup in Germany. Gouin returned to URI for a reunion with the 1973 team this past October.

He is the author of *An Unforgettable Salute: Skirmishes, Battlefields, and Making Peace with My Father* (2010). He was inspired to write the book while serving in Iraq, which, he says, “changed my life completely and forever.” He has several other book ideas that are currently works in progress. 🐏

—Barbara Caron

SPOTLIGHT

Fancy That

As an extra in *The Gilded Age*, Michaela Mooney, M.S. '87, got all dressed up and scored an insider's view of the making of the HBO hit series.

Michaela Mooney, M.S. '87, thinks retirement is pretty great. One of the things that's made it especially great is that she landed a role as an extra in Season 2 of the HBO series, *The Gilded Age*, which was filmed in Newport, R.I., in 2022.

"I'm pretty sure I got the role because not a lot of women my age grow their hair this long," says Mooney. "I blame it on the pandemic!"

Mooney, who earned her URI master's degree in college student personnel, worked at URI for 31 years in roles that included communications, development, admission, and new student orientation. She retired in 2018.

Mooney graciously answered a few questions about her unique experience.

—Barbara Caron



Michaela Mooney on the set of *The Gilded Age*, in Newport, R.I.

How did you find out the show needed extras?

A newspaper article caught my attention: It specifically stated they were looking for women with long, natural-colored hair to portray a member of the upper class—a spectator at a tennis match.

Did you have to try out?

I submitted the required photographs in March 2022 and a month later got a response asking me to send back-facing photos so they could get a closer look at my hair color. Shortly thereafter I was asked to submit my body measurements—I made the required waist measurements by a half inch!

How much time did you devote to your role, all told?

Besides a costume fitting, I was on set three full days in mid-May 2022. They required onsite COVID testing, and masks were required except when filming. Days began at 3 a.m., and you could order breakfast while you waited to have your hair and makeup done. Costume assistants got us dressed, and we were bused to the Tennis Hall of Fame, right down the road. They served lunch at La Forge Casino. I was impressed with the communication and the coordination of so many moving parts.

Are you a fan of the show?

I was a fan of *Downton Abbey* and was disappointed when it ended. So, when I heard that Julian Fellowes, the writer/creator of *Downton Abbey*, was behind *The Gilded Age*, I was on board. And I do like a period drama.

In which episode and scene can we spot you?

Season 2, Episode 2—shot at the Tennis Hall of Fame. You can easily identify me holding a green parasol and being bumped into by an obviously inebriated main character. I had to act startled and upset. Blink, and you'll miss my reaction! We were referred to on-set as “background,” not extras.

Have you ever done anything like this before?

I had roles in college and community theater and a role in URI's *The Children's Hour*—about 30 years ago! Shoutout to Tony Estrella '93 (artistic director of Gamm Theatre in Warwick and a faculty member at URI), my love interest in the play!

Was the costume uncomfortable?

Laughingly, I asked if I might take the corset home—it made for wonderful posture. I couldn't really sit comfortably with the bustle/bumroll on, but I managed. The skirt was a series of layers and I was outfitted with everything from stockings to kid leather gloves, to period earrings and a brooch. My hat was designed to match my costume. Every detail of every costume worn by the extras was authentic. When I was being fitted, I inquired about the clothing and was told mine was made in Italy.

Best part of this experience?

Being behind the scenes and watching how it all came together. I brought a book to read during downtimes, but I never opened it because watching what was going on was fascinating.

Assuming this isn't a typical day for you, what is?

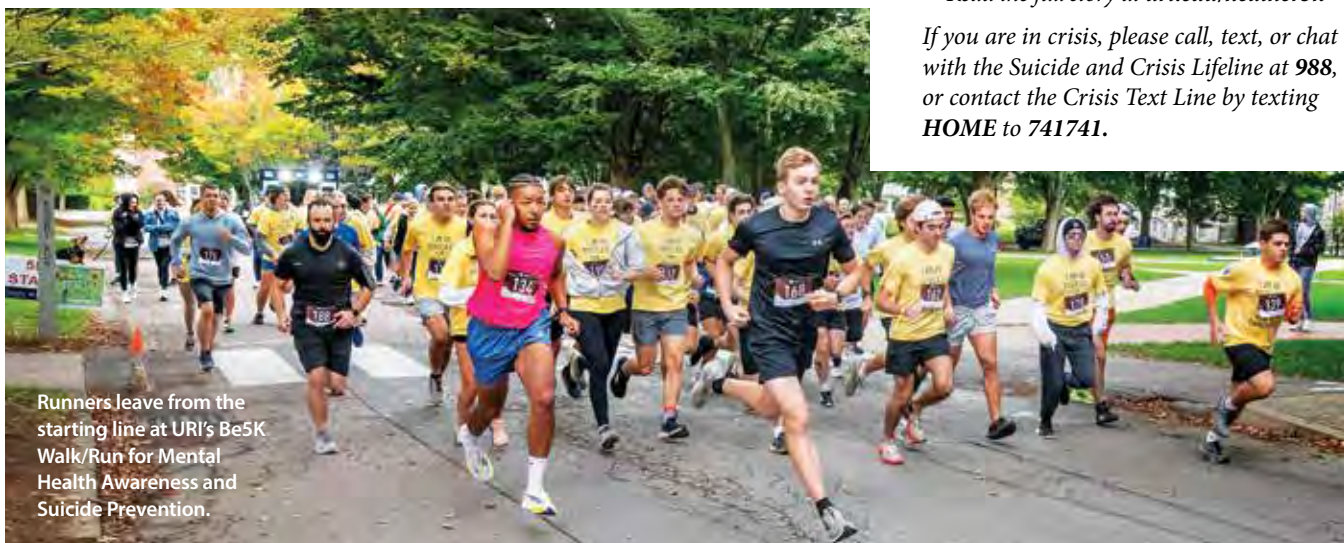
Retirement isn't all it's cracked up to be—it's better! Every day is like Saturday. I'm focused on staying healthy, exercising, and connecting with friends, old and new. 🐏



Friends of the late Heather Vennewald, (from left) Marissa Warren, Johanna (Ware) Buoncontri, Amy (Liakos) Darling, and Jill (Weiss) Collado, gather around a photo collage of the four friends with Vennewald when they were URI students.



URI President Marc Parlange at the Sunflowers for Heather table with, from left, Marissa Warren, Johanna (Ware) Buoncontri, and Jill (Weiss) Collado.



Runners leave from the starting line at URI's Be5K Walk/Run for Mental Health Awareness and Suicide Prevention.

IN UNISON

Reunited in Remembrance

Four friends reunite to remember their friend and raise money for mental health awareness and suicide prevention.

Johanna (Ware) Buoncontri '96, Marissa Warren '96, Amy (Liakos) Darling '96, and Jill (Weiss) Collado '96 came to campus last fall for URI's 15th Be5K Walk/Run for Mental Health Awareness and Suicide Prevention.

For them, the event had special meaning, because the event is a benefit for the Heather Fund, which was established in honor of their college housemate and friend, Heather Vennewald, who died by suicide in January 1996.

"Heather was amazing, and we miss her every day. Having the four of us together for the Be5K on campus this year is everything!" says Buoncontri. "As parents—with kids almost the same age as us when we lost her—we feel more compelled than ever to support the event."

"By sharing our story and continuing to build Heather's legacy at URI," Buoncontri continues, "we hope to spread awareness of mental health and suicide by sharing our story and continuing to build Heather's legacy at URI." 🗨️

—Dave Lavallee '79, M.P.A. '87

Read the full story at uri.edu/heather5k

If you are in crisis, please call, text, or chat with the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988, or contact the Crisis Text Line by texting HOME to 741741.

RHODY FRIENDS

Friends for Life

When Jim Tucker needed a kidney transplant, his fraternity brother and lifelong friend Steve Round stepped up. Now, the two share a bond that's stronger than ever.

There's nothing quite like an old friend—especially when that friend saves your life by giving you one of his kidneys at age 72.

Steve Round '73 and Jim Tucker '73, M.A. '76, were fraternity brothers at URI. Their paths crossed several times after graduation, but it wasn't until they were both married with kids that they fully rekindled their friendship.

By then Jim had parlayed his master's degree in philosophy into a successful career as a computer programmer, while Steve took a sharp turn from his English degree and went into jewelry manufacturing. Both men changed careers in midlife; Jim to an alternative medicine practice and Steve to teaching elementary school. Life is rarely a straight line.

Their kids grew up together and the two couples vacationed together. But as they approached retirement, Jim was diagnosed with a hereditary kidney condition known as polycystic kidney disease, and suddenly he was facing dialysis and early death. As his kidneys deteriorated, Jim became anemic, and his energy level plummeted.

His only hope was a kidney transplant, but finding a donor was no small task. In Rhode Island, the wait time for a kidney is five to seven years, and half of all patients older than 60 die before they get a transplant.

One day, the two friends were walking with their wives and Jim grew exhausted so quickly he had to go back. On the way, he told Steve how discouraged he was by his inability to find a donor. The next day, Steve called his friend to say he was willing to part with one of his kidneys. Jim was speechless.

"What do you say to someone who offers you a part of their own body?" he says.

But as Steve soon found out, making that decision was the easy part. Getting approved was an ordeal. Both men had to undergo a daunting battery of tests that stretched on for nearly a year—MRI, EKG, blood tests, urine tests, cancer



screening, tests for tuberculosis, HIV, venereal disease, bone marrow matching, and more.

When they were nearly done, Jim got a call while he was waiting in the doctor's office. It was Steve's wife. Steve had just failed the cardiac stress test and was removed from the donor list. Jim was back to square one.

His kids and other family members had already tried to become donors, but none qualified. So, Jim prepared for dialysis, which, to him, seemed like a slow march to the grave.

"This is the most remarkable part," says Jim. "Several weeks later I heard from the hospital that they had a potential donor. I had dinner with Steve that night and told him the good news."

"Jim," he said after a long pause, "the new donor is me."

After Steve failed the cardiac stress test, he contacted a cardiologist and arranged for an expensive angiogram test, which confirmed that there was nothing wrong with his heart after all. When he won approval, he didn't tell Jim

right away because he didn't want him to endure the disappointment if something else went wrong.

Finally, on Feb. 28, 2023, the two friends found themselves on tables in adjoining operating rooms, where two surgeons conducted the operation, one removing the kidney from Steve and the other performing the transplant to Jim. The procedure was supposed to take four hours but took seven and a half hours because the donor kidney had several extra arteries that had to be surgically closed before it could be implanted in Jim.

Ten months later, both of Steve's kidneys are doing great—one in Steve and the other in Jim. Rather than living his life on a dialysis machine, Jim is back to doing carpentry around the house and restoring old cars.

"He's back to the old Jim," says Steve. 🗨️
—Bill Ibelle

Jim and Steve hope their story will inspire others to consider becoming kidney donors. Information is available at kidney.org/transplantation.



Story on page 24

NICHE

Personal Mission. Global Perspective.

Joe DaMoura '00 is the president of the Cape Verdean Museum in Pawtucket, R.I., which celebrates the history and culture of Cape Verde and Cape Verdean Americans.

Joe DaMoura '00 and his family have a nickname for URI, their alma mater. “We call it the DaMoura college. Five of us are grads,” he says. “When I was a student at Hope High, I’d visit my older brother, Antonio, on the URI campus. He launched the country’s first Cape Verdean student organization there. I couldn’t wait to go.” Joe is number three of the sibling alums; he graduated with a degree in English and psychology.

Some 25 years later, he’s president of the Cape Verdean Museum, the only one to celebrate the islands’ culture in the U.S., he says. The museum in its current location is the culmination of a three-year, \$400,000-plus fundraising effort to migrate the 20-year-old institution to a spiffy Pawtucket space. It also reflects the islands’ robust immigrant community in Rhode Island, estimated at 18,000.

It’s been a long and winding road for a child who moved to Rhode Island from Cape Verde when he was just 6, along with his newly widowed mother and nine of his brothers and sisters. None of them spoke English.

“We came to a new country, on an airplane. I wore my first shorts suit and new sandals. It was exciting. When you know nothing better, it’s a big deal. I couldn’t sleep the entire trip.”

The family settled into their South Providence home near relatives, and his mom got a job in a pewter factory, making key chains and belts. “She’d bring work home at Christmas so we could help and make extra money,” DaMoura says. And at Fox Point Elementary School, he learned English—and the value of education. “It prepared me the best.”

After URI, DaMoura taught elementary school in Providence for several years. At 6-foot-6, he has a compelling presence, says Yvonne Smart, a retired Providence librarian who’s known DaMoura since he was a child. “When Joe was at the library, the kids latched on,” she remembers. “He liked to read and the kids related to him,” she says. “It was fun seeing this big guy sitting in a little chair with them. He really was a positive male figure. He talked to them about the importance of school.”

After a disability forced him to leave teaching, DaMoura continued cohosting

and producing a Cape Verdean-focused program on the URI radio station, WRIU. Three years ago, he assumed the daunting task of the Cape Verdean Museum presidency and focused on fundraising for a new building. “This was personal to me. It was the biggest honor,” he says.

Marissa Lopes, a high school friend and third-generation American-born Cape Verdean, is the museum board’s secretary. “He’s so dedicated and passionate about our history,” she says. “He’s attuned to the community. He has a big personality. He’s put his heart and soul into making the museum happen. We couldn’t see his vision for it, but we see it now.”

The newly renovated 4,000-square-foot former restaurant/bar had its grand opening in April 2023. Some of DaMoura’s favorites among the thousands of artifacts on display are an oversized water jug and a corn husker like those he remembers from his own childhood.

“I love educating about our people and how important Cape Verde is to American history and to world history,” he says. “This is personal to me.”

—Sarah Francis

A Taste of Cape Verde—Stateside

- VISIT** The Cape Verdean Museum (617 Prospect St., Pawtucket, R.I.) offers exhibits on everything from music to whaling, as well as an extensive library of books and films.
- EAT** Just a short drive from the museum, you can experience one of the centerpieces of Cape Verdean culture: the food. The menu at 10 Rocks Tapas Bar and Restaurant (1091 Main St., Pawtucket) features Portuguese, West African, and Caribbean flavors. Owner Carmen Monteiro (proud mom of a URI grad!) focuses on traditional dishes with a modern twist. The restaurant’s name, 10 Rocks, is a reference to the 10 islands that make up the Cape Verdean archipelago.
- LISTEN** Joe DaMoura '00 started broadcasting the Cape Verdean Afro Beat program in 1992 on URI’s radio station, WRIU. Tune in on Saturdays from 2–4:30 p.m. at 90.3 or wriu.org.
- CELEBRATE** An annual Cape Verdean Independence Day Festival is held in July at India Point Park in Providence. ricapeverdeanheritage.org/press

—Anna Vacarro Gray, '12, M.S. '16



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 Margaret (Easterbrooks) Gigger '43
 Olive (Brousseau) Prunier '43
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 Mary (Olney) Fine '47
 Pauline (Bric) Olds '47
 Gloria (Stein) Kenner '48
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 Jean (Whitaker) Westwater '48
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Norman Coates, professor emeritus of business
 Elizabeth "Billie" Connors, former assistant professor and director of the URI Speech and Hearing Center
 George de Lodzia, professor emeritus of business management
 Donna Gilton, professor emerita of library and information studies
 George H. Wheatley Sr. '51, former director of the W. Alton Jones Campus and founder of the Environmental Education Center

FAMOUS FOOTSTEPS

Eleanor Roosevelt in Kingston

The legendary first lady—and Roosevelt Hall’s eponym—visited URI in 1938, shortly after the infamous hurricane of that year—and again in 1953.



During Eleanor Roosevelt’s 1938 visit to URI, she met with then-president of URI Raymond George Bressler (top photo) and visited with students in Roosevelt Hall (below).

The University of Rhode Island had the honor of hosting Eleanor Roosevelt on the Kingston Campus twice: first, in 1938, in her role as first lady of the United States; and again in 1953 when she came as a distinguished speaker to address the campus community on world issues.

Roosevelt’s first visit, on Oct. 1, 1938, was for the dedication of Roosevelt Hall, which was built as a women’s dormitory. The region was still reeling from the Sept. 21 hurricane, “one of the most destructive and powerful hurricanes in recorded history,” according to the National Weather Service. In her syndicated “My Day” column, she wrote, “Many people lost members of their family and friends, and there are still many people among the missing. A rocking chair with a little child’s chair not far away, in the middle of a field, seemed the epitome of desolation. All around was wreckage of one kind or another. Along the shore we could see a few houses still standing, leaning crazily in different directions. In some places the land as well as the houses has disappeared, and prized possessions with which families had old associations are gone forever.”

The dedication of Roosevelt Hall on that day left her with a happier impression. In the same column, she wrote, “The exercises at the State College in Kingston, R.I., were simple and delightfully arranged. The girls’ dormitory, which had been named after me, is a charming building. After lunch the girls invited me to light a fire in one of the big living room fireplaces, to symbolize the warmth which should always surround the family hearth.”

Roosevelt Hall was the first major building on campus built of brick. Up to that point, all of them had been built from Westerly granite. The building was one of three on campus—along with Green and Quinn halls—constructed through President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Public Works Administration, which funded the construction of public buildings across the country. In the 1960s, the building transitioned from dormitory to office space and today houses offices and programs including University College, the Writing Center, and the Center for Career and Experiential Education.

Eleanor Roosevelt was the longest-serving first lady of the United States, serving from 1933–1945, through her husband’s four terms in office, during which time the nation struggled through the Great Depression and World War II.

She was known for her activism and outspokenness—especially on issues of civil rights and human rights. This made her controversial, especially during her early years as first lady. But her dedication to human rights and her diplomacy made her one of the most admired women of her time and led to her later career as a diplomat. She was an in-demand lecturer and public figure, which ultimately led her back to URI in 1953. ☺

—Barbara Caron



PHOTOS: COURTESY UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES; ANG CAI



BOOKSHELF

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



Lashon Aish –
Tongue of Fire –
Israel at War
Barbara A.
Goldscheider '77
(2023)



Rice Is Life
Ken Lee '81
(2022)



Green Chemistry
in Practice
Thomas McKeag '77,
M.C.P. '82
(2023)

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 or respond at uri.edu/magazine.

Submit entries by
May 15, 2024



FALL 2023 WINNERS

WINNING CAPTION

“Belatedly, she realized she had grabbed the wrong coat.”

—Robert (“Scaf”) Schafer ‘58

RUNNERS-UP

“Thinking I should not have worn this raccoon coat to Wildlife Management 101.”

—Michael Powers ‘72, M.S. ‘74

That day Mr. Vanderbilt’s confused aunt wandered over from the Breakers and into a URI classroom.

—Elizabeth Tobin ‘85

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.

PHOTO: URI DIGITAL ARCHIVES



ALL FUR FASHION

This photo from the 1937 *Grist* elicited, not surprisingly, lots of funny captions about the student in the fur coat.

We also got a lot of captions about that empty front row. It seems to be one of those quirks of human nature that we just avoid the front row, especially in a classroom or lecture setting. You’ll find a lot of answers, theories, and opinions about this if you Google “Why do people avoid the front row?”

While we don’t know the full story behind this photo, the caption that accompanied it in the 1937 yearbook was, “A Typical Class—Our roving camera man, while in the new Home Economics building, snapped this studious group.”

Maybe some of the students in this photo were around the following year, 1938, when first lady Eleanor Roosevelt visited campus (page 62).

Thank you, readers, as always, *fur* all the fun captions.



PHOTO BY MARION O’SULLIVAN ‘20

Trailblazers Go Here

Thousands of Rhody Rams are the first in their immediate families to attend college. Your contribution to RhodyNow can tell them that they belong and ensure that they have what they need to achieve their goals.

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GIVE TODAY

END GAME

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Students who take biology with Central Falls High School teacher David Upegui, Ph.D. '21, work with actual animal skulls to figure out how they evolved and what the connections are between different animals.

In the story on pages 40–45, skulls are used as a design element. Can you guess which animals the skulls pictured here are from? (Answers on page 45.)

