



Gallup: RI a global strengths leader

By Frank Prosnitz '96

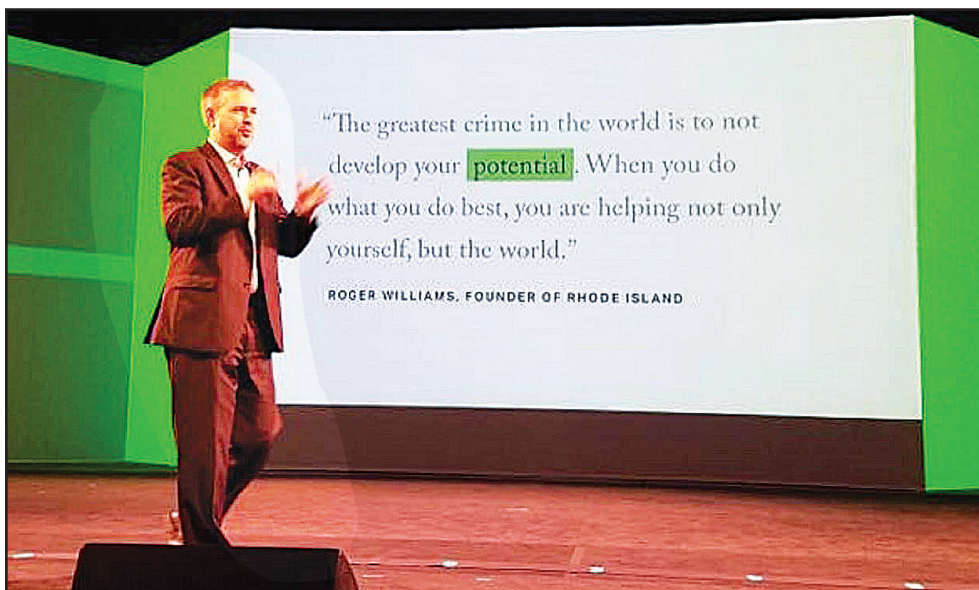
Leadership Rhode Island's Make RI Stronger initiative is making a difference, not only in America but worldwide.

"Rhode Island has a chance to lead the country," says **Mario Cirillo '15**, who is determined that the charter school he heads in Providence will become the state's first strengths-based high school.

Cirillo, who heads the Academy for Career Exploration, says that Gallup, the organization that developed the StrengthsFinder Assessment, sees Rhode Island as a leader globally.

Widespread awareness of Rhode Island's efforts became apparent when **Mike Ritz '07**, LRI's executive director,

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With a quote from Roger Williams in the background, Paul Allen, Gallup's strengths evangelist, tells attendees at the first Global Strengths Summit that Rhode Island is "an inspiration" for the worldwide movement.



Shameem Awan '15 dons a Colonial-style wig and uses a quill pen to sign the Declaration of Independence at a Jeffersonian Dinner hosted by Michael Lester '13.

Finding common ground at Jeffersonian Dinners

By Nancy Kirsch '94

Invitations to Leadership Rhode Island's Jeffersonian Dinners may be easier to score than Broadway tickets to *Hamilton*, but they are rapidly becoming a smash hit as well, according to several participants.

Unlike a typical dinner party at which most guests know one another and chat in small groups, a Jeffersonian Dinner features a diverse gathering of eight to 10 people often unfamiliar with each other. Together the guests focus on a single discussion topic, prompted by a question invitees ponder before they arrive.

LRI recruits the hosts, develops the guest lists, picks the discussion topic and moderates the ensuing conversation. Side chitchat is discouraged or, as LRI Executive Director **Mike Ritz '07** puts it, "Attend-

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For Alpha, re-engaging a 'phenomenal experience'

By Jim Farley '81

You might call me a pioneer – perhaps even a guinea pig – because I was a member of the first class of Leadership Rhode Island. Thirty-five years later, I am back, offering input for what the Mu IIs see, hear and do on their monthly session days as a member of the 2016 Core Program Committee.

What prompted me to re-engage? Leadership RI sent out an alumni survey a while ago which, among the questions, asked if there was interest in getting involved. I checked yes.

Then came the first request. Would I like to interview some applicants for the next class? That's how I started on this new journey, one that keeps me looking forward but also backward. The LRI that exists today is a far more sophisticated operation, with big ideas, alumni involvement, community projects, and lots of planning sessions.

There was no interview panel for the Alpha class in 1981. As I recall, my boss called me into her office and said: "Jimmy, (she liked to call me Jimmy), we've selected you to be our representative at Leadership Rhode Island."

This time I joined an alumni panel to interview some of the candidates for the 2015 class. We asked thoughtful questions and offered our opinions about whether the applicants would be a good fit in the Lambda II class.

The Alpha class started its year with nothing more than a coffee-and-doughnuts introductory session. Oh, how I wish we'd had a retreat!

I attended opening night dinner at the Mu II retreat at the Alton Jones campus of the University of Rhode Island. The fellowship was overwhelming. Had somebody said, "Jim, why don't you spend the night?" I would have jumped at the chance.

I am delighted to serve on this year's planning committee. This is where you get into the nitty gritty. I have no idea who planned the program days for the Alpha class, but it's quite a process now.

A committee of 14 alumni gathers to plan each program day. For each topic – economic development, education, government, etc. – we listen to experts and those working in the field to learn what's new, what's significant, what's different. Then comes a lively discussion, with ideas flowing, about interesting ways to introduce the Mu IIs to the subject.

For me, re-engaging has been a phenomenal experience.

If you've lost touch, I encourage you to re-engage, too, because Rhode Island's future leadership depends on all of us.



Above: Jim Farley joins the Mu II class on a visit to Matunuck Oyster Farm. Left: A photo of Farley from his Alpha days in 1981.

Saying goodbye to Stan

Alumni use Facebook to share memories of great LRI champion

Stan DeAngelis '90, one of Leadership Rhode Island's greatest champions and the recipient of the 2015 LRI Volunteer Award, died Aug. 15.

Home from the hospital in early August and aware that the cancer he thought he had defeated had returned with a vengeance, Stan requested that friends come by for visits. The plan changed quickly when Stan realized that personal visits were too exhausting.

That's when **Lorne Adrain '94** asked Leadership Rhode Island's **Mike Ritz '07** to create a way for friends and family to express their admiration on Facebook. "The wonderful thing about Stan ..." went up Aug. 5.

"I've never seen social media used to communicate with someone in hospice, but it seemed like a good idea, so, with Stan's encouragement, we dug up old Stan photos from LRI's archives and started inviting his class-



Stan DeAngelis '90 embraced the circus theme of LRI's 35th anniversary celebration last fall, joining members of the vintage dance troupe Chifferobe for this photo.

mates and others to connect online," said Ritz.

There were plenty of photos to choose from because Stan remained active with LRI after graduating in 1990. He was elected to LRI's Board of Governors, serving as vice chair, acting chair and chairman.

Before stepping down in 2000, he chaired the fund development committee and raised thousands of dollars that still generate revenue in

LRI's legacy investment account.

Dozens of alumni responded. "Stan's commitment to Leadership Rhode Island has been unparalleled. His smile, passion, and enthusiasm – all will be remembered with great fondness," posted **Jane Nugent '95**.

"I can't tell you how deeply I am touched," Stan's brother **Ken** wrote from Texas. "I feel like I'm a charter member of Leadership RI, as I would

listen to Stan for hours and hours (and hours) talk about all of you and your activities when I would visit ... He loved his time with LRI and he loved being with you. On behalf of the DeAngelis Family, may I say thank you for your sharing ... we feel the love, which is all so important any time, but especially at times like this."

Before he died, Stan, his wife **Deb** and Ritz talked about starting a scholarship fund in his name for LRI's Core Program. Stan loved the idea because it will support entrepreneurs connected to the Social Enterprise Greenhouse, a startup incubator which Stan followed through its development with great enthusiasm.

If you'd like to make a donation in Stan's memory to the DeAngelis Entrepreneur Fund of Leadership Rhode Island, please contact Matt Coupe at mcoupe@leadershipri.org or 401-273-1574.

The wonderful thing about Stan is ...

Stan's Kappa classmates quickly posted comments:

Fran Gast – Stan, you're the first person I met on the first day of orientation. Of course you were, since you introduced yourself to everyone and everyone met each other through you.

Susan Fabrizio – The mere mention of his name brings a smile and joy to all who know him.

Richard Staples – Regardless of how much time had passed between visits, it's like we'd just seen each other the week before.

John O'Leary – There's really no way you could forget him or that smile.

Christopher Hurd – He builds businesses from scratch and he builds relationships that will last forever.

Diane Spaziani – We all thought Stan was one of our best friends. That's how he made us feel.

Barbara Shoenfeld – You can't get near him without being pulled in by his aura of warmth and goodness. And you can't get away without a big hug (not that you would want to).

Josh Fenton – Stan has always been that person who made you feel good.

DePlante '14 promoted to deputy director

Michelle DePlante '14, who joined the LRI staff in 2014 as director of programs, recently stepped up to become the organization's first ever deputy director.

Why did you come to LRI?

I applied to Leadership Rhode Island's core program with a gut feeling that the program would provide me with a life-changing experience that would not only grow my network but also deepen my roots in Rhode Island. The experiences I shared with my Kappa II class members encouraged me to step beyond my comfort zone, find common ground, and grow as an engaged citizen. Joining LRI's staff meant joining a strong team of professionals who shared my passion and commitment to shaping Rhode Island's future!

What's your proudest accomplishment at LRI so far?

From the beginning, Mike and I shared a vision to bring neighbors and communities together across the state. I'm very proud of the work that was spearheaded by the Lambda II class last year to convene neighbors and of the Greatest Lil' State on Earth event which brought together over 600 Rhode Islanders under my oversight.

How do your strengths comple-



Michelle DePlante '14

ment LRI's strengths-based team?

My strengths let me see the potential in everyone and to align our team's strengths for maximized, high quality results. Here is how I use my top five:

- Input – seeking out tangible tools and resources to share with others
- Maximizer – commitment to excellence and high quality results
- Developer – seeing the potential in everyone
- Arranger – aligning our team's strengths
- Belief – wanting to make the world a better place

What is your vision/focus for LRI?

I look forward to developing evaluative methods to determine LRI's impact – on individuals, teams, organizations, communities, networks and Rhode Island's culture. I also look forward to increasing LRI's scale, scope and reach. For example, ensuring inclusion of diverse community members and consistent participation from every city and town.

What three things don't alumni know about you that they should?

- My mom came to the United States from Cuba in 1969 with only the clothes on her back to become a successful entrepreneur. My parents raised me bi-culturally and I am a first generation college graduate. Go Friars!
- Over the last seven years I have served as a Community Faculty Member at Providence College, co-teaching Public Service and Global Studies senior capstone and introductory courses. As a result I have connected countless students to volunteer, internship and job opportunities which have assisted with reversing the brain drain in our state.
- I serve on the Association of Leadership Programs' 2017 National Conference planning team. I look forward to showcasing Rhode Island in a positive light on the national stage.

Alumni support boosts LRI's impact

Since alumni dues were first requested in 1982, the annual membership campaign has become the largest source of alumni giving, raising nearly \$50,000 each year in support of LRI's mission.

In 2015, a record number of alumni renewed their memberships, allowing LRI to offer more programming and activities this year than ever. These ranged from public forums on land use and commercial fishing sustainability and the expansion of the

Make RI Stronger initiative through the training of additional strengths coaches to the creation of the alumni-hosted Jeffersonian Dinner series, offered as a benefit to those whose dues are up-to-date.

With your generous support, LRI's impact continues to increase year after year. Our work is shaping dialogue and affecting wider networks of leaders across the state and outside our borders. We're more relevant than ever!

We now ask you to help us sustain this momentum by joining the alumni listed in this newsletter and renewing your membership today. Help the mission continue. Invest in our network of 2,000-plus alumni making a difference in Rhode Island. Thank you for your support!

To renew your membership, please contact **Matt Coupe**, LRI's Alumni & Community Engagement Liaison, at 401-273-1574 x102 or visit us online at www.leadershipri.org/donate.

The Mission Continues ...

Based on Lambda II research, Mu II projects helping communities

By Jane Nugent '95

A Providence block party guide, a coastline food market pop-up, a tour of Blackstone Valley for 4th graders, a Cranston scavenger hunt through letterboxing are among the 11 Leadership in Action projects undertaken by this year's Mu II class under the theme, The Mission Continues.

"The mission continues annually by way of our 'Leadership In Action' team projects, class by class," says **Mike Ritz '07**, executive director of Leadership Rhode Island. "But this year's projects are rooted in last year's class efforts – a direct continuation of their mission."

To select their projects, teams of Mu IIs dug deep into two 80-page reports listing 900 contacts and key local issues affecting residents throughout Rhode Island – the legacy of the Lambda IIs.

The Lambda IIs devoted much of their class year in 2015 to organizing 33 "hyper-local" listening sessions and compiling what participants had to say about their respective communities. The local sessions were followed by a mass convening of hundreds of people from all walks of life and representing all 39 cities and towns at which more information was gathered. (Request to see the two 80-page unedited reports by emailing office@leadershipri.org.)

"The Mu IIs have taken the work of the Lambda IIs seriously, relying on the data they gathered . . . to determine how they can best help their own communities," says **Michelle DePlante**, deputy director of Leadership Rhode Island, who directly oversees the Leadership In Action projects.

Leadership In Action projects benefiting Rhode Island became integral to LRI's core program starting in the 1990s as a way to expand learning, raise understanding about the complexities of change, strengthen networks and challenge leadership skills.

The Mission Continues has offered LRI the opportunity to create a comprehensive two-year body of work at the local level.

Here is a brief summary of the Mu II projects:

- **Exploring Blackstone Valley:** Historic field trip along the bike path for 84 4th graders of Blackstone Valley Prep.
- **Blackstone Valley Farm Loop:** The creation of a "farm loop" map, highlighting farms and local foods to be



One Mu II project, Savor South County, promotes the multiple values of eating locally. They've been publicizing the initiative on social media and at local events like the Richmond Farmers Market.

sustained by Blackstone Valley Tourism Council.

- **Cranston Community Quest:** A "passport" driven scavenger hunt of Cranston through letterboxing.
- **Townie Trail:** A map of local landmarks to highlight the history and culture of East Providence, which will live on the city's website.
- **East Bay Promotional Video:** A short promotional video that highlights the strengths and assets of Southern and East Bay Rhode Island.
- **Savor South County:** A multi-tiered marketing campaign to promote the economic, health, culture, and community value of eating locally.
- **Project Snowbound:** Implementation of a sustainable network of volunteers to remove snow for seniors and individuals with disabilities each winter.
- **Rocky Point Improvement Project:** A walking path of outdoor interpretive exhibits that tell the story of Rocky Point, past and present.
- **Eat Drink RI Central Market:** Hosting a pop-up marketplace for a proposed Central Market site.
- **Cup of Sugar:** A block party booklet designed to remove city regulatory barriers and encourage traditional neighborhood block parties around Providence.
- **Providence Armory:** An awareness campaign to support the revitalization of the Providence Armory.

Crime & Incarceration Day leaves mark, sparks action

By Holly Jensen '08

Most Rhode Islanders will never step inside the state prison to walk past rows of hauntingly stark cells, observing the dispirited faces of inmates. Nor will they ever tag along on a night shift with a Providence police officer, holding their breaths as the officer takes off on foot to chase a suspect down a city street.

Graduates of Leadership Rhode Island have been doing that and more since the mid-1980's as part of Crime and Incarceration Day, a session that leaves an indelible impression and inspires action far beyond graduation.

This year's class, the Mu IIs, concluded their session day by listening to riveting stories from one of their own classmates, **Barry O'Connor Jr.**, whose brother was murdered on the streets of Providence, and from alumnus **Sal Mon-**

teiro '14, who did time behind bars.

Monteiro and O'Connor grew up together, though their lives took different paths.

In 1997 O'Connor watched his 17-year-old brother, **Malik**, die after being shot in the head. Malik and a friend were in a car they had borrowed from another friend the night before. Just two blocks away from their destination on the South Side, two young men shot at the car, critically injuring Malik.

People in the community are convinced it was a case of mistaken identity. Malik's murderers have never been brought to trial and his family continues to feel the pain and devastation every day.

"Even if telling my story helped one person, I'd be happy," O'Connor said.

O'Connor got the courage to speak for the first time about Malik's mur-

der from his mother, **Cleora Francis-O'Connor** '01, who shared her story with the 2013 class.

Monteiro talked about doing time at the ACI for second-degree murder. "It's important for LRI members to see somebody like me. I did go to jail for 12 years, but I got a second opportunity and I did something good with it."

Monteiro is on the staff of The Institute for the Study & Practice of Nonviolence where he teaches conflict resolution and conducts community outreach.

"People don't realize that there are victims on both sides: the person who did the shooting and the person who got shot," says Monteiro.

Crime and Incarceration Day is "consistently emotional," says **Mike Ritz** '07, LRI executive director.

"Class members are uncomfortable and they should be."

"As leaders we have a responsibility to act in ways that can reduce incarceration without jeopardizing safety," Ritz said.

A group from last year's class was affected so profoundly they got together again to talk and decided to do something to reduce recidivism.

"It was clear we needed to do more . . . and that's what LRI calls us to do: to work together in cross-communities and use our networks to help people who need it most," says **Dave Curtis** '15.

Curtis and other '15 alumni are teaming up with the Rhode Island Mentoring Partnership to support a program that will match LRI alumni with reentering teens and young

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MU IIs gather around Warden Sergio DeSousarosa during tour of medium security at the Adult Correctional Institutions.

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adults. The LRI group will also recruit alumni to serve on reentry boards and councils throughout Rhode Island.

The first class compelled to take action was back in 1989.

"... we visited the women's division and we were all shocked at how they just sat around and watched soap operas all day. There was no programming," recalls **Mike Gerhardt**. "That's when we got together and decided to develop a mentoring program, led by **Judy**

Fox, for inmates who were preparing to transition back into the world."

Community volunteers were recruited "to meet with inmates once a week and build relationships and trust over time," says **Roberta Richman** '90, the women's warden at the time.

Sue LaLonde '89 has stayed connected with the same former inmate for 26 years. "She needed someone to be there for her, to listen and support her. At the time, she didn't have anyone else in her life," LaLonde said. The two still

keep in touch even though LaLonde has moved to New Jersey.

One evaluation, which included RI data, reported that inmates with mentors were less likely to be back in prison one year after release than those without mentors – 25 percent versus 40 percent, respectively.

"I'm proud that LRI did something that affected the lives of so many women over the years," said Gerhardt. "Taking action on a cause like this wasn't part of the program before we started. It really distinguished our class."

Applications open for 2017 Nu II class

Was it knowledge, access, friendships, inspiration, or something else?

Encourage a friend or colleague to apply for what many of the 2000 alumni have described as one of the most significant transformational experiences of their lives – LRI's 10-month Core Program.

The application period for the Nu II class – LRI's 37th – ends Oct. 17. You can nominate candidates or urge them to apply on their own.

Here's what one member of the current class had to say:

"The education on each industry within Rhode Island has been absolutely invaluable. The ability to have the highest decision makers speak to us and be open to our inquisitive and challenging questions has been eye opening. The materials given to prepare and educate us on the topic is a great mix of different perspectives and facts. The session days stretch us personally and professionally and challenge us to dive into a topic that may be near and dear to our hearts and lives and open our eyes to a side that we may never have considered."

For more information, email office@leadershipri.org.



MU II class members (from left) Jesse Carr, Rafaelina Gomez, Marc Streisand and Elena Gaudette are riveted as they listen to classmate Barry O'Connor's tragic story.

Make RI Stronger turns sights on youth

By Frank Prosnitz '96

Nearly 7,000 Rhode Islanders, from the workplace to the classroom, have discovered their personal strengths since the Make RI Stronger initiative kicked off in March 2014.

At the launch, Leadership Rhode Island set a three-year goal of 10,000, a figure that is within reach if current expansion proposals materialize, says **Mike Ritz** '07, executive director.

The strengths campaign grew out of an alarming survey by Gallup in 2013 identifying Rhode Island as having the most actively disengaged workforce in America. Active disengagement results in lost productivity, unhappy employees, and high turnover, leading to what Gallup suggests are "toxic workplaces," and a loss across the country of hundreds of billions of dollars.

LRI, working with Gallup and its StrengthsFinder division, set out with the expectation that a more invigorated workforce would lead to a more robust state economy, while also helping Rhode Island regain its self-esteem.

Is the goal of 10,000 enough to make an impact in a state with a population of roughly one million? Ritz, who has become a student of change theory, says that once 10,000 Rhode Islanders from different age groups and multiple sectors embrace strengths-based thinking, growth should take off exponentially. When commitment to strengths development reaches just 10 percent of the state's population, 100,000 people, lasting change should set in, he says, citing computational/analytical research by scientists at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

Progress is already evident. Ritz points to the most recent Gallup survey that shows a more engaged workforce, with Rhode Island moving from rock bottom in 2013 to 39th in 2016.

If a strengths-based mindset pays off for adults in the workplace, Ritz reasons that reaching young people, before they enter the workforce, assures sustainability over the long term.

The Make RI Stronger initiative will add its first youth tribu-

YOU SHOULD KNOW

The StrengthsFinder Assessment is a fast-paced measurement of your natural talents. Developed by Gallup after years of research, the assessment is done online and takes 35 minutes. A list of your top five strengths emerges.

Anyone interested in the StrengthsFinder Assessment, training to apply strengths-based thinking to the workplace or becoming a strengths coach may call Kevin Cooper, LRI's strengths expeditor, at 401-273-1574, ext. 111.

tary this fall when the Academy for Career Exploration (ACE), a charter school in Providence, begins its journey to become the state's first strength-based high school.

Mario F. Cirillo '15, head of school, says ACE has made a dramatic turnaround since faltering badly three years ago.

"We're developing a blended learning situation, where the kids take charge of their learning," he says.

To keep the school's academic progress moving, Cirillo and staff began to explore how they might tap into the LRI strengths initiative.

Enter Atrion, whose CEO **Tim Hebert** not only embraces the strengths movement, he has fostered a mentoring relationship with students at ACE. Hebert agreed to sponsor the school's strengths venture.

The ACE staff has taken the StrengthsFinder Assessment; students will do the same when they return to school.

"We'll try to group them (students and faculty) by their strengths," Cirillo says. "It's a paradigm shift, approaching edu-

cation in a different way, presenting opportunities that lead into their learning styles."

Now in its third year, the Make RI Stronger initiative continues to broaden its reach:

- More than 40 companies, nonprofits and government agencies have sought strengths training. Some training involved entire workforces; others a division, and still others, select members of the staff.

- Atrion, an IT service provider which has used strengths as part of its employee leadership development for years, sought LRI's strengths training for senior managers this year. Hebert and another manager went a step further: they trained to become strengths coaches.

- A division of Gilbane, where engagement had been lackluster, sought strengths training in 2014. They are more vibrant, more productive, and fully engaged, according to their latest employee results measured by the Forbes Best Places to Work engagement survey.

- Inspired by LRI's strengths campaign, Providence College is offering the StrengthsFinder Assessment to its 1,000 freshmen. Last year's 1,000 freshmen took the test as well.

- The state Department of Labor and Training used StrengthsFinder to help people displaced by technology, or the recession, recognize their talents and return to the workforce.

- Nine additional strengths coaches – three of whom are bilingual in English and Spanish – recently completed training. With a cadre of 20 trained coaches, LRI is able to accommodate more clients who want to introduce strengths-based thinking to their workplaces.



From left, strengths coach Claudia Cardozo '11, strengths expeditor Kevin Cooper, executive director Mike Ritz '07 and strengths coach Karen King '13 represented Leadership Rhode Island at Gallup's Global Strengths Summit in Omaha, Neb.

- While most emphasis has been on groups, LRI is now serving individuals interested in identifying their strengths. So far, four public workshops, one in Spanish, have been offered – at discounted prices.

To **Kevin Cooper**, LRI's strengths expeditor, the strengths movement is about achieving success. "Our greatest areas of success come from our areas of talent," says Cooper. "If you want to achieve success and be really productive and engaged, your best chance of that is by focusing on areas where you have a natural and innate gift."

To Ritz, Make RI Stronger is not only about empowering individuals, but about changing "a very negative attitude in Rhode Island."

From Amsterdam to Birmingham, strengths coaches eager to follow RI's lead

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led a five-member Rhode Island delegation to the first Global Strengths Summit at Gallup's operations headquarters in Omaha, Neb., in July.

There, **Paul Allen**, Gallup's global strengths evangelist, told the gathering of 1,000 strengths coaches that Rhode Island is an "inspiration for the global strengths movement."

Jurrien Mammen of Amsterdam was among those who attended the breakout session at which Ritz and **Kevin Cooper**, LRI's strengths expeditor, presented the elements of the Make RI Stronger

initiative. "The story of Rhode Island was inspiring," Mammen said when reached after the summit. "This is a more holistic way of thinking about an engaged community or even country."

Months prior to the summit, Gallup's online newsletter told the story of Rhode Island's initiative under the headline: Rhode Island Wants to Become First Strengths-Based State. The newsletter has 1.8 million subscribers.

Reading that story, says **Katherine Houston** of Birmingham, Ala., "was one of the main things that pushed me over the edge" in deciding to become a

Certified Gallup Strengths Coach.

It's also why she was "beyond delighted to meet Mike and Kevin" in Omaha. Birmingham, she says, is similar in population to the state of Rhode Island, prompting her ask: Why can't Birmingham follow Rhode Island's lead? Houston plans to approach city leaders and the executive director of Leadership Birmingham to see if she can get others committed to a local strengths campaign.

And she's not alone.

"I really wanted to make Topeka a strengths-based city," **Kristen Brunkow**, of the Topeka

Chamber of Commerce, explained in a recent email exchange. "I had heard about Rhode Island and so by attending the session I learned more tangibles on how to potentially carry this out in my city."

"What inspired me was learning about it spreading through the leadership program," she says. "We have a similar leadership program where we could implement strengths."

In the Netherlands, Mammen says they already have two foundations "running with strengths." One uses Gallup's StrengthsFinder to train 1,000-plus volunteers; the other is "offering entrepre-

neurial programs to schools and refugees to enable a more sustainable strengths society."

Inspired by Rhode Island's initiative, Mammen says he wants to focus on making Amsterdam an engaged city. "I really liked the way Rhode Island trained trainers/champions and involved influential entrepreneurs/leaders to create momentum."

Ritz says he's heard from several other participants who have been inspired by Rhode Island's achievements. He is sharing LRI's experiences in hopes that they, too, can build their own strengths-based communities.

LRI experiences inspire alumni to seek state office

By John Taraborelli '10

Look up and down the ballot for this year's General Assembly races and you'll see an impressive number of competitive elections for seats normally claimed by incumbents running unopposed.

Look closer and you'll find Leadership Rhode Island alumni well represented among the challengers.

Seven LRI grads are seeking state rep seats, most of them as first-time candidates, and they're joined by seven more alumni running for reelection to the state House of Representatives or Senate.

The challengers cite their LRI experience as a contributing factor in their decision to run.

"The variety of programs and policy issues we were exposed to during Leadership Rhode Island helped me in understanding some of the needs across the state," says **Anthony Paolino '14**, who is running against Deputy Minority Leader **Patricia Morgan** for the District 26 (Warwick, West Warwick, Coventry) seat in the Nov. 8 general election.

He notes that LRI was doubly valuable because he hired a CLRI grad to manage his campaign.

Jason Knight '10, who is challenging incumbent **Jan Malik** in the Sept. 13 Democratic primary for the District 67 seat (Barrington, Warren), seconds that. "Through LRI, I was able to re-



Nicholas Delmenico '14, who is challenging Rep. Patricia Serpa in District 27 (Coventry, West Warwick, Warwick), believes alumni should think of public service as a natural extension of their Leadership Rhode Island experience.

ally get a handle on the tapestry of communities and people that define our state," he says. "That knowledge has made me a better candidate."

In addition to firsthand experience and knowledge of the issues, alumni credit the LRI network as an asset to their campaigns.

"I reached out to my LRI classmates and many have been supportive of my candidacy, especially financially," says current class member **Lisa Scorpio**, who is vying in the Democratic primary for the District 13 seat held for eight years by **Rep. John Carnevale**. (Carnevale dropped reelection

plans after losing a residency challenge.)

"I have been humbled by the support I have received so far," says Scorpio, "and will be calling on my classmates more than ever to help me bring my community's voice to the State House."

All of the legislative candidates hope other LRI alumni will follow in their footsteps.

"I think more people should consider a run in order to affect change in our state," says **Julie Casimiro '08**. "Things are not going to get better if good people don't step up."

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In her Democratic primary campaign for the House District 13 seat formerly held by Rep. John Carnevale, Mu II member Lisa Scorpio has reached out to her classmates for support.

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A Democrat, Casimiro seeks the District 31 (Exeter, North Kingstown) seat being vacated by GOP incumbent **Doreen Costa**.

Nicholas Delmenico '14 was inspired to mount a Democrat primary challenge in District 27 (Coventry, West Warwick, Warwick) against **Rep. Patricia Serpa** after the House Oversight Committee she chairs canceled hearings on 38 Studios.

He believes that alumni should think of public service as a natural extension of their LRI experience.

He advises them to "think about why they applied, why they accepted and how they felt while going through the program. How did your experience change you?"

"I would imagine there would be many similarities between your LRI experience and your run for office."

LRI alumni on the 2016 ballot

Julie Casimiro '08
House District 1

Doris De Los Santos '08
Senate District 7

Nicholas Delmenico '14
House District 27

Jason Knight '10
House District 67

Anthony Paolino '14
House District 26

Lisa Scorpio Mu II
House District 13

Camille Vella-Wilkinson '00
House District 21

Sen. Dennis Algieri '97
Senate District 38

Sen. Bill Conley '01
Senate District 18

Rep. Art Handy '11
House District 18

Sen. Donna Nesselbush '87
Senate District 15

Sen. Juan Pichardo '00
Senate District 2

Rep. Carlos Tobon Mu II
House District 58

Rep. Stephen Ucci '15
House District 42

Dinners allow for honest, open talk

Continued from Page 1

ees ... must speak to the table.” Also, he says, “What’s said at dinner, stays at dinner,” an LRI tradition that frees guests to tell some highly personal stories in response to the opening question.

Guests are selected from a list of LRI alumni whose dues are up-to-date. Dinners are in homes, private clubs or at one of the restaurants belonging to the Newport Restaurant Group, thanks to the generosity of CEO **Paul O’Reilly** ’95. The first, held in April, was at the Waterman Grille in Providence.

Angie Ankoma ’14, an LRI board member, says the dinner she attended at the East Side home of **Lorne Adrain** ’94 and **Ann Hood** ’95, was a unique opportunity for people of different races, backgrounds and work environments to talk to each other.

Our common ground as LRI alumni and our shared stake in improving the state allowed us to feel safe enough to let down our guard and honestly and openly discuss difficult issues, Ankoma, co-director of the Health Equity Institute at the state Department of Health, said.



Waterman Grille in Providence hosted the first Jeffersonian Dinner. Guests included (clockwise, from left): Paul O’Reilly ’95, Jeshua Zapata ’10, Barry Couto ’97, Kyla Coburn ’14, Jerauld Adams ’14, Sam Zurier ’04, Alec Beckett ’11, Nondas Voll ’85, MaryEllen Butke ’08, Christine McDermott ’11, Mike Ritz ’07 and Elaine Collins.

The past caught up with Warwick’s Mayor **Scott Avedisian** ’97 at the dinner at the Hope Club hosted by **Jerauld Adams** ’14. He and three other guests had all worked at some point for **John H. Chafee**, governor in the 1960s and U.S. Senator from 1976 until his death in 1999.

Avedisian relished taking time to listen and understand others’ viewpoints. “If we all did that more, we wouldn’t have some of the situations we do have,” he said.

Another plus to the evening, Avedisian said, was developing a closer relationship with fellow guest **Rose Jones** ’09, chief of public affairs at the state Department of Environmental Management, the agency which has environmental jurisdiction over T.F. Green Airport in Warwick. Whenever there’s that relationship, it makes working together much easier, Avedisian observed.

Participants traveled back to Jefferson’s time (1743-1826) at the dinner hosted by **Michael Lester** ’13. Not only did guests wear Colonial-style wigs and use a quill pen to sign the Declaration of Independence, they conversed while enjoying Madeira, Thomas Jefferson Cu-

vée Sparkling Wine, and a multi-course menu inspired by the third President’s passion for French cuisine.

“As with all LRI events, I felt challenged to strive to be my best self and to further connect with my community,” said Lester, on-premise manager for MS Walker Fine Wine & Spirits.

“These dinners aim to accomplish one of my personal goals of connecting all LRI classes. Now, more than ever, it’s important to continue the mission.”

Kathy O’Donnell ’04, senior vice president & director of public affairs, Citizens Bank, says she had to “really think about the question and dig deep” for a story to share at the dinner held at Trio, the Newport Harbor Group’s restaurant in Narragansett.

She said that dinner guests’ professional and personal stories spoke to the value of intense listening and understanding of other people’s goals, motivations and fears.

“Once they did that and took themselves out of their own heads, [there was] further understanding and common ground that they could build from,” O’Donnell said.

The Trio dinner group was inspired enough to commit to gather again.

After serving two terms as President, Thomas Jefferson, primary author of the Declaration of Independence, retired to Monticello, his Virginia estate, where he enjoyed bringing people of diverse opinions and backgrounds together for an evening meal and inspiring conversation. Holding Jeffersonian Dinners to exchange ideas and encourage new human connections took hold in contemporary times after the concept was publicized in a TED Talk in 2012.

MaryEllen Butke ’08 first suggested that LRI organize Jeffersonian Dinners in Rhode Island. The idea picked up steam when alumni told LRI, in surveys and focus groups, that stimulating discussions and small group sessions would keep them connected to LRI.



Lorne Adrain ’94 and Ann Hood ’95 hosted a Jeffersonian dinner at their East Side home, attended by (clockwise around table, from left): Bob McCann ’15, Ed D’Arezzo ’08, Ernie Almonte ’88, Beth Cunha ’12, Kim Arcand ’14, Angie Ankoma ’14, Adrain, Kim Hall ’11 and Hood.

Dear President, ‘Promise you’ll listen’

By **Nancy Kirsch** ’94

Death and taxes are not the only certainties; there are two others: On Nov. 8, we will elect our 45th president and, no matter the outcome, our nation will remain profoundly polarized.

It’s in this confrontational and divisive environment, says **Mike Ritz** ’07, LRI executive director, that LRI seeks consensus and collaboration. To that end, “LRI is holding monthly Jeffersonian Dinners – as Thomas Jefferson did at Monticello – where alumni from diverse back-grounds and professions gather to explore how they, as accomplished leaders, find common ground, reach compromise and progress,” he says.

When the Jeffersonian Dinners were launched last spring, Ritz decided to add a special LRI twist: Guests are asked to go home and write letters to the new President.

LRI’s “Dear President ...” project will compile advice from LRI alumni to guide our next president – How can he or she govern after such a lengthy and hostile election season? How can she or he help heal the nation?

Here are excerpts from a few of the letters submitted to date:

“Candid discussions and public engagement with your opponents will show the country your desire to be everyone’s president,” counseled **Sam Zurier** ’04. As a member of the Providence City Council (Ward 2), Zurier understands the perils of partisanship for parti-

sanship’s sake. “You can increase the chances for your own success, while helping to bind our nation together as one,” he says.

“Promise you’ll listen,” urged President of North American Industries **Jerauld Adams** ’14. “Encourage entrepreneurship. Support those who think outside the box. Support those who want to work hard,” he added.

“Our country depends on you ... to lead by listening to gain knowledge, by respecting all opinions, by standing tall ... in the face of adversity and by using every ... ounce of energy you have to keep us inspired, free and protected,” wrote **Clare Eckert** ’95, president of Flynn Consulting Group LLC.

Acknowledging the marked disparities between the “haves” and the “have-nots” and the shrinking middle class, **Alec Beckett** ’11, creative director of NAIL Communications, wrote: “Thirty-nine percent of working Americans make less than \$20,000 a year ... their fates will be affected by nearly every decision you make.”

“Don’t look at politics as a profession; look at it as public service,” said **Ed D’Arezzo** ’08, recently retired associate director of health at the Department of Health.

LRI plans to publish a curated selection of the letters and perhaps some of the stories told at the Jeffersonian Dinners, along with information about LRI, in a book that will be sent to the 45th president and made available to all alumni.

Thank you to our 2016 dues-paying alumni!

**Visionary Member
\$500**

Mike Ritz '07
**Champion Member
\$250**
Pam Alarie '05
Bill Allen '87
Ernie Almonte '88
Nicole Benjamin '13
William Bundy '02
Laura Calenda '11
Joanne Daly '12
Ed D'Arezzo '08
Kim Hall '11
John Harpootian '88
Lisa Holley '12
Sharon Marable '01
Bob McCann '15
Christine McDermott '11
Tricia O'Neil '09
Clark Phillip '92
Anne Powers '86
Donna Sams '09
Baldev Seekri
Lynn Singleton '84
Richard Staples '90
Member - \$100
Candy Adriance '00
Jean Anderson '06
Stephen Antonucci '14
Armeny Apkarian '90
Kim Arcand '14
Scott Avedisian '97
Shameem Awan '15
Bruce Balon '06
Ting Barnard '15
Bob Baute '12
Kathy Bello '88
Natalie Benkovich '13
Emilie Benoit '83
Tim Benson '13
Lisa Blackman '06
Adrian Boney '11
Colleen Brard '10
Jacob Brier '14
Dan Bryant '93
Ken Burke '13
David Caprio '14
Angela Carr '15
Julie Casimiro '08
Frank Champi '82
Mary Chatel '97
Arlene Chorney '00

Mario Cirillo '15
Sandra Coletta '93
Sharon Conard-Wells '91
Susan Connery '99
Gayle Corrigan '13
Jane Cotter '10
Matt Coupe CLRI '12
Michael Criscione '10
James Crowley '92
Jeanne D'Agostino '02
Susan Daly '13
Stan DeAngelis '90
Rob DeOrsey '11
Michelle DePlante '14
Jane Desforges '05
Amy Diaz '14
Henry Diaz '13
Colleen Dickson '09
Bradford Dimeo '96
Peter Durfee '14
Andy Erickson '94
Susan Fabrizio '90
Michael Fantom '07
Chris Feisthamel '01
Mark Felag '05
Rosie Fernandez '15
Barbara Fields '93
Christine Foisy '13
Stephen Geremia '00
David Giardino '09
Christine Goulette '13
Richard Graefe '82
Amy Gravell '14
Joan Gray '86
Lenny Green '02
John Gregory '94
Akhil Gupta '07
Adam Gwaltney '12
Carol Hamilton '11
Karen Henault '11
Peter Hollmann '88
Andrea Hopkins '88
Jon Howard '08
Martha Hultzman '91
Roberta Humble '01
Chris Hurd '90
Deb Imondi '88
David Jardin '14
Holly Jensen '08
Rose Jones '09
Maria Kasparian '15
Betty Ann Kearney '02
Theresa Keegan '09

Karen King '13
Nancy Kirsch '94
Josh Klemp '13
Abby Klieman '10
Jason Knight '10
Cindy Lawlor '98
Tom Lisi '07
Val Littlefield '10
Janis Loiselle '99
Derek Lombard '13
Rosanne Lowe '07
Marie Lynch '15
Michael Lynch '01
David Macedo '13
Molly Magee '07
Rajani Mahadevan '10
Stephanie Mandeville '15
John Marion '11
Joseph Marocco '87
Ron Martel '06
Donna Martin '09
Fred Mason '03
Leeds Mitchell IV '15
Rob Monnes '12
Paul Mooney '98
Peter Moreau '09
Fran Mossberg '99
John Mugeridge '04
John Mulattieri '09
Lori Needham '15
Jim Nellis '13
Kelly Nevins '06
Kim Noble '14
Andy Nota '11
Michele Nota '09
Jane Nugent '95
Jim Nyberg '15
Kevin O'Brien '14
Kathy O'Donnell '04
Janice Olsen '15
John Palumbo '93
Nina Pande '12
Steven Pare '01
Michael Pearson '86
Kathy Power '86
Frank Prosnitz '96
Michael Quinn '05
Ralph Rodriguez '01
Caroline Rumowicz '10
Joan Sackett '83
Jessica Salter '13
Chris Sanford '10
Brian Schattle '07

Roberta Segal '94
Monica Shea '94
Sam Slade '13
Cheryl Snead '00
Brian Spero '84
Frank Spinella '11
Michael Steiner CLRI '14
Susan Stevenson '14
Robert Suglia '05
John Surette '10
Thomas Tanury '92
John Tarantino '91
Jay Thompson '10
Jill Tobak '06
Maria Tocco '07
Vanessa Toledo-Vickers '01
Stephen Ucci '15
Camille Vella-Wilkinson '00
Dale Venturini '88
Martin Vincent '99
Bill Warburton '88
Ray Watson '15
Sylvia Weber '90
Herb Weiss '12
David White '10
Liz Wiedenhofer '10
David Winoker '88
Scott Wolf '87
Mary Wyatt '98
Art Yatsko '14
Tuition Assistance Gifts
Kathy Bello '88
Deborah Brayton '92
James Crowley '92
Ed D'Arezzo '08
Stan DeAngelis '90
Michael Fantom '07
Carol Hamilton '11
Jon Howard '08
Mary Kozik '92
Clark Phillip '92
Ralph Rodriguez '01
Ed Schottland '92
Gary St. Peter '92
Myrth York '92
Carol Young '92

Note: This list only includes alumni who renewed their dues between Jan. 1 and July 31, 2016.

Class Notes

Here's what some of our members have been up to

After 15 years in leadership positions at the Providence Plan, **Andrew Bramson** '15 has been named CEO and president of the College Crusade of Rhode Island.

Libby Slader '12 has been re-elected chair of the board of the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts. She also designed the interior of Persimmon's new restaurant in Providence.

Maria Kasparian '15 and **Tom Stehl**, 2016 Mu II, opened Edesia's new manufacturing facility at the Quonset Business Park. Maria is the executive director and Tom the deputy director of the non-profit that produces ready-to-use foods for malnourished children throughout the world. It is the largest international exporter in Rhode Island.

Ken Burke '13 has been elected to the board of Stage Hands Massage Therapy. **Darcy Lynch** '99 is the organization's founder.

Christine Lopes Metcalfe '12 is the chief of staff/policy director for Commissioner **Ken Wagner** of the state Department of Education.

Gender equality was the topic of the United State of Women Summit convened this summer by the White House. **Kim Arcand** '14 was among the invited attendees.

Bob Whitcomb '97 is writing a weekly column, Digital Diary, for GoLocalProv.

Raymond Watson '15 won the RI Foundation Innovation Award to establish the Providence Cultural Equity Initiative. He will receive \$100,000 a year for three years to execute the project. **Donald King** '02 and **Mike Ritz** '07 are serving as volunteer directors.

Michael Lester '13 was invited to pair wines for "Summer in Rhode Island," a Rhode Island chef-and-farm collaboration dinner held in early August at the James Beard House in New York City.

Angie Ankoma '14, LRI board member, has



Arcand



Bramson



Gomez



Slader



Watson

been promoted to co-director of the Health Equity Institute at the state Department of Health.

Three alumni and three members of the 2016 Mu II class made this year's Providence Business News "40 Under 40" list. They are **Danielle Ward** '14, **Kyle Zambarano** '14, **Katje Afonseca** '15, and current class members **Justin Savage**, **Thomas Stehl**, and **Daniel Xavier** CLRI '09.

Vinny Gebhart '15 has been promoted to vice president of software and technology operations at Preventure Inc.

New parents should see the commercial featuring **Ted Shallcross** '11, LRI's board treasurer, and his family. The public service ad campaign promotes Collegeboundbaby, a program of the RI Higher Assistance Authority to encourage parents to start saving early for their child's education. Google it!

Speaking of new parents, **Angus** and **Joanna Davis** '14 are celebrating the birth of their third child, **Oscar Michael**, while **Amy Diaz** '14 and **Jason Case** are celebrating the birth of their first child, a girl.

Shameem Awan '15 received the Paul Harris Award from Cumberland-Lincoln Rotary Club.

Marcus Jannitto '97 was named Rhode Island Coach of the Year for his success and dedication as La Salle Academy's volleyball coach.

Ray Nunez CLRI '15 was chosen 2016 Student Leader of the Year at Johnson & Wales University.

Deputy Chief **Thomas F. Oates III** '06 retired from the Providence Police Department after 36 years of service.

Rafaelina Gomez, 2016 Mu II, has been promoted to senior compliance advisor at Fidelity Investments.

Peter Garino, 2016 Mu II, has been promoted to chief operating officer of the state Department of Transportation.

Want to share some good news from the Best Class Ever?
Email us at office@leadershipri.org.



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2016-2017 Events Calendar

Entire Month of September

Savor South County, a 2016 Mu II "Eat Local" Class Project

September 9

College Leadership Rhode Island (Class of 2016) begins

September 28

End-of-Summer Alumni Social, The Avenue Concept, 304 Lockwood St., Providence

October 17

2017 NU II Application Deadline

November 2

LRI-accompanied Young Presidents' Organization visit to Gallup HQ

November 16

The Mission Continues . . . LRI's FINEST alumni party & 2016 Mu II Graduation Celebration, The Dorrance

December 2

College Leadership Rhode Island (Class of 2016) Commencement

December 5

Publick Occurrences: A public forum on marijuana legalization in RI, Rhode Island College

December 30

Final Day for 2016 Dues Renewals and LRI Tuition Assistance Donations

January 20-21

2017 NU II Class Retreat

March 16

LRI's Inspiring Leaders Awards Luncheon