



LRI's virtual year: We couldn't stop

By Christine McDermott, '11

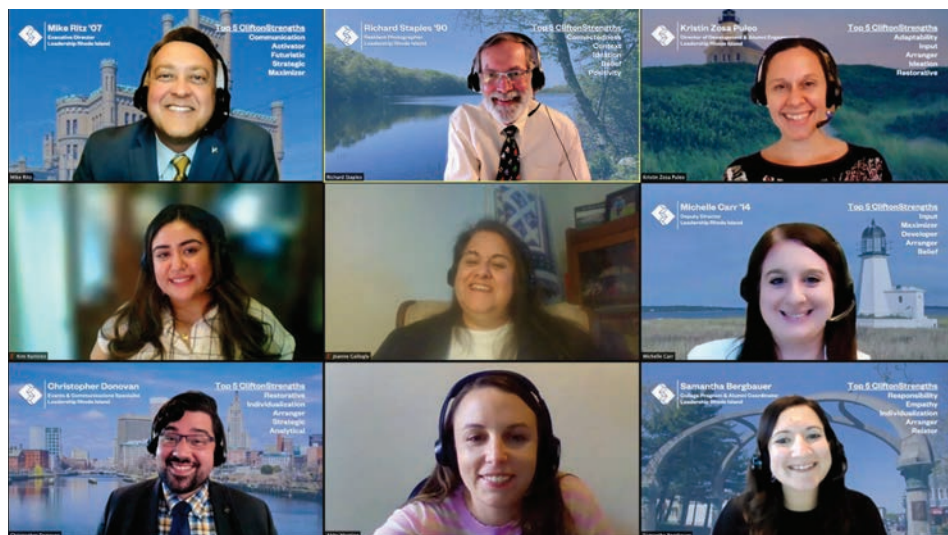
To support herself during graduate school, **Abby Montine** was a distance-learning pioneer: She taught children in China while based in New England.

When she was hired as the Training Administrator at Leadership Rhode Island in January of 2020, she proudly posted on Instagram, "I can hang up this headset!" After all, she expected to lead LRI's training and consulting services in person.

But in March, she found herself dusting off the headset and putting it back on as the pandemic forced LRI to shift its entire model to virtual. If you saw anyone from the LRI team online this past year, they were sure to be wearing one of these headsets, which were purchased on Montine's recommendation.

While COVID-19 caused 67 percent of leadership programs around the country to cancel or suspend programming, LRI never even paused.

"I don't think any of us even would have considered stopping," says **Kristin Zosa Puleo**, who was recently promoted to Director of Development and Alumni Engagement. "I don't even remember that being a consideration."



The cast for more than 300 virtual sessions, from top row: Mike Ritz, Richard Staples, Kristin Zosa Puleo, Kim Ramirez, Joanne Gallogly, Michelle Carr, Chris Donovan, Abby Montine, Sam Bergbauer.

"Can't stop, won't stop" became the mantra of Executive Director **Mike Ritz '07** as the staff mastered virtual communications and re-imagined their trademark core program and college program. They racked up new milestones, experiencing the best year ever for the Make RI Stronger initiative and alumni giving, and launching the National Leadership Network.

Friday, March 13 was the memorable day when Ritz told the staff to take home their laptops because the office would likely be closed for an undetermined amount of time. Deputy Director **Michelle Carr '14** had been researching best practices for engaging virtually and offered to prepare a presentation for the staff.

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LRI unites leaders across the country

By Ashley Rappa '19

While many saw the pandemic as a time to shut down, cut back or curl up, Leadership Rhode Island saw it as a perfect time to bring an idea to life that had been percolating for three years.

The idea was to create the National Leadership Network (NLN), an initiative to inspire America's community leaders to share, act and think big.

Launched in the spring of 2020, NLN is an engine of connectivity, a collaboration of the graduates of the nation's 800-plus Community Leadership Programs (CLPs) – an alumni pool that is 700,000 strong. The concept is rooted in a powerful premise: that activating a diverse group of leaders from all corners of the country can be a catalyst for national change.

Mike Ritz '07, LRI's executive director, first floated the notion of a national network of community leaders in 2017 with senior executives on the Association of Leadership Programs governing board. They shared the realization that the issues their communities were grappling with simply weren't contained by city or state lines.

That hunch was confirmed when LRI commissioned Starr Opinion Research, an international surveying organization, to ask a wide swath of CLP leaders nationwide about their organizational concerns, values and approaches to problem-solving.

Yet CLPs have historically been just what their name suggests – community oriented – and

therefore defined by the boundaries of a body politic. What would happen if their graduates could share connective experiences, problems and solutions through a vast coast-to-coast network? What could they achieve if their alumni applied the search for common ground on a much bigger scale?

Ritz, joined by **Michelle Carr '14**, LRI's deputy director, continued to test the waters with local leadership organizations at gatherings in Nashville, Louisville and Kansas City, culminating in a formal, invitation-only presentation at a conference in Tulsa in 2019. It was so positively received that they began planning for a national convening in Providence in 2020.

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Letter from the Chair

As an organization whose mission is to engage and connect people through shared experiences, the COVID-19 pandemic challenged Leadership Rhode Island in immeasurable ways. But those same challenges propel us forward today.

As part of our commitment to creating broader engagement, deeper connections, more shared experiences and an organization that not only meets today's needs but also anticipates tomorrow's needs, LRI has begun a strategic planning process to create a compelling vision for the future.

Long before we had any awareness that the world around us was about to change, LRI's board committed to engaging in a comprehensive strategic planning process. The pandemic put those plans on hold and, in hindsight, that hold was a fortuitous intervention.

While the demands of reimagining and reworking every one of our programs and services in 2020 kept LRI's staff and board working fervently to ensure that we continued to deliver the same high-quality and deeply engaging programs and services virtually, the pandemic also created space. Space that allowed us to reflect on and study the needs of our program participants and our alumni, as well as their employers, our communities and the changing world around us.

Today, we are approaching strategic planning with new vision and renewed rigor but grounded in the mission, beliefs and values that have long made LRI successful. We have engaged Spartina Consulting to facilitate this initiative and, in addition to our dedicated board and staff, we have assembled a committee of 14 of some of the most strategic and dynamic members of our community who have generously volunteered their time to help guide this work.



Over the course of 40 years, LRI's work has been felt across all sectors and across many communities in our state. Its impact has been exponential. LRI has not only left an indelible mark on our more than 2,500 alumni but, in turn, it has had a similar impact on the communities, the organizations and the people that those more than 2,500 alumni reach through their own leadership. But, even after 40 years, there is so much work that remains to be done. There remain communities to be reached, people to engage and plenty more shared experiences to be had both here in Rhode Island and far beyond our borders.

We are well positioned to propel LRI forward to the next 40 years and we look forward to unveiling to you our strategic plan this fall.

Nicole J. Benjamin, Esq. '13, Board Chair

Our Mission

We engage and connect people through shared experiences that positively transform individuals, organizations and communities.

Our Vision

We see a Rhode Island that is flourishing — economically, civically, culturally — built on a foundation of ever-improving human capital whose strengths and potential we spend each day revealing and igniting.

And we see the lessons of this lively leadership experiment being shared and amplified around the country and the world to nurture the kind of fully-engaged societies that create lasting, positive change.



Alumni support bolsters building project

By Ashley Rappa '19

In an unassuming corner of Providence's Olneyville neighborhood stands a crumbling brick building. It's currently vacant, filled only with cast-off reminders of prior use. But when **Lanre Ajakaiye '17** first saw it, he knew it was packed with much more than rust and dust. The property was bursting with potential.

The address is 25 Bough Street, an apt street name for the project it will soon house. A bough is defined as the branch of a tree, a metaphor for what the building will become once Ajakaiye's vision is realized. Entrenched in a long-neglected neighborhood, 25 Bough will serve as a vibrant, new community hub, reaching out to inspire, shape and empower those who live and work there.

The 15,194-square-foot space will support six integrated uses including a multi-purpose function and event hall, an athletic skills facility, a Futures Hub and a Heritage and Cultural Experience center, all to fuel a mission that spans education, career

awareness, health and wellness and financial empowerment for youth, women, families and the community at large.

Just below the surface of 25 Bough's bright future you'll find evidence of the diverse Leadership Rhode Island network rumbling to action in significant and meaningful ways.

Ajakaiye purchased the property in September of 2020, but he had been searching for the perfect site since 2017 when he and his Nu II classmates were learning all about the state through LRI's Core Program. Throughout that year he tapped into his newfound network's collective and individual expertise to learn more about the potential complexities of purchasing and rehabbing a derelict building and to help dream up and define the services the eventual community center might provide.

"The people in my LRI class and in all the classes past and present have become trusted brothers and sisters. They are

Bough continued on page 12



Photo Credit: Nora Lewis

Lanre Ajakaiye '17 sits inside 25 Bough Street, his building in Providence's Olneyville neighborhood that is destined to emerge as a vibrant, multi-purpose community hub.

Get ready to celebrate 40 years of LRI

By Diana Gugliotta '20

Mark your social calendars so you, your families, colleagues and friends don't miss a fantastical statewide scavenger hunt the weekend of Aug. 28 and 29 or the

"biggest and best celebration ever" on Oct. 20. The scavenger hunt, open to all Rhode Islanders, offers a chance to appreciate the state's beauty and its history while also supporting Leadership Rhode Island.

Why the hoopla? LRI is celebrating its 40th anniversary.

LRI traces its roots to the late **Bruce Sundlun**, a business executive who successfully prodded the Greater Providence

Chamber of Commerce to develop a program to groom future leaders for the state's government, business and nonprofit sectors.

The first class convened in October 1981. By the time Sundlun became governor 10 years later, more than 500 Rhode Islanders had graduated from the 10-month program. The count at the 40-year level stands at 2,718 graduates, a total that will increase by 75 when the current class graduates Oct. 16.

Over the decades LRI emerged from the Chamber umbrella and became an independent nonprofit;

added an overnight retreat to orientation and incorporated on-site visits to places like the state prison, the state landfill, schools, and media outlets; created a supportive alumni network; made team projects integral to the Core Program; expanded its mission to include College Leadership Rhode Island; and added revenue-producing activities, such as strengths training.

None of the developments would have been possible without the support of LRI's Board of Governors. In separate conversations, four board chairs offered their thoughts about leadership, the need to keep changing, and preserving the LRI legacy.

Asked about her accomplishments as chair, **Martha Hultzman '91** says it was coaxing **Mike Ritz '07** to leave the governing board to become executive director in the fall of 2009.

Anniversary continued on page 14



Since 1984 class members have posed holding 'the rope' that connects them forever. All of the iconic rope photos will be on display at the 40th Anniversary celebration in October.

Teams tackled loneliness during pandemic

By Kara Brady '19

Joyce Nix, an assisted living resident at Wingate Residences on Blackstone Boulevard in Providence, says spending time with loved ones, albeit in cyberspace, kept her “happy and thinking positive” during the seemingly endless ban on visitors.

Before the pandemic, she regularly left Wingate to have dinner with her granddaughter's family, attend her great grandchildren's school events or take a walk in the park with them.

The sudden switch to enforced solitude in the spring of 2020 hit hard, softened immeasurably by a small electronic tablet that linked her visually with those she loves. At 92, she says she even mastered the best way to share virtual hugs and kisses.

The use of iPads to soften the harsh blow of isolation at four congregate living sites can be traced to two leadership-in-action teams from Leadership Rhode Island's 2020 class.

Early in 2020, **Mike Ritz '07**, LRI executive director, told the class, divided into 10 leadership-in-action teams, to think of projects that diminish loneliness. Even in crowds, aloneness is a significant, but rarely recognized, societal problem, he said at the time.

Then the pandemic hit. Loneliness moved out of the twilight to center stage. Overnight, social distancing, sheltering-in-place, visitation bans and distance learning became part of our everyday lexicon.

Members of the LIA teams quickly recalibrated, replacing original pre-COVID-19 plans with an array of new projects, several still having an impact a year later.

One team created “Keep it Together, People,” a Facebook page that shares light-hearted posts to relieve pandemic stress and encourage new connections. The page has nearly 4,000 followers.

Another team decided to recognize people whose actions brighten the lives of others. Heroes Around Here, the group's Facebook page, features lots of Rhode Islanders, including Sheri Arbige and her son Jaxon, who put happy messages on painted seashells and hid them on Aquidneck Island for others to discover, and Annette, who cheerfully checks out groceries at Dave's Market at Quonset.

The team that set out to reduce isolation in nursing homes got liftoff when member **Dino Rizzi '20** secured 15 iPads from Amgen, where he is the director of manufacturing. Team member **Josh Short '20**, artistic director of the Wilbury Theatre, obtained a Rhode Island Foundation grant to purchase iPad covers and



Photo Courtesy: Lisa Huftalen



Photo Courtesy: Wingate Residences



Pi II's Leadership in Action projects to tackle loneliness live on.

Top left: Lisa Huftalen '20 delivers iPads and custom instructional guides to the residents of Crystal Lake Rehabilitation & Care Center.

Right: Kim Newman, life enrichment assistant at Wingate Residences on Blackstone Boulevard, Providence, assists 92-year-old Joyce Nix with a virtual family visit.

Bottom: Heroes Around Here Facebook group continues to showcase everyday Rhode Islanders whose actions spark smiles, beacons of light and happiness.

screen protectors, and **Lisa Huftalen '20**, who handles graphic design and marketing at VIBCO Vibrators, created a useful instructional guide.

The team placed iPads at Elderwood of Scallop Shell and Brightview Commons, both in South Kingstown, and Crystal Lake Rehabilitation & Care Center in Pascoag.

The arrival of iPads at Wingate took a more circuitous route, one inspired by an LIA team that created a campaign called One Thing Helps.

“It's kind of like ‘random acts of kindness,’ but very deliberate and specific,” explains team member **Richard Davia '20**, creative director of branding at (add)ventures.

After One Thing Helps was launched, team member **Rebecca Twitchell '20**, president of a consulting company, half full, was chatting with an official at Wingate about the wellbeing of a beloved family friend. At one point, she asked if there was anything she might do to help lessen

the pain of the pandemic.

The answer: Provide an electronic tablet to enable video conferencing.

With that, Twitchell's One Thing took flight.

Networking led to **Ian Lester '10** at COVID Connectors, a New England-based organization dedicated to providing electronic devices for hospital patients. Lester said the organization was amenable to expanding its reach to include nursing homes and assisted living sites.

Twitchell's One Thing mushroomed into 12 things when COVID Connectors donated 12 iPads to Wingate.

Ryan Harris, Wingate's life enrichment director, says he has facilitated countless virtual visits and is convinced they had a profound positive impact.

Harris is certain that virtual visits have become so popular that the donated iPads will be linking residents with their loved ones long after the pandemic is in the rear-view mirror.

Be Kind RI connects helpers to those in need

By Kara Brady '19

"It's kindness, made easy," says **Maggie Slane '20**, describing a new community program that quickly and easily connects people needing a food delivery with neighbors willing to help.

Aptly named Be Kind RI, the program is a collaboration of three organizations, Family Service of Rhode Island (FSRI), where Slane is vice president of advancement, the Rhode Island Community Food Bank and Age-Friendly Rhode Island.

After supporting a Family Service program last year called Be Safe, some of Slane's Pi II classmates have stepped up this year to support the new, collaborative effort, Be Kind RI.

Be Safe emerged in response to the pandemic-driven statewide shutdown in March 2020. Family Service decided to deliver Be Safe kits packed with essentials like shelf-stable food, personal protective supplies and other necessities like diapers and formula to Rhode Islanders in need.

"Our CEO's office was floor-to-ceiling diapers, the Human Resources department became a distribution center, and when the landlord offered additional space in the building, we jumped

at the chance and used it for the assembly of kits," recalls Slane.

At the same time FSRI headquarters was beginning to resemble an Amazon fulfillment center, Slane's leadership-in-action team was looking for a project that addressed loneliness. The team opted to support the Be Safe effort by raising funds and collecting notes of kindness to include in the kits. A website was launched, on which any Rhode Islander could donate and write an uplifting message, thanks to a \$5,000 in-kind donation from Rustle & Spark, where teammate **Adam Olenn '20** is CEO.

Teammates **Rob Hancock '20**, now senior director of marketing and communications at United Way of Rhode Island, brought in East Bay Printing to print cards for the kits as well as the hopeful messages, and **Diana Gugliotta '20**, senior manager of public affairs at AAA Northeast, secured a \$10,000 donation from her employer.

Others in the class, while focusing on their own team projects, pitched in to help, too. **Nancy Serpa '20**, a manager at Sensata Technologies, brought in a \$3,000 donation from her employer, and **Tom Baldwin '20**,



Jhane Pereira from Family Services of Rhode Island's foster care program prepares to deliver a Be Safe Kit which includes a note of support from the Be Together RI leadership in action team.

faculty member at the Naval War College, did kit deliveries to Aquidneck Island.

Many Pi II's also made personal donations, and all together, Slane, her team, and the Pi II's played a significant role in the scalability and sustainability of Be Safe by bringing in \$15,000 toward the cause.

The power of the Pi II's professional and social networks spilled over to Be Kind RI when Gugliotta connected Slane with Age-Friendly Rhode Island, a partnership that "blossomed from there," says Slane.

The new collaborative took shape after the discovery of new technology developed by Nesterly, a Boston company that specializes in linking people in need with those who can help. "Without this technology, it would be a completely inefficient way to carry out volunteer services at this time," says Slane.

Here's how it works: Volunteers and those needing a food delivery

fill out forms on BeKindRI.org. Volunteers specify their preferred pickup-delivery radius and languages spoken, while beneficiaries indicate whether they'd like a delivery from a grocery store or a food pantry. When a beneficiary requests a delivery, the website automatically pings the volunteer database, finds a potential match, and texts that volunteer.

Volunteers, who do not have to commit to set hours or a regular schedule, can accept or decline a request based on their immediate situation. If declined, the site automatically texts the next potential volunteer.

"Our increasingly busy lives make it hard to commit, so being able to volunteer on demand when someone needs you is huge," says Slane.

Even volunteer background checks are automated. It takes just minutes and uses the same technology that companies like **Kind continued on page 14**



Photos Courtesy: Family Services of Rhode Island

As part of their Leadership in Action projects, Be Together RI set up a website where notes of encouragement and support were collected and then included with Family Services of Rhode Island's 'Be Safe Kits'

Difficult conversations essential to progress

By Barry O'Connor '16

I first heard about Leadership Rhode Island 20 years ago when my stepmother **Cleora Francis-O'Connor '01** talked about her experiences, often highlighting the public figures she met during session days, people like **Steven Pare '01**, then Colonel of the State Police, and **Congressman David Cicilline**, then in the General Assembly. I was fascinated.

Fourteen years later LRI came up again when **Max Foster '15**, a good friend, mentioned he was participating. I told him my mom was an LRI graduate who had been chosen class speaker. You should apply, he said.

I was reluctant. I had reached a point at which I no longer wanted to engage with people on societal issues, given the political climate in our country. I was particularly frustrated by discussions on the topic of race – not with all people, just those who refuse to acknowledge that systemic racism exists, or are oblivious to the fact that not everyone experiences life in the same way.

It's impossible to have a conversation about the details of a problem if someone doesn't recognize that a problem exists. Getting this message across, while also trying not to implicate someone in perpetuating structural racism is emotionally exhausting.

Beyond that, engaging with defiant people is risky for me. As tensions rise and the defiance grows, I have to tread incredibly carefully because, if I express frustration or exasperation, they will tap into racist tropes about angry Black men who are a threat to their safety. Trying to communicate with anyone in these circumstances is a losing proposition that is not worth the effort.

Despite my reluctance, curiosity and my friend's encouragement carried the day. I applied for the 2016 class and decided, if accepted, I would participate with an open mind. During the retreat's torch ceremony, I realized I had made the right decision.

Even though I am more likely to listen than interact, I had many fruitful conversations over the course of the 10-month program. Unfortunately, I had some challenging ones, too.

One difficult encounter occurred on Defense Day, a session this former U.S. Marine was anticipating with enthusiasm. In his morning welcome, **Mike Ritz '07**, executive director, reminded us to use breaks in the day's activities to chat with classmates with whom we had not had much interaction.

Heeding Mike's advice, one classmate approached, asking to talk. What happened next hurt me to the core. Sitting down next to me, the

classmate asked: "Why are all Black men violent and why do they abandon their children?"

How could I respond to that? Should I have said that I was raised mostly by my father or that I raised my son almost exclusively as a single dad since he was 3 years old? Should I have pointed out that mass incarceration of Black men, specifically in the '80s and '90s, essentially destroyed the African-American family?

How do you bridge the informational gap, the lack of compassion and the ignorance in that question? I could not. I kept my composure, stood up and walked away. I just could not bring myself to engage.

Given this stunning encounter, you might wonder why I agreed to serve as program committee co-chair for this year's class, the Rho IIs. Here are some of the reasons.

The positives of LRI's Core Program outnumber the negatives. For me, that means more rewarding encounters than troubling ones, and many opportunities to forge new, lasting relationships.

I view LRI as the standard bearer of positive change in Rhode Island, a state in which I have a vested interest.

It is a point of personal pride when I discover that individuals I have long admired are LRI alumni, from **Frank "Chico" Santos '84** who, along with the late Leo "Mr. D" DiMaio, was instrumental in my pursuit of a college degree, to **Linda Newton '84**, who is essentially an extended family member, and



the **Rev. Virgil Wood '84**, who joined me in advocating for legislation benefiting the state's Black and brown communities.

LRI is adamant about exploring hot-button issues from multiple angles and providing a safe space for class members to share opinions and perspectives, especially those that differ from mainstream thought. "Whatever is said at LRI, stays at LRI" is Mike's way of encouraging honest and frank exchanges.

Reflection tells me that instead of walking away from that offensive encounter with a classmate, I could have turned it into a teaching moment.

After all, conversations between individuals, no matter how difficult, are essential to genuine progress.

A note from the executive director

I encouraged Barry, program committee co-chair of this year's Rho II class, to write about his troubling encounter because that experience in 2016 illustrates the very challenge Leadership Rhode Island has faced since its founding in 1981. The expressed goal then - and now - is to bring together individuals with vastly different perspectives and life experiences in pursuit of solutions and changes that benefit all of us. As we learn from Barry, failed human connections can be needlessly hurtful.

The canyon between us is widening, the difficulty in crossing immense. LRI must keep

trying to shorten the distance by providing more opportunities to develop authentic connections, a bridge to better understanding, a place safer than the outside world for emerging and established leaders to grow empathy and understanding, compassion and trust.

Changing our own biases or being confronted by the biases of others is hard, sometimes painful, but I have hope that change is possible with each interaction and the reflection it inspires. This leadership journey is worthwhile. May success be our proof.

—Mike Ritz '07

CLRI grads say program helps with job hunt

By John Mulattieri '09

College Leadership Rhode Island equips its participants with interviewing skills, offers a plethora of networking experiences, and teaches the value of knowing one's own strengths – a job-hunting combination that works even in a pandemic. Success, however, may take more time.

That's the take-away from conversations with three CLRI graduates willing to share how COVID-19 influenced their transitions from academia to employment.

While some alumni have yet to find jobs, the number is small, says **Samantha Bergbauer**, coordinator of CLRI.

"I love it when I hear that our CLRI class members and alumni are setting up informational interviews themselves or getting involved in nonprofits they learned about during their session days," she says.

Paige Zuber has experienced two job-hunting journeys. The first landed her in Manhattan, and the second brought the New Jersey native back to Rhode Island where she attended Johnson & Wales and **participated in CLRI, as a student in 2018** and as co-chair of the 2019 class.

Zuber was thoroughly engaged in her first big job as cafe manager at Walt Disney headquarters when COVID-19 hit, turning New York City into a ghost town. The cafe, which served nearly 3,000 meals a day when she arrived in June 2019, dropped to roughly 100 meals a day, forcing her into the heartbreaking process of laying off most of the food line workers she supervised. By October 2020, she too was laid off.



Photo Courtesy: Paige Zuber

Paige Zuber CLRI '19 proudly displays the edition of Rhode Island Monthly that announces her new position as digital marketing and events manager.



TsheWang Sherpa CLRI '20 introduces himself to classmates during the 2020 College Leadership Rhode Island orientation.

Zuber says she landed the job with the FLIK Hospitality Group, in part, because of her college degree and, in part, because she was the only candidate in a group interview who emphasized her strengths, the natural talents she discovered she had while in CLRI.

"When interviewing, I was able to talk about creating and building relationships" and say, with confidence, that "I had WOO," she says. She was referring to an official CliftonStrength that captures "those who love to meet new people and win them over."

Zuber opted to return to Rhode Island where she still had a strong network of friends and contacts. A "side hustle" as a freelance social media consultant kept her afloat until she was ready to plunge into yet another job search, one involving "lots of applications, not many interviews."

A happy ending came in April with an offer to be Digital Marketing & Events Manager for RI Monthly magazine, a job quite different from cafe manager.

CLRI encourages flexibility, she says. "If you initially pursue one business sector, but later discover another passion, it's ok to change your mind. That's the beauty of CLRI."

One might call **TsheWang Sherpa CLRI '20**, a Networker Extraordinaire. He grabbed every opportunity – and CLRI offers many – to put the concept of networking into practice. And, in the most unexpected way, it helped him land a job.

On CLRI's mock interview session day, Sherpa was paired with **Adam Olenn**, CEO of Rustle & Spark, a marketing and communications agency, who was participating in the 2020 Core Program at the time. After their mock interview, Sherpa visited the firm's website and passed

along a few positive suggestions for improving it. A mentoring relationship emerged.

During the session day focused on jobs and service in the nonprofit sector, Sherpa chatted briefly with **Laura Jaworski '18**, executive director of House of Hope, a nonprofit that develops affordable housing and services for the homeless. Months later, he learned on LinkedIn that House of Hope was looking for new board members. Sherpa successfully sought a seat on the board.

Sherpa, who holds an MBA from Johnson & Wales, describes his pandemic job search as a difficult process that took more than seven months and 300-plus applications that led to a mere seven interviews.

Some freelance digital marketing work for Olenn's firm kept his spirits up, countering the anxiety and self-doubts of the search process. A native of Nepal, Wang, as he is known, wondered whether being from another culture would be a plus or a minus, whether his inexperience would be a disadvantage, even whether he was "good enough."

In June 2020 came the offer as a marketing specialist at Northpoint Mortgage Inc. Sherpa discovered later what had set him apart from the competition. The mortgage company, he was told, was impressed that he was on a governing board to serve the homeless community and that his focus was finances.

Thomas Heavren CLRI '20, took a different approach to his search for the right job. Instead of casting a wide net, he stayed narrow and focused. Still, like Zuber and Sherpa, he leaned on his network and his strengths.

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Not a dry eye when alumnae met VP

By Christine McDermott '11

Six-year-old Hasana Spellman could not contain her excitement when she learned that her mother was going to meet **Vice President Kamala Harris**.

"Mommy, so tell me what the vice president does," Hasana asked her mother, **Sterling Clinton-Spellman '19**, CEO of Polished by Sterling.

"She's like the second boss," Clinton-Spellman explained to the kindergartner.

"For real?" Hasana exclaimed. "And she's mocha like me?"

The day after Clinton-Spellman presented her business to Harris at the Social Enterprise Greenhouse in Providence, Hasana squealed with glee when relating that her teacher had hung up a news photo of her mother with the vice president.

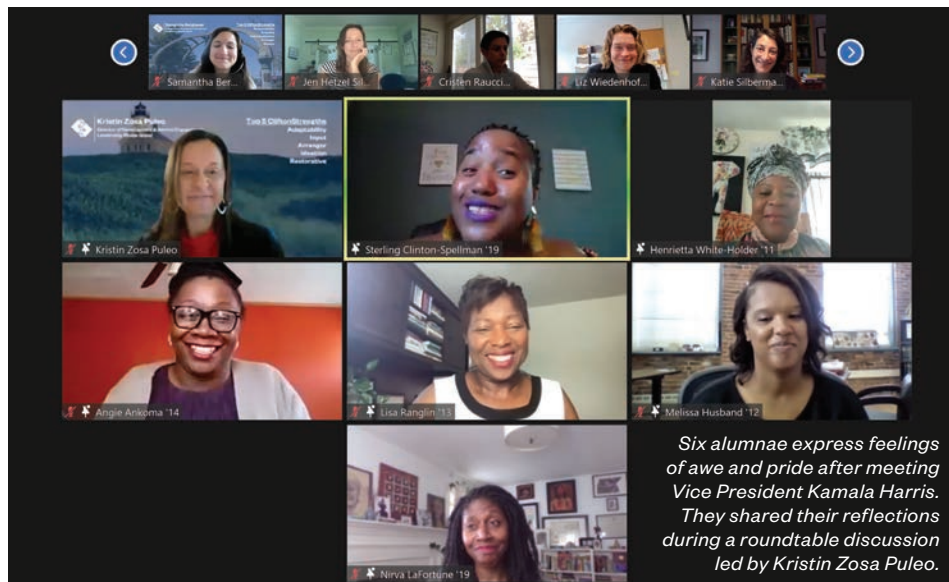
"When is your next conversation with the VP?" she asked.

Clinton-Spellman was one of six Leadership Rhode Island alumnae who spent time with Harris when she joined former Governor, now **U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo** in Rhode Island on May 5. LRI Executive Director **Mike Ritz '07** invited the women to participate in a virtual roundtable to reflect on why the election of the first woman of color to the office of Vice President is such a pivotal moment in history.

Lisa Ranglin '13, CEO of Ranglin & Associates, said there wasn't a dry eye in the room when the group met with Harris.

"We were just over the moon," she said. "Oh my god, this is somebody that looks like us, and she's literally just talking to us and looking in our eyes. I had this 'aha' moment when I said something and she repeated it. It was just incredible."

As a Jamaican-American woman, Ranglin said seeing Harris in the vice presidency gives her hope that her daughter's journey will be smoother



than her own. Among the challenges Ranglin herself faced: being told she would never enter the corporate space, that she was likely to become a teen mom and that "girls that look like her" do not study computer science.

She earned her bachelor's degree in computer science and worked her way up the corporate ladder during a 21-year career at Fleet Bank, but it wasn't easy. Ranglin has long been a champion for women, fighting for access, inclusion and mobility.

"We should have our careers, we should have our family and we should do the things that we want to do," she said. "We should be bold, we should lead, but we should be supported."

Henrietta White-Holder '11, founder of Higher Ground International, said Harris gave her an infusion of energy at a time when she was feeling battle-weary. Prior to meeting Harris, White-Holder had told a friend, "I can't do this anymore, I can't. I'm tired, I'm worn out, I just don't have it in me."

Harris urged the group to speak the truth and fight for racial equity and justice, even when it's difficult, White-Holder said.

"She's given me breath and life and new opportunities to know that what I'm fighting for is not in vain and to continue fighting, because we have people that are depending on us to help be that voice of change," she said.

Providence City Councilwoman **Nirva Rebecca LaFortune '19** is optimistic that Harris' election will transform politics. She noted that Harris embraces the intersectionalities within her identity as a Black woman, an Indian-American woman and the daughter of immigrants.

"What she represents is the diversity of our nation," LaFortune said. "People within this country come from various sectors, but yet when we see people who are in positions of power, they're all the same, and those are the people who are making decisions for such a vast group of people and a lot of times they don't understand the need."

She hopes that other women are inspired by Harris to run for office.

"For the first time I stood in a space and I looked at someone who was in a position that many of us could never reach, and finally, I looked at her and I said 'Wow, I see myself in her,'" LaFortune said. "And that has not been our narrative. I think that's going to change what politics looks like in the United States across the board."

For Clinton-Spellman, she won't soon forget the vice president's reaction to her Incred-A-Bowl Fresh Start program, through which she provides work opportunities for the "hard to employ."

"... when I was speaking to her she looked me in my eyes and afterwards she came up to me and said, 'You know, what you're doing is really going to change the world.'"



Photo Courtesy: Sterling Clinton-Spellman
Sterling Clinton-Spellman '19, third from left, was among a group of local entrepreneurs who spoke directly with Vice President Kamala Harris and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo at an event organized by Social Enterprise Greenhouse, led by Kelly Ramirez '11, far right.

Reflections continued from page 1

"The mission needed to continue," she says. "We had to be ready to pivot."

That weekend, Carr produced what was essentially a 10-page white paper on how to transition to the virtual space. What she presented to the staff that Monday and Tuesday became a training format that Carr, within days, was also sharing with leadership programs around the country.

Being a CliftonStrengths-based organization helped LRI react. Each team member had something special to offer beyond their usual job description.

Events & Communications Specialist **Chris Donovan** is skilled in stage production, which was critical for events like the virtual luncheon and alumni holiday party. Zosa Puleo has a background in events and hospitality. And Montine, of course, had taught remotely.

"I came in with the tools and best practices and research and a can-do attitude: We can do this well," Carr recalls. "I tried to show the staff how we could utilize everybody's expertise in this."

Adds Zosa Puleo: "Adaptability is my number one strength. Whatever comes at me, I'm going to figure out how to do it."

As the staff worked to become proficient at Zoom, LRI emailed a video message to the 2020 Pi II class letting them know that the Core Program would continue. While LRI postponed the March session day to spend time revamping their plans, Zosa Puleo kept in touch with the class.

"The class was exploring loneliness for their Leadership In Action projects, and then everybody got locked in their houses," she said. "Not only were we trying to do this program, now there was this extra layer of keeping the class connected, and we wanted to make sure they were doing OK. There was a lot of checking in.



Danielle Kopf '19, Ken Burke '13 and Karen King '13 hold banners celebrating the 2020 Pi II class during their outdoor graduation ceremony at The Towers in Narragansett.

We did what we could. If people reached out, we had individual conversations with them."

They wound up holding three session days virtually, including Government and Crime & Incarceration, which meant the Pi II's missed two quintessential LRI experiences: a simulated bill hearing at the Statehouse and a tour of the state prison. (They were given IOUs for those experiences at their graduation.)

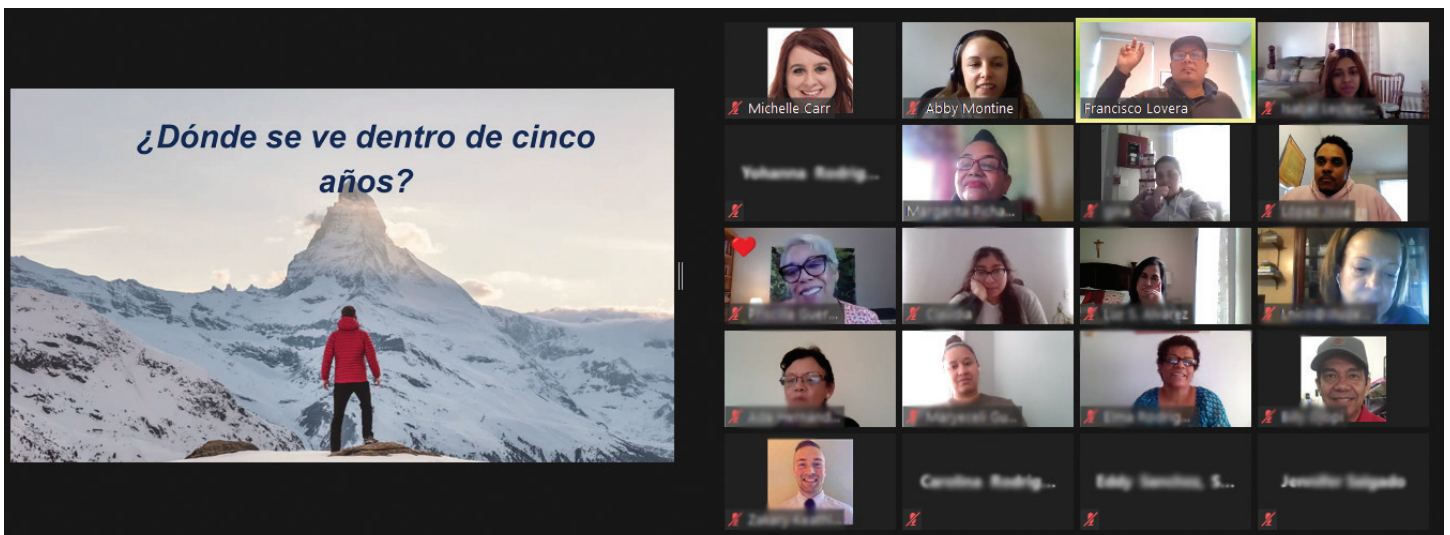
"Faces over places" became an objective of the program committee, Zosa Puleo said, as they brought in marquee speakers like **U.S. Senators Jack Reed** and **Sheldon Whitehouse**, whose Washington, D.C. schedules in the past prevented them from attending a session day in person.

One session became a Pi II day, where they just focused on the class.

"One class member pointed out last year that you got to know people on a whole other level," Zosa Puleo says. "On Zoom, you're literally in people's houses, you see their pets walk by and see their kids come up. We were flexible with one another and understanding that we all had our lives to deal with. We were all seeing each other deal with their lives on screen during a session day."

LRI quickly gained notice for their excellent work in the virtual space. And they began consulting with organizations like Johnson & Wales University and Gilbane to host

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Francisco Lovera '18 and Abby Montine, training administrator, conduct a virtual strengths training in Spanish as part of the Ready, Set, Work! program with Skills for Rhode Island's Future.

More than 4,500 leadership program alumni were asked about some of the nation's greatest challenges in 2020, and what we need to do to move forward, together. Here's how the LRI alumni responses compare to the national average.

National
83% Agree

Rhode Island
83% Agree

They have an obligation to publicly demonstrate how local leaders from different backgrounds can work together to improve their communities.

National
98% Agree

Rhode Island
96% Agree

Frank discussions among leaders allow them to work towards meaningful change.

National
97% Agree

Rhode Island
97% Agree

Collaboration among leaders increases the sustainability of change.

National
97% Agree

Rhode Island
100% Agree

On the importance of engaging with people from different backgrounds.

Results from National Leadership Network's 2020 Alumni Leadership Insights survey

Network continued from page 1

This large-scale gathering joined the pandemic casualty list but instead of feeling deterred, the LRI team found inspiration. "With everyone suddenly on video instead of in person, many boundaries just disappeared," says Ritz. "At a time when the nation needed leadership arguably more than ever, that fundamental shift opened up a world of possibility to bring people together and find solutions through common ground."

And so the idea of a national network of community leaders found new life in the virtual space. Ritz and a core group of supporters across the country saw an unexpected and immense opportunity for innovation in the name of the greater good.

LRI launched the National Leadership Network on May 5, 2020, at a session titled "Come Together," which closed with a familiar anthem: "We Are Family" by Sister Sledge.

The inaugural program featured a four-part series, Discussions That Matter, in which hot topics such as policing, protesting and election security were examined, each with the express purpose of hearing from experts and challenging the status quo.

All in all, NLN offered a dozen



Leadership Rhode Island's Deputy Director Michelle Carr, in red dress, meets with other Community Leadership Program staff during a 2019 conference in Tulsa, Okla.

get-togethers between May and November of 2020, drawing more than 2,000 virtual participants from 47 states to network, to address real issues and find concrete ways forward.

The events were a huge success, bridging divides and bringing people together who otherwise would never have crossed paths.

"In a normal time, NLN's mission would have added a huge amount of value for participants and communities. But, at this particular moment in history, the mission feels urgently necessary," says **Pete Rumsey '19**, Chief Business Development Officer at the University of Rhode Island's Research Foundation and new member of the LRI governing board.

"In this fractured, polarized world we're living in, there are few spaces that exist with the explicit purpose of reminding ourselves that we all get

up in the morning, put on our clothes, one piece at a time, and have a cup of coffee," Rumsey says. "Just as there's strength in our differences, there is power in our commonality. Embracing both is how progress is made in our backyards and across borders."

The craving for that kind of space and that method of action is real among CLP graduates. In a second national survey by Starr, this time aimed directly at alumni, a whopping 83 percent of national respondents said they believe they "have an obligation to publicly demonstrate how local leaders from different backgrounds can work together to improve their communities."

LRI alumni responses mirrored national results on many key issues, including:

- Our goal is to find and implement changes that will have a long-term positive impact

Network continued on page 15



National Leadership Network events have engaged thousands of alumni representing more than 190 community leadership programs across the nation since May 2020.

LRI Welcomes New Programs Manager

Teresa DeFlitch, whose varied experience includes developing and leading learning centered history programs for teachers, students, Congressional staffers and museums, has joined the Leadership Rhode Island staff as Programs Manager.

She is responsible for LRI's Core Program, College Leadership Rhode Island, and Leadership in Action projects, with an eye toward providing quality experiences that incorporate leadership development, relationship building, networking, civic understanding, community engagement, workforce development and personal wellbeing.

Most recently, DeFlitch led the development of a people-centered HR strategy for an award-winning craft whiskey distillery in Pittsburgh, Wigle Whiskey and Threadbare Cider, while also leading special projects, including the launch of a new spirits tourism trail across Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Washington, DC.

Earlier, she oversaw national outreach for a

K-12 history education project funded by the U.S. Department of Education, facilitated the training of thousands of Congressional staff, interns and volunteers on the art and history of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, and led the development of a nationally recognized City as Our Campus program in Pittsburgh.

DeFlitch has consulted with several organizations on projects that explore new boundaries in teaching and learning, including the management of a pilot maker education project with the crowdfunding platform Kickstarter, the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh, and the Community Robotics, Education and Technology Empowerment Lab at Carnegie Mellon University.

DeFlitch majored in history at Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, PA., and earned a master's degree in history from Syracuse University. Originally from Pittsburgh, DeFlitch says she fell in love with Rhode Island during the summer of 2005 when she was a Buchanan-Burnham intern at the Newport Historical Society. She says she decided back then that one day she would call the Ocean State her home. That day came in January when she, husband Rick and son Silas became residents of Barrington.



Teresa's Top 5 CliftonStrengths:

Learner – Intellection
– Connectedness –
Strategic – Relator

Reflections continued from page 9

virtual events and trainings, including Gilbane's New England Regional Dinner with 232 attendees.

Among the highlights for Montine: LRI supported the Prepare RI High School Internship Program, during which 470 students participated in weekly virtual CliftonStrengths trainings focused on understanding and

leveraging their unique Top 5 Strengths.

The basic Make Rhode Island Stronger program has remained in demand, with LRI holding more than 100 trainings from March 2020 through May 2021.

"We found there was just as much of a need – if not more – for strengths training," Montine says. "It's a philosophy based in positive psychology. Workplaces found themselves in places of dramatic

change, some in different, dark places. Using this framework that brings the positive perspective in, there was more of a need than ever."

Throughout it all, LRI has managed to stay connected to its vast alumni network. Membership renewals increased over 2019, both in the number of alumni and total dollars contributed. And fundraising on 401Gives Day surpassed expectations, when more than 137 individuals representing 33 classes raised more than \$15,000 in support of LRI.

In October, Carr and Donovan presented – virtually – to a conference of community leadership programs in Tennessee on the work LRI has been doing.

From the beginning, it was important to Carr to keep the heart in LRI, and that meant putting a good deal of thought into designing each experience, considering learning styles and creating purpose statements for each event.

"We were really thinking through that emotional engagement piece of it – what are people needing – which really was purpose and

connection," she said. "It's not like we were on the front lines providing basic needs, yet we were trying to serve people in a different way, which was this human element and sense of connection that people were so needing."

While the Pi II's were eventually able to reunite in person for small group sessions during the summer and a graduation at Narragansett Beach in the fall, the 2021 Rho II class began their year with a virtual retreat. One upside: several class members said they otherwise would not have been able to participate in the program because of their work and travel schedules during normal times.

Zosa Puleo said the learnings from the pandemic will impact programming in the future.

"It's been a wild ride," she said. "There's going to be a virtual piece to everything that we do moving forward. I'm proud that we were able to be an example for the work that we're doing – not only across the country but in Rhode Island. The fact that so many people are looking at us to be the example is a point of pride for all of us."



The Strengths van led a car parade underneath the arches of The Towers in Narragansett during the outdoor 2020 Pi II graduation ceremony.

Bough continued from page 3

incredibly brilliant people whose thoughts and insights have added immense value to my life and this project at every step of the way. And there have been a lot of steps,” jokes Ajakaiye.

The project's genesis actually extends back to Ajakaiye's youth. As a child, he would accompany his father, a Nigerian immigrant, to scope out residential properties and together determine if they could be purchased, fixed and flipped for profit. That activity eventually evolved into a shared dream: To own a property together, out of which they could deliver services to better and benefit the community.

Ajakaiye, whose full-time job is Global Head of Membership for the National Fire Protection Association, is a doer through and through. So he put his first career – 10 years of experience as a residential real estate agent and broker in Manhattan – to good use to find the perfect place to bring his and his father's vision to life.

After the first property he pursued fell through, he found 25 Bough Street. Though there was no for-sale sign, its broken glass and two-story frame caught his eye. The telltale signs of abandonment prompted him to sleuth out the building's status. He discovered it was city owned and eventually uncovered that it was indeed available. But there was a hitch: Someone had already made an offer.

Discouraged, but undeterred, he kept looking. Seven months later he got a call – the deal on 25 Bough had fallen through. Later that same day, Ajakaiye submitted a deposit, the purchase and sales agreement and a formal offer.

With the wheels finally in motion, he began to tap into the LRI network in earnest to tackle the myriad logistics needed to transform a vacant building into the thriving heart of community empowerment. He first looked to his 2017 classmates – **Hamza Chaudary** for advice on risk mitigation; **Andrew Pelletier** for help with securing commercial insurance; **Holly Ferrara**, for experience with commercial loans; **Jason Chopoorian**, to help with the mental, health and wellness considerations and programming;

Dan Murphy, for business and commercial venture expertise; **Zlatomir Popov** for financial information; **Henry Cruz** for engineering and multicultural input, and many more.

LRI alumni are also financial supporters of 25 Bough, the first project in New England to be approved for Regulation CF funding, a financing method akin to crowdfunding that allows individuals to back startups and receive equity in return. To date, 199 investors have raised just shy of \$150,000.

Ajakaiye is also one of the first Black entrepreneurs to be approved for CF funding nationwide. Once 25 Bough's doors officially open, it will be sustained by revenue from retail tenants, corporate and private rentals, corporate sponsorships and grants.

Other supporters from Ajakaiye's 2017 class who have visited 25 Bough or otherwise offered support include **Maureen Mammen**, **Gian-Mikel Facenda**, **Jill Tuttle Woodcome**, **Amy Vitale** and **Terrence Green**. Those from other class years include **Rosie Fernandez '15**, **Ginnie Dunleavy '16**, **Kate Kennedy** and **Patrice Jean-Philippe**, both from 2018, **Adam Olenn '20** and **Adriana Dawson**, a member of the Rho II class.

Supporters from 2019 include **Jen Silbert**, **Nick Scappaticci**, **Mira Estaphanous**, and **Hilina Ajakaiye**, Lanre's wife and founder of the RISE Women's Conference, which is slated to be one of the first tenants when 25 Bough opens in late 2022 or early 2023.

Cortney Nicolato '19, president and CEO of the United Way of Rhode Island, the headquarters of which is just down the street from 25 Bough, is thrilled about the prospects for their collective mission. “At United Way, we believe that in order to strengthen our state, we must focus on building stronger neighborhoods. I'm so excited about



Lanre Ajakaiye '17 captured a selfie with Joe Jean-Philippe '20, Patrice Jean-Philippe '18, and their son Joey, during a visit to 25 Bough Street.

the 25 Bough Street project. We can see using it for corporate events, training and also to partner to bring community driven and proven programs to help children.”

The building is currently being prepped for occupancy. Not one to let an opportunity to engage the community pass by, Ajakaiye enlisted YouthBuild Providence to help clean the space and partnered with Rhode Island School of Design students to provide architectural renderings. To commemorate their contributions, but also to foster pride in ownership, the names of students from YouthBuild and RISD will be featured on a plaque once the building is complete.

Marcy Reyes '20, program committee co-chair for the current class, will use the space to operate The Financial Literacy Youth Initiative, the nonprofit she founded to provide culturally responsive financial literacy programming to underserved and underrepresented students. **Raymond Two Hawks Watson '15** and **Donald King '02** are working together to help develop some of the content central to The Cultural & Heritage Experience. **Ian Barnard '17** is working to see how The Avenue Concept can help bring one of their signature murals to the barren brick wall across the street.

25 Bough Street is poised to grow into a thriving, vibrant, holistic community center, one with an expansive reach and deep, strong roots.

“This project is community grown, community owned, and that is a dream come true,” said Ajakaiye.

“It's my vision, but it's a vision fueled by everyone involved, from the children it will benefit to the LRI alumni who are helping it become a reality. I want us all to be able to come together to enjoy this space and know our state, our neighborhoods, and our future are all the better because of it.”

Wahab Ajakaiye, who dreamed of someday creating a community center with his son Lanre, passed away on May 20, 2021 at the age of 77.



Left: Raymond Two Hawks Watson '15, in grey top, will develop content for the Cultural and Heritage Experience. Right: Marcy Reyes '20 plans to make 25 Bough Street the home for the Financial Literacy Youth Initiative.



Photos Courtesy: Lanre Ajakaiye

Kristin Zosa Puleo Begins New Role

Now in her fourth year at Leadership Rhode Island, **Kristin Zosa Puleo** has been promoted to Director of Development and Alumni Engagement.

Puleo, who began her journey at LRI as Programs Manager in 2017, advanced to Director of Programs in 2019. In that role, she was responsible for successfully pivoting both the core and college programs from in-person to virtual when COVID-19 led to a shutdown of all non-essential activities in the spring of 2020.

By the end of 2021, Puleo will have played a key hands-on leadership role in the development of more than 500 individual leaders who participated in either the Core Program or College Leadership Rhode Island. These alumni, connected through shared experiences, are equipped with knowledge, and deeper insights for their own leadership growth and the positive transformations of their organizations, their communities, and our great state.

Your career has strong roots in programs and events. What inspired you to make the shift into the role of Director of Development and Alumni Engagement?

Looking back on my career path and even my personal life journey, I have come to realize that I thrive on creating and maintaining meaningful relationships and connections – for myself and for others. My career path has never really been linear. After graduation from college, I fell into the events industry, then transitioned into events and programming. Although I was hired in a programming role here at LRI, there is a great deal I've taken with me from my special events background. Every session day is a small event with so many moving parts! At the root of it all for me, however, is relationships. I've been thinking for a couple of years now about a transition into a role in development and alumni engagement, and what better place to do it than with this team, where we're all about the people! We're not about transactional experiences here at LRI, we're about transformation. It has been a truly humbling experience to have overseen the core and college programs over the past four years, and I am extremely grateful to have the opportunity to continue to grow and develop my own leadership skills within the organization. Honestly, it's slightly nerve wracking to think about moving into this new role here, but I know I'll have the support to help me succeed. And of course, I am thrilled to have the opportunity to continue to engage with our alumni in new ways!

A survey in 2020 by the Association of Leadership Programs showed that 67% of leadership programs cancelled or suspended some, most, or all of their programming as a result of the pandemic. What gave you hope during that long period of uncertainty, isolation and economic strife?

Our alumni and class members gave me hope. Our LRI team is pretty magical, but none of the magic would have happened without the community around us. Our alumni are our backbone. The support we received from our alumni and our class members last year and this year has been exhilarating. We have witnessed them lifting one another up, and we have seen how they can band together to lift entire communities. They have lifted us up — not only as an organization, but as individuals who are committed to the continuous improvement of our beloved state. That's the power of LRI. This sense of collaboration and unity is what truly gives me hope and it energizes me daily.

As Rhode Island begins a return to normalcy, what are you most looking forward to?

All of the people! I look forward to the coming days when we can connect with folks over food and drinks, or have intimate conversations around a shared table. We've been extremely lucky to have been able to stay connected virtually with so many members of our network over the past year – alumni and community members alike – but there's nothing that can truly replace breaking bread or toasting a glass together!

What I'm really, REALLY looking forward to is our 40th anniversary party this fall. After over a year of being physically apart, it's wonderful to be planning a big party that will bring everyone together again. I look forward to celebrating 40 years of leadership and togetherness!

What has been your proudest accomplishment at LRI so far?

Navigating the transition of our programming into a virtual and hybrid format! You may have heard our adopted mantra of "Can't stop, won't stop" a few times last year. And stop we did not! When the pandemic forced us to remain

physically distant from one another, we knew we had to keep going – not only to deliver the programs that could have been halted or stalled, but to keep connecting and bringing people together virtually. The ways in which we were able to think about pivoting our programs, ensuring that they weren't just "another bad Zoom" became a national model for our Community Leadership Programs across the country. Even when we're back to some semblance of normal, virtual will be here to stay, and I'm grateful to have a team of creative thinkers who all had a hand in the development of these virtual sessions.

On a personal note, getting through a full three months of distance learning with my two girls while accomplishing what I was able to at work last year was no small feat!

Do you have a piece of advice you want to share with the new Programs Manager?

This will be one of the most rewarding, and intense, jobs you may ever have. You'll have the opportunity to oversee the leadership development of 125 of Rhode Island's best and brightest leaders, annually. You'll have the opportunity to engage with multigenerational leaders, from all types of backgrounds. You will learn so much along the way! Embrace it all, and remain flexible and adaptable. Programs is a fast-moving machine, but know that you'll be supported by the best team ever all along the way.



Kristin Zosa Puleo with her husband Paul, daughters Olivia and Nadia, and pup Logan after a successful Easter egg hunt in 2020.

Anniversary continued from page 3

"I always believed LRI could do more than the Core Program," she says. "Mike has proved that over and over again."

Sometimes actions reflect changing priorities. Hultzman recalls the board decision to move LRI headquarters from the East Side to the West End of Providence this way: "The change in location meant we embraced the community focus of LRI by leaving the corporate-style offices of the past. Our goal was to make LRI more welcoming to our stakeholders."

The importance of civil discourse and furthering inclusion came up when talking with **Richard DiRienzo '85**, who served as chair from 2001 to 2003.

"The evolution toward being socially conscious and engaging has expanded LRI's role and impact by providing a forum for thoughtfulness and collaboration that is very much needed in today's world," he notes.

"Too many leaders lead by finding ways to divide and focus on differences," he says, adding,

"it would be nice to see leaders consistently and sincerely reaching across divides to find common ground and resolution."

Relationship building is key to the development of leaders, agrees **Nicole Benjamin '13**, current board chair. "Bringing and keeping people together, something critically important even while socially distanced" is even more important "as the economy reopens and we step into a changed world," she says.

"To appreciate those changes, it is important to listen closely to others, to keep an open mind and to reflect before reacting," Benjamin says.

Looking ahead to the next generation of leaders, Hultzman, who was vice chair during the emergence of CLRI and chair from 2008 to 2009, observes, "This next generation wants to know why; they are outside-in-thinkers with a broader lens. It doesn't work without bottom-up leadership, without developing relationships with stakeholders."

Deborah Imondi '88, offered poignant testimony of her own experience leading to

participation in the Core Program and then service on the governing board.

Participation in the Theta class, she says, restored the hope she lost in 1985 when her mother was a victim of violent, deadly crime on the streets of Providence.

"I learned that while RI had its challenges and many obstacles to overcome, there were many people more than willing to commit their time and energy to making RI a beacon of hope to all," she says.

"Pursuing the dream of a more robust, equitable, fiscally sound, safer Rhode Island" was her primary goal when she assumed the chair of the governing board in 1994.

She eventually realized, she says, that reaching that goal "was a long journey rather than a destination," a journey requiring a continuing stream of leaders and constant attention to keeping hope alive.

"LRI continues to develop those leaders, to change minds, to restore hope, and to better our great little state."

Kind continued from page 5

Uber, Lyft and Aircart, a same-day grocery delivery service, utilize for their national pools of employees.

The first Rhode Islander to volunteer for Be Kind RI, prior to its official launch, was **Zachary Krase**, senior technology lead at WeWork and a 2019 graduate of College Leadership Rhode Island. He got the volunteer sign-up form from **Renzo Arteta CLRI '19**, community resource coordinator at the Food Bank.

After getting a few deliveries under his belt, including one to a family of seven, Krase provided feedback, helping to make it even easier for volunteers to sign up.

Krase spoke about his experience at the April 1 launch of Be Kind, saying "it's nice for people not to feel like they're shouting out into the void. You demonstrated that you had this need and someone responded to it, and they're like right here at your front door."

Nearly nine out of 10 Be Kind deliveries are from food pantries, a statistic that showcases widespread food insecurity in our state.

Leading the charge to inform and engage critical populations across the state are **Marianne Raimondo '89**, founder of Age-Friendly Rhode Island and **Amanda Clarke CLRI '09**, director of innovation and planning at the Food Bank. Raimondo and team worked with providers for the elderly and senior centers to raise awareness of the volunteer service, and Clarke prepared food pantries across the state to expect and cooperate with volunteers doing

pickups for others.

Those behind Be Kind RI are already brainstorming ways to expand the service beyond food deliveries. The opportunities to help your neighbor seem endless, from snow shoveling, yard work and simple errands to picking up a book at the library or deliveries for new parents.

Siu-Li Khoe '20, vice president of business development at Rhode Island Commerce, who attended MIT with Nesterly CEO Noelle Marcus, is currently working with the collaborative on

ideas to further the service's reach.

"As we look toward a post-COVID world, we need to think about how we break social isolation, help our neighbors, and celebrate human connection," says Slane. "I think this is also about bringing more happiness to Rhode Island – we really need this right now after being apart for so long."

To volunteer or request a delivery, visit www.BeKindRI.org and sign up in just minutes. A social worker is also available to discuss and answer questions at 877-958-8785.



Photo Courtesy: Family Service of Rhode Island

Zachary Krase CLRI '19 speaks about his experience as the first Rhode Islander to volunteer for Be Kind RI during a press conference with the City of Providence.



Thomas Heavren CLRI '19 connects with his peers during their private sector session day. Experiences like this helped him develop networking skills that he carries forward today.

CLRI continued from page 7

An enthusiastic participant in CLRI – he was chosen class speaker – Heavren expanded the notion of networking and mentoring to include his peers, especially **Octavian Goncalves CLRI '20**.

“Networking plays a huge role in the social innovation work that I am interested in,” he explains.

Heavren, a Providence College graduate, launched his job search in October 2020, during graduate studies at Boston College. His network helped identify opportunities that matched his career interests and finding employers offering good work environments.

It worked. Just before graduating in May with a master’s degree in social work, Heavren accepted a position as program manager on the sector strategies team at the Commonwealth Corporation in Boston.

“COVID-19 forced me to be smart and intentional,” he says, and CLRI’s focus on networking and “cultivating” one’s strengths were his journey’s guiding lights.

Network continued from page 10

- Collaboration among leaders increases the sustainability of change
- Leaders from different backgrounds who have relationships of trust and respect are in the best position to discuss and reach agreement, as much as it is possible, on the important problems in our communities, and their solutions.

In a couple of instances, LRI responses told their own story. Perhaps due to our close-knit nature, 79 percent of Ocean State respondents completely agreed that “shared best practices and shared learning enable our community to more quickly understand the best approaches to change,” compared with 67 percent nationally.

Ritz has pulled together an Advisory Council to guide the progress of the NLN, which, though now in its second year, is still in a formative period. The co-chairs are **Giselle Mahoney '20**, partner and senior account executive, RDW, and **Christine Sheehan**, new LRI board member, who is chief of staff, Gallup, in Washington, D.C.

Members with LRI connections include **Ian Barnard '17**, **Alec Beckett '11**, **Donald King '02**,



National Leadership Network participants from Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Maryland and Texas share their reactions after learning the key takeaways from the 2020 Alumni Leadership Insights survey.

Pete Rumsey '19, and opinion researcher, **Josh Starr**. Other members are in Lafayette, La., Lincoln, Neb., Columbus, Ohio, and Washington, D.C.

The discussion series for NLN’s second year, already underway, is examining the characteristics people look for in their leaders, according to Gallup research. The series opened with a look at building trust and compassion. Discussions of the other two — stability and hope — will follow. The goal is that some tangible solutions to the pressing issues of our era will

follow soon after that, Ritz says.

At a time when heartbreak and outrage seem like the emotional baseline, and many are exhausted from an unprecedented year of solitude and strife, NLN’s value lies in what it is not. It is not divisive, partisan or devoid of action. It is not an echo chamber or a troll-filled comment section ripe for derision.

“I feel the weight of our country’s division every day, and to hear hundreds of people honestly embrace our collective humanity was incredibly refreshing. Immediately after my first session,

I posted a simple sentence on social media: ‘I really needed this,’” says **Annette Bourne '07**, research & policy director of HousingWorks RI.

“NLN reminds us of what we can do, of what we must do, in order to move forward to get where we need to be,” she says. “It isn’t only about bringing people into the same space, it’s about making sure people across all different regions, sections, backgrounds and beliefs are connecting with a common purpose: to hold the tattered fabric of our nation together.”

Why I Give: LRI has returns in tenfold

By Chris Donovan

During her interview for the **2019 class of College Leadership Rhode Island, Sarrah Berkery** says it “clicked” that CLRI offered exactly what she had been looking for: A forever connection to Rhode Island.

“I didn’t know if I would ever feel like I belonged in Rhode Island, or that I could make an impact,” recalls Berkery, who, at the time, was commuting from Connecticut to the New England Institute of Technology where she was pursuing a business management degree.

Her path to CLRI’s doorstep involved what might be called serendipity. She just kept encountering individuals from Leadership Rhode Island.

During an internship at Edesia, a nonprofit producer of nutritious foods for starving children throughout the world, she met Edesia’s Executive Director **Maria Kasparian ’15** and Human Resources Manager **Priscilla Gonzalez ’17**.

Gonzalez, in turn, invited Berkery to attend the RISE Women’s Conference organized by



Hilina Ajakaiye ’19 and a popular draw for LRI graduates. The women’s conference left Berkery with a significant takeaway: You don’t accomplish much alone, and your wins aren’t just your wins. “They all told me it’s about working together.”

Not long after the conference, opportunity

struck again when, seemingly out of the blue, **Magali Angeloni ’16**, director of NEIT’s master’s program in public health, encouraged her to apply to CLRI.

Though grateful for the chance to learn about the public, private and government sectors, Berkery says she mostly appreciated the discussions with her classmates, a group with many different perspectives but sharing the same intention: Making Rhode Island better.

Participating in the cost-free program was an amazing opportunity, Berkery says. Now a college graduate, a CLRI alumna and a secondary market specialist for Washington Trust, she still lives in Connecticut.

But she participates in fundraising efforts because she wants to create the same CLRI opportunity for others.

“If I can help even one other person have the experience I had, I will do anything I can to make that happen. It’s a cause that has returns in tenfold.”

Thank you to our 2020 supporting alumni!

Your support is greatly appreciated; we’re lucky to have you on our team.

Steward+ Members - \$10,000+

Ting and Ian Barnard '15 & '17

Steward Members - \$1,000

Jerauld Adams '14
Nicole Benjamin '13
Joanne Daly '12
Steve Duvel '12
Luann Edwards '19
Mitch Edwards '11
Bob Ferreira '11
Vinny Gebhardt '15
Bob Huseby '85
Michele Leone '16
Nick Loring '16
Paul Oliveira '07
Mike Ritz '07
Kathy & Pete Rumsey '19
Ted Shallcross '11
Richard Staples '90
Karl Wadensten '17
Carol Young '92

Visionary Members - \$500

Lorne Adrain '94
Ernie Almonte '88
Alec Beckett '11
Sue Carmody '18
Lisa Curry '20
Jay DeRienzo '17
Richard DeRienzo '85
Bradford Dimeo '96

Ed D'Arezzo '08
Bob DiMuccio '01
Rachel Dotson '17
Bill Fitzgerald '18
Melinda Gaudreau '19
Terry Gray '01
Akhil Gupta '07
Linda Lulli '02
Kim McCauley '14
Cindy Parker '08
Scott Seaback '14
Neil Steinberg '91
Leslie Taito '06

Champion Members - \$250

Kristin Abdel-Aziz '19
Pam Alarie '05
Bill Allen '87
Angie Ankoma '14
Dawn Arpin '19
Bob Baute '12
Kathy Bello '88
John Bennett '17
Dana Borelli-Murray '12
Kara Brady '19
Jacob Brier '14
Jen Brinton '17
Sue Bruce '16
Ron Caniglia '87
Michelle and Jesse Carr '14 & '16
Hamza Chaudary '17
Lisa Churchville '98
Sean Coen '18
Marcy Coleman '16

Melanie Coon '06
Barbara Cottam '00
Matt Coupe CLRI '12
Peter Crump '18
Beth Cunha '12
Dave Curtis '15
Lisa Dandeneau '15
Bob DeFelice '19
Loriana DeCrescenzo '10
Matt Dempsey '19
Scott DiChristofero '00
Charlie Francis '81
Angella Franklin '13
Kaitlyn Frolich '18
Jeff Gagnon '19
Kevin Gaw '17
Brett Gerstenblatt '17
Jenna Giguere '19
David Graziano '18
John Harpootian '88
Brooke Havens '20
Louise Herrington '98
Tim Horan '01
Jon Howard '08
Chris Hurd '90
Patrice Jean-Philippe '18
Cynthia Johnson '20
Margaret Kane '03
Karen King '13
Carrie Kolb '19
Danielle Kopf '19
Keith Lang '01
Francisco Lovera '18
Jennifer Luxmoore '10

Darlene Major '17
Maureen Mammen '17
Stephanie Mandeville CLRI '05, '15
Joe Marocco '87
Ed Mastriano '07
Corey McCarty '12
Christine McDermott '11
Katie McDonald '16
Alicia Monnes '18
Rob Monnes '12
John Mulattieri '09
Courtney Nicolato '19
Tricia O'Neil '09
Erica Olobri '20
Kathleen Orovitz '18
Jeanette Palmer '15
Nina Pande '12
Jennifer Parkhurst '11
Ken Phillips '89
A. Kathryn Power '86
Anne Powers '86
Ashley Rappa '19
Darlene Reza Rossi '18
Ralph Rodriguez '01
Sandy Ross '19
Shannon Russell '17
Betsy Shimberg '11
Jeff Spratt '18
Michael Steiner CLRI '14, '17
Rob Stolzman '93
Marc Streisand '16
Bernard “Buddy” Trinkle '99
Amy Vitale '17

Bill Warburton '88
Laura Yalanis '09
Lori-Ann Zannini '08
Samuel Zurier '04
Members - \$100
Joan Abrams '92
Candy Adriance '00
Lloyd Albert '99
Jon Almeida '18
Anthony Ambrosino '11
Farid Ansari '11
Armeny Apkarian '90
Lee Arnold '93
Jess Ashley '20
Scott Avedisian '97
Shameem Awan '15
Dave Bain '19
Barbara Baldwin '92
Thomas Baldwin '20
Bruce Balon '06
Mary Barden '20
John Barry '00
John Barton '18
Natalie Benkovich '13
Richard Beretta '97
Sarrah Berkery CLRI '19
James Berson '05
Cindy Bessette '18
Diane Bianco '17
Andy Bicknell '19
Lisa Blackman '06
Ken Block '12
David Bodah '14
MaryBeth Boivin '16
Adrian Boney '11

Eve Bontemp '19
Keri Borba '19
Chuck Borkoski '01
Laura Bottaro '07
Annette Bourne '07
Courtney Bourns '17
Scott Boyd '16
Scott Bromberg '20
Bob Brooks '03
Barbara Brown '19
Dan Bryant '93
Susan Budlong '14
Cindy Butler '01
Jill Butler '18
Mike Calabro '19
Maria Caliri '16
Marybeth Campellone '00
Victor Capellan '98
Catherine Capolupo '14
Angela Carr '15
Chachi Carvalho '20
Brian Casey '20
Julie Casimiro '08
Evelyn Castillo-Rosado '06
Caitlin Chaffee '20
Frank Champi '82
Eric Charlesworth '19
Mary Chatel '97
Jason Chopoorian '17
Arlene Chorney '00
Tino Chow '17
Michele Cinquegrano '10
Mario Cirillo '15

Brenda Clement '97
Sterling Clinton-Spellman '19
Kyla Coburn '14
Sandy Coletta '93
Monique Collins '20
Kevin Colman '14
Deanna Conheeny '07
Jenica Conley '16
Serena Conley '98
Jay Conway '84
Lori Corsi '18
Laura Lee Costello '18
Barry Couto '97
Keith Couto '09
Margo Crawford '20
Teresa Crean '18
Jim Crowley '92
Judy Croyle '09
Henry Cruz '17
Donna Cupelo '98
Lisa Curtis '19
Liane Czirkaj '07
Jeanne D'Agostino '02
Lisa D'Agostino '07
Diane D'Ambra '16
Jen Dalen '20
Susan Daly '13
Richard Davia '20
Jill Davidson '11
Deb DeBare '95
Beth DeGerlia '18
Richard DeMerchant '92
Nick Delmenico '14
Lisa Desbiens '17

Alumni came out in force on 401Gives Day

Shattering last year's records, 401Gives, a statewide day of giving organized by the United Way of Rhode Island, inspired more than 12,000 donors to raise \$2.3 Million for 422 nonprofit organizations across the state.

137 champions representing 33 classes raised more than \$15,000 in support of Leadership Rhode Island.

Thank you to everyone who generously gave, your support ensures that we can continue to provide opportunities to diverse cohorts of current and future leaders (and followers) that will result in individual development, organizational change, and collective statewide impact.

Lorne Adrain '94, Renzo Arteta CLRI '19, Joshua Avila CLRI '20, Claudette Bannerman 2021 Rho II, Ting Barnard '15, Arlene Barnard, Alec Beckett '11, Nicole Benjamin '13, Walter Berbrick '19, Sarrah Berkery CLRI '19, Goodson Bernard and Eve Bontemp '19, Rich Bernardo 2021 Rho II, Dana Borrelli-Murray '12, Kara Brady '19, Donte Brame CLRI '19, Jacob Brier '14, Scott Bromberg '20, Daniel Bryant '93, Jill '18 and Nick '19 Balzano,

Ronald Caniglia '87, Luca Carnevale 2021 Rho II, Michelle Carr '14, Jason Chopoorian '17, Peter Chung '16, Brenda Clement '97, Sterling Clinton-Spellman '19, M. Coelho '13, Nick Colicci CLRI '19, Elaine Collins, Sharon Conard-Wells '91 in memory of George Floyd, Raymond Cormier 2021 Rho II, Teresa Crean '18, Henry Cruz '17, Lisa Curry '20, Lisa Curtis '19, Jeanne D'Agostino '02, Bob DeFelice '19, Beth DeGerlia '18, Jackie DiChristofero CLRI '17, Scott DiChristofero '00, Maureen Donnelly '12, Christopher Donovan, Tim Draper '19, Laura Duclos, Brian Dugas 2021 Rho II, Steve Duvel '12, Luann Edwards '19, Mitch Edwards '11, Heather Evans '19, Barry Fain '84, James W Farley '81, Cristina Feden '18, Bob Ferreira '11, Bill Fitzgerald '18, Diane Gagne '18, Melinda Gaudreau '19, Vinny Gebhart '15, Octavian Goncalves CLRI '20, John Goodwin, Ashia Graziano '19, David Graziano '18, Terrence Green '17, Gwen & Rob Hancock '20, Brian Hastings, Estela Hernandez, Megan Herne '19, Chris Hurd '90, Bob Huseby '85, Jody Jencks '12, Petra Jenkins '20, Alexander Jimenez CLRI '16, Betsy Jones 2021 Rho II, Paavan Kapadia '17, Kate Kennedy '18, Karen King '13, Carrie Kolb '19, Danielle Kopf '19, Teresa LaForest, Nirva LaFortune '19, Joseph Lajoie '18, Michele Leone '16,

D and K Lowther '09, Linda Lulli '02, Scott Lyons '18, Giselle Mahoney '20, Jessica Marfeo '20, George Evans Marley '20, Emily Martineau '20, Steven Mas-troyin, Joshua McCarthy 2021 Rho II, Sulina Mohanty CLRI '06, Jim Nellis '13, Kelly Nevins '06, Courtney Nicolato '19, Jane Nugent '95, Ray Nuñez CLRI '15, Rebecca Paquette '19, Juan Pichardo '00, Marc Popkin '16, Laura Jaworski '18, Mike Ritz '07, Sandy Ross '19, Peter Rumsey '19, Nick Scappaticci '19, Courtney Schmidt '19, Nancy Serpa '20, Ted Shallcross '11, Christine Sheehan in memory of Daniel Joseph Marti, Donna Sams '09, Tshewang Sherpa CLRI '20, Josh Short '20, Jen Hetzel Silbert '19, Richard '90 & Betsy Staples in memory of Stan DeAngelis '90, John A. '91 & Patrice A. Tarantino, Jennifer Tomasik '19 & Jason Jagatic, Rebecca Twitchell '20, Nisa Villareal 2021 Rho II, Eddie Walker '19, Amanda Wood, Jacklyn Xavier CLRI '20, Kathy Zosa, Kristin Zosa Puleo, and those who wish to remain anonymous.



Jane Desforges '05	Roberta Gosselin '20	Laura Jaworski	Tom Lisi '07	John Mugeridge '04	Debbie Proffitt '16	Brian Spero '84
Carmen Diaz-Jusino '10	Kathy Goulding '99	Razza '18	Val Littlefield '10	Jim Nellis '13	Frank Prosnitz '96	Shaun St. Laurent '18
Linda DiPalma '07	Christine Goulette '13	Petra Jenkins '20	Jon Scott Logel '14	Ross Nelson '06	Joanne Quinn '11	Joyce Stevos '87
Joe DiPina '02	Dick Graefe '82	Jody Jencks '12	Micheline Lombardi '15	Kelly Nevins '06	John Ramos '81	John Stringer '86
Kerrie Donahue '17	Karen Grande '02	Holly Jensen '08	Steve Lombardi '85	Charles Newton '99	Fred Reinhardt '16	Andrea Sullivan '13
Cioely Dove '13	Amy Gravel '14	Karen Jessey '17	Dana Long '19	Andy Nota '11	Marcy Reyes '20	Laura Sullivan '19
Mike Dowhan '20	Ashia Graziano '19	Anne M. Johnson '15	Fran Loosen '16	Jackie Nowell '09	Steven Richard '03	Sally Sutherland '14
Loren Doyle '17	Lenny Green '02	Patrick Jones '20	Luis Lourenco '11	Jane Nugent '95	Roberta Richman '90	Tom Sweeney '98
Tim Draper '19	Terrence Green '17	Simone Joyaux '86	Mike Lynch '01	Ray Nuñez CLRI '15	W. Casey Riley '18	George Tager '17
Ginnie Dunleavy '16	Mary Grover '20	Amy Kane '17	Ted Lyons '18	Margie O'Brien	R. Anthony Rolle '20	John Tarantino '91
Andy Erickson '94	Amy Grzybowski '19	Maria Kasparian '15	Mike Maccarone '20	Reed '16	Steve Rosa '99	Bob Tetreault '88
Heather Evans '19	Susan Gunter '17	Betty Ann Kearney '02	Scott MacLennan '19	Shannon O'Brien '18	Christine Roundtree '91	Jenn Tomasik '19
Gian-Mikel Facenda '17	Jackie Hague '20	Theresa Keegan '09	Molly Magee '07	Steve O'Donnell '04	Christina Rouse '18	Oliver Tutt '18
Jim Farley '81	Carol Hall-Walker '11	Kate Kennedy '18	Rajani Mahadevan '10	John O'Leary '90	Mary Sadlier '02	Rebecca Twitchell '20
Cristina Feden '18	Carol Hamilton '11	Sharon Kennedy '12	Giselle Mahoney '20	Adam Olenn '20	Jim Salmo '12	Stephen Ucci '15
Chris Feisthamel '01	Rob Hancock '20	Scott Kettelle '10	Eva-Marie Mancuso '18	Nancy Olson '17	Rob Sanders '16	Judith Ventura
Mark Felag '05	Barbara Hart '11	Donald King '02	Justin Mandese '20	Ellie O'Neill '96	Chris Sanford '10	Enright '15
Jillian Finkle '20	Gilda Hernandez '17	Melissa Kollitides '07	Sharon Marable '01	Wilfredo Ortiz	Michelle Saunders '09	Dale Venturini '88
Jamie Foster '16	Jamey Herzog '18	Mike Kosiver '16	Jess Marfeo '20	Berigute CLRI '19	Ford Sayre '82	Tom Verdi '18
Diana Franchitto '08	Tom Heslin '87	Ted Kresse '20	Carolyn Mark '17	Bob Padula '83	Sue Schenck '94	Wayne Vieira '09
Scott Fraser '98	Mario Hilario '05	Joe Lajoie '18	Don Marrin '06	Steve Palmer '81	Courtney Schmidt '19	Tracy Walsh '17
Michael Friedman '16	Sarah Hocking '20	Madison Lane	Ron Martel '06	Sam Palmisano '17	Josh Short '20	Danielle Ward '14
Kerri Friel '09	Peter Hollmann '88	CLRI '19	Ray Martin '20	Becca Paquette '19	Brian Schuster '19	Liz Wasson '19
Diane Gagne '18	Steve Horowitz '96	Kari Lang '97	Emily Martineau '20	Steven Pare '01	Terry Schwennesen '04	Sylvia Weber '90
Jo Eva Gaines '92	Roberta Mudge	Paul Larrat '00	Mike Masseur '19	Leslie Parker '20	Mark Scott '04	Hank Webster '18
Carlos Galliano '19	Humble '01	Beverly Larson '05	Armando Medeiros '98	Prutha Patel '16	Roberta Segal '94	Lizzi Weinberg '16
Dora Garcia '20	Steve Hughes '12	Ed Lawrence '18	Patti Melaragno '13	Michelle Pelletier '20	Chris Semonelli '16	Herb Weiss '12
Greg Garvin '08	Tom Hughes '14	Dennis Leamy, Jr '13	Steve Melaragno '02	Ricardo	Cheryl Shaw '16	David Winoker '88
Fran Gast '90	Monica	Barbara Lee '10	Yvette Mendez '04	Pitts-Wiley '04	Rena Sheehan '19	J. Scott Wolf '87
Edward Gatta '01	Hull-Shea '94	Harvey Lee, Jr. '13	Joe Miech '02	Matt Plain '13	Jen Silbert '19	Jack Wolfe '85
Marie Ghazal '95	Rob Humm '16	Mike Lee '94	Carrie Miranda '08	Tom Platt '99	Tracy Silva '04	Jill Woodcome '17
Rafaelina Gomez '16	Ryan Hutchins '05	Rachel Legend '09	Paula Montgomery '15	Marc Popkin '16	John Simmonds '14	Mary Wyatt '98
Michelle Gonzalez '12	Roger Iannetta '17	Nancy	Jim Moody '16	Kate Porter '18	Lynn Singleton '84	Myrth York '92
Priscilla Gonzalez-	Maria Janes '07	Lewis-Oliver '06	Pete Moreau '09	Ray Pouliot '96	Samuel Slade '13	Kyle Zamarano '14
Santos '17	Marcus Jannitto '97	Natalia Lima '16	Tekla Moquin '18	Joe Pratt '06	Maggie Slane '20	Phil Zarlengo '87
Alex Gorriaran '04	David Jardin '14	Cheryl Lisi '06	Ana Bess Moyer Bell '19	Bill Preston '91	Bob Smith '14	Carrie Zaslow '13

Note: This list only includes alumni who renewed their dues between Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 2020

To join our annual membership drive, visit: www.leadershipri.org/alumni

Meet our newest LRI board members



Sharon Conard-Wells '91
Executive Director (Retired),
West Elmwood Housing

**Connectedness –
Restorative –
Communication –
Belief – Adaptability**

A graduate of the 1991 class, Sharon has witnessed the significant improvements LRI has made over the last three decades. She is looking forward to contributing her talents, expertise, perspective and sense of humor to push our organization closer to the fulfillment of our vision locally and nationally.

"Groups learn how to survive in our society, but they don't learn how to live together," she noted in her application for the 1991 class. "There needs to be a commitment to integrating our society."

Sharon dedicated much of her life to serving as the executive director of West Elmwood Housing Development Corp., recently retiring after 29 years. Under her leadership, more than \$122 million was invested in real estate and community development and an additional \$4 million for lending.

Sharon is a recipient of many accolades including the 2019 United Way Rhode Island John H. Chafee Lifetime Service Award and the 2018 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Award for Health Equity.



Christine Sheehan
Chief of Staff, Gallup

**Maximizer – Activator –
Communication –
Empathy – Belief**

Christine was introduced to Leadership Rhode Island in 2013 while LRI was exploring how to lead the charge to improve workforce engagement across the entire state, an unprecedented strategic action. Three years after Make RI Stronger was launched, Rhode Island went from having the most actively disengaged workforce in the country to 15th in a state-by-state comparative analysis by Gallup. On the survey question, "I get to do what I do best every day," Rhode Island emerged No. 1 in the nation.

During that time, Christine was a consistent resource for assistance, support, encouragement and belief in LRI's strengths-based initiative, which has been calculated to bring at least \$112 million back into Rhode Island's economy.

"LRI is leading, inspiring and truly living the CliftonStrengths movement. Their dedication to helping individuals and communities become the best version of themselves is heroic—and their success is unparalleled."

Christine's significant experience, skills, connectivity, strengths and passion for LRI's "Greatest Lil' State" and our new National Leadership Network initiative will undoubtedly contribute to our future success.



Ashia Graziano '19
Associate Director of Parent
and Family Giving, Brown
University

**Maximizer –
Communication – Arranger –
Individualization – Activator**

Ashia is looking forward to lending her expertise to champion a culture of giving around major gifts for LRI from alumni and the greater community, bolstering LRI's ability to fulfill its mission and vision for years to come.

"LRI provides the opportunity to think broadly, discuss big issues alongside big minds, and to push the boundaries of one's own abilities," Ashia wrote when applying for the 2019 class. "I can't imagine any scenario in which any of those things, let alone all of them, would not be considered a tremendous gift and privilege."

Ashia is associate director of parent and family giving at Brown University, where she is responsible for conceiving, developing and implementing the external programming and internal relationships between the university and the non-alumni families of undergraduates. Additionally, she manages a portfolio of families who are philanthropically engaged with the university.

Ashia is a member of the R.I.S.E. Women's Leadership Conference Advisory Council.



Pete Rumsey '19
Chief Business Development
Officer for the University of Rhode
Island's Research Foundation

**Restorative –
Individualization – Achiever –
Communication – Arranger**

When applying for the 2019 class, long before "Zooming" was an everyday verb, Pete imagined a massive virtual convening.

"I would love to 'virtually' assemble the alumni," he wrote, to identify three proven ways we can double the number of participants in community service, increase enthusiasm for investing in our state and overcome the cynical and jaded attitude so pervasive among Rhode Islanders. "We need 'community' in Rhode Island more than ever."

As chief business development officer for the University of Rhode Island Research Foundation, Pete is responsible for the development and implementation of growth strategies to achieve mission and revenue goals.

Prior to his current role, Pete was the director of the Rhode Island Innovation Campus Initiative, reporting to state Commerce Sec. Pryor and then-Gov. Gina Raimondo.

Pete served as an officer in the U.S. Air Force Intelligence Command's Electronic Warfare Center during Desert Storm and Desert Shield and was a recipient of the Meritorious Service and Air Force Achievement Medals.

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

City Parks and Recreation in Warwick are now the responsibility of **Bev Wiley '83**, department director.

Rep. Carlos Tobon '16 has joined the Board of Directors of Thrive Behavioral Health. Two other Mulls, **Christine King** and **Fred Reinhardt**, also serve. The mental health and substance agency is led by CEO, **Dan Kubas Meyer '94**.

Piccerelli Gilstein & Company announced that **Michael M. Tikoian '01** has been named managing partner.

Cicely Dove '13 is now Chief Program Officer of Crisis & Shelter Services, a promotion at Crossroads Rhode Island.

Lt. Col. Dan Fitzpatrick '20 recently retired from the U.S. Marine Corps.

Jessica Polanco CLRI '18 is now an Inside Sales Representative at Amica Insurance.

Katie Strumolo '18 has been promoted to Senior Preconstruction Executive, Director of New England Support Operations at Gilbane Building Co.

Four alums had roles in "Knock it Off - the Movie." **Laura Jaworski '18**, **Stephanie Mandeville '15**, **CLRI '05**, **Cortney Nicolato '19** and **Neil Steinberg '91** were featured in the entertaining documentary which followed the journey of a phrase, a T-shirt, and an initiative that ignited hope for the Rhode Islanders hardest hit by COVID-19.

Conor Mitchell CLRI '12 has been promoted to Associate Director at Wavemaker, a state program providing financial incentives for college graduates pursuing work in technology, engineering and other key sectors.

Sara Federici CLRI '20 has organized a Community Fridge in Providence to assist families struggling with access to healthy food.

Jake Bissaillon '13 has been hired as Chief of Staff for Sen. Dominick Ruggerio, President of the Rhode Island Senate.

The new chair of the Senate Education Committee is **Sen. Sandra Cano**, graduate of Leadership Central Falls.

Sal Monteiro '14 is in the Martin Luther King Jr. Hall of Fame, established by the Providence Human Relations Commission. Inducted earlier this year, Sal is a nonviolence facilitator at the Nonviolence Institute.

Kim Arcand '14 presented NASA Unleashes Space Data Across the Senses at the SXSW Conference. Virtual this year, SXSW showcases music, film and interactive media.



**Bev Wiley
'83**



**Stephen
Zubiago '98**



**Lt Colonel Dan
Fitzpatrick '20**



**Elana Rivkin
CLRI '19**



**Katie Strumolo
'18**



**Mario Hilario
'05**



**Sara Federici
CLRI '20**



**Rafaelina
Gomez '16**



**Sal Monteiro Jr
'14**



**Kelly Nevins
'06**

Nixon Peabody LLP has elected **Stephen Zubiago '98** CEO and managing partner.

Karl Wadensten '17, CEO and president of VIBCO Vibrators, was recognized as a Manufacturing Champion in the 2021 Manufacturing Awards program of Providence Business News. **Stuart Benton**, Bradford Soap Works CEO and president, who is in the Rho II class, was honored in Strategic Leadership category.

In other Providence Business News categories, **Cortney Nicolato '19**, CEO and president of United Way of RI and **Mary Noons '09**, Washington Trust executive vice president and chief retail lending, received C-Suite awards. Also, **Amy Grzybowski '19** and **Rita Danielle Steele '17** were recipients of Business Women awards.

Elana Rivkin CLRI '19 has been hired as the Recruitment and Program Coordinator at the URI Launch Lab.

Mario Hilario '05 and **Kimberly Conway Dumpson '19** are new members of the Board of Directors for Girl Scouts of Southeastern New England. They join **Joanne Daly '12**, **Carrie Majewski '20** and **Tara DeMoura**, current Rho II class member. **Mike Ritz '07** serves on the board's Development Committee.

Josh Avila CLRI '20 is recipient of a national fellowship from the American Society for Public Administration.

Hundreds of men are recipients of spiffy new attire, thanks to **Marc Streisand '16**, owner of Marc Allen Fine Clothiers, who donated the inventory of a now-closed Newport store to job-hunters, those just scraping by, and those needing a boost in self-confidence. The \$300,000 worth of shirts, sports coats, sweaters and trousers is being distributed by three nonprofits.

Rafaelina Gomez '16 has been selected for the Propel Senior Manager Leadership Program at Fidelity Investments.

Lucy Rose-Correia '15 has been named Chief of Talent at Children's Friend.

Steve Kavanagh CLRI '04 has been named Deputy Chief of Staff for House Speaker Joe Shekarchi, and **Emily Martineau '20** is the Speaker's deputy communications director.

Kelly Nevins '06, CEO of the Women's Fund of RI, was among 16 women selected to speak in a virtual leadership training session for an organization called Women Leaders for the World.

Do you have news you want to share with your fellow alumni? Let us know!

Email Chris Donovan, LRI's Events & Communications Specialist at cdonovan@leadershipri.org



LEADERSHIP

RHODE ISLAND

1570 Westminster Street

Providence, RI 02909

401-273-1574 | www.leadershipri.org

CELEBRATE LEADERSHIP RHODE ISLAND'S

40th ANNIVERSARY

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 20, 2021

THE GRADUATE, PROVIDENCE

TICKETS AT LEADERSHIPRI.ORG



Saturday & Sunday August 28 & 29

Tickets at LeadershipRI.org