



LEADERSHIP
RHODE ISLAND

LRI connections: A cure to loneliness epidemic

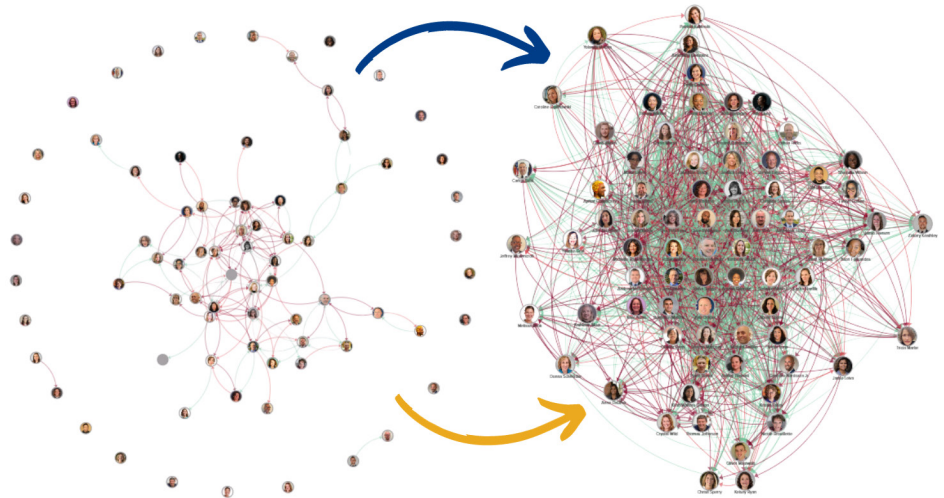
By Ashley Rappa, 2019 Omicron II

A monitor beeps, keeping time with a heart's beat. A machine whirs between gurneys. A doctor pulls back the bedside curtain and emerges, jaw stern and set. "It's not good news..."

The diagnosis? Loneliness, an American epidemic with staggering health consequences. According to the Surgeon General's advisory released earlier this year entitled "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation," lacking connections isn't only a question of lifestyle — it's a question of life itself.

Social isolation doubles the risk of developing depression in adults, and has a physical impact akin to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. People experiencing loneliness face a 29% increased risk of heart disease, 32% increased risk of

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Left: The connections that existed between members of the 2023 Tau II class before their Core Program experience.

Right: The connections that were formed halfway through the program.



Photo by: Seth Holme

In their first act as alumni, the newly graduated Sigma IIs pledged a whopping \$22,000 to LRI at the 40th Anniversary Gala.

Sigma IIs step up

By Christine McDermott, 2011 Eta II

A few sessions into their Core Program experience, members of the **2022 Sigma II** class began feeling a bit frustrated.

On Education Day, they heard from students who didn't feel prepared for college after the pandemic, and on Basic Needs Day, they learned about local housing challenges.

They wanted to do more than listen and learn; they wanted to take action. They aspired to make an impact beyond the team projects they were working on, and they wanted their community involvement to last long past graduation.

A few session days into their program year, **James Rajotte**, Director of Strategy and Innovation for the state's Executive Office of Health and Human Services, issued a call to his classmates, and Sigma II Steps Up was born.

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Letter from the Chair

Dear LRI family and friends,

I have terrific news to convey in my first report to you as board chair: Leadership Rhode Island is undergoing a remarkable period of growth, is financially healthy and operating in high gear.

So give a standing ovation to Michelle Carr, whose first 18 months as Executive Director have been driven by the spirit of servant leadership. She has empowered LRI's talented staff to do what they do best, developed new partnerships and nourished existing ones, all to ensure that our impacts are not just broad, but also deep.

The staff has approached its responsibilities with high-energy and a determination to stay ahead of the curve in a rapidly changing world, even during the hazy, lazy days of last summer.

That's when we hosted eight reunions for the graduates of every Core and College Program class since 1981. Warmth and good cheer filled our Leadership Hub in Olneyville's Rising Sun Mills complex, as alumni spent time catching up while also fondly remembering past shared experiences.

The summer months also saw the debut of a Senior Fellows program, the result of a new partnership with Age Friendly RI. LRI designed the program to equip 25 participants, all over 62, with the knowledge, tools, and pathways to become advocates for changes that would improve the lives of older adults. On their graduation day, we added a whole new cohort to the ranks of LRI alumni.

The strategic partnership with Age-Friendly Rhode Island is one of many that we've catalyzed as we deepen our connections in the community.

We are extremely grateful that after a tremendously successful first year working with teenager Mariam Kaba, the Papitto Opportunity Connection has again selected LRI to work alongside the foundation's second Transform Rhode Island Scholarship winner, Siya Singhal. Each high school student has won the opportunity to invest \$1 million in their respective visions of how to improve life for young people of color in Rhode Island.



I'm sure you are getting the message that there's a lot of awesome work going on. Trust me, there's much more, all of it traced to Carr and LRI's dynamic team of 13 individuals who bring their unique talents to work every day. You can meet the "Best LRI Team Ever!" in a special spread inside this newsletter.

To oversee this burst of growth and activity, the Board of Governors has seven new alumni members, each bringing their strengths, as well as their fresh perspectives, to our table. You can read about these extraordinary individuals inside as well.

I hope that you are intrigued enough to get involved in some way. Alumni engagement is very important to us, and this is an exciting time to connect or re-connect. Drop by the Leadership Hub at 188 Valley Street, send an email to one of the team, or just give us a call. I'm confident that we'll be able to find a rewarding way to include you in the action!

Pete Rumsey, 2019 Omicron II

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.



LRI to host 2024 national conference, adds opportunity for alumni to attend



A group of Community Leadership Program staff members representing programs from across the country at the 2022 ALP conference in Orlando, FL.

By Giselle Mahoney, 2020 Pi II

Leadership Rhode Island will host the 2024 national conference of the Association of Leadership Programs (ALP), an event that will bring hundreds of community leaders from coast-to-coast to Rhode Island Aug. 5-8.

For the first time, the annual conference, usually open to the executive directors and staff members of roughly 300 Community Leadership Programs (CLPs), will include a new category of attendees: the alumni of these local leadership programs.

“Our staff consistently walks away from ALP conferences with new relationships, ideas and energy to bring back to Rhode Island,” says **Michelle Carr, 2014 Kappa II**, LRI’s executive director. “We’re excited to partner with ALP in developing a similar opportunity for alumni seeking high-level conversations about issues like workforce development, the future of work, and civil discourse that transcend local borders.”

Carr says it has long been LRI’s goal to get the graduates of leadership programs together to learn emerging skills reflective of one another’s diverse lived experiences and establish new connections that will help them do their best work in a vast array of volunteer leadership roles as they return to their home communities.

“Simply put: We believe community leaders are stronger together and can create lasting change,” says Carr, a co-founder of the National Leadership Network (NLN).

Lura Hammond, executive director of ALP, recalls how LRI stepped up in 2020 when the Covid outbreak threatened local community programs flummoxed by how to continue their

leadership development work during a shut-down. “LRI leaders were pioneers in sharing best practices on the use of virtual programming with CLPs through ALP,” she says.

The virtual launching of the NLN, uniting alumni across the country, emerged out of the collaboration.

“We’re excited to partner with LRI and NLN in developing a new track for alumni at this year’s conference to deepen the learning and connections between alumni and community leadership professionals from across the nation and beyond,” Hammond says.

To accommodate the new alumni track, the conference will offer workshops that are not specific to running a CLP, but rather discussions around broader concepts such as personal leadership development, relationship building tools and issue-based conversations for change.

The ALP conference will take place just three months before voters go to the polls next year to elect a president, members of Congress, and state and local leaders. Aware that continuing polarization threatens civil discourse and the conduct of elections, LRI and ALP agree that bringing community-based leaders together is more important than ever.

“Alumni, through shared experiences in community leadership programs have been trained to find commonality among differences,” says Hammond. “They are exactly the leaders we need to counter some of the divisiveness communities are experiencing. Our many local CLP programs are already bringing these leaders together; the national conference will



Kristen Adamo (left) and Farouk Rajab (right), CEO and former Chair of the Providence Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau present Michelle Carr with a 2023 Ambassador Award for bringing the ALP conference to Providence.

continue to elevate their work and bring about expanded opportunities.”

At least 200 and as many as 400 attendees are expected to attend. Conference sessions will take place at the Omni Hotel in Providence, with mini-excursions to be offered for guests to explore Rhode Island arts, culture, and historical sites. Leadership Rhode Island and the Providence Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau project the conference will have an anticipated direct economic impact of more than \$373,000.

Hosting the ALP conference and establishing the new alumni track accomplish some of the goals of LRI’s new strategic plan. The goals include: facilitating meaningful discussions, developing relationships, advancing the field of community leadership, and exploring innovations, methodologies and partnerships with like-minded organizations.

Bread & Salt: Setting the table for deep conversations among LRI's alumni

"I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend." This familiar Thomas Jefferson quote often accompanies contemporary dinners where people with varying perspectives gather for conversations around complex topics.

But what if you were never invited to the table in the first place?

Following a hiatus prompted by Covid-19, former Executive Director **Mike Ritz, 2007 Gamma II**, convened a group of alumni to be trained as facilitators for what at the time were known as Jeffersonian Dinners, events LRI began hosting in 2016.

That evening **Ashley Bazin, 2021 CLRI**, expressed a concern that had been simmering under the surface for years: the popular alumni dinners carried the name of the man who was not only the nation's third president, but also the owner of more than 600 slaves.

"These dinners are supposed to be a place where people can feel safe while sharing and being vulnerable. How can everyone at the table feel comfortable when it is named after someone who never would have allowed them at his table?"

Challenging conversations are a hallmark of the dinners, and this night proved to be no exception.

"A core lesson through any LRI experience is recognizing that differences in perspective often exist without clear 'right and wrong' answers," said **Chris Donovan**, Director of Communications and Events at LRI.

"It's our responsibility to find the common truths that exist in between in service of a better tomorrow. In this instance, a truth was needing a name that more universally reflects the core values of the dinner."

The name change is not without precedent. Originally known as 'Feasts of Reason' when hosted by Jefferson, the term 'Jeffersonian Dinner' didn't become popularized until Jeffery Walker's 2012 Ted Talk introducing the conversation format to a national audience.

Shortly after, the LRI staff began to explore alternative names. Ritz offered an option rooted across cultures and beliefs. While each unique concept varied, the meaning was the same; starting a meal with bread and salt indicates you are welcome. The name stuck.



Bill Fitzgerald (second from left) leads a Bread and Salt Dinner with graduates of the CLRI program.

Board member, **Bill Fitzgerald**, recalls his conversation with Executive Director Michelle Carr when he was approached to be a facilitator when the dinner series re-launched in 2023. "Let's keep the core structure of the dinner, which is a good one, but bring the name into the 21st century," said Fitzgerald, echoing the organization's commitment to continued growth while preserving the integrity of the gathering's purpose.

A member of the **2018 Xi II** class, Fitzgerald is no stranger to the format. His class' Leadership in Action teams used the structure with alumni and fellow classmates to identify community issues that they could address through their projects.

"There's no better way to get to know

someone than in enjoying a meal with the right dialogue," He says. The energy and content of the discussion are participant-driven, and listening takes precedence over speaking.

At the most recent dinner he facilitated half of the participants, strangers before the evening, went out after their three-plus-hour dinner to continue their conversations.

"It's my hope that these dinners will continue to be a place for our alumni to forge strong connections and will inspire conversations long after the dishes have been cleared," Says **Jacklyn Xavier, 2020 CLRI**, who coordinates the dinners as LRI's Communications and Alumni Engagement Specialist.

Just as it did for the group that chose to carry on their dialogue into the night.

Tau II project teams make Mariam proud

By Charise Wilson, 2022 Sigma II

The forecast for another rainy Saturday created much angst for the team of **Tau IIs** as they debated whether to postpone their outdoor project yet again.

They tossed the decision to **Mike Sollitto**, superintendent of schools in Burrillville. "He's used to making weather calls," quipped **Melissa Book**, career path manager at Coastal Credit Union.

Sollitto gave a thumbs up, mostly because re-scheduling the mini-excavator, loader and dumpster wouldn't be easy.

So, on a dreary fall morning, seven Tau IIs gathered in Woonsocket to clean up the site of a once-flourishing community garden, one that had fallen into disrepair.

Their ranks were bolstered by **Chris Beauchamp**, then president of the City Council, now Woonsocket mayor, **Valerie Gonzalez**, council vice president, and eight other community volunteers.

They removed broken wire fencing, rotten posts, deteriorated wood that had framed the original beds, brush, weeds and litter from the 1.19-acre site, and then constructed five new ground-level garden plots and four raised, accessible beds.

"Surprisingly, it did not rain a drop," recalls **Anne**



The Tau IIs Team 5 and community volunteers take a break after restoring a community garden in Woonsocket.

DaSilva, Peregrine Group senior project manager.

Restoring the community garden lot was one of this year's 10 Leadership-in-Action (LIA) team projects.

"I'm hoping we made Mariam proud," said Book, referring to **Mariam Kaba**, 18, a high school senior whose vision of a better tomorrow for Woonsocket's young people of color was the inspiration for the projects and the 2023 "Restoring the Village" theme.

Leadership Rhode Island has been stewarding

Mariam's vision since 2022 when her ideas for transforming her village — the city of Woonsocket — won a state-wide competition run by the Papitto Opportunity Connection, a private foundation.

As the winner, she was empowered to use \$1-million in Papitto funds for activities that would address the problems and obstacles she has observed growing up.

Early in the 2023 class year, Mariam gave

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Leveraging strengths in new ways

By Abby Burnep and Franciso Lovera, 2018 Xi II

Leadership Rhode Island's strengths initiative, now in its tenth year, has helped more than 11,000 individuals, from managers and workers to job-seeking college students, identify and develop their own top strengths.

Since Make Rhode Island Stronger launched in 2014, more than 36,000 Rhode Islanders have discovered their "Top Five" strengths as employees for strengths-managed workplaces, college job-seekers, or individuals curious to learn what their natural talents may be.

Strengths training — the engine that keeps the Make RI Stronger initiative moving forward — has positive effects on workplace productivity and performance, outcomes long supported by Gallup survey data and research.

This year, in addition to providing its premier strengths training program to business, government and nonprofit clients, staff is incorporating the strengths-mindset into two new endeavors: Improving the employee hiring and on-



Participants in a recent DEI training session choose images that represent their strengths.

boarding process, and increasing diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in the workplace.

"We're excited to see strengths being leveraged in these new ways," says Executive Director **Michelle Carr**, 2014 Kappa II.

Re-imagining the on-boarding of new employees at United Way of Rhode Island was led by strengths coach **Cindy Scibetta-Butts**, who has more than

30 years' experience in Human Resources.

As UWRI staff members met in a series of workshops led by Scibetta-Butts, they realized that bringing a new person aboard is a perfect time for existing employees to "re-board" by renewing their own commitments to strengths-based behavior.

Re-boarding, she says, is the least expensive way to make strengths philosophy stick and to weave a strengths-based approach into an entire organization.

"Each time a new person is hired, they bring a fresh energy to the organization and continue the conversation and value of a strengths-based approach," she says.

Robert Bush, 2022 Sigma II, chief operations officer, says that LRI had been working with United Way to bring strengths-based development to managers and teams so applying asset-based thinking "to re-imagining our recruiting, hiring and

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Sam Bergbauer broadens LRI's reach as first Director of Community Engagement

By Carol Young, 1992 Mu and
Laionel Cintron, 2022 Sigma II

When **Samantha Bergbauer** joined the Leadership Rhode Island staff in the fall of 2019, she couldn't have imagined — who could? — that her job someday would involve guiding a teenager through the expenditure of \$1 million on projects to improve the lives of young people of color.

Even if Sam's imagination could fathom such a responsibility, it couldn't possibly stretch to that of guiding two teenagers, each with \$1-million to invest on their different visions for a better Rhode Island.

But that's what the warm and seemingly unflappable Bergbauer is now doing as LRI's first Director of Community Engagement.

Stewarding two teenagers, **Mariam Kaba**, a senior at Woonsocket's Career and Technical School, and **Siya Singhal**, a sophomore at The Wheeler School in Providence, is on Bergbauer's front burner in this new role.

Yes, Bergbauer agrees, it is an experience "I never expected." But, she says, she relishes "working with such inspiring young leaders as they make real, tangible change in their communities and assist in their own leadership development."

A glance at her academic studies — community and public service as an undergraduate, a certificate in business studies, and a master's in school counseling — and at her top five strengths — responsibility, empathy, individualization, arranger and relator — leads to the conclusion that this job is a perfect fit.

Though her job description doesn't say it like this, Bergbauer is now LRI's eyes and ears in the community and she's the community's voice inside the walls of LRI.

Beyond that, she is responsible for developing and implementing strategic partnerships, overseeing



(Left to right) Executive Director Michelle Carr, 2014 Kappa II, Mariam Kaba, and Sam Bergbauer at the Tau II commencement after hearing the impact of their Leadership in Action projects.

high-impact programs, and communicating with partners.

Bergbauer, whose first position was coordinator of the College Leadership Rhode Island program, says she welcomed the community engagement position with enthusiasm.

When she was responsible for CLRI, she says she particularly enjoyed engaging with alumni and other community partners when planning CLRI session days.

LRI has engaged with the broader community in various ways over the years, says Executive Director **Michelle Carr, 2014 Kappa II**, but now the organization is able to do even more with someone directly responsible for "leading the charge."

Carr cites the example of LRI's six-year partnership with the Providence Journal and Rhode Island College, to offer a series of public discussions exploring major community issues facing Rhode Island. Twice, these Public Occurrences forums won Community Outreach awards from the RI Press Association.

In 2015, LRI ran the first of three public, family-friendly, state-wide Hi Neighbor! Block Parties at the Steel Yard in Providence. In all, 1,700 Rhode Islanders dropped by for the summer festivities.

Creating a high-level position dedicated solely to community engagement became financially feasible when LRI and the Papitto Opportunity Connection reached an agreement more than a year ago in which LRI assumed responsibility for guiding Mariam Kaba, then 16 years old, through the investment from \$1-million of Papitto Opportunity Connection funds to realize her vision for improving the lives of the people of Woonsocket.

Kaba's vision won the private foundation's first Transform Rhode Island Scholarship (TRIS) competition, which also came with a \$25,000

scholarship toward her own future.

Early this year, Siya Singhal, then a 14-year-old freshman, became the second TRIS winner, and is now under Bergbauer's umbrella as she develops plans to invest \$1-million to carry out her vision of creating cultural confidence among young people by building cultural awareness throughout RI's elementary schools.

"The TRIS Scholarship really is so unique. For a group of adults to not only express belief in young people but to put so much trust in them to invest \$1 million in their vision is unprecedented," Bergbauer says.

Her approach is to view Kaba and Singhal as directors with their own built-in supports from LRI staff, community members, implementation partners, and volunteer resource partners.

In another community engagement activity, Bergbauer co-teaches the Capstone course for seniors majoring in global studies at Providence College.

In that role, she is leading students through what Carr calls an abbreviated version of College Leadership RI, the program Bergbauer coordinated when she first joined the staff.

Bergbauer is also working with three other nonprofits, United Way of RI, the Papitto Opportunity Connection, and the Social Enterprise Greenhouse to stage a matchmaking event at which members of the community, including LRI's own alumni, can link up with nonprofits in need of board members.

"LRI so often benefits from the generosity of the RI community — providing session venues, guest speakers, and event inviting us behind-the-scenes — so it's been really exciting to think about how we can be more intentional community partners and how we can, in turn benefit others across the state," Bergbauer says.



Mariam Kaba (right) congratulates Siya Singhal at the 2023 Transform Rhode Island Scholarship award ceremony.

New leadership award honors Nicole Benjamin

By Rose Kenyon

John Tarantino, 1991 Lambda, says he knew **Nicole Benjamin, 2013 Iota II**, was a born leader the day he met her. "It's in her DNA."

He says "listening and elevating others comes naturally" to Nicole. She focuses "less on being in charge, and more on caring for those in her charge."

In 2008, Tarantino, senior counsel, hired Benjamin as a litigator for Adler Pollock & Sheehan, after receiving a glowing recommendation from Frank J. Williams, then Chief Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court, who told him, "If you do not hire this person, it will be the biggest mistake you have made in your career."

Over the years, according to Tarantino, Benjamin has taken on every leadership role that has come her way. "No matter what organization she joins — and there is not an exception — within a short period of time, she leads that organization." She is currently president of the RI Bar Association.

She is "not a leader who dictates," Tarantino says, "but a leader who involves."

She is also a leader who gives. When Tarantino went on an extended leave to care for his wife who was dying of pancreatic cancer, Benjamin volunteered to take on his entire workload in addition to her own, which, he says, she did seamlessly.

When Tarantino decided in 2022 to honor Nicole for her leadership, stand-out spirit and dedication, she was chair of LRI's Board of Governors, a "leader of leaders" so to speak. To have LRI share responsibility for carrying on the award in Benjamin's name seemed to Tarantino to be a perfect solution.

The Inaugural Nicole Benjamin award was presented to Nicole at a special event last December, the end of her three-year term as board chair.

Going forward, the award will be bestowed only when a leader emerges who has had widespread impact. The award, Tarantino emphasizes, is intended "to recognize excellence, not just 'really good' or 'that was a nice job'." It is for "someone who has really exemplified the qualities Nicole has."



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stroke, 50% increased risk of developing dementia, and, perhaps most alarmingly, a 60% increased risk of premature death.

On top of the effects on the mind and body, being disconnected also has a deep impact on the body politic. Social isolation is correlated to disengagement, dissatisfaction, increased hospital spending, lower academic achievement, worse work performance, and decreased levels of community safety.

Loneliness is a grim prognosis, but there is good news. The cure — social connection — has a head start in Rhode Island.

"Leadership Rhode Island is all about connections. The network is like no other, but it goes beyond that. It's so much deeper. It's about humans relating to each other. It's not a network that simply exists and does nothing. It's an intricately connected group that gives back and makes peoples' lives — and our state — so much richer and better," says Leadership Rhode Island Executive Director **Michelle Carr, 2014 Kappa II**.

LRI fills a chasm in the cultural ethos left behind by what **U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy** points to as a troubling trend: The decline in U.S. participation in community organizations, from faith groups to recreation leagues.

"Nationwide, we're seeing more forces that take

us away from one another and fewer of the forces that used to bring us together," Dr. Murthy said.

To counteract the loneliness epidemic, the report outlined a National Strategy to Advance Social Connection that's structured around six foundational pillars:

1. Strengthen Social Infrastructure
2. Enact Pro-Connection Public Policies
3. Mobilize the Health Sector
4. Reform Digital Environments
5. Deepen Our Knowledge
6. Cultivate a Culture of Connection

One would be hard pressed to find an LRI class that didn't have at least one member involved in all six pillars at a state or national level. But the last is LRI's sweet spot, a formidable layer of defense against the onslaught of loneliness.

Three times a year, LRI convenes cohorts of emerging leaders, college students and, most recently, individuals over 62 years old, to put its mission into action: to engage and connect people through shared experiences that positively transform individuals, organizations and communities. It's been working to boost social capital through social cohesion since its start, but those connections were particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The loneliness epidemic didn't begin with the COVID-19 pandemic — the Surgeon General

advisory found that about half of U.S. adults reported experiencing measurable levels of loneliness before the virus changed the world. Yet when isolation is a mandate, a natural consequence is a further disintegration of social ties.

It turns out that, though the pandemic hit locally as hard as anywhere, it also proved that loneliness isn't about the quantity of your connections, but rather the quality.

Amy Gravell, president of St. Mary Academy-Bay View, and **Karen Barbosa**, assistant principal of Woonsocket Area Career and Technical Center, began as **2014 Kappa II** classmates, became next door neighbors, then friends, and eventually during COVID-19, each other's lifelines. Bundled in warm clothes and clutching steaming cups of hot beverages, they would sit in their shared driveway and discuss what filled their days and kept them up at night.

"During the pandemic, it made an immeasurable difference to be able to connect in a way that felt critical — a critical friend with whom you can talk about critical things, that in turn allows you to be your best self in critical moments, professionally and personally," recalls Barbosa. "LRI was the foundation that made that possible. Being classmates and going through

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on-boarding process felt like a natural next step.”

An action plan emerged from the process that will allow United Way “to continue integrating strengths into every part of the employee experience,” he says.

Using concepts associated with strengths development is also a useful tool for conveying the values of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) in the workplace, according to coaches **Sterling Clinton-Spellman, 2019 Omicron II**, and **Sulina Mohanty, 2006 CLRI**.

“Strengths is a great starting point into DEIB because it gives us all a common language and framework to learn about ourselves and each other,” explains Mohanty.

DEIB, says Clinton-Spellman, is more than a strategy, it’s a cultural shift. “Strengths-based approaches help lay the foundation for this shift by encouraging self-awareness, empathy and the

celebration of diverse perspectives,” she says.

The first organizations to receive diversity training are the staffs of Ready Set Work and Workability, organizations associated with Skills RI; the Cumberland School Department administration and leaders, and Meals on Wheels.

The roster of on-call coaches who lead LRI’s different strengths training sessions is larger and more diverse than ever. The current group of 33 coaches includes 13 coaches of color.

Diversity comes in many forms, says **Renzo Arteta**, recently promoted to Senior Training Manager. “We work with clients from different professional backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, ages, languages spoken, and more. My goal is to mix and match the coach to the client so that the experience of the group of participants feels tailor-made for impact.”

A more diverse bank of coaches is particularly timely because 22 of this year’s clients are grant recipients of the Papitto Opportunity Connection, a foundation committed to promoting diversity, equity and inclusion.

LRI agreed to offer strengths development training to Papitto grantees when the private foundation awarded LRI a five-year grant of \$1.75 million in 2022.

The organizations undergoing training this year include Amos House, Dorcas International, Nonviolence Institute, RI Black Business Association, The Avenue Concept and Young Voices.

There are benefits, coaches of color say, when they, as trainers, “look like” their trainees.

“If you put somebody in front of participants who they can relate to and want to listen to, they will open up,” agrees Arteta. “You get these really authentic discussions.”

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the Tau IIs a slide presentation listing dozens of ways she thought they could have impact. “The class breathed life into the vision on those slides,” says **Jane Nugent, 1995 Omicron**, long-time coordinator of LIA projects.

There were lots of pivots and Plan B’s, but nobody gave up, Nugent said after listening to the teams’ final reports during their graduation day.

“There’s no other group in Rhode Island who could have done what you did,” Nugent told the 74 new LRI alumni. “It was a unique convergence of talent that helped a young person’s dream for her community become real. For that reason alone, you succeeded.”

Kaba, after listening to what the LIA teams had accomplished, summed up her reaction this way: “I literally had goosebumps.”

The teams were asked to develop projects in one of three general areas: education, employment, or community pride.

“It’s happening,” **Jessica Kumar**, senior account manager at Cox Business, said in mid-October, her voice filled with weary resolve. She was referring to the fate of a mural for Woonsocket High School, a project originally planned for last summer.

Instead of brightening the school’s master corridor, the mural will be in the cafeteria. Initially planned to be painted directly on a wall, it is being painted off-site on four large panels. But, during months of bureaucratic delays, the team held fast to its goal that the mural be student-conceived and student-created.

In a November update, Kumar said students working after school at Riverzedge Arts are days away from finishing. “It’s huge and it’s beautiful,” she enthused. An installation date had yet to be set.

Three teams responded to Kaba’s premise

that the city’s young people need more guidance as they consider careers and job hunt.

One team linked its plans for a non-traditional career fair to a back-to-school event staged each August by Milagros, a Woonsocket-based nonprofit.

In doing so, the team shifted its target from high school students to the young parents who bring elementary and middle school children to the Milagros event to pick up school supplies.

The team arranged for representatives of a half-dozen major employers and organizations, from Lifespan to Women in the Trades, to participate.

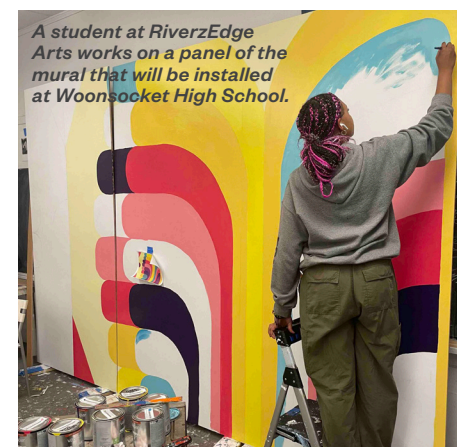
One young father stopped at the Electric Boat table to say he’d always wanted to work there. EB’s enthusiastic response prompted him to complete an application on-the-spot.

RI Energy representatives described the company’s career options, and responded to practical inquiries about getting help in reducing monthly energy bills.

A second team planned a Small Business Bash with contemporary flair that would connect young adults, 18 to 24, with local business owners, especially those engaged in non-traditional creative pursuits. To drum up interest, the team promised food vendors, a raffle of \$100 gifts cards and even the participation of **Ian Brownhill**, popular Tik Tok social influencer.

The youth turnout was disappointing, but the 33 participating entrepreneurs, small business owners and representatives of community organizations and governmental agencies described the event “a big win” as a networking opportunity. “Sometimes things don’t go as planned, but are still very positive,” the team’s final report says.

A third team prepared a Career Exploration



Day tool-kit which includes a list of 40 employers willing to participate, promotional flyers, signage, raffle prizes, and more. It was presented to the Woonsocket High School principal for future use.

Still other teams addressed financial literacy, language literacy, food insecurity, and smoking cessation.

A total of 668 books now fill the shelves of the Woonsocket Clubhouse of the Boys and Girls Club; 12 adults and children enjoyed an enriching farm-to-table feast at a farm retreat, and a partnership with We Share Hope is expected to lead to a food pantry at the Woonsocket Youth Center.

Woonsocket High School students will attend a “Cash Flow Academy” at Bryant University, with representatives of Navigant Credit Union and Fidelity Investments, among the speakers. And, a partnership between the Community Care Alliance and the URI College of Pharmacy is expected to lead to a smoking cessation program.

“We’ve been lacking hope and the Tau II class has helped restore that,” Kaba said, acknowledging that the work of engaging the community must go on.

LRI and Age Friendly Rhode Island develop Senior Fellows Program

By Herb Weiss, 2012 Theta II

When **Gilda Hernandez**, learned about Leadership Rhode Island's new Senior Fellows Program, she promptly applied. Then the 65-year old research librarian at Providence College crossed her fingers, hoping she would be selected for the no-cost, eight-week summer series designed "to lift the voices, knowledge and vision of Rhode Islanders, age 62 and over."

Hernandez got her wish. She was among the 25 applicants invited to participate in the program's pilot year.

She had two goals. As the medical advocate for her 88-year-old parents, Hernandez wanted to become an educated caregiver, one who knows how to navigate public agencies to get appropriate services for them. Beyond that, she wanted to be better prepared to tackle the societal problem of ageism, especially in the education sector.

The program was "what I expected...and more," says Hernandez, giving a thumbs up to the "exceptional programming and top-notch presenters."

The newly-minted Senior Fellows, residents of 13 different cities and towns, range in age from 62 to 83. Nearly half are retired. Four are graduates of LRI's core program: **Anne Powers, 1986 Zeta**, **Ron Caniglia, 1987 Eta**, **Susan Daly 2013 Iota II**, and **Hernandez, 2017 Nu II**.



The 2023 Senior Fellows cohort presents their personal civic commitments at the RI Statehouse during their final session.

"We were looking for a diverse group of individuals that clearly expressed an interest in aiding the older adult population in Rhode Island and could bring an interesting perspective to the cohort. We were also conscious of building a cohort that included individuals with different levels of experience in civic engagement," says **Teresa DeFitch**, LRI's director of leadership development.

The idea to develop a senior advocates program was the vision of **Marianne Raimondo, 1989 Iota**, who made the link between Leadership Rhode Island and **James Burke Connell**, executive director of Age-Friendly Rhode Island, an initiative at Rhode Island College that represents a coalition of public and private agencies, organizations and individuals committed to healthy aging.

Empowering more seniors to become advocates, activists and champions of age-friendly thinking and practices "will result in a Rhode Island where older adults thrive and live their best lives," Connell says.

He made a pitch to **Michelle Carr, 2014 Kappa II**, LRI's executive director, who could easily see the benefits of the proposed joint venture. One such positive: Nearly a fourth of LRI's more than 3,000 alumni are 62 years or older, many of whom are prime candidates for the program.

More importantly, Carr adds, LRI and Age-Friendly RI are both propelled by the belief that citizens of all ages who are actively engaged in their communities can make lasting impacts.

Senior Fellows continued on page 17

Looking at CLRI with a contemporary lens

By Linsey Covington, CLRI 2020

After two decades of growth, it is a good time to imagine new possibilities for the College Leadership Rhode Island program, according to LRI's Director of Leadership Development, Teresa DeFitch.

"Over the last few years, we've seen change in the workforce, and in society in general. We want to take a moment to re-evaluate how we can better meet the needs of younger adults in Rhode Island," she says.

LRI is developing a process that will gather feedback from CLRI's stakeholders, including program sponsors, alumni, and community partners as well as prospective applicants.

Launched in 2004, CLRI's first class had 25 undergraduates from 10 local colleges and universities. The tuition-free program has gradually

expanded and now offers up to 50 students eight days of programming over the course of the academic year. CLRI has more than 500 alumni.

In addition to community building for participants with different needs, experiences, and perspectives, CLRI exposes participants to career possibilities in the public, private and nonprofit sectors, and provides practical advice on networking, job searching and interviewing. Strengths coaching and the importance of well-being in all facets of personal and professional life are also part of the curriculum.

A few years ago, participation was adjusted to include college graduates up to the age of 26.

Sara Gilkenson, CLRI 2023, co-chair of the current class, says she is one who benefited when eligibility was expanded to include those who

already had their college degrees. However, the change resulted in a mixture of participants who are at distinctly different stages of their young lives, she says.

Undergraduates are still trying to navigate the school environment, while graduates are trying to navigate the world of work. To illustrate her point, Gilkenson said that a college sophomore may think "it's cool to know about all of the different sectors," for employment, but actual job hunting is far from an immediate concern.

The challenge, she says, is tailoring a program that serves young adults "exactly where they're at."

DeFitch agrees. "LRI's goal in this exploration is to ensure that the program meets the needs of all participants," she says.

Meet LRI's Best Team Ever!



Michelle Carr, 2014 Kappa II
Executive Director • mcarr@leadershipri.org

Input | Maximizer | Developer | Arranger | Belief

Using her heart as a compass, Michelle stands at the helm, charting the course for LRI's voyage toward transformative change. Her unwavering belief in people serves as the guiding star, charting a course towards a brighter and more impactful future for Rhode Island.



Kristin Zosa Puleo
Director of Development & Alumni Engagement
kzosapuleo@leadershipri.org

Adaptability | Input | Arranger | Ideation | Restorative

Kristin is the maestro of meaningful connections, weaving a tapestry of alumni relations and crafting fundraising strategies that turn our visions into reality.



Samantha Bergbauer
Director of Community Engagement • sbergbauer@leadershipri.org

Responsibility | Empathy | Individualization | Arranger | Relator

With a knack for nurturing networks, Samantha is the architect of community partnerships, building bridges and creating collaborative opportunities that resonate across Rhode Island.



Chris Donovan
Director of Communications & Events • cdonovan@leadershipri.org

Strategic | Individualization | Activator | Responsibility | Relator

Chris is the storyteller-in-chief and master event planner, bringing LRI's narrative to life with flair and orchestrating events that leave lasting impressions.



Abby Burnep
Director of Organizational Learning and Strategy
aburnep@leadershipri.org

Achiever | Learner | Input | Developer | Relator

Abby is the strategist behind the curtain, harmonizing organizational learning with forward-thinking strategies to propel continuous growth and innovation.



Teresa DeFlicht
Director of Leadership Development • tdeflicht@leadershipri.org

Learner | Intellection | Connectedness | Strategic | Relator

Teresa is the guru of growth, developing leadership programs that transform potential into prowess, and guiding people on their journey of personal and professional evolution.



Antonieta Falconi

Director of Finance • afalconi@leadershipri.org

Harmony | Learner | Achiever | Analytical | Input

Antonieta is the cultivator of LRI's finances, strategically nurturing a robust fiscal landscape. Her sharp eye for numbers and an analytical mindset ensure financial growth and stability, fostering a flourishing organizational foundation.

Joanne Gallogly

Office Manager • jgallogly@leadershipri.org

Relator | Harmony | Responsibility | Achiever | Arranger

Joanne is the operational wizard, ensuring the daily magic happens seamlessly, from logistics to administration, making the office a hub of efficiency and positivity.



Kim Ramirez

Database Administrator • kramirez@leadershipri.org

Learner | Arranger | Responsibility | Relator | Achiever

Kim is the data dynamo, managing the digital backbone of LRI with a blend of tech-savvy and strategic insight, ensuring information flows flawlessly.

Renzo Arteta, 2019 CLRI

Senior Training Manager • ranteta@leadershipri.org

Restorative | Input | Adaptability | Learner | Connectedness

Renzo crafts thoughtful training programs that are as engaging as they are enlightening, equipping folks with the tools to unleash the best version of themselves.



Lyanh Ramirez

Leadership Development Manager • lr Ramirez@leadershipri.org

Individualization | Learner | Arranger | Woo | Achiever

Lyanh is the catalyst of conversations, delivering dynamic facilitation to LRI's programs, ensuring that every experience is a journey, fostering an engaging environment of growth.

Jacklyn Xavier, 2020 CLRI

Communications and Alumni Engagement Specialist

jxavier@leadershipri.org

Restorative | Achiever | Adaptability | Relator | Responsibility

Jacklyn is the nexus of communication and connection, fostering alumni networks and crafting messages that resonate and inspire.



Rose Kenyon

Leadership Development Coordinator • rkenyon@leadershipri.org

Restorative | Strategic | Individualization | Learner | Arranger

Rose is the coordinator extraordinaire, the linchpin in LRI's leadership development endeavors, ensuring every program runs as smoothly as a well-oiled machine.



Original Sigmas reunite 25 years later

By Jacklyn Xavier, 2020 CLRI

Year after year for a quarter century, the Original Sigmas have made an effort to get together at backyard barbecues, pot-luck suppers, cocktail parties, or at a local pub.

So, it's no surprise that the graduates of the 1998 Core Program would plan a special bash for their 25th class anniversary. In September, 22 of the 51 Original **Sigmas** got all gussied up for dinner at the Dunes Club in Narragansett where they spent the evening sharing hugs, laughing, recalling past good times, taking pictures, and dancing.

The attendees were mostly alumni who still live in Rhode Island, though **Beverly Scott** flew in from California to join the celebration. Scott, who was general manager of the RI Transit Authority (RIPTA) back in her Sigma days, took the opportunity during dinner to talk about a national nonprofit she has started to inspire students,

especially girls and young people of color, to become tomorrow's infrastructure leaders, innovators, entrepreneurs, and skilled workers.

Dave Mullen, regional manager at TD Bank, attributes the extraordinary bonding of the Sigmas to "the magic of the people" in the class. He singles out **Lisa Churchville** and lawyer **Mark McKenney**, state Senator from Warwick, as instrumental in getting the Sigmas together over the years.

"We've always had a good time together... and consistently made time for each other," says Churchville, who, back in 1998, was beginning a 14-year run as president and general manager at NBC-10. "Nurturing early relationships, building trust, and becoming valuable resources for each other definitely keeps bringing us back together," she says.

The only somber note during the upbeat evening came when **Marcia Russell Cintron** spoke of the

recent passing of classmate **Peter Wells**. Wells, who died in July, served 21 years as regional director of Veterans Affairs for the US Government. He also spent several years as editor of the Providence American, then a monthly newspaper established to provide news of interest to African Americans. It is now a digital service for all communities of color.

Another member of the 1998 Sigma class, **Paul Pickens**, long-time president of Goodwill Industries of Rhode Island, died in 2014.

To honor the memory of their two classmates, the Sigmas pledged to raise a full tuition scholarship for a diverse candidate admitted to next year's core program. So far, the Sigmas have raised more than \$4,900 toward their \$6,300 goal.

Though the competition for LRI's Best Class Ever will go on forever, the Original Sigmas likely hold the record — so far — as the Most Gregarious Class Ever!

Sigma II continued from page 1

Since then, the class has taken on more than a dozen monthly service projects, many of them supporting organizations run by their classmates or session day speakers. About three-quarters of the class has participated in at least one initiative, and the group has no plans to stop.

"Onward and Upward was our class theme," Rajotte says. "The spirit of what we did was to lift each other up and lift the community up together. We lived, lived, lived the theme of our class."

For the first Sigma II Steps Up project, about 30 members of the class helped furnish the new Open Doors Women's Shelter with furniture, appliances and artwork. Since then, they have collected Halloween costumes for Foster Forward and grocery store gift cards for Rhode Island's indigenous population. They attended the citizenship ceremony for one classmate, **Billy Leiva**, and organized a meal train for another, **Jada**

Taglione-Dietsch, a first-time mother whose husband was deployed. And they supported organizations such as Lucy's Hearth, Special Olympics and A Wish Come True.

"Inclusion and impact were the two driving forces no matter what. Anyone's contribution was a valued contribution, and anyone's ability to show up was valued," says Rajotte.

Sigma II Steps Up wasn't the only initiative started by this standout class. They formed several affinity groups, two of which — women and Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) — continue to meet regularly. And they have built a strong support network for each other, as evidenced by the Leadership Rhode Island Shout Outs, individual videos about the 74 Sigma IIs that Class Speaker **Deb Honor** shared to her wide network on LinkedIn.

The Sigma IIs are not only generous with their time, they are generous with their money.

They raised more than \$22,000 for LRI, a gift announced at the 40th anniversary gala in 2022.

Kelly Villanueva, Vice President of Strategic Business Partnership at The Hanover Insurance Group, who helps coordinate the Sigma II Steps Up effort and leads the Women's Affinity Group, noted that the Sigma IIs were a "very self-driven, self-motivated class."

For her part, Villanueva's time in LRI led to her joining the board of McAuley Ministries, which was the beneficiary of her Leadership-In-Action team's project. The team introduced McAuley Ministries Executive Director **Barbara Haynes** to the CCRI Industry Partnership Program and helped secure the grant money needed to provide customer solutions training for women living at McAuley Village.

Sigma II continued on page 17

Our 2023 Onward & Upward Campaign supporters

Thank you for your support; We are so grateful for your commitment to our mission.

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Sharon Conard-Wells, 1991 Lambda
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Dave Curtis, 2015 Lambda II

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Christy Durant, 2022 Sigma II
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Jacklyn Xavier, 2020 CLRI
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Note: This represents individual who contributed between Jan. 1 - Nov. 30, 2023

Fuel LRI and add your name to this list! Scan the QR code or visit: www.leadershipri.org/onwardupward

Meet the newest members of our board

By Jacklyn Xavier, 2020 CLRI



Ernie Almonte, 1988 Theta

Learner | Analytical | Achiever
Responsibility | Connectedness

The seeds were planted for Ernie's commitment to public service back in 1988 when he participated in LRI's core program. He graduated, he says, determined to be a better member of the greater community and with a sense that positive change happens when people of different backgrounds, perspectives and cultures seek solutions together.

Now, 37 years later, that notion has blossomed into a solid belief. Ernie says he wants to use his role on the LRI board as a springboard for discussions, whenever relevant, that take diversity, inclusion and access to power into account.

Ernie entered the public sector in 1994 when he left his own accounting firm to serve as the state's Auditor General, a position he held for 15 years. The office conducts financial and performance audits, fraud investigations and federal compliance audits of state and municipal governments.

In his current position, as Executive Director of the RI League of Cities and Towns, he advocates for the diverse interests of 39 municipalities, and oversees training and leadership development programs for local tax collectors and public safety workers to public works employees and town clerks.

He's also serving his first year as Chair of the RI Convention Center Authority board, as a director for Blue Cross & Blue Shield of RI, and as the Army Reserve Ambassador for Rhode Island, a recent appointment by the Secretary of the Army.

Ernie holds bachelor and master degrees — and received an honorary doctorate in 2009 — from Bryant University. He also completed two programs at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

His varied career includes six years as national partner of RSM US, a global accounting and consulting firm, a year as chief of staff to Lt. Governor Sabina Matos, and a brief stop at the RI Department of Health

He has also served as national chairman of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants and national president of the Association of Government Accountants.



John Bennett, 2017 Nu II

Learner | Relator | Achiever
Futuristic | Analytical

In today's world of ever-evolving technology, John, a 2017 Nu II, brings his expertise in software development and team leadership to LRI's Board of Governors.

"As the organization continues to evolve," he says, "I hope my technology background can be helpful in managing the ever-increasing administrative workload, so the team can continue to create the excellent programming that LRI is known for."

After more than 30 years of experience building software and leading technology teams, John is now an independent consultant, assisting clients in the creation, construction and expansion of their software. He places strong emphasis on the use of software and data in ethical, responsible ways, he says.

Prior, he worked for several technology companies, holding the position of Principal at Nevo Technologies, and Vice President of Engineering at Huge, an international digital company. For NBC News Digital, where he was Principal Engineer, he spearheaded the development of new software for NBC News websites and apps, a system supporting hundreds of millions of users.

He is an advisor at the Social Enterprise Greenhouse, head-quartered in Providence. In the past, he also has volunteered to assist iMentor, an agency that empowers first-generation students to achieve their ambitions, Malaika, an organization that supports the village of Kalebuka in the south-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Blue Ridge Labs which builds tech-based solutions for real-world problems faced by people experiencing poverty.

"The expansion of LRI's local programs and national influence over the past few years has been wonderful to see," he says. "Though it hasn't really been a surprise, given the amazing staff and network of alumni."

John, who lives in Warwick, is an avid sailor, amateur blacksmith, and the parent of an extremely spoiled cattle dog. He majored in Russian and Soviet Studies at Harvard College.



Bill Fitzgerald, 2018 Xi II

Responsibility | Strategic | Arranger
Futuristic | Relator

Bill, vice president of sales & client services at Amica Mutual Insurance Company and new member of LRI's Board of Governors, is convinced that relationship building is a key to success in both the business world and within the greater community.

Three years ago, in a LinkedIn post headlined Building Lasting Relationships, Bill encouraged readers to embrace all opportunities "to learn from others with diverse backgrounds, experiences and perspectives."

LRI's mission "of engaging and connecting people, while making our community stronger, is what has attracted me to LRI since 2018 when I had the good fortune of being part of the Xi II Class," he says now.

"The relationships that have been built along the way have inspired me to invest time inside and outside of the LRI community while supporting our mission, and continuing to accelerate the impact we make as an organization. This is what I'm most excited about looking forward."

Bill received his bachelor's degree in finance from the University of South Florida and has built his career in sales, underwriting, and insurance operations over the past 30 years, all at Amica. Bill also has experience in customer relationship software, reinsurance, market expansion, and creating new distribution channels.

Given his decades of experience in the insurance sector, Bill, who lives in Bristol, is a regular guest lecturer on sales, underwriting, and risk management at Providence College.

He has served on the governing board for the Rhode Island Free Clinic for nearly 15 years. In January, he ended a three-year stint as board president, and continues to serve as president emeritus. The clinic provides free medical care and preventive health services to low-income adults without health insurance.

Bill has also served as President of the Rhode Island Association of Insurance and Financial Advisors.



Sean Fontes, 2022 Sigma II

Responsibility | Learner | Analytical
Restorative | Individualization

Sean, who grew up in Boston, cites vivid childhood memories to explain his strong work ethic, his belief in the power of education and of strong multicultural relationships.

He recalls how his mother, after finishing her full-time day job, earned a high school diploma and attended community college classes at night. He also remembers the evenings when his exhausted father, a hard-working manual laborer, found time to tutor him in arithmetic.

And, he remembers his mother's close friendship with an Irish woman, a sisterhood that survived ugly outbursts of bigotry in the 1970s when the Irish of South Boston angrily resisted the bussing of black children to their white neighborhood schools.

Sean graduated from the University of Massachusetts and earned a law degree from Boston College's Law School. Later he added a certificate in Executive Leadership from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.

He recently joined the Providence firm of Partridge Snow & Hahn as counsel in employment and litigation. The move to the private sector followed 12 years as head of the legal division at Rhode Island's Department of Labor and Training.

His volunteer services are extensive. In Boston, Sean provided pro bono legal services for indigent clients for 15 years, and now serves as legal counsel for the Community Mentoring Team that guides men and women of color into union construction apprenticeships.

He is long-time chair of the West Elmwood Housing Development Corp. in Providence and serves as fellow of the Rhode Island Bar Foundation.

Now on LRI's board, Sean says he wants to use his leadership, professional, educational, philanthropic and life experiences to guide LRI through a period of growth and into its best position ever to nurture new leaders "to lead in a multi-racial society and fast-evolving society."



Brett Gerstenblatt, 2017 Nu II

Strategic | Futuristic | Responsibility
Maximizer | Deliberative

Brett hopes to bring "more meaning, more connection and more joy to the LRI community" and he's already thinking about how to do it.

"I see opportunities to better tell and share the story of why," the new board member says. "A more widespread understanding of LRI's capabilities and capacity would put the organization in a better position to be a catalyst for positive change."

"Generating new and different reasons to convene will foster more connections between alumni, cohorts and others." And, he suggests, "By reigniting hope and optimism... I believe the impact will be more joy."

Brett Gerstenblatt, 2017 Nu II, has developed corporate branding, marketing and communications programs for more than three decades. He has advised a broad range of organizations including nonprofits, start-ups and Fortune 500 companies helping them pursue new strategies, respond to competitive challenges and adapt to changing environments.

From 2013-2023, while at CVS Health, he played a key role in the campaign to halt tobacco sales, the development of the CVS Health brand, and the transformation of the company from being America's corner drug store to the nation's largest consumer healthcare company. As Vice President, Brand Experience, Creativity & Design he founded and led the in-house award-winning agency, Heart Haus.

Earlier, he was a consultant and design expert at McKinsey & Company, an entrepreneur, leader at a digital marketing agency, and creative director at several preeminent design firms.

Brett earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the Hartford Art School, University of Hartford. Brett completed his senior thesis at the Rhode Island School of Design and studied abroad on several occasions.

Brett is a mentor and guest lecturer, volunteers often and serves on several boards including the Board of Trustees for The Miriam Hospital Foundation.

New Members continued on next page



Jennie Silbert, 2019 Omicron II

Connectedness | Arranger | Positivity Achiever | Maximizer

In 2019, Jen was a participant in LRI's core program. In 2021, Spartina Consulting, the company Jen co-founded, facilitated LRI's strategic planning process, and earlier this year, Jen joined LRI's governing board.

Jen has approached each endeavor with her high-octane enthusiasm and characteristic positivity. Jen is a self-described "serial mentor to emerging leaders," and says she "lives and breathes strengths-based organization development consulting" and wants to "strengthen the leadership potential in every life I touch."

She is thrilled, she says, to be an LRI board member because it is an opportunity "to help steer LRI's strategic plan into its next chapter for all leaders, near and far."

Spartina Consulting, established 10 years ago, has served clients that include schools and education organizations, Fortune 500 companies, government agencies, including the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and indigenous villages around the world.

Prior to founding her own practice, Jen was an Organization Development consultant and leadership coach for BearingPoint, EDS, Price Waterhouse Coopers, and IBM. She is also co-author of a book, "Positive Family Dynamics: Appreciative Inquiry Questions to Bring Out the Best in Families".

Over the years, Jen has been a volunteer with a number of organizations. She is on the board and co-chair of the fund development committee for the Girl Scouts of South-eastern New England, spent 14 years as a classroom volunteer in South Kingstown, and three years as a mentor for Year Up participants and for Women in Tech.

Jen did her undergraduate studies at American University, majoring in economics and International studies. She holds a master's degree in organization development from Johns Hopkins University,



Oliver Tutt, 2018 Xi II

Context | Analytical | Consistency Futuristic | Learner

As the board's new treasurer, Oliver, a graduate of the core program in 2018, is eager to use his expertise in planning ahead to help guide LRI through a period of remarkable growth.

"Thanks to the hard work of a tremendous group of staff and volunteers past and present, we are fortunate to be presented with many opportunities to grow beyond our traditional programs," he says.

But, he cautions: "Inevitably, growth brings challenges. " With that in mind, "I hope I can help LRI evaluate and manage these opportunities from both a mission and business perspective so that we can continue to capitalize on our strengths while we expand our reach."

A University of Rhode Island graduate with a degree in finance, Oliver is a Certified Financial Planner who received his certificate in financial planning from the Denver College of Financial Planning in 1996.

For more than two decades Oliver has owned the Randall Financial Group, a firm that offers personalized financial planning and investment management.

He also has been willing to share his planning and investment expertise in the public arena. He hosted The Money Pro\$ television show on Fox Providence for more than eight years, has written a financial advice column for the East Bay newspapers, and has hosted a weekly call-in talk radio show on personal finance.

He has led numerous workshops and presentations, some aimed at helping people understand and avoid pitfalls in their personal finances. Oliver also shares his advice as a frequent financial speaker at College Leadership Rhode Island session days.

When he's not working, Oliver enjoys sailing Southern New England waters with his family. He also serves as Commodore of the Barrington Yacht Club.

Loneliness continued from page 7

that experience with Amy created a certain level of conversation and connection that otherwise would have taken decades to achieve. It got us through."

The Pi II class were their own kind of connection experiment, beginning just weeks before the pandemic descended and all in-person activities shifted onto quarantined screens. In a stroke of prescience, their class theme was "aloneness," the state of being solitary. Group projects sketched out pre-lock down took on an air of fervor and urgency, the theoretical now acutely tangential. And though the class met face-to-face less frequently than any other in history, they forged a unique, enduring bond.

Since graduating three years ago, they've made up for lost time. Lead by class speaker **Tom Baldwin, 2020 Pi II**, program manager at Netsimco and former military professor at the U.S. Naval War College, and classmate **Rebecca Twitchell**, president and founder of half full, llc, the class has convened in "Forward Retreats." Much more than simply making up for lost time, these gatherings are dedicated to continuing group conversations, checking in with each other, and deepening existing connections.

"Being together in person is incredible, but it's not a replacement for what we had. Going through LRI in the pandemic was like turning it up to 11. Being virtual actually allowed us the opportunity for more connections—you can have coffee with every classmate on screen," said Twitchell. "Our topic was "aloneness" and we were the very thing keeping each other from being and feeling alone. What we're doing now is strengthening the relationships we built when we needed them most."

If those relationships are Leadership Rhode Island's secret sauce, a new software called Kumu is helping the team unveil the full power of its formidable network. Its mapping technology visualizes how people are connected to each other, creating a roadmap for collaboration.

For two years running, the team has been able to map connections at the beginning of a class, and the midpoint, and the results are powerful—circles upon circles of knowledge, inclusion, culture, and potential. Being able to quantify and qualify impact and influence is critical for not only the future of the Ocean State, but for community leadership programs as a whole.

We're living through an undeniably hard time in history. The Surgeon General has delivered his loneliness diagnosis, but never fear — LRI will see you now.

Senior Fellows continued from page 9

Age-Friendly RI agreed to fund the pilot program, and asked LRI's "talented team" to handle recruiting, participant selection, curriculum planning, and guiding participants in the development of individual community commitments, Connell says.

To get started, DeFlicht says she had conversations with Connell and others associated with the Age-Friendly movement during which it was emphasized that older adults need more opportunities to share their experiences and their solutions to age-related challenges.

She kept these observations in mind when working with the team to develop programming. The resulting curriculum drew on LRI's long-standing reputation for facilitating dynamic learning experiences and took advantage of the expertise and availability of Age-Friendly experts.

Most session days were divided into two parts, with half focused on knowledge-building around relevant issues, such as housing, food insecurity, transportation needs, and health care.

The other half focused on skill-building, such as writing persuasively, public speaking, and network building, to enable the Fellows to develop and eventually execute their own Civic Commitments.

The Fellows took turns divulging their individual Civic Commitments during their final session, held at the State House in early August. The brief presentations, which included several "poignant and pin-drop moments," were well received by the audience, mostly of nonprofit leaders, according to Age-Friendly's Connell.

Senior Fellow Caniglia, 77, from Warwick, applauds the advocacy program for emphasizing the importance of "living in place," rather than "aging in place." In fact, his Civic Commitment — to urge the expansion of Medicare benefits to adequately cover hearing, vision, and dental care — would enable more older adults "to live life to the fullest."

A retired contractor, Caniglia's arguments for the expansion of these benefits are passionate and personal. Hearing loss, if not addressed, can contribute to the breakdown of family and everyday social relationships, he says. This could lead to unhealthy isolation.

DeFlicht has high hopes that the first crop of Fellows - who are expected to begin civic engagement within six months of leaving the program - will have a positive impact on older adults throughout the Ocean State.

We hope, she says, that by participating in the program, the Fellows have expanded their knowledge, network, and confidence when it comes to making a difference.

It is also hoped, she adds, that each participant feels more connected to a supportive and joyful community, including their fellow Fellows, and the LRI and Age-Friendly networks.

"We are eager to run the program again and incorporate feedback from this year's cohort. Working with Age-Friendly Rhode Island has been wonderful and we are learning a great deal from the cohort members about what's affecting them as older adults in the state. It's been an inspiring and energizing experience," DeFlicht says.

Sigma II continued from page 12

Haynes said she was thrilled when Sigma II member **Alison Croke** reached out to offer her team's services on a workforce development project.

"We're under-resourced to the nth degree, and we're serving vulnerable populations," Haynes says, noting that many of the women who live at McAuley are survivors of domestic violence, with children, low income and no cars. Some have been living in the United States for less than five years.

All of those barriers would have made it impossible for these women to attend workforce training off-site. It was "monumental," Haynes said, to have CCRI offer the training at McAuley Village, where child care could be provided. Seven women graduated from the inaugural class, where they learned basic professionalism, Microsoft Office, customer service skills and call center structure. Their certificates qualify them to apply for customer service roles with companies like AAA and Amica, whose representatives joined a class to speak about opportunities.

Haynes said the connection to CCRI would not have been possible without the Sigma IIs.

"It's been really impactful, and it's going to matter for the women that we put through this year and in future years," she said. "I'm really grateful and glad that it all happened."

Villanueva said it was a "heartwarming project to have been part of" and that her desire to continue her involvement with the organization led to her joining the board, where she shares her human resources expertise.

When she was going through the LRI program, she says, "I was at a point in time where I wanted to lean in and find a place in Rhode Island where I could personally give back. When we selected McAuley Ministries as our LIA Project, I really felt connected to their purpose and what they're doing."

Villanueva is not the only Sigma II who joined a board as a result of relationships forged during the Core Program. Four class members are now serving on the board of Amenity Aid, whose founder and executive director is a fellow Sigma II **Liz Duggan**.

"A lot of people heard my story and wanted to get involved," says Duggan, whose nonprofit distributes hygiene products to direct service agencies that assist vulnerable populations throughout Rhode Island.

The Sigma II Women's Affinity Group hosted a Period Packing Party for Amenity Aid, raising money to purchase the products in bulk and assembling them into kits. Rajotte is now the organization's board president, and **Lammis Vargas, Deb Honor, Norelys Consuegra** are board members.

Duggan said it was part of the Sigma II culture to support and lift one another up.

"I'm proud to be part of a class that has really embraced the community support," she says. "That's really important to me personally and professionally to be surrounded by people of different backgrounds to support each other. It really made that a good home for me."



(Left to right, starting 2nd from left) Alex Jimenez, James Rajotte, Deb Honor, Lisa Odom-Villela, and Laura Hart delivered three car loads of professional attire for women living at McAuley village.



This image was created using MidJourney, an Artificial Intelligence image generator. Here's what I asked it to create: In the center of the picture is a group of 6 people of different races and ages, dressed in business casual wear, talking to one another while standing on a patch of vibrant green grass. Surrounding them, the rest of the grass is brown, desolate, and barren. In this areas are robots wandering.

Opinion: Authentic leadership is the key to humanity in the Age of AI

By Chris Donovan

Over the last year the terms Artificial Intelligence (AI), Generative Pre-trained Transformers (GPTs), and learning language model have become so prevalent that even if you don't use them, or understand them, you've likely heard of them. The rapid evolution of these technologies and their potential to change the world dominates headlines, news feeds, and casual conversations, leading some to tell you that we're entering an Age of AI.

I have an alternative to offer, but for it to succeed, it needs you.

Before I get to the heart of my message, we need to get on the same page about a few things:

I have been a tech nerd since I took apart and rebuilt my first computer at 12 years old. (My parents were not thrilled.) That curiosity and passion for technology now finds me spending some time each day exploring the latest and greatest AI innovations. I love technology. AND, I love human connection. (Dynamic tensions anyone?)

The foundation of AI is fundamentally problematic. The algorithms that developers use are inherently biased by the data they have been fed. An unknown, but believed to be significant, amount of that data has been sourced without the consent of its creators. At least that is the basis of a recent lawsuit by a group of artists against two of the leading AI image generation tools. Sourcing issues only begin to scratch the surface of the darker side of this technology.

Predictions differ about the impact of AI on the labor force, and the speed with which AI will spread, but it's clear, regardless of how we feel about it, that AI is here, it will grow, and it will impact you and those you lead and serve.

OpenAI, creators of the infamous ChatGPT model, believe that "80% of the US workforce

could have at least 10% of their work tasks affected by the introduction of GPTs." In reality, this could range from using GPTs to create first drafts or marketing materials, up to having fully automated digital assistants that learn your routines and provide the resources you're looking for before even you realize you wanted to look for them.

If you're getting a knot in your stomach similar to how you felt in March of 2020 when Covid-19 forced us to abandon our daily routines, I encourage you to lean into that feeling. The people, companies and organizations that innovated through the discomfort of new technologies at that time are the ones who didn't just weather the storm, but lead others through it.

But you need to remember that success, during that time, was not found in the technology itself (How many of those Zoom meetings were you on?), but in the people behind the tools who figured out how to use them to drive real impact and change.

This brings me to four virtues that a recent FastCompany article outlined as crucial if we are to maintain humanity in the Age of AI.

HUMILITY: "We must, for the first time, ask ourselves what it means to be human in an era in which much of our thinking can be outsourced to machines."

CURIOSITY: "What matters today is not experts knowing the answers to all questions but that they are asking the right questions, not retrieving information but critically evaluating and vetting, not collecting insights but making smart decisions based on them."

SELF-AWARENESS: "Understanding ourselves in the age of AI means paying attention to how our interactions with technology are reshaping our

behaviors, and what they tell us about ourselves, including our dark side traits: impulsivity, distractibility, self-centeredness, and bias."

EMPATHY: "Through recognizing our intellectual limitations and appreciating others' strengths, even if they are machines, we can become less self-focused, and pay due attention and recognition to others, ultimately leading to feelings of empathy and gratitude."

Humility, curiosity, self-awareness, and empathy.

If I were to list those values in the abstract, would you think I was talking about AI? Or LRI?

Humility, recognizing that you do not have all of the answers.

Curiosity, wanting to seek out answers.

Self-awareness, knowing that you have as much to offer as you have to learn.

Empathy, understanding that you are part of something greater than yourself.

These values are at the core of why we, at LRI, convene people from different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives. We believe that only authentic human connection leads to real change.

So I challenge the notion that we are entering an Age of AI. Instead, I argue that we are stepping into an Age of Authenticity. An era in which new technology exists, but does not dominate; where we leverage AI as a tool, but not as a replacement for human connection and leadership rooted in values.

Maintaining our human virtues at the center of all we do will ensure that our communities will continue to grow stronger, more resilient, and deeply authentic in spite of the technologies that we use.

But this vision of the future requires you to step up to the challenge of not just embracing these values, but leading with them. For the sake of what we know as humanity, I hope you will.

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

The Rhode Island Superintendent of the Year is **Michael Sollitto, 2023 Tau II**, who is in his fifth year as superintendent in Burrillville.

The first-ever chief equity officer for the City of Pawtucket is **Chachi Carvalho, 2020 Pi II**.

Moving Up: **Mary Noons, 2009 Epsilon**, is Washington Trust Company's new president and chief operating officer, the first woman to hold the position in the bank's 223-year history, and **Elizabeth Boyle Eckel, 2005 Alpha**, has been promoted to executive vice president, chief marketing and corporate communications officer. Both alumnae have worked at Washington Trust for more than 30 years.

Julie Moura, 2020 Pi II/2004 CLRI, has been promoted to vice president, HR chief of staff at Hasbro.

The new president of St. Mary Academy Bay View is **Amy Gravell, 2014 Kappa II**.

Bradly VanDerStad, 2014 CLRI, has been sworn in as second lieutenant of the RI Army National Guard.

A Place in History: **Sharon Harmon, 2022 Sigma II**, is the first Black colonel in the Rhode Island National Guard.

Leonard Green, 2002 Chi, has been appointed to the Ethics and Professional Standards Committee of the National Federation of State Medical Boards.

The new board chair of Trinity Repertory Company is **Kibbie Reilly, 2003 Psi**.

President Biden has appointed **Tina Guenette, 2023 Tau II**, to a four-year term on the Access Board, a federal effort dedicated to the removal of barriers for those with disabilities. Tina is founder/president of a nonprofit, RAMP, that advocates for accessibility and inclusion.

Rafaelina Gomez, 2016 Mu II, is now director of technology strategy & planning at Fidelity Investments.

Jude Amoako, 2018 CLRI, was among the 10 University of Rhode Island alumni honored in 2023 for achievements within 10 years of their graduation. Jude's 10 under 10 award recognized his Ethical Leadership and Community Engagement.

Dana Long, 2019 Omicron II, has started a new position as technology change manager at FM Global.

Kevin Deeb, 2021 CLRI, has joined the board of the Alumni Association at Roger Williams University as a representative of the Class of 2020.

The new executive director and senior vice president of City Year Providence is **Nirva LaFortune, 2019 Omicron II**.

Patricia Martinez, 1995 Omicron, has been inducted into the Central Falls Women's Hall of Fame.

Two alumni are helping to oversee The Providence Children's Museum: **Ted Kresse, 2020 Pi II**, is in his first year as president of the board, and **Zlatomir Popov, 2017 Nu II**, is a new member.

John Morrison, 2019 CLRI, has started a new position as clinic strategic account executive at CVS Health.



Chachi Carvalho



Carmen Diaz-Jusino



Sharon Harmon



Ronald Caniglia



Tina Guenette



Irving Martinez



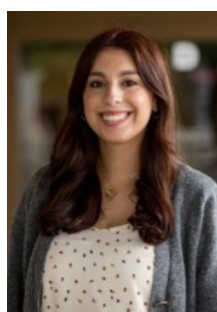
Jude Amoako



Etie-Lee Schaub



Zlatomir Popov



Victoria Cuttone

Heather DiFazio, 2023 CLRI, and **Nathaniel Sandoval, 2021 CLRI**, have been awarded prestigious Fulbright Scholarships. Heather will conduct research on the development of an artificial intelligence module for a surgical diagnostic device that can differentiate tumors from healthy tissue at the University of Bern, Switzerland. Nathaniel will be an English teaching assistant in Panama and will also serve as a citizen ambassador within the community.

Sara Gilkenson, 2023 CLRI, the RI Supreme Court's diversity director, has been appointed to the board of the Rhode Island Black Business Association.

Carmen Diaz-Jusino, 2010 Zeta II, is now strategic initiative officer at the Rhode Island Foundation.

Paige Zuber, 2018 CLRI, has started a new position as assistant director of social media at Bryant University.

Milly De La Cruz, 2019 CLRI, is now associate director of academic support and care at Clark University.

Hannah Ung, 2020 CLRI, took home All-American honors in wrestling at the 2023 NCA National Championships, representing Northeastern University.

Ron Caniglia, 1987 Eta / 2023 Senior Fellow, is president of Point Associates, a new company offering guidance for diverse construction start-ups.

Amanda Clarke Cantrell, 2009 CLRI, is chief of staff at the state Department of Environmental Management.

Irving Martinez, 2016 CLRI, has started a new position as Senior Marketing Associate, Paid Media at ASICS Digital.

Sharon Conard-Wells, 1991 Lambda, has been inducted into the Martin Luther King Jr. Hall of Fame for her inspiring work for equity, civil rights, and justice.

Shanna Davine Marzilli, 2008 Delta II, has been named president and CEO at Plan International USA, where she has held executive positions since 2013.

Lawyers Extraordinaire: **Nicole Benjamin, 2013 Iota II**, former chair of LRI's governing board, has been elected president of the Rhode Island Bar Association and **Etie-Lee Schaub, 2021 Rho II**, senior assistant city solicitor in Providence, is the president of the Rhode Island Women's Bar Association.

Elizabeth Cunha, 2012 Theta II, is the strategic advisor for the Women in Leadership program at the University of New Haven.

Raymond Two Hawks Watson, 2015 Lambda II, has started a new position as Policy Director at the Center for Indigenous Peoples Rights.

Victoria Cuttone, 2023 CLRI, received the 2023 Student Leader Award at Johnson & Wales University.

Congratulations to **Luca Carnevale, 2021 Rho II**, **Tino Chow, 2017 Nu II**, **Daniela Fairchild-Frydryk, 2018 Xi II**, **Nicholas Loring, 2016 Mu II**, and **Jessica Marfeo, 2020 Pi II**, for their selection as 40 Under 40 honorees by the Providence Business News.

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

E-mail Jacklyn Xavier, LRI's Communications & Alumni Engagement Specialist at jxavier@leadershipri.org



LEADERSHIP RHODE ISLAND

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Inspiring Leaders Luncheon

Wednesday, March 20

401Gives

Monday, April 1

LRI Golf Classic

Monday, June 10

ALP National Conference

Monday August 5 - Thursday August 8

Statewide Scavenger Hunt

Saturday, August 24 & Sunday, August 25

Upsilon II Graduation Party

Wednesday, October 16