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Maggie Johnson

Welcome to another mini-episode of [As Spiders Do](#), from the University of Richmond Office of Alumni Engagement. I'm your host, Maggie Johnson, from the Class of 2018, and I am so excited to introduce Season 2 of *As Spiders Do*. To celebrate the new year and the new season, we asked a few alums to share what they're most looking forward to in 2024. First off, I'd like to introduce you to Christine Hofler.

Christine Hofler

So I graduated in '87. I currently live in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota.

Maggie Johnson

What's something you're looking forward to in 2024?

Christine Hofler

I am really excited about a new thing that I'm doing with my business and a partner, a life coach that I'm working with. And I have an organizing business, [Bold Joyful Organizing](#), and just have expanded into bringing the ideals of my business just to everything in life rather than just your physical stuff. So the bold in my business name stands for beauty, order, love and depth. So just bringing intentionality, bringing joy to our everyday lives and really some simple steps that we can take and really practical ways to make a shift, make a change, do a reset. We need joy so much right now, I think. There's so much going on individually, corporately, globally you know. Everywhere you look, there's reasons to be discouraged or have despair. And I'm looking forward to helping people focus on sources of joy and deliberately bringing that into our lives because that fuels good things.

Maggie Johnson

I love that. What brings you joy?

Christine Hofler

I think one of the things I love to do is just to look for joy in my surroundings, in my everyday world. I love to look out my window and see the snow or the lakes and just all the beauty and nature. I love to get outside and I love pops of color: in my clothing, in my house, wherever, I like to bring color in. And those are just some really simple things. But then also, of course,



Mini Webisode: Happy New Year!

there's all of the deeper things, friendship and love and family and connection, all of those are bigger, deeper sources of joy as well.

Maggie Johnson

That's wonderful. I feel like the new year is kind of a big time where people are reprioritizing, maybe doing some organizing. Do you have any tips you can share?

Christine Hofler

Yeah, I think one of the biggest things that I've always done is organizing categories rather than in spaces so much. Don't do just the clothes in your closet, pull out all your clothes in your out of season bins or the ones in the spare room or the special event ones, wherever, bring it all together and organize it. Or find all of the pens that you have all over the entire house and pull them all together. And you can really see what you have then. Then you can decide what you want and what you don't want. And if you're not a person who likes or doesn't like organizing, get a friend and do it with somebody because there's a lot more energy when you have somebody else to do it with.

Maggie Johnson

What's your favorite thing about being a Richmond Spider?

Christine Hofler

I think one of my favorite things is the fact that we have a unique mascot, that there's no other place that has spiders. And that's just something I've always loved, being unique or being different, standing out from the crowd. And I think Spiders do that.

Kadeem Alphanso Fyffe

My name is Kadeem Alphanso Fyffe. I am Richmond College, class of 2013. I'm based in New York City. I'm a fashion designer and author.

Maggie Johnson

What's something you're really looking forward to in 2024?

Kadeem Alphanso Fyffe

That would be 2024. I'm looking forward to continuing to expand my audience with my book, my published book, which is called [*Threading the Needle, a Fashion Designer's*](#)



Mini Webisode: Happy New Year!

[Guide to Successfully Launching Your First Collection](#). I published it earlier this year and things have been going really well for me. So I'm just really looking forward to continuing to grow on the momentum and continuing to try to get more readers and inspire more students and reach out to more designers and hopefully just continue to grow as a person as well.

Maggie Johnson

What was your favorite part about writing the book?

Kadeem Alphanso Fyffe

For me, it was a period of a lot of self-reflection. And looking back on some things, some career highlights that I had not thought about, and also career setbacks. So it was a really good exercise for me to think about what great things I've accomplished and also what setbacks I've faced but overcome and being able to write this sort of detailed guide to give this lesson or these lessons back to other people. So this is the whole process. Knowing that I was going to help other people, made it worthwhile.

Maggie Johnson

That's awesome. Who are you hoping reads your book?

Kadeem Alphanso Fyffe

I guess one major goal would be to have the book included in the course curriculum at a school that teaches either art or fashion, fashion design or fashion merchandising. I'm really interested in trying to get the book included in the course curriculum. And so it'd be college students. But then for now, a lot of my audience has been New York-based designers, designers who might be, or people who are looking to get into the industry. Those are kind of my target readers.

Maggie Johnson

And if someone wants to read your book, where can they find it?

Kadeem Alphanso Fyffe

Again, it's called [Threading the Needle](#) and you can find it on Amazon as an ebook, paperback, and audiobook. And the book is actually available online everywhere books are sold. So if you just type in the title, you'll be good to go, but primarily Amazon.



Maggie Johnson

And what's your favorite part about being a Spider alum?

Kadeem Alphanso Fyffe

Oh my gosh. I mean, I just had such an amazing experience at Richmond and the alumni relations has always been a place where I know I can go back and feel welcome. And I really appreciate all the great events that we get to do as alums in Richmond, but then also in New York. So my favorite part is just being able to continue to be involved with the university and reach back and help current students and new alums. So just being involved in the community is what, you know, I feel like that's what being a Spider is all about.

Laura Lee Chandler

I'm Laura Lee Hankins Chandler. I have a double first name, so I always have to add the maiden name in there when we're talking about college. I am a 1974 graduate of Westhampton College. So this year is a big reunion year for my class. I have a mother that graduated from Westhampton. My father went to Richmond. My sister and brother were there. My husband went to law school there, and I have a daughter who graduated from there, so we're a big, huge Spider family. And I currently live about 15 minutes from the campus. So it's a beautiful place to go.

Maggie Johnson

Do you get to visit campus often, or do you could just come back for special occasions?

Laura Lee Chandler

I go fairly regularly. I am currently president of the Chapel Guild at the University of Richmond supporting the [Office of the Chaplaincy](#).

Maggie Johnson

Excellent. Well, Laura Lee, what are you most looking forward to in 2024?

Laura Lee Chandler

This is a great year for you to ask that question of me. So it is my 50th college reunion this year and that coincides with my 50th wedding anniversary in June. Two remarkable events in the same year. So my husband Ted and I want to recognize our 50 years together. So I developed a plan, and Ted wholeheartedly agreed with this plan, to create 50 memorable



Mini Webisode: Happy New Year!

events next year. 50 events to remember our year together. This will include past moments that are important, but it also is to create new memories. We love to travel, so we are going to go to Namibia in Africa. We are going to go hiking above the Arctic Circle in Norway. We will be dog sledding, we will be hiking, we might even be kayaking in the Arctic Circle.

Maggie Johnson

Wow!

Laura Lee Chandler

Memories that, yes, new memories we haven't done before. So Ted actually joked when I explained my idea, he said "you do realize that's like one a week don't you?" So yes of course that is one a week, but we're working through it!

Maggie Johnson

I love that so much. What's the first thing you're doing?

Laura Lee Chandler

The very first of the 50 is to be on January 1, actually December 31, but we will still be awake on January 1. We will be watching fireworks in Sea Island, Georgia. But then on January 6, we will be chartering a sailboat and we'll be sailing from St. Lucia in the Caribbean to Grenada. And we will hit lots of places where we've been before.

Maggie Johnson

Before we started chatting, you sent me a photo of your bookshelves with some favorite college memories. What's your favorite memory from that bookshelf?

Laura Lee Chandler

Well, my college roommate for most of the four years was Beth Neal Jordan, and I have a picture of the two of us from one of our recent reunions. And so probably the favorite memory is that picture of the two of us because we are lifelong best friends.

Maggie Johnson

I have one last question for you. What is your favorite part about being an alum?



Mini Webisode: Happy New Year!

Laura Lee Chandler

I love being a part of the collage of the Westhampton women that are still part of my lives, of getting to meet the students now because I'm on campus occasionally. I will tell you one quick little story aside from that.

Maggie Johnson

Please!

Laura Lee Chandler

I graduated with a degree in elementary education and I taught first grade and one of my student's father was my education advisor when I was on campus. And he got to see firsthand what at least one of his students was capable of. But that was a fun memory.

Rhonda Mellwain

My name is Rhonda Mellwain, class of 1979 from the Business School. And I have worked at the university since July of 2011 in the Office of Gift Planning.

Maggie Johnson

And what's something you're looking forward to in 2024?

Rhonda Mellwain

Well, I am retiring, as of January 5th of 2024. And so I am most looking forward to my schedule being my schedule, and being able to be aware and do things that I want to do on my schedule.

Maggie Johnson

What are you most looking forward to doing with your newly found time?

Rhonda Mellwain

Oh gosh. I will say one of the benefits of retiring from this university is I get lifelong membership to the fitness center. I'm actually looking forward to being able to take advantage of the classes offered at the fitness center. I'm looking forward to getting more involved at the [Osher Institute](#). I have taught a class or two there, but not really taken advantage and I'm looking forward to doing that.



Mini Webisode: Happy New Year!

Maggie Johnson

Is there anything you're going to really miss about working for UR?

Rhonda Mellwain

Oh my gosh. I have had some of the nicest relationships with fellow alumni. I've had amazing relationships over the years. My colleagues, I will miss terribly. This is a great place to work.

Maggie Johnson

Well, we'll miss you too. Thinking back to 2024 a little bit, is there like anything on your bucket list that you're going to spend some time working towards?

Rhonda Mellwain

I have a group of high school friends I'm very close with and we are all going down to Key Largo where one of them lives in the first week in March. And then there's places I want to go visit. I've got a list of places. I do spend a lot of time in Cape May, New Jersey where my son's family and my grandsons live. And I will look forward to spending more time there and then fit in going and seeing friends and family all over the place.

Maggie Johnson

What is your favorite part about being a UR alum?

Rhonda Mellwain

That is a tough question because I love everything about being a U of R alum. I think that probably what attracted me to this university first and foremost was the campus. And it has only gotten better over the years. The students, faculty and staff are second to none, as far as I'm concerned. And I have lifelong friends who are my classmates, but the relationships I've developed over the years, some of my best friends on campus, I've met in the locker room going to fitness classes. So it's just a very special place.

Ed Pruden

I'm Ed Pruden, class of 1972, and I got a master's in education in '74 and have lived in Richmond most of my career as an educator. I'm active at the university and on the alumni board actually.



Maggie Johnson

What's something you're looking forward to in 2024?

Ed Pruden

Well, I'm looking forward to the Spiders getting into the NCAA tournament. Coach Mooney and the team are off to a great start and, you know all of the athletic teams at UR, just across the board. Our student athletes do a great job and bring a lot of joy to the alumni.

Maggie Johnson

Do you have a favorite sports memory either from your time as a student or as an alum?

Ed Pruden

Well, absolutely. There are so many, but I'll have to say the 1968 Tangerine Bowl victory, our first bowl game ever. And we played a team that was ranked 10th in the United States, Ohio University. They were undefeated and the Spiders went to Florida and beat them 49 to 42 in the most exciting football game ever. And that's been hard to top over the years.

Maggie Johnson

That's amazing. And I'll switch really quickly to the [URAA](#) again. Do you have a favorite memory from your time on the Board so far?

Ed Pruden

Well, at the last meeting, we had lunch with five of the current students and they were just awesome. All five were engaging and had such interesting personal stories. They gave us tremendous insights into the current student experience on campus. And actually, after the hour was up and we had the Board just kept hanging around the students and engaging in personal conversations until I finally had to invite them to leave so I could get control of my meeting again. And they were just awesome.

Maggie Johnson

What's your favorite part about being a Spider alum?

Ed Pruden

You know, Richmond is small enough that we develop friendships with our professors that can last a lifetime. My classmates that I've been in touch with, the people that I've met on



Mini Webisode: Happy New Year!

the Board from five other decades, we have Board members in their 20s and in their 70s like me and everywhere in between. And getting to know persons across the decades and become friends is just really rewarding.

Lisa Gray

I am Lisa Gray, class of 1993, Westhampton and Richmond. I currently serve on the [University of Richmond Alumni Association Board of Directors](#), which I love. And I'm calling in at this point from Rock Hill, South Carolina, but I've been traveling across the country since September 2022.

Maggie Johnson

I would love to just know in your years of nomading, where has been your favorite place to visit or live?

Lisa Gray

Oh, it's so hard to choose because I've been to a few different places that are awesome. I would say Sedona, Arizona - just an amazingly gorgeous place. I can't even tell you how beautiful it is. It's like looking at a postcard in real time.

Maggie Johnson

What are you most looking forward to in 2024?

Lisa Gray

I am looking forward to being out the door in 2024. That's kind of my new phrase for it. I'm hoping to travel at least every three to four months somewhere outside of the United States. I've committed to being a better world traveler and world citizen. I think what I've learned from this past year of nomading and my grownup gap year, career breaking, gave me a lot of time to reflect, right? So in that time, I noticed how much I missed just experiencing the world as a community member within it.

Maggie Johnson

Do you have an idea of where you want to go? Any trips booked? Where are you looking to explore next?



Lisa Gray

Oh, well, yes, I do. I've already booked a trip for my birthday month, which is April, to Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Maggie Johnson

You mentioned you were on the URAA Board. What's your favorite part about serving on that group?

Lisa Gray

Gosh, my favorite part is we're just fun and we all have a shared love for all things Spider Nation. I feel like we all, in different ways, irrespective of the time period that we were students at Richmond, we all have very deep and fond and even transformative memories of our time as students that we have carried into our alumni-hood collectively. So despite the many generations that are now represented on the board, we are all just about the red and blue.

Maggie Johnson

And do you have any favorite memories from your time on the Board so far?

Lisa Gray

Absolutely. I'd say one of my favorite memories is just kind of being on a bus during our winter meeting in West Palm Beach last year. Being on a bus on the way to a presidential reception that Dr. Hallock was doing and we all just ended up having a party and dancing and having like a little bit of a DJ moment with each other. And it was just super fun. It just was very impromptu. But it really helped to bring us closer together. Like it showed me that even though we are very serious on the board about trying to do what we can to represent the University of Richmond and to be its ambassadors in different ways, we also know how to have fun as we do it.

Maggie Johnson

That's amazing. What's your favorite part about being a Richmond Spider?

Lisa Gray

I think my favorite part is how we support each other. Even though I have been out of my student Richmond experience for many years now, I just had my 30th reunion this past June,



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I feel like my favorite part is every time I go back to campus, there's something new to discover as well as something to be nostalgic about. And that is, I think, a testament to the many hardworking staff and faculty over the years who continue to pour into us as students first and then stay connected to us as alums.

Maggie Johnson

Thank you for tuning in to our New Year's episode of *As Spiders Do*. This season, we'll be bringing you double the number of episodes, so make sure to subscribe to us on your favorite podcasting platform to get the latest ones. And if you'd like an opportunity to be on a mini episode like this one, subscribe to our monthly newsletter at the link in our show notes. Talk to you again soon, and remember, there are Spiders everywhere, and that's a really good thing.

