Suffolk University Law School Alumni Magazine, Fall 2022

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we began. And it’s made us who we are. The story of Suffolk’s first-generation college students.

Brothers Michael Smith, BSBA ’61, and Larry Smith, BSBA ’65, were the first in their family to attend college. Now they help other Suffolk students do the same.
And We’re Back!

Hundreds of new first-year and transfer students filled historic Tremont Temple on September 6 for Convocation ceremonies, where they were welcomed by Provost Julie Sandell and members of University leadership and the Board of Trustees. More than 40% of Suffolk’s first-year undergraduates are also first-generation college students. Photograph by Michael J. Clarke
FEATURES

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Long a school of choice for first-generation college students, Suffolk has evolved to ensure their success.

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On the Cover
Brothers Michael and Larry Smith (pictured here near the Smith Fitness Center) have had a transformational impact on Suffolk Athletics, and the entire University campus. Photograph by Faith Ninivaggi.
Proud to Be First

In this special issue of Suffolk University Magazine, we celebrate the success of our first-gen students and graduates, and their immeasurable impact on our institution and their communities.

Their stories are rich and varied, but they share a common tie: They are living examples of why this University was first established—to provide educational opportunity to people who might not otherwise have access to it.

Suffolk creates transformational opportunities for all our students. But that’s particularly true for students who are the first in their families to attend college—and it is especially important for them. We know how much these students contribute to our community, and we also understand the very real challenges they can face.

The magazine explores how Suffolk has evolved and innovated to meet their needs, with a broad network of services and a strong culture of support embedded in everything we do.

We also salute the alumni whose generous financial support helps make first-gen success possible. Every individual should have the opportunity to define what success means for them and to pursue pathways that lead them there. Yet it’s an incredibly rare individual who can do that without help. The Suffolk community provides that help. Together, across generations, we have helped thousands and thousands of students find their pathways to success.

Perhaps it’s not surprising that many of our most generous supporters are themselves first-generation graduates. You can read about some of them here, including Michael, BSBA ’61, and Larry Smith, BSBA ’65, who have capped a lifetime of support for Suffolk with a new $2 million gift to support our Athletics program and student scholarships. That list also includes Ken Taubes, MBA ’84, and Stacy Mills, BSBA ’87, who give unflaggingly of their time and expertise (like Larry Smith, both are trustees) and who have each made leadership financial aid gifts.

You’ll see this same desire to give back in recent first-gen grads like Kevin Luna-Torres, BA ’22, now beginning active duty service as a 2nd lieutenant in the US Army, and in current students like honors psychology major Nicole Kingdon, a McNair Scholar whose research focuses on improving outcomes for low-income children.

“We are here to have an impact,” is how Nicole describes her work—which is also a very good way to describe Suffolk. We have grown into a much larger university than we were at our founding in 1906, but we have stayed grounded in our original mission: to positively impact our graduates, and through them, our world.

“Suffolk is here for its students,” says first-gen college student Logan Gozzi, a junior from Natick who is majoring in law.
Suffolk awarded more than 2,000 degrees to graduates on Sunday, May 22, in three ceremonies held at Boston’s Leader Bank Pavilion.

What makes a generation great?

To Manny Lopes—executive vice president for Blue Cross Blue Shield and one of three honorary degree recipients at Suffolk’s 2022 Commencement ceremonies—the answer is clear: living through extraordinary times, and rising to meet them.

And the Class of 2022, he said, has done just that. “The hard stuff makes us stronger,” Lopes, an advocate for greater health care access and equity, told the 780 graduates of the College of Arts & Sciences. “Through everything you’ve endured, the strengths you’ve developed, the community you’ve fostered—you are prepared to be our next Greatest Generation. You too will lead us to new political courage, creative accomplishment, technological advancement, and a more equitable prosperity.”

In all, Suffolk awarded more than 2,000 undergraduate and graduate degrees on May 22, during three separate ceremonies held at Boston’s Leader Bank Pavilion. Those graduates hailed from 41 states and 60 countries, and more than 30% of the undergraduates who received degrees were the first in their family to do so.

Claire Cronin, JD ’85—the US ambassador to Ireland and the first woman to serve as House Majority Leader in the Massachusetts Legislature—delivered the Commencement address during the Suffolk Law ceremony, and received an honorary doctor of laws degree. The Sawyer Business School awarded an honorary doctor of commercial science degree to its Commencement speaker, Tim Ryan, the US chair and senior partner of PwC.

And for the first time since the pandemic, Commencement weekend festivities featured several other joyous in-person events. These included the Commencement Eve dinner, where Lopes was also a keynote speaker, and the 1913 Celebration that recognizes Suffolk’s first graduate of color, Thaddeus Alexander Kitchener, and which honored the richly diverse members of the Class of 2022.

—Beth Brosnan
Happy Birthday to Us!

Celebrating 75 years of undergraduate business education at Suffolk

When you reach 75 years, it’s time to throw a big party— which is just what the Sawyer Business School community did to mark the 75th anniversary of the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) program.

Like many successful ventures, the BSBA program started small—but with a powerful idea: make a top-quality undergraduate business education accessible to students who might not otherwise be able to afford it.

More than 100 people, including alumni from as far back as the Class of 1962, returned to campus last spring to share stories, reconnect with friends, and learn how the Business School has evolved over the decades.

Two undergraduate students were among the featured speakers: Alex Kontis talked about her experience as the first Business School honors student, which is just what she was later elected president of the student-run finance and investing club.

“We are proud that the Sawyer Business School supports the University’s mission of providing access to education, regardless of one’s particular circumstance, location, or future passions,” Business School Dean Amy Zeng told the crowd. Also in attendance were former Business School Dean William O’Neill and Susan Atherton, the first associate dean of undergraduate programs at the school. – Ben Hall

Read more at suffolk.edu/bsba-75th-anniversary

New Leaders Join Suffolk University Board of Trustees

Suffolk’s five newest trustees bring a diverse set of leadership experiences and backgrounds, but they share something in common as well. Each credits their Suffolk experience as a major catalyst for positive change in their lives and careers.

The new trustees—all alumni—are leaders in industry, financial services, nonprofits, and the law, with broad experience addressing complex and global business issues. They have also maintained a strong engagement with an institution that helped drive their success. They are:

Mark Sullivan, JD ’79, charter trustee, retired Bose executive who spent more than 35 years with the pioneering audio giant, rising to become vice president, chief legal officer, and secretary of the company. He returns to the board after having served two previous five-year terms.

Marie-Louise Skafte, JD ’96, charter trustee, president of Skafte Global Law, P.A., a boutique global legal consulting firm she founded in 2015 following a career as a general counsel at major global transportation companies. She is a board member and international ambassador at One Love Foundation, a nonprofit working to end relationship abuse by educating youth on creating and maintaining healthy relationships.

Dorothy Savarese, MBA ’04, HDCS ’21, charter trustee, executive chair of Cape Cod 5, who led the bank’s dramatic growth over 17 years as chief executive officer. She has been named one of the 25 Most Powerful Women in Banking by American Banker magazine for 10 consecutive years.

Darren Donovan, BS ’83, charter trustee, former managing principal with KPMG and current board chair of the Boston Private Industry Council, connecting youth and adults with education and employment.

Hind Habbach, BA ’09, alumni trustee, representing the College of Arts & Sciences, commercial counsel for the gaming app developer Zynga, and an investor relations specialist.

Photographs: left, Michael Fitzgerald; center, CC; courtesy of University Trustees

For the second year in a row, Suffolk University has received a Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award from INSIGHT Into Diversity magazine, which cited our “outstanding commitment to diversity and inclusion.”

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Noteworthy
Fall 2022

Photographs from left: John Gillooly (3), Sean Sweeney

Speaking Out for Ukraine

Nika Chelnokova has never enjoyed public speaking. Which is pretty ironic because last March, the rising Business School senior found herself leading a rally of several hundred demonstrators protesting the Russian invasion of Ukraine—her homeland, where her parents still live.

“It was an incredible moment in front of the crowd on the Boston Common,” Chelnokova says. “I felt that it wasn’t a speech, it was a conversation. And people started clapping and cheering. I felt the power of support.”

Chelnokova drew on what she learned in Social Change, a course that exposes students to contemporary social issues and movements, and examines the roles of governments, businesses, and nonprofit organizations in addressing those problems. “We were learning about social movements two weeks before everything happened,” she says.

Chelnokova has been unable to return to Ukraine because of safety concerns, but her activism continues. Over the summer, she traveled to Poland, where she worked with Ukrainian refugee children. She also spent time in Vienna where she was able to see relatives—and many people who had fled Ukraine.

Seeing the impact of the war on Ukraine’s citizens grieved her deeply. “People are so broken inside,” she says. It has also renewed her determination, she says, to “keep speaking out.”

—Ben Hall

OF NOTE
Helping others move up is what we do best: U.S. News & World Report has ranked Suffolk among the top 100 universities in the country for social mobility, and among the top 5 in Massachusetts.

Last spring at its fourth annual Celebration of Black Excellence, the University honored seven alumni who embody Suffolk values of inclusion, equity, and opportunity.

“Black excellence lifts everyone, and it’s always been so,” said keynote speaker Linda Dorcena Forry, a former state legislator and vice president at Suffolk Construction. “Our greatness enhances the fabric of America, making it stronger and nimble and resilient.”

The honorees have been active members of the University community for decades. This year’s faculty/staff award recipients were Sonia Alleyne, MPA ’91, executive-in-residence, Institute for Public Service; Jennifer Blakely, MEd ’20, head of access services, Mildred F. Sawyer Library; and Lolita Darden, JD ’91, former associate clinical professor of law and director of the Intellectual Property and Entrepreneurship Clinic.

Alumni honorees came from each of Suffolk’s three schools. They were the Honorable Serge Georges, Jr., JD ’96, HLLD ’21, associate justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court; Tony Richards, MPA ’21, vice president of equitable business development at the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency; and Rachel Deveaux, MEd ’07, assistant vice president of organizational culture, inclusion, and equity at Simmons University and the first Black woman president of the Suffolk University College of Arts & Sciences Alumni Board of Directors.

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To watch the ceremony, go to suffolk.edu/black-excellence2022

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Lessons in Good Government

Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker and co-author Steve Kadish meet with Sawyer Business School faculty to discuss their new book, *Results: Getting Beyond Politics to Get Important Work Done*.

Even the biggest fan will tell you baseball can sometimes be a slow game. So when the Red Sox need to kick up the energy, they have a reliable reliever they can count on. DJ Liv Dulong, BS `21.

"As a DJ you have to be fast in reading the crowd and keep the energy going. Liv’s ability to do all of that and quickly anticipate her next move has been fantastic," says John Carter, vice president of Red Sox Productions.

At Suffolk, Dulong was a much-in-demand DJ at campus dances and events, as well as general manager of WSFR, the campus radio station. Shortly before she graduated summa cum laude with a degree in broadcast journalism in 2021 (in a ceremony held, fittingly enough, at Fenway Park), she was hired along with two other DJs to provide music at Sox home games. The music they play reflects Boston’s changing demographics, with tracks aimed at younger, more diverse crowds.

"The world is always changing, and music needs to be constantly evolving as well," says Dulong. "I’m a big fan of the variety of music we are bringing into the park. It’s something for everyone to feel good about."

Seated in the Red Sox press box alongside her computer and audio board, Dulong has a commanding view of both the on-field action and the crowds. She arrives early on game days to choose the mood. She alternates between songs that make people want to dance and songs that make them want to sing along.

Her go-to song list includes “Time to Groove” by Majestic with Nøna, “Bongo Cha Cha Cha” by Goodboys, and “Massive” by Drake. When the Sox turn a double play, she reaches for “It Takes Two” by Rob Base and DJ E-Z Rock. And she makes sure to play “Sweet Caroline” before the bottom half of every eighth inning and “Dirty Water” after every Red Sox victory.

Says Dulong: “The sight of thousands of people dancing in the stands late in a game absolutely motivates me the most.”

—Tony Ferrafo
The Corner of Tremont and Opportunity

Suffolk’s Center for Career Equity, Development & Success gets a vibrant new home in the heart of Boston’s financial, government, and business districts

Suffolk University is opening one of Boston’s most accessible and visible career development centers this fall at the bustling corner of Tremont and Beacon streets.

With its new location, the Center for Career Equity, Development & Success will be a vibrant hub for career planning, advising, networking, and interviewing for Suffolk students, as well as alumni and hundreds of local employer partners. The nearly 4,000-square-foot storefront space will support not only Suffolk students but also the talent needs of local companies, nonprofits, and financial district businesses.

A key goal is to foster career equity within Suffolk’s community—and by extension, employers in greater Boston—by bringing career services front and center so that they will be vigorously used, especially by students historically underserved by university career centers.

Moving the center to the highly trafficked street level—right on Boston’s Freedom Trail and steps away from its centers of government, finance, retail, and cultural attractions—is more than just a logistical move, says Suffolk University President Marisa Kelly. “We are excited to reduce the number of steps, both literally and figuratively, between a Suffolk University student’s first day on campus and the first day of their professional pursuits, whatever they may be.”

Suffolk’s integrated career education curriculum focuses on equity and inclusion as much as traditional skills, such as building a professional network, writing a solid resume, or preparing for an interview, says the center’s director, Associate Provost Dave Merry.

“Our students enter the workforce well-prepared, with a perspective that has the potential to transform workplaces and industries,” Merry says. “This center is designed to make that critical career preparation easier to access.” —Erica Niswander

Kelly Elected Chair of Higher Ed Group

Suffolk’s president now leads the board of the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in Massachusetts

The Association of Independent Colleges and Universities in Massachusetts (AICU Mass) announced in June that it elected Suffolk University President Marisa Kelly to chair its board of directors, citing her leadership as vice chair over the course of the previous year.

AICU Mass shapes policy and serves as a key voice and advocate for matters affecting its more than 60 private college and university members. Those matters include research and innovation, economic and workforce development, and financial aid and college savings programs. Kelly praised the industry group’s leadership in bringing together college and university presidents during the earlier stages of the pandemic to collaborate on safely reopening their institutions, an effort that she said made all the difference. Together, those leaders developed critical COVID testing solutions, safety recommendations, and other initiatives that allowed tens of thousands of students to safely continue their education.

“For me, it is not just the collaboration, it is very possible higher education would not have been up and running in 2020,” Kelly said.

Earlier this year, Suffolk partnered with AICU Mass to launch an inclusive leadership program that brings together higher education professionals from across Massachusetts and Rhode Island to more broadly advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in their campus communities and the broader community.

AICU Mass President and Suffolk alumna Rob McCarron, JD ’93, described Kelly’s leadership as “an invaluable resource.” —Greg Gatlin

Survey Says: ‘Success’

Her independent study with the Suffolk University Political Research Center propelled Mikaela Linder into the world of polling

What does it feel like to shape the national political discourse before you even finish your degree? For applied politics alumna Mikaela Linder, BA ’21, MA ’22, seeing poll questions she wrote get picked up by major news outlets was surreal—and addictive. Now she’s in her “dream job” working as a junior analyst at the Boston polling firm Beacon Research, a position she landed thanks in large part to a resume packed with experience writing, analyzing, and presenting several real polls through her independent study with the Suffolk University Political Research Center.

For center director David Paleologos, working with talented students such as Linder is an obvious win-win. Aquiring pollsters get uncommon access to this exclusive field, while the SUPRC gains fresh perspectives.

“What Mikaela and her generation offer are different questions, and different ways to ask questions,” Paleologos says. “That means the Suffolk polls are going to connect with the next generation much better than our competitors.”

“I love to know what people are thinking. Polling is such a great way to gauge public opinion and identify the broader conversations we need to have,” says Linder. —Andrea Grant
A new partnership is forging connections between Sawyer Business School students, innovative Swiss startups, and MBA students from the School of Management Fribourg in Switzerland.

What began as a virtual collaboration during the pandemic— with Swiss and Suffolk students navigating time-zone differences and cultural nuances to help Swiss entrepreneurs expand into the US—picked up steam this April, when a group of Swiss MBA students visited Boston and joined in Suffolk’s first-ever design-a-thon. “For 12 hours, students got together and worked on a problem for a local not-for-profit, the Northeast Arc,” says Shari Worthington, associate director of the Center for Entrepreneurship and associate professor of practice.

The Northeast Arc, which helps provide jobs, training, and other support for people with disabilities, explained their challenge to the students: Many of their clients can work recaning wicker chairs but get discouraged by the difficulty of the task. Could they create a tool to make the job easier?

After watching the process in action, mixed teams of Swiss and Suffolk students got to work designing prototypes. Twelve hours later, the teams presented their creations to the nonprofit. “The winner designed a glove that would help better grip the material as the chair is being woven, and 3D-printed a model of it from the makerspace,” Worthington says. They received prize money to fund production of the new tool.

Plans are now in the works for Suffolk students to visit Switzerland next year for an immersive travel seminar that would include similar workshops and site visits to some of the world’s most renowned companies. “It’s really exciting for us, because the Swiss economy is an incredibly dynamic one,” says Carlos Rufín, director of international engagement at the Sawyer Business School. “I think this will create a lot of great opportunities for our students.” —Jon Gorey

OF NOTE

LEAPS AND BOUNDS: The Sawyer Business School has risen more than 25 spots in the latest U.S. News & World Report rankings of Best Undergraduate Business Schools. Over the past four years, it’s climbed nearly 100 spots, making it one of the country’s fastest-rising business schools.

Photograph of General Joseph Dunford courtesy of Suffolk University Center for Entrepreneurship. (Left) Michael J. Clarke

OF NOTE

20,000: That’s how many times citizens in Massachusetts and beyond have completed smart, mobile-friendly court forms designed by Suffolk Law’s LIT Lab—earning the team national headlines and a global award for legal visionaries from the College of Law Practice Management.

Gen. Joseph Dunford, Jr., former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, saluted Suffolk University and its student veteran graduates in a pre-Commencement ceremony at Sargent Hall in May.

Dunford, a Boston native who served as the nation’s highest-ranking military officer from 2015 to 2019, personally thanked the University—which has been named a military-friendly school for more than a decade—for steadfastly supporting students who have completed their education while serving their country. The event honored 36 student veterans from Suffolk’s Classes of 2022, 2021, and 2020. The 2022 graduates represented five branches of the military and had a combined 196 years of active-duty service, including service in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

Dunford urged the students to assume leadership roles in their communities as civilians. “Democracy is not a spectator sport,” he said. “If we want our communities in this experiment we call democracy to succeed, we actually need to step up and do something about it.” —Erica Noonan
Opening Night in Edinburgh!
Theatre Professor Wes Savick and Juvenilia took their latest show on the road to Scotland’s Edinburgh Festival Fringe

Suffolk University Theatre Professor Wes Savick never expected to find inspiration in his mother’s basement—until he discovered the “Handbook of Civilian Defense.” The government-issued pamphlet is a relic from World War II, designed to teach everyday Americans how to brace for catastrophe.

Savick found the advice eerily resonant. Alarmed by today’s political strife, he adapted its contents to create *Handbook of Civilian Defense (What Every Loyal American Can Do to Help the United States Win the War)*, a word-for-word musical re-creation of the original.

In August, Savick fulfilled a longtime dream when the play with music was selected to debut at Scotland’s Edinburgh Festival Fringe, one of the world’s foremost venues for experimental theater.

“As a theater practitioner, this is like going to Mecca,” he says.

The 50-minute satire features alumni actors with Suffolk’s professional theater company, Juvenilia, which Savick created in 2016. The play was enthusiastically embraced by Edinburgh Fringe crowds; the company actually had to turn people away for the final sold-out performance.

Juvenilia plays, typically staged at Suffolk’s Modern Theatre and exclusively featuring Suffolk-affiliated personnel, tackle hot-button issues. For example, Waters Rising used Greek tragedy and musical comedy to explore global warming.

“I’m not aware of any other university in the country that has anything quite like this,” Savick says. “Suffolk should be very proud.” —Kara Baskin

‘Much Ado’ About Suffolk Night on the Common

Bard and Boston met for reimagined version of 16th-century romantic comedy

Hundreds of theater lovers gathered on Boston Common on a hot August night to enjoy an updated version of *Much Ado About Nothing* by the Commonwealth Shakespeare Company, featuring 1990s-inspired costumes and a progressive take on gender, love, and sexual politics.

The Commonwealth Shakespeare Company has been performing Shakespeare on the Common for 26 years, but this was the first year that Suffolk’s Theatre Department sponsored the free performance and the company’s Apprentice Program, an intensive Shakespeare-focused summer training program for early-career actors. Seven Suffolk alumni and three current students—including seniors Constance Citelli and Kendra Elizabeth Waugh and junior Rose Beardmore—took part in the program, which included showcase performances of Shakespeare plays presented at Suffolk’s Modern Theatre.

“This collaboration has been an exciting one,” says Roz Beauchemin, communications manager for Suffolk’s Department of Theatre. “Suffolk works with a lot of professional companies, but this was very special for us. It was a wonderful production right in our neighborhood...and a really nice platform to tell people more about Suffolk.” —Erica Noonan

Communication, Journalism & Media Professor Jonas Kaiser was recently appointed to Spotify’s newly formed Safety Advisory Council. Kaiser, who studies how social media and algorithms contribute to radicalization, will help develop policies and products that protect users from misinformation while respecting creators’ expression.
Service: A Calling and a Career

The Sawyer Business School has made service learning a core part of its curriculum

By Ben Hall

S
ervice learning has always been part of the Sawyer Business School experience. But over the past few years, teaching students how to develop greater civic knowledge and the skills they can use to address real, community-identified needs has become central to the Sawyer curriculum. And it’s what students want: A 2021 survey from Deloitte found that Gen Z students want to work for companies that value purpose as well as profits. Demonstrating positive societal impact is now part of the formal accreditation for business schools like Sawyer.

Toward that end, the University began offering a minor in nonprofit management in 2019. And in 2020, the Business School appointed Professor Sonia Alleyne, MPA ’01, executive in residence in the Business School’s Institute for Public Service. A past vice president for community reinvestment at the Santander Bank Foundation, she brings a wealth of experience (and a robust list of contacts) to the Business School, where she teaches courses like Social Change, Nonprofit Management, and Revenue Strategies for Nonprofits.

Q: Since coming to the Sawyer Business School in 2020, Dean Amy Zeng has made service learning a cornerstone of her vision. How do you see that playing out?

Alleyne: My goal is that when nonprofits need help thinking through ideas, solving an issue, redoing their website—whatever it is—that they can come to the Sawyer Business School and work with our students. The value we bring is that we can partner with other disciplines, like marketing or data analytics. The aim is to offer a holistic, one-stop resource to any nonprofit organization.

What’s the most important thing you try to teach students?

I tell all my students that I’ve done my job if they leave my classroom more empathetic. That they see people and they’re not invisible. Like when they see a homeless person, they’ll now understand that every homeless person has a story—they came from a family, maybe a nuclear one like the students have—but something happened along the way that derailed their hopes and dreams.

You not only teach students how to be empathetic, you also show them that working for a nonprofit can be a viable career option.

We have more than 34,000 nonprofits in Massachusetts, so having our students exposed to that opens their eyes, and they see that their business skills are transferable. Even if, for example, they want to be an accountant, they can be an accountant for a nonprofit. Same with marketing or data analytics.

What are some of the organizations you’ve helped Business School students work with over the past few years?

Home Base, which helps veterans. InnerCity Weightlifting, a Boston-area gym that doubles as a job-training program for at-risk youth. Jewish Vocational Services. The City of Boston. Bridge Over Troubled Water, which serves homeless, runaway, and at-risk youth. That’s just a few of them.

An impressive list! Sawyer’s focus on service learning is clearly an important part of the Suffolk experience these days.

This generation has different expectations, right? They want to work for companies that reflect their inclusive values. Suffolk is a place where they can learn about the mechanics of that—and that they don’t have to wait until they graduate to be effective. They can start making an impact while they’re here. That’s very important.
The sounds of construction buzz in the background as Faries and Taj McCree sit shoulder-to-shoulder at an outdoor table in Arlington, Virginia. They are wearing T-shirts emblazoned with giant lobster claws, an insignia for the Mason’s Famous Lobster Rolls franchise they are opening there.

“I’ve always wanted to start a business of some kind,” says Taj, JD ’01. “I spent years researching different opportunities.” He and Faries, MEd ’97, settled on the Annapolis, Maryland-based lobster company as one that would be a hit with local diners (and require minimal cooking, since the lobster arrives freshly prepared).

They were all ready to go in February 2020. “Then COVID-19 hit and the whole market went down,” Taj says. Even as restaurants closed en masse, they stuck with their vision, signing a lease in the fall of 2021 and spending the last year building out the space in time to open this fall. “We’re starting a new chapter and bringing jobs into the community,” says Faries.

Working hard to build community and make an impact has been a lifetime pursuit for the McCrees. After they both earned graduate degrees from Suffolk, Taj served a number of years in the Army National Guard while practicing law at the state level before becoming an attorney for the US government; Faries is now a guidance counselor at a public school in Virginia, helping teenagers chart their next moves.

Several years ago, at the point in life when other successful mid-career professionals might think about investing in a second home or upgrading their vehicles, they instead thought of Suffolk University. “We were stationed overseas, and a lot of our expenses were paid for, so we had extra cash,” Taj remembers. “When I started thinking about what we could do to help give back, Suffolk was right at the top of the list.” Because Suffolk had helped launch their careers, they say paying it forward and giving other students that same chance felt like the right thing to do.

For Faries, giving back is personal. A native Bostonian, she worked full time while earning a master’s in education from Suffolk—something the school’s central location and easy commute along MBTA subway lines made possible. “Suffolk was a natural fit for me because of the class times offered. It allowed me to keep my day job and do school in the evenings,” she says.

She met Taj, a military veteran, through a postgraduate job at the local YMCA, and it was her advice that led him to get his law degree from Suffolk. Originally from Rochester, New York, Taj came from a family that valued service and philanthropy—his grandfather was vice president of Philander Smith College, a historically black college in Little Rock, Arkansas, and his parents were both teachers—so with law degree in hand, he decided against taking a job at a high-powered law firm and returned to military and government service.

Taj says, “Law school was expensive, and I paid my full tuition. Offering a scholarship to people who don’t have those resources or foundations means a lot to us.”

The McCrees worked closely with the University’s Office of Advancement to plan an annual gift toward the scholarship fund. “Suffolk made it easy for us to start the scholarship because we could build it over the course of six years,” Faries explains. For the total endowment of $50,000, they started with $10,000, adding $8,000 a year for five years. “You start small, and add a little bit every year,” says Taj.

The endowed scholarship, which will be awarded this coming academic year, benefits two underrepresented students who have demonstrated financial need—a law school student and a College of Arts & Sciences student minoring in education studies.

When he isn’t litigating, helping raise their musically inclined son, Caleb, or living the startup life, Taj writes plays at night, most notably a riff on Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol set during the Harlem Renaissance.

For grads considering philanthropy themselves, Faries suggests they consider how they have benefited from Suffolk. “For those who might be on the fence, think about how the University impacted your life,” she says. “Then ask yourself, would you be willing to have that positive impact on someone else’s life?”
Entrepreneurs in Training

Suffolk's Center for Entrepreneurship launched an intensive three-week, three-credit summer program for rising high school seniors from Boston, offered free of charge thanks to the support of alumnus Spencer Lake.

By Jon Gorey

he room is abuzz with big ideas and pizza. It’s a July morning at the Suffolk University Center for Entrepreneurship at One Beacon Street, and 30 some high school students across seven tables are trying to come up with a new product line—either a racing bike or a passenger railcar—along with an attention-grabbing elevator pitch that sums up their idea in a succinct 60 seconds of sizzle.

“Bike people, who’s your target customer?” prompts Professor Shari Worthington, as she filters through the room. She reminds the groups that an interesting data point can reveal the urgency of the market demand for a given product. One group of students, reading a research report on their phones, cautiously ventures a well-received answer: “Um, the 4.5 million people who have started biking as their main cardio workout or to get to work in the last three years?”

Nearby, a group working on trains brainstorms ways to improve the commuter experience. “What about a luxury car, with a Starbucks on the train?” one student suggests. These rising high school seniors, from Boston, Lynn, and other nearby communities, are the inaugural participants in the Sawyer Business School’s new Summer Entrepreneurship Program. The three-week, intensive, college-level course called Entrepreneurship at One Beacon Street is the Suffolk’s “pay it forward” mentality, Worthington adds. “We wanted to do something for kids from Boston who don’t necessarily have the same kind of access to resources that we might see in the suburbs.”

The idea is to get students to think more deeply about entrepreneurship, including how they “could take this knowledge back to their communities and use it as an economic engine,” says Professor Chaim Letwin, the Carol Sawyer Parks Endowed Chair and Suffolk’s director of entrepreneurship.

The course includes a site visit to LearnLaunch, an education-focused innovation lab and incubator in Boston, as well as a full slate of guest speakers, including alumni and local business people coming in “to meet and network with the students, and tell them about their entrepreneurial story,” Letwin says. In addition to Lake, other guests include the restaurateur Eric Fagachron, BSBA ’98, MBA ’99, co-owner of Porto Boston and Saloniki, and Julia Rodgers, JD ’16, CEO and co-founder of HelloPrenup, an online legal service backed by Shark Tank investor Kevin O’Leary (aka Mr. Wunderful).

On this particular morning, Worthington first delivers a lesson on the entrepreneurial method; the wall of the room is one gigantic whiteboard, and it soon looks like a subway station wall visited by a business-savvy graffiti artist.

Students then listen raptly as Pariss Chandler, founder and CEO of the recruiting platform Black Tech Pipeline, describes the challenges, successes, and lessons she learned along her unconventional but rewarding path to entrepreneurship.

“Before you pay for something, make sure you can’t find it for free,” she suggests. “And don’t go to a venture capitalist unless you absolutely can’t move forward without one. If you can bootstrap your way to success, do that.”

Letwin hopes the students come away from the program excited about college, but also thinking like entrepreneurs, regardless of what field they might enter. “The biggest misconception about entrepreneurship is that it’s only about starting a business,” Letwin says. “There’s so much more to it. It’s the way we think, the way we go about things, the toolkits and mindsets that we use when approaching problems.”

From finance to management to marketing, he adds, “the entrepreneurial mindset is used in every major.”

For their part, the students are embracing the opportunity. “It’s amazing,” says one student, Raihan Ahmed, who hopes to apply some of the concepts to an online business he is developing with a friend. “I had heard some of these terms before, but now it’s more in-depth,” he says, a spark of passion lighting up his eyes. “Now it’s all making sense.”
Mission Driven | Fall 2022

A Virtuous Circle

Celebrating its 25th year, Suffolk’s Center for Restorative Justice looks ahead to a more just and equitable future

By Andrea Grant

M inyears separated Dennis Everett from a murder charge. The year was 1998, and Everett, who had spent much of his childhood in foster care, was just 18. Only “by the grace of God,” he believes, did the shots he fired at rival gang members miss their intended targets—and spare him a lifetime of guilt and regret.

That knowledge drove him to radically change his life after serving an eight-year sentence for three counts of armed assault with intent to murder. Everett co-founded a nonprofit that works with youth caught up in the same cradle-to-prison pipeline he’d faced, and helps incarcerated men grapple with the hurt they’ve caused and what to do next.

In 2010, Everett’s life took another fateful turn. That year, with the help of his wife Kat, he invited Susan Maze-Rothstein from Suffolk’s Center for Restorative Justice (CRJ) to speak at a panel hosted by his non-profit organization. He was, he says, simply amazed by how closely their missions aligned.

Restorative justice is a community-centered practice in which victims, offenders, and stakeholders come together to address and repair harm. For Everett, it offered a way to prioritize the voices of people over the powerful systems that he felt had failed him throughout his youth, including child welfare agencies, schools, juvenile courts, and ultimately the Department of Correction.

Says Maze-Rothstein, now the center’s director: “Restorative justice isn’t centered around punishment. It’s centered around healing in community.”

THE CENTER OF A MOVEMENT

In the mid-1990s, when Sociology & Criminal Justice Professor Carolyn Boyes-Watson was teaching her students about systemic racism, societal inequities, and a legal system in need of reform, she remembers thinking: “I can’t do this to my students. I can’t teach them about how truly unjust our institutions are, and just leave them with that.”

So she sought a way forward, a practical solution to offer her students and herself that was worth working toward. This year marks 25 years since she founded the Center for Restorative Justice at Suffolk.

What started as a program to bring speakers together to share best practices has grown into a nationally recognized hub of scholarship and training. Boyes-Watson has written foundational texts on restorative justice, and helped bring the concept to school districts, nonprofits, and the courts.

Central to CRJ’s philosophy is recognizing the value that each individual brings to society. Many of those concepts, Maze-Rothstein says, draw on wisdom from Indigenous cultures around the world.

Such communities, she explains, could not afford to expel members because each had an important role to play. “Sending someone away in hate”—such as punishing an offender with imprisonment—would lead them to “come back in hate,” she says, and cause more harm to the community. So rather than banning transgressors, they came together to find solutions and make meaningful reparations.

The CRJ has worked with hundreds of schools to train counselors and teachers in such restorative justice practices, including peacemaking circles, which teach participants how to practice conflict resolution together. “This is how we build capacity within systems,” Maze-Rothstein explains. “Restorative justice leverages people’s ability to embrace and do these practices themselves, rather than having experts come in to impose solutions.”

Last year, when Boyes-Watson announced her retirement, she tapped Maze-Rothstein to lead the CRJ into its next phase, and together they recruited Associate Director Carl Stedel, who brings deep experience in restorative justice in higher education. This summer, the center graduated its first cohort of practitioners from its new Professional Certificate in Restorative Justice Practice program.

SCHOOLED IN RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Linda Barber, recent certificate program graduate and former principal of the Browne Middle School in Chelsea, gives the example of a student who was repeatedly writing graffiti in a school hallway. What would benefit that student more, she posed: an academically disruptive suspension, or talking with teachers, parents, and the school custodian to understand why the behavior is harmful and to develop a plan for cleaning the walls?

Restorative justice can help disrupt the cradle-to-prison pipeline by keeping kids in classrooms, addressing disciplinary problems through dialogue, and making offenders take responsibility for remedying the harm they cause.

This effort is critical not just to helping individuals but also to addressing systemic disparities in punishment. According to a 2021 report from the Civil Rights Project at UCLA, students in the US lost a total of 11 million school days of instruction due to out-of-school suspensions during the 2015-16 school year. But Black secondary students were far more likely to serve suspensions, an average of 103 days per 100 students compared to just 21 days for their white peers. Rates were also much higher for other students of color and those with disabilities.

Lourenço Garcia, assistant superintendent of equity and inclusion at Revere Public Schools, is working with the CRJ to help level the playing field in his district, where a majority of students are immigrants or first-generation Americans.

Restorative justice practices help break down language and cultural barriers to teaching about systemic racism, societal inequities, and a legal system in need of reform.

This effort is critical not just to helping individuals but also to addressing systemic disparities in punishment.

It’s relatively easy to see the practical and developmental benefits of restorative justice in schools, but can the same approach be applied to adults whose crimes cause deep harm?

Continued on next page
Practitioner Kara Hayes believes so. A coach and trainer in the CRJ and director of restorative justice practices for the Suffolk County District Attorney’s Office, Hayes teaches colleagues how to incorporate circles and other restorative practices into the criminal legal system. As a survivor of violence and abuse and a longtime victims’ advocate, she says restorative justice can center the experiences of those who have been harmed.

Recently, Hayes conducted a circle at the request of a person who had been unjustly imprisoned for three decades based on false evidence. She brought the man together with the person who’d been coerced into providing that evidence as a young teen, who was now a middle-age man who has carried the guilt of that act for his entire adult life. Creating shared understanding cannot always repair the harm done or lead to forgiveness, but it is an important first step that has the potential to help both parties move forward.

This spring, the Suffolk County DA’s Office announced a restorative justice pilot program for courts in Charlestown, Chelsea, and Roxbury. Hayes says it’s a natural progression of work she and her colleagues have been doing for years, which has gained attention since the murder of George Floyd fueled more discussions about systemic reform.

“We’re at a moment where this is catching fire in our culture,” Hayes says. “The center is unfailingly restorative and kind, and captures the best principles of this work.”

**THE RIPPLE EFFECT**

Boyes-Watson estimates that she and trainers at the CRJ have educated thousands of participants-turned-practitioners over the last 25 years. For someone who lives the program’s philosophy so fully, eschewing individual renown for group wisdom and valuing knowledge transfer over guarding her own expertise, it’s a staggering legacy.

Maze-Rothstein says that in its first decade, the CRJ was pivotal in explaining and promoting the concept of restorative justice; in its second decade, the center focused on how to implement it within systems. While continuing that vital work, she also has a vision for the next stage of the process: bringing restorative justice back to its community roots. Nascent efforts are already underway to establish circle practice in the Boston neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan, bringing generations together to address complex issues like public safety.

That’s an evolution that makes sense to Everett, the former gang member whose life has come full circle thanks in part to the center. Today, he is a devoted husband and father of seven. Some of his former rival gang members are parents now, too. He sees them out in his community. They’re not friends, but they are no longer enemies.

He recently completed the center’s professional certificate program and began work training colleagues in his role as director of restorative justice for the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security.

Restorative justice is a way for people behind those prison walls to grow,” he says. “There’s a lot of work to be done, and I believe people who are living in these lands are passionate and beyond capable of building the transformation necessary to curate a restorative culture and community that benefits all.”

**WHERE DOES A CIRCLE BEGIN?**

Newly appointed Center for Restorative Justice Director Susan Maze-Rothstein says the basic concepts of the circle method are simple, but that incorporating the practice successfully requires intentionality, openness, and continuous effort. That starts with the beliefs one brings into each circle. Founder Carolyn Boyes-Watson and her collaborator Kay Pranis developed a set of seven core assumptions each participant should accept as they begin:

1. The true self in everyone is good, wise, and powerful.
2. The world is profoundly interconnected.
3. All human beings have a deep desire to be in a good relationship.
4. All human beings have gifts, and everyone is needed for what they bring.
5. Everything we need to make positive change is already here.
6. Human beings are holistic.
7. We need practices to build habits of living from the core self.

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Nine out of 10 of us made it across the stage on May 22 thanks to financial aid support from donors like you.

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Long a school of choice for first-generation college students, Suffolk has evolved to ensure their success.

Or hundreds of members of the Class of 2026 taking in the majesty of Convocation at Boston’s historic Tremont Temple, not only was this their first official day as college students—it was the first day that anyone in their family had been a college student.

Many of those students sitting in a sea of Suffolk yellow T-shirts on that early September day were, no doubt, experiencing a range of emotions. Deep pride at being the first in their families to attend college, tempered by the weight of carrying family hopes and dreams on their shoulders. Exhilaration about opportunities ahead, offset by flickers of imposter syndrome. Some were probably worrying about how to navigate this unfamiliar landscape, some about how they were going to pay for it all.

Yet if these students felt momentarily lost or alone, they were not. The 515 undergraduates in the Class of 2026—41% of the class—share a common bond not only with each other, but with the tens of thousands of first-gen Suffolk students who came before them and who have shaped the University’s identity.

Those students bring to the classroom and the campus an invaluable diversity of experiences and perspectives as well as a deep appreciation for their educational opportunity—along with a determination, drive, and ingenuity that have become synonymous with the Suffolk name.

They also share ties to the very first Suffolk students—immigrants and working-class people who sought greater opportunity through education, gathering in University founder Gleason Archer’s Roxbury apartment in 1906 to study law. They, too, were first-generation Suffolk.

By Greg Gatlin

Photograph: Michael J. Clarke
A full range of resources

Opening doors for first-gen students has been at the heart of Suffolk's mission since its founding. Talk to older Suffolk alumni who were the first in their families to attend college and there's a good chance they will tell you, sometimes emotionally, how Suffolk gave them opportunities that changed their lives. They just may not call themselves first-gen—a concept that has its origins in the Higher Education Act of 1965, but which has gained greater visibility as the number of first-gen college students has risen.

The Department of Education defines first-generation college students as those whose biological parents did not complete a bachelor's degree. According to the National Center for First-Generation Student Success, today one in three US undergraduates identify as first-gen. Many come from lower-income families or underrepresented backgrounds and face systemic barriers to higher education. Their families have had little exposure to the so-called "hidden curriculum" of the higher education system, and no experience navigating the college application and financial aid process. Many first-gen students hold down jobs while in college to help pay for their education.

While Suffolk's commitment to providing opportunity to those students has been steadfast for well over a century, what has evolved significantly is the breadth of support systems and programs that help first-gen students thrive at the University today. "The landscape has changed, but the need to serve that population has not changed at all," says Suffolk University President Marisa Kelly. "It is as critical now, if not more critical than it ever was."

Abraham Peña, MSBA '21, who helps lead these efforts as executive director of Suffolk's Center for Academic Access & Opportunity, says support for first-generation students is embedded in every department and program. He describes "a coordinated, across-the-board effort" with offices including admissions, financial aid, career development, the Division of Student Success, the Center for Student Diversity & Inclusion, and others (see sidebar).

"From before they arrive at Suffolk to well after graduation, there is support to help these students through," he says. In fact, for prospective first-gen students visiting Suffolk, offices that provide support services are some of the first stops on their campus tour. "Other universities might show the dining hall and the climbing wall," Peña says.

Last year, in recognition of these efforts, the Center for First-Generation Student Success named Suffolk University a First-Gen Forward Institution, one of a select group of US colleges and universities that have a demonstrated record of improving the experiences and outcomes of students who are the first in their families to attend a four-year college. And this November 7-11, Suffolk will mark First-Gen Week for the sixth consecutive year, with a series of events and celebrations.

"Suffolk has students from every walk of life and every corner of the globe, and it has made it clear we all belong here," says first-gen student and Commencement speaker Taylor Monteiro.

Closing the financial gaps

Peña, himself a first-generation college graduate, understands the pressure that many first-gen students feel. "The biggest thing is their sense of duty to their community and their family. So that can be a burden. They think, 'I can't fail, because I will let everybody down.'" But most persist, and when a student does not, it is almost always for the same reason, he says. While Suffolk awards close to $330 million in financial aid to undergraduates, including first-gen students, gaps remain.

"Too often, the thing that causes our students to not finish their education is that they can't pay for it," Peña says. "What holds our students back is the pressure that many first-gen students feel. "The biggest thing is their sense of duty to their community and their family. So that can be a burden. They think, 'I can't fail, because I will let everybody down.'"

He says donors who fund scholarships don't always realize just how much impact their gifts can have on the lives of these students. But it's huge, he says, as is their gratitude.

Kelly says some Suffolk students are working nearly full time to pay for their education, and in some cases, to also support their families.

"The more that we can do financially for these students, the more that they can focus on making the most of their college experience," she says.

It is, Kelly adds, a wise investment. "Every dollar that a donor gives us to support scholarships and financial aid is a dollar that is going to make a difference in the life of a person who is going to make a difference in their community and in the world."
The rise of Michael, BSBA ’61, and Larry Smith, BSBA ’65, begins with a fall.

The Smith brothers—who grew up in a Chelsea triple decker in the shadow of the Tobin Bridge and worked their way through Suffolk—went on to found one of the country’s largest and most successful roadside assistance companies.

Yet a defining incident in their lives happened shortly before they were born. In the 1930s, their grandfather, a 50-year-old Jewish immigrant, fell to his death while washing windows on a Boylston Street high-rise—just blocks from where his grandsons would later become the first members of their family to graduate from college.

“He fell off a building next to the Colonial Theatre, probably as the result of a heart attack,” Michael says. His death plunged his widow and seven children—including Harry Smith, Michael and Larry’s father—into real financial peril.

“My father had to quit school to help support his brothers and sisters,” Larry says. “He had always wanted to go to college, but never got the chance.”

The Smiths have spent much of their adult lives helping other students get just that kind of chance, giving more than $5 million to the University that gave them their start. And this summer, they committed another $2 million to benefit Suffolk’s athletics program and the scholarship they endowed in memory of a childhood friend.
On Tremont Street, just blocks from where their grandfather died, the Michael and Larry Smith Residence Hall is now home to more than 400 Suffolk students—a powerful symbol of how one generation can create access and opportunity for the next.

Entrepreneurs from an early age

Larry and Michael Smith grew up in a Jewish working-class neighborhood in Chelsea. Their grandparents had emigrated from Eastern Europe and Russia around the turn of the 20th century, their father's family exchanging an old-world name for the all-purpose moniker “Smith” at Ellis Island.

As boys, Larry and Michael worked odd jobs around Chelsea. When they turned 14, they each got work permits and their first payroll jobs—at Fenway Park. “We worked there for 10 or 11 years,” Larry recalls, “selling souvenirs, programs, peanuts, through junior high, high school, and college.”

“If the Sox were out of town, I worked as a bellhop in the Hotel Bostonian,” Michael adds, and Larry served as an elevator attendant at a Bromfield Street office building. These jobs gave them an early introduction to business culture. They also put nearby Suffolk University on their radars.

Suffolk made sense for a lot of reasons. Both brothers liked its proximity to the business district, its community spirit, and the short commute from Chelsea. And in Benson Diamond, their business professor, they found a mentor. When Michael was a senior, Diamond encouraged him to get licensed in a variety of areas, including real estate, finance, and insurance. Michael found the last of these most immediately useful in the working world following his graduation in 1961.

“I tried to work for Continental Insurance for a time, but if you weren’t from the elite schools,” Michael recalls, “you didn’t get the key to the men’s room upstairs. So that didn’t go over too well. Then I worked for a guy in Malden, a small insurance agency. I said, ‘Hey, I can do this by myself.’”

Meanwhile, Larry—who earned a scholarship to Suffolk—was wearing number 21 as the center on Coach Charlie Law’s basketball team, increasing an athletics legacy he had built as a state champion in junior high and high school. When he graduated in 1965, Larry joined Michael in the new family business, starting an auto insurance business in nearby Brockton.

Building their empire

Located in a beat-up grocery store next to the Registry of Motor Vehicles, that first agency didn’t look like much. Michael started it with $200 in his pocket and a typewriter. When other agencies wouldn’t touch high-risk drivers under age 25, the Smiths got a loan from Shawmut Bank and found a company that would underwrite those policies. Well before H&R Block became a national chain, they recruited bookkeepers from Brockton factories and launched a tax-preparation service on the side.

“We were still single, so we lived with our parents,” Michael says. “We ate a lot of bologna and eggs.”

Gradually, they built a chain of agencies around Boston, followed by a motor club. After the infamous Blizzard of 1978 crippled much of the region, the brothers
tacy Mills, BSBA ’87, is standing at the end of a long, white conference table on the 32nd floor of a Manhattan high-rise. A dozen or so Suffolk accounting students look on as she lays out their assignment: Marsh McLennan, a Fortune 200 corporation and the world’s leading professional services firm in the areas of risk, strategy, and people, is looking to acquire a new company, and the students must examine its financials and decide whether to make the purchase. The case is based on an actual decision that Marsh McLennan had to make, representing the kind of high-stakes choices corporate accountants face.

“When this first came in, we had two days to figure out a preliminary answer. You have an hour and a half,” challenges Mills, who is the global controller and chief accounting officer for Marsh McLennan, overseeing all the company’s daily accounting operations and a staff of 1,700 employees worldwide. She is also a Suffolk University trustee and strong supporter of its accounting program.

Mills has reddish blond hair and glasses, and is wearing a blue blouse today in honor of the Suffolk students, who are visiting as part of a weeklong tour of companies arranged by accounting professors Tracey Riley and Melissa Renschler. “I thought it would be fun for you to see a real-world example of what we do, and in the end, we’ll tell you what we did,” Mills says with a slight Boston accent. As the students look around nervously, she offers them a reassuring smile. “You have the tools to do this.”
For many of the students on the cusp of the “real world” themselves, being here is a heady experience. The plate-glass windows look out on a forest of skyscrapers, including the towering MetLife Building and the chrome spire of the Chrysler Building. Many are first-generation college students; some have never been to New York City before. They buzz with nervous energy as they break out into four groups in smaller conference rooms, accompanied by their “coaches,” other senior accounting staff whom Mills has enlisted for the exercise.

Over the next 90 minutes, the students wrangle over contingent compensation, multiyear commissions, and intangible assets to arrive at a total purchase price for the firm, and decide whether it’s worth the money. When the time comes to present their conclusions to Mills, they seem notably more confident. “It was difficult—but I had the skills to get through it,” says Michael Power, BSBA ’22.

One by one, the groups stand to talk through their reasoning—and despite small discrepancies, all arrive within the same ballpark on purchase price, between $174 million and $184 million. Two groups say they’d make the purchase, arguing it would generate revenue and create synergies with Marsh McLennan’s current businesses. One says they need more information, and the last, Power’s group, says they would not acquire the company, citing issues with its balance sheet and potential problems if employees exercise stock options.

At the moment of truth, Mills and her colleagues reveal they did not acquire the firm. “But I liked your conviction,” emphasizes Mills, adding she is impressed with the students’ reasoning. “I know we didn’t give you a lot of time, and you walked through the deal with the information you had. So excellent job, everyone.”

If the smiles around the table are any indication, the students are already feeling more like they belong in the room—which is the whole point. Mills herself knows what it’s like to come from a humble background; an electrician’s daughter and first-generation college student, she underwent her own struggles in rising to her now lofty perch, and she and the Suffolk professors wanted to show the students they could as well.

“We gave the students an imposter syndrome assessment, and they were off the chart,” says Riley, who is also the Business School’s associate dean of online programs. “Stacy’s story speaks to them, because it’s ‘I was you, and look where I got—and not because I was lucky, but I just worked hard and took every opportunity that came my way.’ To know she did that is inspiring to them.”

Making more room at the top

The weeklong trip to New York came out of a schedule change that Suffolk’s accounting department implemented this year.

A key part of an accounting student’s college experience is landing a summer internship at a major firm, yet competition with students from larger Boston-area schools can be fierce. Riley restructured the spring term so that students could take classes remotely while doing internships from January to April at top firms in Boston, including offices of the Big Four—Deloitte, Ernst & Young, PwC, and KPMG. That change, however, left them shy of a few credits to graduate, however, so the department created the New York trip to fill in those last credits while introducing students to accounting professionals operating at the highest levels.

In addition to organizing the day at Marsh McLennan, Mills provided funding for the students who would not otherwise
have been able to afford the trip. It’s part of her own commitment to mentoring the next generation of Suffolk accounting students. “My intent was to make it easier for the next Stacys,” says Mills, who became a Suffolk trustee in 2019. “I remember what it was like to have multiple jobs and a scholarship and student loans, trying to figure out how I was going to get through the next semester.”

Mills grew up in Billerica and commuted to Suffolk every day by bus, or drove into Wellington Station to take the T. During her junior year, her father did electrical work on a Suffolk building for a few months.

“After my morning classes, I would go to the Capitol Coffee Shop and bring them all coffee,” Mills remembers. In the afternoons, she worked for a startup company on Long Wharf, doing all the books by hand. Many of her classmates, she recalls, were also juggling both schoolwork and after-school jobs. “There was this underlying buzz,” she says. “We were all able to multitask, and we had this drive to succeed.”

After graduating in 1987, she thought her future was set when she got a job as a public accountant at a Big Four firm. After she met her husband-to-be there, however, she was forced to leave, since company policy at the time didn’t allow employee relationships. She landed at another local accounting firm, but after she had her son, she realized she couldn’t juggle motherhood and the grueling demands of the company, which required her to fly back and forth to Philadelphia for a client several times a week. “It was the first time I had to admit, ‘I can’t do this,’” she says. “The cost was too much.”

Abandoning thoughts of the CPA partner track, she took a new job at a large Boston-based bank doing financial reporting and corporate accounting. Not only did she find a better work-life balance but she also enjoyed the corporate environment. “I like when people say, ‘You can’t do that, Stacy,’ and I say, ‘Oh yeah? Watch me.’” At the time, the accounting world was dominated by men, and she often felt she had to work twice as hard to prove herself. “I can’t tell you how many times I was in a room where I was the only woman—and there was no diversity either,” she says.

A few years later in 1999, a recruiter called her about a new position as controller at Putnam Investments under a female CFO, and she jumped at the chance to work for a woman in a male-dominated field. Even so, she never imagined herself as rising to those heights herself. It was the CFO’s successor who encouraged her to think seriously about a career in the C-suite. “He was pivotal, the first one who kind of kicked me in the butt and said, ‘You know, you could really make it up the chain.’”

At the time Putnam was owned by Marsh McLennan, which sold the company in 2007. The following year, she was invited to New York to become controller for the brokerage division. It was an amazing decision—the brokerage division at Marsh McLennan alone took in $5 billion, five times Putnam’s entire annual revenue. Moreover, she was conflicted about commuting to New York while her son was still in high school. She turned to her father for advice, who reminded her that her son would soon be graduating and moving on. “He has his own car, his own life. What’s the worst that could happen?”

After thinking a moment, Mills told him, “I could fail.” Her father didn’t miss a beat. “So, you pack up and come home.” That wisdom convinced her to take the chance. Although she was “terrified” riding the Acela down that first day, she promised herself to give it at least a year before admitting defeat. Far from failing, she worked her way up over the next 14 years to deputy global controller, and then global controller and chief accounting officer by 2018. She jokingly told her father she was sitting in the “big girl chair” when she took him up to her office on the 44th floor. “I want to sit in the big girl chair,” he told her, settling into her office chair and looking out over the Manhattan skyline. “You are sitting up here with all these guys telling them what to do,” he marveled. It wasn’t quite like that, Mills insisted, but she basked in the moment. “You could see how proud he was.”

Mills attributes her success in part to her attention to detail, which is crucial for any publicly traded company. “I have this personality trait like I can’t do anything if I don’t do it really, really well,” she says with a smile. “Sometimes the people around me say that’s an annoying trait.” On the other hand, attention to her employees is just as crucial. “I have 1,700 people, and I wake up every day thinking about all of them,” she says, “making sure we are communicating and that they get everything they need.”

On her trips to Marsh McLennan’s branches around the world, she shakes the hand of every person who works for her. “If you are going to lead people, I feel like they should at least know you.”

The real world looks like me

It’s that same care for people that has inspired her to give back to Suffolk. While she had long donated to her alma mater, she “had an epiphany” a few years back, wanting to make a more direct impact by consolidating her gifts. She dedicated half of her donations to a scholarship fund specifically for people like herself—accounting majors with financial needs. After the first year, she met the three women who received the award. “One of them said to me, ‘I was going to have to drop out [otherwise],’” Mills says. “She starts to cry. I start to cry.”

“I like when people say, ‘You can’t do that, Stacy,’ and I say, ‘Oh yeah? Watch me.’”

—STACY MILLS

CONTINUED ON PAGE 60
They span decades, yet these first-gen grads and students share a determination to get ahead—and to give back.
2nd Lt. Kevin Luna-Torres

This first-generation college student—and first-generation American—has a plan to serve both his country and his family.

By Andrea Grant

Photograph courtesy of Kevin Luna-Torres

On a Saturday a few weeks after Commencement, cum laude political science grad Kevin Luna-Torres, BA ’22, set out on a 14-hour solo drive to an Army base in Kentucky. The newly minted 2nd lieutenant knew his life would change forever when he began active-duty service—but more importantly to him, so would his parents.

More than two decades after his mother and father emigrated from Mexico in search of a better life for their young family, Luna-Torres hopes his service will finally put his parents—and eventually, through them, his young family, Luna-Torres hopes his service will finally.

put his parents—and eventually, through them, his three siblings—on a path to US citizenship, thanks to an immigration law that directly benefits the family members of military personnel, making them eligible to apply for their green cards.

“Never let anybody hold you back”

Luna-Torres knows he wanted to make a difference. Now he is four years into a 20-year plan designed to do just that.

“Everything I’ve done at Suffolk and everything I do as a whole is because my family sacrificed everything to come here,” he says. “That’s why it’s so critical for me to have a plan.”

His military commitment is the next step in a detailed vision for the future that includes law school, public service, and perhaps, in the end, a run for political office—a blueprint he drafted and refined at Suffolk.

Traveling to Myanmar to build a home for a family through the Alternative Winter Break program freshman year inspired him to become a political science major and focus on international relations. Deep study and thoughtful debate in that program prepared him to have respectful, informed policy discussions with peers and officers while his National Guard unit was deployed to protect the Capitol during the 2021 presidential inauguration. And an internship with the Department of Homeland Security showed him a new option for serving his country someday.

Early on in his Suffolk experience, Luna-Torres learned another important lesson: Even the most self-sufficient among us sometimes need help. “I didn’t know how to fill out my FAFSA,” he says, referring to the federal application for financial aid that students must fill out each year. “I couldn’t submit the form without filling in my parents’ Social Security numbers. But my parents don’t have them.”

As a result, he ended up paying for his first semester out of pocket, which was not sustainable for him or his family. Making ends meet became even harder during the pandemic, when his mother lost her nursing home job, and her undocumented status meant she wasn’t eligible for unemployment assistance or stimulus funds.

A cross-country teammate found out and stepped in to help him complete his application. Since then, Luna-Torres has been grateful for the financial burden that’s been lifted in part due to scholarships from generous Suffolk donors. In May, Luna-Torres was a featured speaker at the Commencement Eve dinner, where he shared his story and expressed his deep gratitude to the Suffolk community.

As he prepared to embark on a series of special Army training programs, a nervous Luna-Torres was bolstered by Suffolk alumni veterans, yet more proof that representation matters, especially to first-generation students. At a commissioning event he helped organize to honor graduating service members, he spoke with Robert Catalanotti, MS ’81, an alumnus who’d been in Luna-Torres’ shoes decades before. Catalanotti, a retired major general who has had a distinguished career in the Army and with the Department of Defense, shared lessons from his early days with Luna-Torres.

“He told me that during training he would wake up and his boots were frozen. But you have to put them on and keep going,” he says. “When you think about the big picture, it seems so difficult, but to be able to see that people have made it, that’s inspirational.”

Then Catalanotti said something Luna-Torres will play over in his head when things get rough: “Never let anybody hold you back. Keep striving for your very best performance, and always look to help those less fortunate along the way.”
Ray Ciccolo

Driven to Succeed, and to Pass Along That Success

By Katy Ison | Photography by Adam Detour

ay Ciccolo's entrepreneurial streak emerged early, leading him from the corner Kool-Aid stand he ran in Cambridge as a youngster to the fleet of a dozen automotive dealerships he oversees from the North Shore to the South Shore today. But his make-or-break moment was literally that: a high-school job breaking bottles in the kitchen of Boston's Ritz-Carlton Hotel. It's the kind of gig that disappeared with the advent of recycling, but it made a lasting impression on Ciccolo, BS '79, who realized he wanted bigger and better things. It also set him on the path to Suffolk—he was the first member of his family to attend college.

"College was a lot more flexible. You could arrange your classes so you could have a couple of days off. So, I would work those days and pay for it," he says.

Ciccolo attended college in an era before financial aid was commonplace, and fewer than 10% of adults who completed high school went on to graduate from a four-year college, according to the US Census Bureau. Many students were paying their way, and after the bottle-breaking job, Ciccolo opened a coin-operated laundrette. By the time he graduated, Ciccolo had expanded to two laundrettes in Cambridge and one in Chelsea.

"I went in to buy a car, and I came out with the dealership," he jokes.

Over the next five-plus decades, the coursework Ciccolo completed at Suffolk would prove invaluable in growing Village Automotive to a recognized dealership brand stretching across the Boston area. As an 18-year-old, he took away business knowledge in accounting, bookkeeping, and human relations.

"I remember doing some case studies at Suffolk, and one in particular where they found that if the environment was more pleasant—let's say in a factory, and you had music on—the productivity went up," he recalls. "Well, it didn't take much to figure out that in the business world, if you've got happier employees, they produce more."

Building on that philosophy, Ciccolo created an environment and culture where team members were treated like family, and that was passed on to their customers.

Ciccolo knows the value of hard work when an opportunity presents itself. Through his philanthropic endeavors, Ciccolo has paid that success forward. He and his family fund a wide variety of cultural, health, education, and environmental organizations throughout the greater Boston area, including Suffolk, where he earned his undergraduate degree in accounting.

"The honors finance major and Accounting Faculty Term Scholarship recipient spends his days in class and his nights working at a Brookline restaurant to help support his family. While serving as president of Suffolk's chapter of the national accounting and finance honor society Beta Alpha Psi, he completed an internship with Boston financial giant John Hancock. Now he's preparing for a spring 2023 internship with Deloitte.

"I remember doing some case studies at Suffolk," he says. "I tell them nothing is impossible if you are willing to try."

Aron Librea

Making Every Moment of His Education Count

By Erica Noonan | Photography by Michael J. Clarke

S
enior Aron Librea hasn't wasted a minute since his family moved to the United States from the Philippines four years ago in search of greater economic opportunity.

"America has taught me that time is the most important thing in the world," says the 22-year-old Weymouth resident. "But also that anything is possible."

The honors finance major and Accounting Faculty Term Scholarship recipient spends his days in class and his nights working at a Brookline restaurant to help support his family. While serving as president of Suffolk's chapter of the national accounting and finance honor society Beta Alpha Psi, he completed an internship with Boston financial giant John Hancock. Now he's preparing for a spring 2023 internship with Deloitte.

Librea arrived in Massachusetts shortly after finishing high school in his home country, and honed his English skills working the early-morning drive-through at McDonald's. He began his college career at Bunker Hill Community College, where he earned an associate's degree in accounting. Suffolk was his top choice to complete his undergraduate education, he says, because of its diversity and urban setting, and its reputation as a reliable gateway to career opportunities in Boston's financial industry.

"I went in to buy a car, and I came out with the dealership," he jokes.

This summer he returned to the Philippines for the first time in four years, and the visit reinforced his gratitude for what he's found in America and his desire to extend a hand to others. This fall he'll be coaching other accounting undergrads on resume building, networking, and interviewing skills. "I love helping people and sharing what I have," he says. "I tell them nothing is impossible if you are willing to try."
Roxann Cooke

WORKING TO EXPAND ECONOMIC EQUITY IN BOSTON AND BEYOND

BY S.I. ROSENAUM | PHOTOGRAPHY BY FAITH NINIVAGGI

I wanted to make more than a living at work. I wanted to make a difference.

Ask Roxann Cooke, MBA ’16, about her achievements, and you’ll quickly hear a story full of sponsors, mentors, and allies. Her supporters included the high school guidance counselor who encouraged her to apply to an Ivy League school; the friends, family, and faculty who helped her navigate past systemic oppressions; the community that fueled her successful banking career; and the Suffolk University MBA program that provided important skills and experience that have guided her along the way.

Now, as the consumer bank and wealth management regional director for JPMorgan Chase, she’s drawing on her experience at Suffolk as she works to create economic equity in communities like Roxbury, where she grew up.

“I wanted to make more than a living at work,” she told an audience in March at the Boston Chamber of Commerce’s 2022 Pinnacle Awards, where she was recognized for her achievements in management. “I wanted to make a difference and an impact through my work.”

Cooke emigrated from Jamaica to the Grove Hall neighborhood of Roxbury at the age of 10. Her grandmother, an entrepreneur in Jamaica, had always stressed the importance of education, but no one in her family had been able to attend college. “My cousins went into the military; others went to work,” Cooke says. “Others that lived around me in Grove Hall, it wasn’t their first inclination to go off to college.”

But at Boston Technical High School—now the John D. O’Bryant School of Mathematics and Science—she was encouraged to apply to colleges by a guidance counselor, Charles Andrews. “I gave him the list of schools and he said, ‘Go for it,’” she recalls.

Cooke was admitted to Dartmouth, where she initially intended to study to become a doctor. That changed during a semester off, when she took a short-term job as a bank teller at Boston Five Cents Savings Bank—and loved it. “I pivoted,” she says. The temporary job turned into a career.

From the beginning, Cooke aimed to use banking to lift her own community. Her first job as a bank manager was at a Bank of Boston branch on the corner of Blue Hill Avenue and Cheney Street—right where she’d grown up in Grove Hall. “I intentionally applied for it because I knew the perception that branch had,” she says. “It wasn’t thriving; the success factor wasn’t there. I needed to change that narrative.”

And she did—“because the community supported me,” Cooke says. People she knew in the neighborhood came to see her: “They opened accounts, they came and high-fived, or brought lunch.” The branch, she says, became a success. “It was a win for me, a win for the community,” she says. “I went away and got the education I needed, but I still wanted to give back because something was given to me.”

Eventually Cooke would become a regional manager, overseeing 17 branches at Eastern Bank. One of them, in Roxbury Crossing, was the first new branch any bank had opened in Roxbury in 20 years—which she would view as the crowning achievement of her time at Eastern.
Jeffrey & Adilson Lopes

**While They Chose Different Career Paths, These Identical Twins Share a Commitment to Pushing the Envelope.**

BY MICHAEL BLANDING WITH REPORTING BY MORGAN BAKER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL J. CLARKE

Jeffrey and Adilson Lopes couldn’t be more alike: They’re identical twins who attended Suffolk together, earning both undergrad and graduate degrees.

Then again, they couldn’t be more different: Jeffrey, BS ‘12, MPA ‘14, is a detective with the Boston Police Department, while Adilson (right) is a banker turned tech executive with AWS, Amazon’s cloud computing platform.

Yet while they’ve each carved out their own paths, they remain the other’s lodestar—the person who knows them best, cheers them on, holds them accountable. Having each other’s back turned tech executive with AWS, Amazon’s cloud computing platform.

Jeffrey says, “You’re never alone when you’ve got a twin brother.” And Adilson adds, “When I’m putting in 80-hour weeks to ensure our children could get ahead and become the first members of the family to attend college. The twins each earned the Nathan Miller Scholarship, a full tuition scholarship awarded to Boston Public School graduates.

Even as Boston natives, the Lopeses say Suffolk felt like a new world, with classmates from around the globe and classes that set them on the course to their future careers. Jeffrey dove headfirst into student leadership, working with the Black Student Union and the Student Government Association, and serving as a Diversity Peer Educator.

“All these things awakened my passion for social justice and for giving back to the community,” he says. “Now I work in the government sector where I can be a champion for these issues.”

Jeffrey, who went on to earn a PhD in law and policy at Northeastern, brings a strong community-policing approach to his work and a commitment to being a change agent. “Social justice and policing can mix when it’s done right,” he says. “We can create policies that benefit the community, we can create conversation.” And through his work with MAMELO, he advocates for internal reforms around diversity and equity within police departments in the state.

For his part, Adilson’s passion was always for business. In high school, he set a goal to one day earn $50,000 a year. After taking classes in business. In high school, he set a goal to one day earn $50,000 a year. After taking classes in business, in high school, he set a goal to one day earn $50,000 a year. After taking classes in business.

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For his part, Adilson’s passion was always for business. In high school, he set a goal to one day earn $50,000 a year. After taking classes in business.
Kosta Ligris’s entrepreneurial vision started earlier than most. Ligris, JD ‘01, an MBA-wielding lawyer and serial entrepreneur, got his first glimpse of the business world as a child working at his immigrant father’s dry-cleaning shop in Brookline.

Ligris’s dad, who had been a tailor in Athens, Greece, reinvented himself stateside, and Kosta and his younger brother, Nik, JD ’11, used to spend Saturdays at the shop. “As soon as we were old enough to see over the counter, we both worked in the family business,” Kosta jokes. “I suspect it was a violation of child labor laws.”

That time behind the counter would prove pivotal in shaping Ligris’s entrepreneurial spirit. Today, Ligris is on a mission to make complex legal and financial transactions easier, safer, and more accessible as the co-founder of Stavvy, an online platform designed to simplify mortgage lending, which won Tech in Motion’s Timmy Award for the 2021 Best Tech Startup in Boston. Ligris launched Stavvy (named for his father, Stavros) after successfully overseeing more than $50 billion in commercial and residential real estate transactions as an attorney with his own firm.

Ligris is a whirlwind of energy with a palpable passion for entrepreneurship, innovation, and the law. Beyond Stavvy, he mentors, advises, and invests in fintech startups as an entrepreneur-in-residence at the Martin Trust Center for MIT Entrepreneurship. He’s an engaged civic and fundraising leader who sits on numerous boards, including the Suffolk University Board of Trustees. He’s a member of the Suffolk Law Dean’s Cabinet, and serves on various hospital boards, including Beth Israel Lahey. He’s also a Renaissance man—an amateur photographer, art lover, foodie, movie buff, politics junkie, and die-hard Boston sports fan. At the center of it all is a deep-seated belief in humanity, a relentless curiosity, and what seems like an unquenchable desire to connect, collaborate, engage, and empower.

He now credits that early exposure to his family’s business challenges with his decision to go to law school. “I think there was sort of an innate passion there to help others,” he says. After completing an undergraduate degree in human physiology and chemistry at Boston University—he was the first in his family to go to college—Ligris enrolled at Suffolk University Law School, ready to put that passion into practice. “Being first generation, and growing up with English as a second language, can make you feel like an underdog and like others have a leg up on you,” he says. “Going to graduate school and earning a professional degree not only gives you a sense of accomplishment, but also the confidence to pursue your dreams.”
Sebastian Sicari
SPURRING MORE SUCCESS STORIES WITH A NEW SCHOLARSHIP
BY NAT PANEX | PHOTOGRAPHY BY FAITH NINIVAGGI

When Sebastian Sicari, BSBA ’75, was in the seventh grade, his teacher gave him a letter informing him he’d scored high enough on a citywide math test to attend a prestigious summer program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

“I never showed it to my parents,” he says now with a laugh. Growing up in Boston, he was much more interested in playing stickball with friends than in attending summer school. “Who knows? Maybe it would have changed my trajectory,” he says now. “Or maybe I would have hated it, and gone in a completely different direction.”

Eventually, those math skills would come in handy as Sicari embarked on his career, first as a certified public accountant and then as a financial executive in the rapidly expanding technology industry.

Sicari’s family had emigrated from Sicily to Boston when he was just 4 years old, moving into a three-story tenement in a bustling West End neighborhood of immigrants from all over the world. “You had people from the same town in Italy who all lived in the same building,” he says. “But also people from Southeast Asia and Latin America.”

At the same time, growing up in the heart of the city, he was less than a ten-minute stroll from his future alma mater, Suffolk University. Like many immigrants, Sicari’s father was a big proponent of education as a way to better his children’s prospects, and pushed for them to go to college.

“I tried to look at my background and mimic it to some extent,” he says of his focus on first-generation students who are working their way through college. “I think Suffolk still offers exceptional value to students, and I wanted to help out a little bit where I could.”

Eventually, Hearing that some friends had gotten good-paying jobs as CPAs, he enrolled in the Sawyer Business School and majored in accounting. His experience at Suffolk was inspiring in broader ways as well. However, “Being located next to the State House and just down the street from the Financial District proved to be a real awakening for a lot of students with similar backgrounds to mine,” he says. “It was the type of place where we could mature and realize what an education and a professional career could bring. I can honestly say Suffolk provided the catalyst and the opportunity for me to achieve what I have in the business world.”

Eventually, he did attend MIT, completing the Boston Executive Program in Business Management at Sloan School of Management, and went on to senior positions at electronics companies GCA and Apollo Computer. He co-founded the semiconductor equipment company Aseeo, serving first as chief financial officer and eventually as CEO. He finished out his career as co-founder and CEO of KSARE, a fiber optic connectivity manufacturer serving the defense and aerospace industry.

A donor to Suffolk for many years, he and his wife recently established the Sicari Family Scholarship for first-generation students from Massachuets at the Sawyer Business School to spur more success stories like his own.

“I never showed it to my parents,” he says now with a laugh. Originally from Colombia, Cañon felt out of place in high school in a predominantly white, wealthy Worcester suburb, where few students looked like her or shared her experience. Suffolk felt more like home, a place where she could learn not only from her sociology and government classes but also from the University’s Center for Community Engagement.

Cañon is the director of finance and operations at Chica Project, whose mission is to close the opportunity divide for young Latinas and other women of color with school- and community-based workshops and mentorship and leadership programs. Under Cañon’s leadership, the Massachusetts-based organization has grown its budget from $190,000 to over $1 million.

“All my work has been creating or building on things that I wish I had when I was younger,” she says. Originally from Colombia, Cañon felt out of place in high school in a predominantly white, wealthy Worcester suburb, where few students looked like her or shared her experience. Suffolk felt more like home, a place where she could learn not only from her sociology and government classes but also from the University’s Center for Community Engagement.

Cañon’s work with both Nur Ventures and Chica Project earned her a Suffolk 10 Under 10 alumni award this spring; she also delivered the keynote address at May’s 1913 Celebration, a joyous Commencement week event that honors the diversity of Suffolk graduates. She is also vice president of the College of Arts & Sciences Alumni Board.

“There’s nothing like seeing things you dream of come to fruition,” she says.
Nicole Kingdon

“WE ARE HERE TO HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE WORLD”

BY ERICA NOONAN

S
enior Nicole Kingdon is passionate about improving how our country cares for and educates low-income children. “We know from our research on children in poverty that ages 3 to 5 are the most crucial for their social and emotional development,” says Kingdon, an honors psychology major.

Kingdon’s interest isn’t simply academic. The Barrington, New Hampshire, native and first-generation college student knows what it’s like to grow up close to the financial edge. “My family to earn a degree. Now he is an accounting assistant, daycare teacher, and orientation leader.

From GNC to CFO

Growing up in Boston as the eldest of three boys raised by a single mother, Damien Vassall, MBA ’01, didn’t know many people who had gone to college. That changed when his mom enrolled him in METCO, a program that places Boston kids in suburban schools. “Being able to leave the city gave me the chance to develop relationships with people I would otherwise not have met,” he says. “That really opened my eyes as to education being the path to great opportunity.”

After high school, he enrolled in Suffolk as an accounting major, and became the first in his family to earn a degree. Now he is vice president and chief financial officer at Williams Industrial Services Group in Atlanta, a construction and maintenance company that services power plants of all kinds. Vassall rose to his current executive position last year, after working his way up through the ranks for 12 years at the company. He attributes his success to persistence and long-term vision. “Oftentimes we are so focused on the short term,” he says. “It’s important to have a longer view, recognizing that success not only takes hard work but also takes time.”

Vassall had an interest in business from a young age: he remembers the paper route he had as a kid, and the summer jobs he took to help ease the financial burden on his mom. He worked full time all the way through Suffolk, too, starting as a cashier at GNC, a health and nutrition company, and rising to become a store manager, prior to graduating.

“There were plenty of times I thought to myself, ‘Man, this is hard!’ Between studies and work, I don’t know if I can do this,” he says. But encouragement from friends and family members kept him going. “They just always reminded me what I was working toward.”

Now Vassall is providing encouragement—and financial support—for a new generation of Suffolk students. He has created a scholarship for Suffolk finance and accounting majors, with preference given to Boston Public School graduates and residents of Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan.

“I always thought, if I was ever in a position to be able to help someone else that had a path similar to mine, that I would love to be able to assist. When you are 20, 21 years old, it can be hard to think about your long-term plans,” he says, especially when you’re juggling short-term pressures like a full course load and a full-time job. “Having a good support system around you is so important, and I wanted to be part of that. I wanted to pass that forward.”

Smith Brothers

Continued from page 37

The Smith brothers brought athletics at Suffolk to a new level, says their longtime friend, Suffolk’s legendary coach and athletic director Emeritus James Nelson. “The renovations to the fitness center and their investment in new sports, a team bus, and athletic uniforms have spawned a new era for Suffolk.”

As Suffolk Athletics’ all-time most generous supporters, the Smiths have had “a transformational impact on the Rams,” agrees Athletics Director Cary McConnell. “Their support has allowed us to double the number of student athletes, add six new intercollegiate sports, and move into a new athletic conference. It’s changed the whole landscape for Suffolk.”

The Honorable Amy Nechtem, JD ’85, chief justice of the Massachusetts Juvenile Court Department and vice chair of the Suffolk trustees, has a unique vantage point on the Smiths’ impact. “Larry and I grew up together in Chelsea, and I am so proud of all of his business successes through the years,” she says. “He and Michael have always been active Suffolk alumni, and Larry’s service on the board has been outstanding.”

Beginning in the 1990s, the Smiths made leadership giving at Suffolk a priority. In the decades that have followed, Smith gifts have underwritten investment not only in scholarships and Suffolk athletics, but in the University’s infrastructure. The Smith name appears across campus from north to south, from both the Michael and Larry Smith Fitness Center and the Larry and Michael Smith Court in the Edgerly Building to the Smith Dining Hall in the Samia Academic Center to the Smith Residence Hall. And in the summer of 2022, Larry and Michael pledged $2 million more to improvements in athletics and the Sheldon R. Cohen Scholarship Fund.

“It is a remarkable act of generosity in a lifetime filled with them,” says Suffolk President Marsia Kelly. “Thanks to Michael and Larry, we will be able to further enhance the experience of our student-athletes, expand our intercollegiate offerings, and strengthen community-building throughout the entire University.”

Both brothers have served as marshals at Suffolk commencements in recent years. But the 2021 Commencement, held at Fenway Park, was particularly special for Larry. Wearing full academic regalia, the first-generation college graduate turned business executive and now trustee led the Sawyer Business School graduating class to the stage in the outfield, past the stands where he’d once sold peanuts and programs.

Neither Larry nor Michael takes their success for granted—and neither has forgotten their roots.

“If it wasn’t for Suffolk,” Larry says, “I’d be washing windows.”
She gave the rest to the Department of Accounting to set up a fund to sponsor students for trips such as the one the students are on today. On November 1, in recognition of Mills's leadership philanthropy, the University will rename the Blue Sky Lounge in Sargent Hall in her honor.

After lunch, a diverse panel of Mills’s associates–some heads of their own accounting divisions–tell their own stories about how they rose in the firm. The panel includes several women of color, and people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. “I wanted the students to see there are a lot of people at Marsh McLennan who are just like me,” Mills explains.

At the close of the day, Mills brought the group to the 9/11 Memorial Museum to share one last, crucial piece of Marsh McLennan history. The company, which once occupied several of the top floors of World Trade Center’s North Tower, lost 700 employees and consultants in the September 11 attacks. Even as Marsh McLennan reeled from the loss, “the company just mobilized–everybody was trying to help,” says Mills, who was still working in the Boston office at the time. She was hoping they could take all of that and say, “We’re going to share one last, crucial piece of Marsh McLennan’s history.”

“I wanted them to sit there and say to themselves, ‘Maybe my parents didn’t go to college, maybe the English wasn’t my first language, but I don’t feel uncomfortable as he prepares for what’s now ongoing financial uncertainty, that he realized that some of the same challenge. “It’s larger expectations making that whatever it is that we’re building is not only helping underserved, underbanked, or underrepresented communities but also not creating new obstacles in the process.”

Ligris has brought that same approach to supporting innovation at Suffolk Law as a member of the Dean’s Cabinet. “We are so grateful for his contributions, both his philanthropy but also his eagerness to help us reimagine what we could do with the same spirit he has brought to innovating in every place he’s been,” Perlman says.

“Kosta brings his natural curiosity and unique insight to his work as an engaged member of the Board of Trustees. He is always asking the right questions to help the University advance its mission. If it’s been a tough time to run a new business, first with the pandemic and now ongoing financial uncertainty, Ligris says he’s still comfortable being uncomfortable as he prepares for what’s ahead. His time at Suffolk reinforced the hardworking instinct he developed as a child as well as his adaptability. “I’m Suffolk-ready,” he says.
Robert Caret, BA ’69, HDHL ’96

retired as chancellor of the University System of Maryland and is now serving as the vice president for executive search at Greenwood/Asher and Associates. He now resides in Naples, Florida, with his wife.

Thomas Horgan, BSBA ’70, JD ’74

has retired after 22 years on the bench. He was the former First Justice of the Boston Municipal Court Central Division.

Sheldon Wolff, BSBA ’72

is working in Medicare insurance and is licensed in 12 states. He enjoys the opportunity to assist others with Medicare questions.

Judith Josephs, JD ’75, EdD ’79

has completed 30 cable TV shows highlighting positive community leaders and their organizations. She has submitted four articles with embedded videos to the Massachusetts Association of School Counselors Association and has donated a book to the Suffolk library.

Steve Achin, BA ’76

worked as a social worker for 40 years. He has been enjoying retirement since 2013.

Keith Sexton, BSBA ’78

has been a top real estate agent on Cape Cod for many years, and recently acquired his Florida real estate license. He will be working both on Cape Cod and the Fort Myers and Naples area in Florida.

Brian Sellus, BS ’86

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is the co-founder and chief operating officer of Mission First and was appointed for the Department of Labor for more than 15 years.

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is currently working for Whole Foods in South Weymouth as a member of their e-commerce team. He is currently a third-year district deputy with the Massachusetts State Council Knights of Columbus.
Jacob Stewart, BSBA ’10, MSA/MST ’12 will be starting a new position as a senior compliance examiner at Newton Investment Management North America, a subsidiary of BNY Mellon Corporation, after a successful three-year internship and 10-year career at the US Securities and Exchange Commission.

Natalie Breen, BSBA ’14 has an exhibit on display at the Museum of Science, a collection of postcards. Natalie has been appointed to the Board of the Friends of the Chevalier Theatre in Medford.

Breanne Schatzman, MSMHC ’14 celebrated three years as her current employer this year, where she serves outpatient psychotherapy clients in the Back Bay neighborhood. She recently traveled to France, Italy, and Germany for her first European vacation.

Amy Rossetti, BSJ ’15 recently celebrated the second anniversary of her company RAR, Public Relations, a boutique PR firm specializing in real estate.

Georgia Polemenakos, BS ’16 is currently working toward earning her MBA at Suffolk and has recently accepted a position at Beth Israel Lahey Health after seven years working for Gov. Charlie Baker in various capacities.

Diana Rogatch CTU/BA ’16 has joined Bousquet Holstein PLLC Brownfield Practice Group. She successfully passed the Uniform Bar Examination in April 2022, and she is currently admitted to practice law in Colorado. She will be admitted to practice law in New York state in January 2023.

Matthew O’Brien, BA ’20 is continuing his education at Harvard University, where he is pursuing a Master of Liberal Arts in Government. He recently began a new role as a legislative aide in the Massachusetts House of Representatives.

Sonak Bahad, BS ’21 serves as a parishioner for Boston Capital. She is currently a candidate for her Juris Doctorate at New England Law–Boston.

Monica Bolduk, BS ’21 has been enjoying many exciting experiences while serving as the social media marketing manager for Minglings, a plant-based food company created by Iron Chef Ming Tsai.

Katherine Johnson, BS ’21 is currently working in the film industry as the office manager for PiC Town Productions in North Hollywood, California. PiC Town works with HGTV, where they produce House Hunters and Flip or Flop.

Olvia Lapolla, BA ’21 received her MA in history of art from the Courtauld Institute of Art in London.

Angela Quiterio, BSBA ’21 is working in campaign operations and promotions after serving in sales operations and analytics at a SaaS company. She resides in California.

Justin Casanova-Davis, MPA ’22 was awarded the International City/County Management Association’s Early Career Leadership Award in August 2022. The award is presented annually to one individual worldwide nominated by their peers. He was recently selected by the Norfolk Select Board as the Town of Norfolk’s next town administrator.

Chris Donato, MPA ’22 recently accepted a position as the head of talent, human resources, and operations for a market research firm.

Andre Franck, BSBA ’22 has been working as a project development manager for a healthcare consulting firm in Florida.

Ryan Inchaustegui, BSBA ’22 has spent time traveling the world and is currently working at Wellington Management.

Katharine Marlow, MBA ’22 started a new role as a business continuity consultant with Sungard AS, where she assists with business impact analysis, risk assessments, disaster recovery, and cybersecurity. She has also obtained multiple professional certifications including PMP, PMI and ARCP.

Andrew Miller, MBA ’22 is serving as a senior philanthropy officer with the Rhode Island Hospital Foundation, fundraising for Rhode Island Hospital and Hasbro Children’s Hospital.

Michaela Zouharis, BSBA ’22 has begun serving at Wellington Management as an IntivTech Associate using the technical skills she learned from her professors at Suffolk!
IMAGINE THE DIFFERENCE
YOUR LEGACY WILL MAKE

When you give to Suffolk University through your will, trust, or beneficiary designation, you help generations of Suffolk students step into their future.

Call or email today to find out how you can make a difference through your legacy plan.

Contact Bruce Paolozzi, PhD at 617-573-8383 or Bruce.Paolozzi@suffolk.edu or visit mysuffolklegacy.org.