

# Class notes

## 1960

**Rev. Louis Bier G'62** was honored with the Council Duty to God Award by the Boy Scouts of America in June 2025 during a meeting of the Spirit of Adventure Council. He also celebrated the 66th anniversary of his ordination to the ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Ordained on August 3, 1959, Rev. Bier has served his community with dedication for more than six decades.

## 1970

**Russell Dupont '71** released his latest book, *One Foot in Front of the Other: Poems by Russell Dupont*, now available on Amazon. The collection features poems that capture the joys, sorrows, and complexities of daily life.

**Demetrios Giannaros '72** was inducted into the 2025 Immigrant Heritage Hall of Fame, which honors individuals whose lives and contributions reflect the rich legacy of the immigrant experience in America. Giannaros served as deputy majority leader and was the first foreign-born Deputy Speaker in the Connecticut General Assembly. He is also a former president of the World Hellenic Interparliamentary Association and co-founder of the National Immigrant Heritage Center.

**Gina McCarthy '76**, former EPA administrator and the first White House national climate advisor, delivered the keynote address at the 2025 Colorado School of Public Health Convocation in May 2025. She also received the distinction of the A.J. Kauvar Visiting Professorship for her distinguished leadership in public health and climate change.

**Robert Tucker '76** published his third novel, *Darkness Has a Name*, a young adult fantasy set in 1960 that follows a boy named Theo as he's swept into a battle between two colliding worlds. The book marks a genre shift for Tucker, who previously released two successful detective mysteries.



**JAMES E. SAMELS '69** is the founder and CEO of The Education Alliance and The Samels Group, and founding partner of Samels Associates, a law firm serving independent and public colleges, universities, foundations, nonprofit and for-profit higher education organizations across the globe. A noted authority on higher education mergers and institutional strategy, Dr. Samels is also advancing models for charter colleges and vocational preparation, partnering with districts to empower graduate-credentialed high-school faculty to deliver college-level instruction.

## 1980

**George Drugas '82** joined the Commercial and Industrial Banking team at Needham Bank as first vice president, small business team leader. A seasoned strategist with leadership experience at HarborOne and Citizens Bank, Drugas is dedicated to developing new opportunities and strengthening client relationships.

**Thomas C. Proctor G'84**, director of institutional research at McLennan Community College in Waco, Texas, received the 2025 National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development's Excellence Award. This prestigious national honor recognizes individuals who demonstrate extraordinary dedication and impact on their campuses.

## 1990

**Vanessa Calderón-Rosado G'94, PhD'00** was named one of the *Boston Business Journal's* 2025 Icon Awards: Women Who Mean Business signature honorees. As CEO of Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción, she is a leading voice in the fight against housing displacement in Boston's South End, steering a nationally recognized community development

corporation. She was also a BBJ Power 50 honoree in 2024.

**Sam Folta G'94** completed his 31st year as a professor, teaching at universities and schools across Northeast China. Throughout his career, he has dedicated himself to cross-cultural education and building connections between students in China and the wider world.

**Jane Parks Gardner G'99** published *The Wreck of the Circus Ship Royal Tar: Tragedy in Penobscot Bay*, a nonfiction account of the 1836 steamship disaster that explores the immigrant experience, 19th century traveling circuses, and the perils of sea travel.

**Karen Hart '92** published *What Is the Deep State? 10 Steps You Can Take Right Now to End Its Influence: A Citizen's Guide to Taking Back Power*. In this urgent and accessible guide, Hart unpacks the hidden forces shaping government and media and offers readers practical steps to reclaim transparency and accountability. Hart also served as a producer on the 2024 Netflix series *The Program: Cons, Cults, and Kidnapping*.

**Sharon Hartley G'93** retired after more than 50 years in education as a teacher,

principal, policy advisor, and school committee chair. A Mattapoissett native, she began at Rochester Memorial School and later earned her master's degree from UMass Boston. She served in Lt. Governor Evelyn Murphy's office, led two Cape Cod elementary schools, and returned to Rochester to advocate for students on the school committee.

**U-Meleni Mhlaba-Adebo '98**, poet, educator, and filmmaker, debuted her short film, *Reclamation: This is My Country, This is My Land*, at the Roxbury International Film Festival in June 2025. Written and directed by Mhlaba-Adebo, the film explores themes of identity, heritage, and connection to land through poetry and spoken word, set against the backdrop of Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands.

**Rekha Singh G'96** joined Aura as chief technology officer, bringing over 30 years of experience building enterprise-grade, scalable platforms. Prior to joining Aura, Singh served as senior vice president of engineering, analytics, and data science at GoPuff and as vice president of engineering at TripAdvisor.

**Gemima R. St. Louis '93, G'96, PhD'98** was elected as a distinguished fellow of the National Academies of

Practice. This honor recognizes professionals who have excelled in their field and are committed to advancing interprofessional education, scholarship, research, practice, and policy in support of interprofessional care.

**Jasmine Trillos-Decarie '93** was inducted into the Legal Marketing Association Hall of Fame. As chief client officer at Lathrop GPM, a top-ranked national law firm, Trillos-Decarie leads firmwide client-experience strategy and business development.

## 2000

**Jed Davidson '06**, vice president at Brown and Brown Insurance, has been appointed as one of six new board members to the Boston Arts Academy Foundation. The foundation supports Boston's only public high school for the arts, and Davidson's leadership will help advance its mission of providing an enriching, arts-intensive education.

**Margo Gabriel '09** was awarded a fully funded fellowship from the European Union and Next Generation to participate in The Break, a prestigious program for women entrepreneurs. As a member of the 2023 cohort, Margo joined 1,000 participants from across the EU in a hybrid training experience that culminated in a month-long work retreat at various locations throughout Spain.

**Angelo Gomez, Jr. '00** was designated by Governor Maura Healey to serve on the Massachusetts Parole Board. A seasoned criminal justice professional with over 30 years of experience, Gomez previously served as chief parole supervisor for Field Services, where he oversaw statewide parole operations and reentry efforts.

**Jeffrey B. Lappin CER'05** was appointed director of student services for Medway Public Schools. With over two decades of experience in special education administration, Lappin most recently served as assistant director of student services for Sudbury Public Schools. He brings expertise in inclusive programming, therapeutic services, and trauma-informed practices,

with a strong record of advancing educational equity.

**Nicole Lyons '02**, artist and designer, debuted a collection of upcycled apparel and accessories at New York Fashion Week in September 2025. Lyons' one-of-a-kind pieces are inspired by the urban landscape, graffiti, and classic vintage patterns. She has a background in theater costume design and training and has built a career as both a designer and freelance photo stylist, collaborating with top fashion houses at New York Fashion Week and beyond. Her work has been worn by celebrities and featured in national and international publications.

**Jessica Murphy '00**, partner at Tarlow, Breed, Hart & Rodgers, P.C., was named a 2025 "Go To Construction Lawyer" by *Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly* in recognition of her outstanding work in construction law. An accomplished civil litigator, Murphy focuses on commercial disputes and construction issues and has been a dedicated member of the National Association of Women in Construction for over a decade.

**Rick Musiol, Jr. G'00** was appointed chief external affairs officer at The Home for Little Wanderers, New England's oldest child and family service agency. In this newly created role, Musiol leads government relations, community engagement, and external partnerships to strengthen The Home's impact across the region.

**Irohama B. Ogbefun '07**, managing director and CEO of Starzs Investments Company Limited, was appointed to the Governing Board of the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. With more than 11 years of experience in maritime operations, Ogbefun has grown Starzs' fleet from three to 11 vessels and played a pivotal role in securing \$15 million in funding for business expansion. She also serves as chair of the Technical Committee of the Shipowners Association of Nigeria.

**Heidi Siefkas G'04** released *Look Up—Global Stories of Resilience*, a collection of over 20 true stories from

around the world that highlights how individuals overcome life's greatest challenges. Inspired by her own journey through personal tragedy – including a broken neck and broken heart – Siefkas explores how people turn pain into purpose through the power of perspective.

**Rachel Skerritt G'07** was appointed to the Boston School Committee by Mayor Michelle Wu. Skerritt is the chief strategy officer at Attuned Education Partners, an organization that provides technical assistance to public and charter school systems. She is also a former Boston Public Schools teacher and district administrator and served as Boston Latin School head of school from 2017 to 2022.

**Tara Smith '00**, CEO of Smith Farm Sales, was honored with inclusion in *Marquis Who's Who* in July 2025 for her expertise in agriculture, accounting, and business. A sixth-generation leader of

her family's enterprise, Smith has guided the company since 2008, quadrupling revenue and expanding its market reach. She is active in several industry organizations, including the International Fresh Produce Association, and supports initiatives like Brighter Bites and Mind Your Melon to promote healthy food access and farmer well-being.

**Yonas Tamene '07** was named assistant medical director of Medical Services at WillowBrooke at Tanner Medical Center in Villa Rica, Georgia. A triple board-certified internist and family nurse practitioner, Tamene blends clinical excellence with academic leadership, also serving as an assistant professor at Mercer University and a board member at Herzing University.

**Eliza Wilson '09** was appointed to the Brockton Redevelopment Authority by Mayor Robert F. Sullivan and elected to serve as chair through 2030.

**KATHLEEN DUNN '83** was featured in WGBH's Community Canvas initiative, which showcases local artwork on the station's digital mural overlooking the Mass Turnpike. Her painting *High Tide* was displayed in summer 2025, reflecting the influence of the scenic coast where she resides.



## Class notes

### 2010

**Alexander Lee Bevans '14** joined Snell & Wilmer's Tucson office as an associate in the Litigation, Investigations, and Trials practice group. Bevans brings experience in complex commercial litigation, intellectual property disputes, and government investigations, representing clients across industries from biotechnology to financial services.

**Elizabeth Chen G'14, PhD'16** was appointed the inaugural program director of the new online Master of Health Administration degree at the UMass Amherst School of Public Health and Health Sciences. A seasoned executive with leadership experience across the biotech, academic, and public sectors, Chen most recently served as secretary of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs.

**Haywood Fennell '10**, a U.S. Army veteran, was honored by the Massachusetts Cultural Council for his contributions to the arts. He is the founder of the Tri-Ad Veterans League and the Oscar Micheaux Family Theater Program Company. A published author of four award-winning books and twelve plays, Fennell also leads the Coota Literacy Program, promoting arts appreciation and literacy in the community.

**Meghan Fitzgibbons '13** was named to *Vegas Inc.*'s 2025 40 Under 40 list, which recognizes rising leaders shaping the future of Southern Nevada. A former critical care nurse from Boston, Fitzgibbons now serves in a leadership role at Intermountain Health, where she oversees operations for a specialized heart failure clinic delivering high-quality, cost-effective care.

**Anne Harvey Gross PhD'10**, senior vice president for Patient Care Services and chief nursing officer, has been named the inaugural Ning Zhao Chair of Nursing at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

**Serap Kantarci G'14** founded 17 Healers Multicultural Mental Health Organization, a Massachusetts-based nonprofit dedicated to providing affordable, culturally sensitive mental health services for immigrant families, international students, and diverse communities. In addition to counseling, 17 Healers offers workshops, psychoeducational programs, and support groups that empower individuals to build resilience, promote wellness, and maintain their cultural identity.

**Tariana V. Little '12, G'17** and her partner, **Jonas Meyer '14**, are the proud owners of EmVision Productions, a social impact media agency recently honored as the 2025 Massachusetts Microenterprise of the Year by the U.S. Small Business Administration and the 2025 Small Business of the Year in Cultural Excellence by the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce.

**David Lun '11**, a former UMass Boston student-athlete, was named head coach of the UMass Boston women's hockey team, returning to his alma mater after leading the Salve Regina Seahawks to their first winning season in nearly a decade. Lun earned NEHC Coach of the Year honors in 2025 after guiding the team to a 17-10-0 record and a conference semifinal appearance.

**Krunal Panchal G'15** published a research paper titled "Sensor Fusion Using Machine Learning for Robust Object Detection in Adverse Weather Conditions for Self-Driving Cars." The project, inspired by his work in self-driving car engineering, explores how AI can tackle real-world safety challenges.

**Nivia Piña-Medina G'10** was appointed vice chair of the Urban College Foundation Committee, where she'll help lead fundraising and community engagement efforts for Urban College of Boston. A longtime champion of bilingual and multilingual education, Piña-Medina draws on her experience as an educator, entrepreneur, and advocate for nontraditional learners. She is also co-founder of the 3 Islas Group, a portfolio of acclaimed Latin restaurants in Massachusetts.

**Kate Price PhD '19** released her memoir, *This Happened to Me: A Reckoning*, in August 2025. The book traces her journey from a childhood marked by generational trauma in rural Pennsylvania to her academic and personal transformation in Cambridge. Both a personal reckoning and a call to action, the memoir chronicles her path from survival to advocacy as she returns to her hometown to help protect vulnerable children.

**Jonas Roessel '14**, founder and managing partner of Roessel Joy, LLC, celebrated a second consecutive year of recognition on the *Boston Business*

*Journal's* Fast 50 list, which honors the fastest-growing private companies in Massachusetts. This recognition reflects Roessel Joy's impressive revenue growth from 2021 to 2024 and its commitment to delivering innovative, high-impact solutions.

**Milton Santiago EdD'14** was appointed interim president of New York City College of Technology, effective July 2025. With more than 30 years of leadership experience across multiple CUNY institutions, Santiago most recently served as interim president of Bronx Community College.

**NATHAN HUTTO '01** was promoted to chief operating officer at The Trustees. Formerly serving as chief people officer, Hutto now oversees statewide operations, including business operations, human resources, education, engagement, and stewardship. He brings a strong background in organizational leadership, having previously held dual roles as COO and CPO at Last Mile Health and served as CPO at LabCentral.





**JOE MILLER '14**, a member of the Young Alumni Council, recently proposed to his fiancée, **HULERIE MCGUFFIE '16**, in a surprise moment at the Boston Public Garden. The couple met as student athletes at UMass Boston – McGuffie as an All-American and national champion sprinter, and Miller as a lacrosse captain who also competed on the track team.

**Dudley Waddle CER'13** was appointed director of patient care services at Fountain Palliative Care in Knoxville, Tennessee. A board-certified family nurse practitioner with additional certification in hospice and palliative care, Waddle brings over a decade of clinical and leadership experience to his new role.

**Nancy Zhou '11**, owner of Silver Whisk Bake Shop, announced the bakery's first permanent location in Waltham, Massachusetts. Known for her award-winning custom cakes and inventive confections inspired by her Chinese American heritage, Zhou has built Silver Whisk into one of Boston's most beloved dessert destinations. The new location opened this past fall, offering pre-booked pickups, weekly pop-ups, and even more creative flavors.

## 2020

**Akiba Abaka '20** was appointed interim executive director of the National Center of Afro-American Artists in Roxbury, Boston's premier institution for Black and African diasporic arts and culture. A celebrated theater producer and arts administrator, Abaka was handpicked by the board to lead the center into its next era.

**Rifat Canca '23** co-owns Lazuri Taqueria and Chicken n' Pizza with his brother and shares ownership of Lazuri Cafe with his father, Ziya, as part of his family's growing group of halal restaurants in Allston. The group operates four neighboring eateries whose mission is to expand halal dining options in Boston while fostering a welcoming community space that celebrates their Turkish heritage.

**Ken Casey '21**, frontman of the Dropkick Murphys, traveled to Ukraine as part of a humanitarian aid convoy. The Dropkick Murphys raised funds for Ukrainian aid efforts by donating 100 percent of proceeds from special merchandise sales. Casey, who also founded The Claddagh Fund in 2009, said the trip was about showing solidarity and seeing the impact firsthand.

**Melanie Garvey G'23** was named archivist at the Robert C. Byrd Center for Congressional History and Education in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. A historian and educator with over a decade of museum experience, Garvey previously served as archivist and historian for the Clarke County Historical Association in Virginia. She also teaches history and archives courses as an adjunct at Shepherd University.

**Deysi Gutierrez '21** was named coalition organizer at Partners in Democracy, a nonprofit leading democracy renovation efforts in Massachusetts and beyond. In this role, Deysi builds and manages partnerships with community and advocacy organizations across the state.

**Kamala Kiem PhD'23** was appointed dean of undergraduate student life at Columbia College and Columbia's School of Engineering and Applied Science. She joined Columbia from Clark University, where she served as associate provost for student success and dean of students. Kiem brings more than two decades of experience in higher education, with a focus on equity, student engagement, and academic policy.

**Norma Marotta G'24** was named the director of community relations at The Branches Assisted Living in North Attleboro, Massachusetts. Marotta began this new chapter just months after graduating with her master's degree in management of aging services from UMass Boston's Gerontology Department.

**Zenobia Morrill PhD'21**, a critical-liberation psychologist and professor, was recently featured on the *Mad in America* podcast, where she discussed reimagining psychology to challenge mainstream perspectives and promote social justice. Morrill's work centers on the psychotherapy process, ethical practice, and expanding the stories psychology tells about distress and healing.

**Keelin Severtson G'20** was named the assistant coach for Brandeis University volleyball. Severtson previously coached at Macalester College, helping the Scots achieve their best conference finish in two decades, and spent four seasons at Albion College, where she guided multiple all-conference and all-region honorees.

**Sean Terrill G'21** joined the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries in February 2025 as a habitat restoration specialist in the Fisheries Habitat Program. Previously a marine ecologist with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Terrill conducted ecological research and field studies across marine and freshwater environments. In his new role, Terrill supports planning, permitting, and monitoring efforts for collaborative restoration projects throughout Massachusetts, drawing on his extensive field experience in aquatic habitat restoration across New England.

**Milton Valencia '21**, criminal justice editor at *The Boston Globe*, has been selected for the 2025 cohort of ProPublica's prestigious Investigative Editor Training Program. He joins a national group of 13 journalists receiving intensive training and mentorship to strengthen investigative reporting in newsrooms across the country. At the *Globe*, Valencia oversees coverage of crime and public safety and has led impactful reporting teams, including the Pulitzer Prize-winning coverage of the Boston Marathon bombings.