

{Double Legacies}

Loyalty and legacies

Firefighters share family career paths and alumni legacies

BY SANDE SNEAD ('82)



Loyalty and legacy are words that come to mind when describing five dedicated Richmond firefighters who all hail from the same alma mater. David Griffin, Kevin Knight, Kim Roberts, Chris Davis and Michael Oprandy work at different stations around the city, but they have a number of things in common — many come from a family legacy of firefighters as well as a legacy of Dukes.

Both Lt. Michael Oprandy's father and brother are in the firefighting business, but check out the purple blood running through the Oprandy family veins: Oprandy ('02), his brother, one of his sisters, his wife, her sister, her brother and his wife are all JMU grads.

Likewise, Chris Davis' ('76) grandfather was a police officer, and his father was a firefighter, so his career path was pretty clearly

defined. So was his college choice. Four of his seven sisters graduated from JMU. His daughter, Heather Davis ('10), is a junior at JMU.

Kim Roberts ('01) is a fourth-generation firefighter. Her great-grandfather was a New York City firefighter, and her grandfather and father were New Jersey firefighters. "I've always known I wanted to be a firefighter," she says, "but I still wanted to go to college and study different things just to be sure."

Roberts is pleased with her decision. "Every day is exciting," she says. "You never know what to expect. It's very dynamic and it feels good to know that you are helping someone almost every day."

Richmond Dukes and career firefighters Chris Davis ('76), David Griffin ('81), Kevin Knight ('99), Kim Roberts ('01) and Michael Oprandy ('02) hail from families of firefighters.

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{Dukes' Connections}

While Kevin Knight ('99) did not follow family members into the firefighting field, he shares Roberts' passion for helping people. "My brother and I came upon an accident where a 13-year-old was hit by a car," Knight recalls. "My brother had EMT training, and he knew what to do. Then I saw the fire and rescue teams come on the scene, and I knew that's what I wanted to do for a living."

Oprandy followed a different career path. After working in the field for a few years, he was tapped to be a public information officer for the station.

But after nearly two years at a "desk job," Oprandy headed back to the field. "I was one of those little boys who dreamed about fire trucks and being a fireman," he says, "but I'm one of the few who actually did it."

Same for David Griffin ('81). It was the allure of the big red truck and being able to drive really fast that drew him in. "I'm suffering from the Peter Pan syndrome and never want to grow up," he says.

Unlike what is depicted on television, Richmond firefighters seldom while away hours at the station. Roberts and many firefighters work three 24-hour shifts a week. A typical day begins with a shopping trip for lunch and dinner supplies. Next, firefighters clean the station from top to bottom, eat lunch, then engage in training or driving around the district to patrol and learn about different areas — when not on calls.

Because she works at Station 1, which is a busy station at 24th and Broad Streets, Roberts' team may receive as many as 12 to 14 calls during a busy day.

After 28 years on the job, Davis can honestly say, "This is the best job I've ever had."

It's the only job he's ever had. Although he graduated with a degree in business administration, times were tough in the mid-'70s. "I was trying to get a job in business, but nobody was hiring. My dad said, 'You ought to try the fire department.' I've been here ever since."

While Davis has found the job rewarding, he admits it's high stress, too. The biggest fire Davis tackled was when Benedictine High School's 75th-anniversary events were interrupted in 1986 by a five-alarm fire that destroyed the school's upper floors. "It's very emotional, and you see things you shouldn't have to see," he says. "Still, I can't imagine doing anything else."

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALISON COOPER ('93)

Work hard, play hard

Alumni groups raise money, network and share the Purple Pride

Fort Lauderdale Chapter

Fort Lauderdale Alumni Chapter members held their first event in March. More than 40 area alumni gathered for a cocktail party at the home of chapter president John Torregrosa ('90) to kick off the chapter with some Purple Pride. Want to join this chapter or volunteer? E-mail ftlauderdalechpt@alumni.jmu.edu.

Hartford Alumni Chapter

The Hartford Dukes hosted a tour of the Thomas Hooker Brewery in March. Area alumni spent the day learning how beer is made, sampling the brews and mingling with fellow Dukes.

Jacksonville Spirit City

Jacksonville, Fla., was recently named a JMU Spirit City. Dukes in the area hosted a kickoff event in March and plan

to paint northeast Florida and southern Georgia purple and gold.

Los Angeles Alumni Chapter

Los Angeles Dukes have raised nearly \$1,000 by participating in charity walks since recently re-establishing an active alumni chapter. To get involved in rebuilding this chapter, e-mail chapter president Ted Yeschin ('00) at lachpt@alumni.jmu.edu.

Richmond APN

The Richmond Alumni Professional Network hosted its third networking dinner in April. Virginia Lt. Gov. — and JMU parent — Bill Bolling ('09P) presented the keynote address. Bolling is the father of Kevin Bolling, who graduated May 9.

More than 50 Dukes heard the lieutenant governor speak, and alumni enjoyed an evening of networking. To join the

Richmond APN, contact Brandon Hedrick at hedricb@nationwide.com.

Tidewater Alumni Chapter

Tidewater Chapter President Alison Cooper ('93) says that area Dukes celebrated and networked at the Third Thursday Happy Hour events in



Tidewater Chapter President Alison Cooper ('93) and Kelly Woodruff ('94) have fun at a Tidewater's Third Thursday Happy Hour.

March and April at Norfolk's 626 Press and Virginia Beach's Gordon Biersch. To volunteer for a leadership position with Tidewater Dukes, e-mail tidewaterchpt@alumni.jmu.edu. 

* If you are interested in getting involved with a JMU alumni group visit www.jmu.edu/alumni to find a chapter, Spirit City or Dukes Around the World group in your area. Don't see an alumni group near your area? E-mail Stephanie Hamson, alumni chapter coordinator, at hamsonsk@jmu.edu to start a new group.

WHO'S IN THE FAMILY?

Some JMU alumni groups are about more than the city you live in. Check out the list of nonregional alumni groups:

■ **BLACK ALUMNI CHAPTER** ■ **CHEERLEADING DUKETTES** ■ **MADISON EQUALITY** ■ **MADISON RUGBY** ■ **MARCHING ROYAL DUKES** ■ **NURSING** ■ **ORL/RA ORIENTATION** ■ **SGA** ■ **STUDENT AMBASSADORS** ■ **UREC ALUMNI**

Are you part of the Purple and Gold Nation? Check out the most up-to-date list of alumni groups at www.jmu.edu/alumni/involved/groups.shtml