

SPECIALREPORT

Timeless Madison connections

Consider the role alumni play in assuring the continuity of Madison BY ANDY PERRINE ('86)

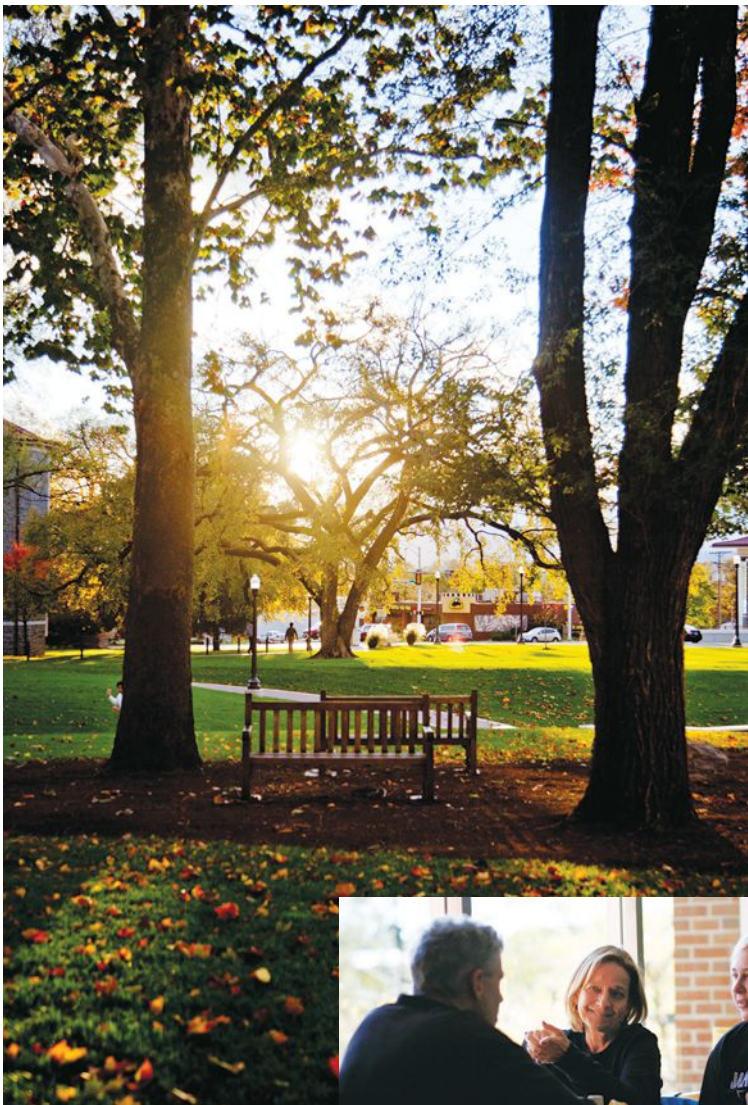
For any of you who graduated during the 1980s, just turn the page now.

Really, stop reading before you get to the part where I reflect on my student years at Madison; it only will make you uncomfortable.

This fall, during the celebration of the James Madison University Alumni Association Centennial celebration at Homecoming, I reflected on my time as a student at Madison. I'm not typically nostalgic, but that's what you do during anniversaries — you reflect.

I arrived as a freshman in the early '80s, a cool time, I thought. The Talking Heads were my favorite band, people had fabulous hair and fashion was slick. My world seemed fast and ultramodern to me. In fact, everything was beginning to resemble the futuristic vision of society depicted in the movie version of Orwell's *1984*, released during the quaint and long ago 1950s.

Speaking of the 1950s, at Homecoming during my freshman year I clearly remember seeing alumni from the '50s walking bemusedly around campus marveling at all the shiny new buildings. Poor shuffling oldsters, I thought smugly; they had no idea how connected and wired my 1981 world was. I cranked The Head's *Life During Wartime* on my cassette Walkman and contemptuously whistled the theme to *The*



JMU students and alumni have helped create Madison traditions for 100-plus years and are an key part of the success of the Madison Experience.



Madison Experience and leave hopefully as better people, prepared to come to grips with the problems that are out there. I don't have any doubt that that sense of contribution is just going to be magnified in the future."

Andy Griffith Show as they walked by. I was hilarious.

Here's when my happy memories hit me like a stone ricochet: It suddenly occurred to me that I am as old to this year's freshmen as those 1950s alumni were to me then. Ouch. Immediately my ego switched into full defense mode searching for ways in which I might appear cool in some way to an 18-year-old freshman. Despite my best efforts I failed. Or, as an 18-year-old might simply say today, "Fail."

Despondent I picked up a copy of the Fall 2011 edition of the excellent student magazine, *port & main* — a great source for discovering what's cool with students. The cover story was an interview with the soon-to-be-retired President Linwood H. Rose reflecting on his 36 years at JMU. In it the interviewer

asks him, "What's JMU's biggest contribution?" He responds, "In a word it's our graduates. It's not so much the institution as a physical entity. It's the students who go through the

'In a word it's our graduates. It's not so much the institution as a physical entity. It's the students who go through the Madison Experience and leave hopefully as better people.' — JMU PRESIDENT LINWOOD H. ROSE

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Still in reflection mode I considered the president's idea. While I always have felt connected to other alumni in a somewhat vague sense of having shared a common positive experience, it never occurred to me that collectively we represent an extension of the university's community ethos through time and geography. All of us — no matter how long ago we graduated and how far from Harrisonburg we settled — are a continuum streaming from campus into the world carrying a bit of it with us.

I recently chatted with JMU Alumni Association President Jamie Jones Miller ('99) about the alumni centennial. I asked her, "Much is said about the unique culture of closeness at JMU. Students comment all the time on how they love the feeling of JMU. Is this a legacy built by alumni?" She replied, "My husband works at another university where this sort of culture is completely missing. I believe a lot of credit should go to the admissions office for admitting a particular type of student. But it's really what we do while we're students. It's a giant community; and the more connected you are, the more you expand it."

As we head into a rare occasion at Madison, Dr. Rose's idea and Jamie Miller's comments carry even more potency. This spring, the university will select a new president — an event that has happened only five times



Students and alumni share and grow Madison connections through campus traditions, lifelong friendships, faculty interactions and shared memories.



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— JAMIE JONES MILLER ('99), JMU Alumni Association president

during Madison's nearly 104-year history. As the transition in leadership is made, consider the role alumni play in assuring the continuity of JMU culture. When you think of it in this way, what we did as students and are doing as alumni may be the fullest expression of why Madison matters and why it must persist.

This links us all in a meaningful way.

I didn't know it back in 1981, but I was glimpsing my future self walking by when those 1950s graduates passed me on campus at Homecoming. Hopefully freshmen today don't feel the same way about me as I walk by seemingly out-to-lunch. But if they do, it's OK. Some day they will come to know the incredible Madison connection we share.

In this issue of *Madison* you can read about and see images of the events on campus this past Homecoming that celebrate the 100th anniversary of the alumni association. No matter how much time has passed since your days as a JMU student, I hope you see yourself in the celebration. Sure, campus looks different, and so do the students. Times change, after all. So I think of it in this way: Heraclitus said, "You cannot step twice into the same river; for other waters are continually flowing in." While he was correct that everything changes, as alumni we all passed through the same stretch during an important time in our lives, and we will forever flow from Madison.

