

JMU's new first lady brings unique skills and expertise to her role as a volunteer in the Madison community

A passion for people and relationship building

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DIRECTOR OF THE JMU CENTER FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Mary Ann Alger's eyes light up when she talks with students, professors and community entrepreneurs who are thrilled to tell their startup story to an eager listener.

At a Friday Fusion event, 12 JMU students gather to explore their own business ideas and to meet JMU's new first lady. Friday Fusion events invite collaboration among student innovators, inventors and entrepreneurs. For two hours, conversations spark from one aspiring entrepreneur to another, "What is your idea?" "How do you make money?" Together, they share their successes and failures. Alger helps the students discover options for growing markets and inexpensive resources. The animated entrepreneurs depart, exchanging contact information and planning next steps to help realize their dreams.

At the 2012 College of Business Venture Creation Business Plan Competition more than 75 sharply dressed students, professors and alumni gather in the Montpelier Room of East Campus Dining Hall. Animated voices fill the banquet room as alumni greet old friends, student teams huddle with their mentors in final preparation and newcomers are introduced to others who love the thrill of entrepreneurship. A buzz of excitement stirs the crowd each time a local celebrity enters — former JMU presidents Linwood Rose and Ronald Carrier and then Mary Ann Alger. College deans, faculty members, and students' families and friends greet Alger and the former presidents and then sit with their favorite student teams.

Joining local entrepreneur Keith May and attorney Michael Drzal, Mary Ann Alger takes her seat at the judges' table. She is in her element.

Alger graciously shares her expertise in business, her eye for opportunity and her passion for people. "I am very interested in helping all students become productive citizens after graduation and helping them experience the best of what JMU has to offer while they are here," she says.

And she is proving it. Alger is meeting student entrepreneurs in their classrooms, exploring business strategies with professors and engaging alumni who are investing their time, money and talents in JMU. Andrew Mortillo ('14), a junior psychology major, created the publication, *Life Lessons from JMU Professors*, featuring advice from JMU faculty members. His maga-

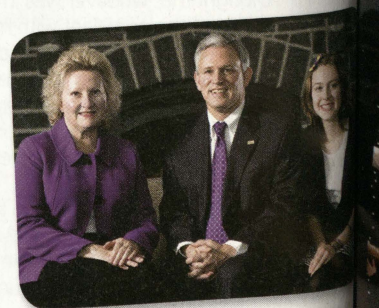
zine shares JMU stories through the experiences of several JMU professors. "Mrs. Alger gave me a better sense of direction and brought up issues that I had not thought of," says Mortillo.

Alger's advice emanates from experience. She brings a wealth of business experience and entrepreneurial passion to the Madison community. After earning a B.S. degree in international business and Spanish from Auburn University, she launched a professional career in international and corporate banking. A Florida native, she pursued her love for business and earned an M.B.A. in international finance from the University of Miami. Fluent in Spanish, she worked in international banking and then spent several years as a consultant performing business valuations throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

Alger then moved into the venture capital space and made investments in the renewable energy/energy efficiency sectors in Mexico and South America. When her family moved from the Washington, D.C., area to Ann Arbor, Mich., she naturally gravitated toward teaching at the University of Michigan business school and consulting for early-stage, technology-based companies. Alger is a founding board member of the Great Lakes Entrepreneurs Quest, an annual statewide business plan competition and entrepreneurial training network. She also served as an adviser to the Wolverine Venture Fund, a \$6-million student-run investment fund at the University of Michigan business school.

Since arriving on campus, Alger has been eager to listen, learn and contribute. "JMU is a wonderful and high-spirited place with much to offer," she says. "I have been particularly captivated by the quality of students, faculty and staff. There are many smart and hard-working people here who are pursuing excellence every day. They inspire others to that work ethic. Moreover, I am impressed by

"Working with students and professors, Mary Ann Alger brings warmth and grace in her role as first lady," says business professor Carol Hamilton.





the quantity and quality of daily activities on campus. Many days I have to pick and choose from among several options. I often chuckle that I have been busy all day with meetings and events, but have put only five miles on my car!"

Mary Lou Bourne, director of the JMU Office of Technology Transfer, welcomed Alger to campus by inviting her to lunch. To their delight the pair discovered a common interest — entrepreneurship. Conversations led to growing connections that formed a business network of people and knowledge in the startup space. Technology transfer staff assist in moving JMU innovations and intellectual property to commercialization. Alger's previous banking and investment experience filled a missing link for this network.

Bourne then reached out to me, as director of the College of Business Center for Entrepreneurship, and Joyce Krech, director of the Shenandoah Valley Small Business Development Center, to join in planning the network. We recognized the synergies of a JMU professional network to promote innovation, business development, job creation, entrepreneurship and career mentoring. The Madison Business Network emerged. More than 60 JMU faculty and staff members attended the 2013 Madison Business Network Kickoff event.

Serial entrepreneur John Rothenberger ('88) also recognizes Alger's successful track record in business development and higher education. He asked her to join the JMU Center for Entrepreneurship Advisory Board. "I am happy to welcome Mary Ann to our team," he says. "She is passionate about entrepreneurship and has chosen this as one of her main initiatives to support." The goal of these eight successful entrepreneurs/alumni is to lead the Commonwealth of Virginia with excellence in undergraduate entrepreneurship education.

Nick Langridge ('00, '07M), vice president of advancement for JMU, has seen Alger's passion for relationship building firsthand. "Mary Ann is a systems-builder with a strategic view," says Langridge. "She has demonstrated a clear interest in actively engaging with constituents on and off campus. Such engagement is key

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- MARY ANN ALGER, JMU first lady

to stimulating growth in our volunteer ranks and ultimately leads to investment in JMU's future."

Alger's engagement within the Madison campus extends to the local business community as well. "We have been warmly welcomed, and it has been easy to get involved and to make friends," she says. "I have been impressed by the widespread civic pride and efforts to continue building the community."

She serves on the Advisory Council of the Shenandoah Valley Small Business Development Center, which supports business development in a seven-county area. "Mary Ann is a welcome addition to our team," says Krech, SVSBDC director. "She played the role of investor in a recent client meeting, and her observations and questions helped the owner re-imagine the potential and direction for the business. She is an important member of our business community in the valley."

JMU President Jon Alger shares her commitment to the local area and economy. The couple participated in the first Harrisonburg Startup Weekend, April 5-7. Mary Ann Alger's tireless efforts in campus and local initiatives are infusing renewed energy into entrepreneurship, innovation and business development — vitalizing partnerships of education, business and government.

Her professional and personal pursuits clearly show that Alger relishes a challenge and likes to see results. An avid sports fan, Alger already bleeds purple, and she and her family are seen regularly at numerous athletics events cheering on the Dukes. In her spare time, she enjoys a brisk walk or a game of tennis. Alger also loves music — an integral part of the Alger family. A gifted pianist, she has accompanied choirs, vocalists and instrumentalists since she was a teenager. She, Jon and their daughter, Eleanor, enjoy singing, and the family regularly attends Eleanor's choral and musical theater performances.

"We are very happy with the public schools and the array of quality course offerings and high-impact teachers," says Alger. She volunteers at her daughter's school and is a member of the advisory board for the Shenandoah Valley Children's Choir, a nationally acclaimed program based at Eastern Mennonite University.

As Alger settles into her role as first lady of the JMU community, she is focused on nurturing relationships. "As a volunteer, I don't have a job description, so thankfully I can create a role for myself that advances the university's goals. Relationship building is a priority among students, alumni and other JMU friends and organizations, which serve and interact with JMU. I will continue to devote many hours to outreach and cultivating relationships that will benefit the university."

The Algers enjoy working together as a team to align their professional interests and gifts with a single vision. "Jon and I have always supported each other's careers, but I must say that this is the first time we have been in the same workplace, and I love it," she says. "We are in the same boat and rowing in the same direction. We are both working to advance James Madison University and to nurture internal and external relationships. Our daughter enjoys being part of the team as well."

"Jon and Mary Ann seem like the perfect power couple for JMU," says Paul Holland ('82), who hosted the Portola Valley, Calif., event of the "Why Madison?" Presidential Listening Tour. Holland is a general partner with Foundation Capital, one of the leading venture capital firms in the United States. "Jon's background in school administration and Mary Ann's experience with entrepreneurship is a terrific fit," Holland says. "They are a perfect combination for JMU coming into the 21st century as we attempt to build a student body that is both strong in traditional skills and strong in skills needed for today's entrepreneur."

Students are already buzzing about the next Friday Fusion event to be hosted by Alger. She has invited students to meet at the president's home. "Really? The President's home?" students inquire. Their eyes widen and they quickly key the date into their iPhones. It is a new world, in more ways than one.

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