

# Alumni *for* Life



## A family affair

Brothers behind Crabfest bring JMU family together

BY SARAH CHASE ('17), alumni relations coordinator

Every year, the Richmond and D.C. (MetroDukes) alumni chapters host their biggest scholarship fundraiser—Crabfest. Alumni from all stages of life gather to hang out with friends and family, feast on good food, compete in a cornhole tournament and enjoy the company of their fellow Dukes.

It's one of the most laid-back and enjoyable experiences for many alumni, but the effortless feel of this event wouldn't happen without the hard work of numerous volunteers, chapter leaders and event sponsors. In particular, two brothers are monumental in coordinating the event. In fact, the brothers have been coordinating Crabfest for more than 25 years. Meet Sam ('91) and Mike ('94) Jones.

Sam and Mike both decided to attend JMU and major in accounting after falling in love with the community and the Shenandoah Valley. "It was the perfect distance from our home in Annandale, Virginia," Mike said. "We weren't too far if something happened, but we also weren't close enough for mom and dad to pop in unannounced. Plus, everyone there was so friendly, and they still are. It was hard not to like JMU."

After graduating, Sam and his wife, Mary ('91), settled in the D.C. area and quickly



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— SAM JONES ('91)

plugged into the MetroDukes Alumni Chapter. The young couple felt chapter events were a great way to connect with fellow Dukes but didn't always offer opportunities to involve the whole family. From the desire to create a family-friendly event inclusive of all Dukes, past, present and future, the idea of Crabfest sprang into existence.

The idea was modeled after a similar gathering put on by West Virginia University. The Jones' older brother, Jimmy, graduated from WVU and had attended

**(Above): Hundreds of alumni attend the Richmond Crabfest. (Left): Sam ('91) and Mike ('94) Jones prepare a tray of steamed crabs for the feast.**

an alumni cookout event he felt accommodated everyone. "After picking their brains at WVU, we made a few tweaks and decided to have our first one in 1995," Sam said. "It's grown ever since."

From its debut with 89 people the first year, Crabfest has grown to an average attendance of 338.

Each year, the event changes slightly, depending on the location and activities planned for the day. However, the food is a given. Feeding over 300 people is no small feat. It's a group effort by the local alumni chapter leaders, the Office of Alumni Relations and the Jones family to coordinate all of the food and event logistics.

Over the years, the Jones brothers have created a spreadsheet to help track and inform food ordering. Although it has become a well-oiled machine, it took awhile for the brothers to perfect their system. Remembering their first year, Mike mentions that they over-estimated how many crabs they would need and ended up with several bushels left over. "I think we ended up releasing the remaining crabs into the water source at our location."

In addition to figuring out food quantities, the brothers provide the necessary equip-

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ment to cook everything. Mike even has a shed to house everything for Crabfest. “It got to the point where we had too much equipment in our garage, so my wife told me I needed a shed just for Crabfest,” Mike said.

Both the brothers’ wives and children have been integral to making Crabfest happen. From loading and unloading equipment, cooking the food, serving people, collecting trash and cleaning up, the day is always a family affair.

As the event has grown, the number of volunteers who help to make the day happen has also grown. “Initially it was just our families and chapters who helped out, but now there are other volunteers and sponsors who make it possible,” Sam said. “So many people share in it now.”

Through the combined efforts of chapter events like Crabfest, the MetroDukes and RVA alumni chapters have been able to award 38 students one-time scholarships, totaling approximately \$59,500, over the last seven years.

While the event certainly supports scholarships, the

**(Right): While the crabs cook, Ethan (Mike’s son), Mike (‘94) and Sam (‘91) pause for a picture. (Below): Four generations have made Crabfest a Jones family affair.**

Joneses keep hosting because of their motivation to serve the JMU family and help fellow Dukes along the way. “It’s a chance for people to connect with the university,” Sam said. “The purpose of Crabfest is to bring the JMU family together.”

Both Sam and Mike have fond memories of their time at JMU and both regularly attend football games with their family and alumni friends. “It’s like a big family,” Mike said. “When I run into someone and they say they went to JMU, I feel an instant connection. I’m willing to do anything for them. I think we all think that about each other.”

These remarks speak to the hearts of many Dukes, but it takes special brothers to create so many meaningful Crabfest memories over the past 25 years.

Mark your calendars and join RVA Crabfest on June 8 and the MetroDukes Crabfest on Oct. 5.



Creating a legacy

BY ERIC BOWLIN (‘02), Alumni Association president

I recently watched a video of a high-school senior as she finds out that she was accepted into JMU as part of the Class of 2023. It made me smile, watching her running and screaming around her house, jumping up and down with her parents as they celebrate this accomplishment in her personal and academic journey. I showed the video to my Future Dukes, Ainsley (Class of 2031) and Parker (Class of 2034), and thought back to when I received my acceptance letter. There was no Twitter to join in on the #JMU02 hashtag back then, but I’ve thoroughly enjoyed seeing all the recent #JMU23 tweets from high schoolers who are so thrilled about getting into their first-choice university.

Family legacy is an important part of the Madison Experience. The shared history created by having an alumni parent or grandparent creates a unique bond with JMU and the campus.

“Family legacy is an important part of the Madison Experience.”

My kids have grown up as JMU football season ticket-holders, and they know what it means to bleed purple.

If you are a JMU alum and have your own high-school Future Duke, I want to invite you to join us for Legacy Family Days,\* June 20-21. Presented jointly by the JMU Alumni Association and Office of Undergraduate Admissions, Legacy Family Days is designed for parents/grandparents and students to help navigate the college admissions process. All rising high-school students and their alumni family member(s) are invited to attend.

Our first Legacy Family Days event in 2018 was a rousing success, as students and their families received an insider look at the college admissions process and heard a panel of experts provide a holistic view of college admissions. This year’s event will have two separate tracks—one for ninth- and 10th-grade students and another for 11th and 12th graders.

I hope you’ll bring along your Future Duke and join us for Legacy Family Days. I’ll be there and look forward to meeting you and your family!

\*Participation in Legacy Family Days has no bearing on a candidate’s admission to the university. The event is intended to be a valuable experience for families engaged in the college search and application process.