

# An Inspirational Return Home

## WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SPEAKER SERIES

Dr. Miriam "Duchess" Harris '87, P '25 felt both nervous and excited as she stepped onto the Canterbury campus and the memories started flooding back. "My mind is exploding! This is remarkable," she said. "Seeing the students and trying to reimagine myself in these seats feels like a very long time ago in some ways but also feels very familiar. I feel so connected."

A highly accomplished academic, author, and legal scholar, Duchess is a professor of American Studies at Macalester College in Saint Paul, Minnesota. She was chosen to receive Canterbury's Thomas J. Sheehy III Distinguished Alumni Award, which was presented to her during Alumni Weekend in June.

While students typically hear from "Saints on the Hill" at School Meeting, this time, it was a "Saint Beyond the Hill" as Duchess participated in our Women's Leadership Speaker Series this past April, part of the School's ongoing 50 Years of Coeducation celebration. Sharing her experiences from her time on the hilltop to college life to her professional career, she started by telling students three things she knows now that she didn't in 1987.

"The first thing I know now is that being part of this Canterbury community meant that I was going to succeed in whatever I did," Duchess explained. "The fact that you are a part of this and are being nurtured by these people—I can tell you with tremendous confidence that things are going to work out for you."

She continued: "The second thing I learned is you can't let people put a ceiling on your sky. And the final thing is one of my personal favorites—perfection is the enemy of the good. Sometimes you need to just do it and get it done."

Duchess has certainly gotten it done during an accomplished career as an educator and advocate for social justice and equity. At the University of Pennsylvania, she was the first Black woman to serve as Student Body President at an Ivy League institution. She earned a Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Minnesota and a Juris Doctor from the Mitchell Hamline School of Law in Saint Paul while taking night classes with three children at home. And in 2021, she was appointed to the board of The Kamala Harris Project, a collective of scholars who will track all aspects of Kamala Harris' tenure as the nation's first woman of color to serve as Vice President of the United States.

So she was speaking from experience when she advised students to get out of their comfort zone as they grow and learn. "I would encourage you to try the things that feel challenging," Duchess told them. She did just that during her time at Canterbury. Among her many roles were Sacristan, Proctor, Editor of *Cantuarian* and *Tabard*, Editor-in-Chief of *Carillon*, Debate Club President, Drama Society Stage Manager, and member of Student Government, Social Service, Photography Club, Choral Club, and Chapel Singers.



She also urged students to seek out mentors. "You will be surprised at how open people will be to mentoring because it fills them up so much. When my friends back home said, 'You're going to Connecticut...why?' I answered, 'Because this sounds wonderful! Because it fills me up!' And it really does."

Following her talk, Duchess sat in on a Q&A with Canterbury's Board of Trustees, toured the campus, met with the Academic Committee and other staff members, and chatted with students and faculty on the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Council. The visit reminded her just how much she loved being a Saint. "It is infectious here; the enthusiasm, the excitement, all of it," she said. "The academics here are so strong; it is enviable. I wish all young people in America would get the kind of education you get here."

As her weekend on the hilltop drew to a close, she perfectly summed up the ethos of her alma mater. "This is a mission-oriented space, a way of life, which is different from a job—and I think that is why you get this great vibe. What you feel here is that people believe in this," she explained. "It feels very twenty-first century; it feels like exactly where we should be. That makes this place exciting, the kind of place I want to tell people about!"

## SAVING THE WORLD IT'S IN THEIR JOB DESCRIPTION

Canterbury students leave the hilltop ready to make a difference in the world, but these and other alumni in the environmental and sustainability sectors are taking it a step further—they are helping to *save* the world.

From environmental law, advanced building technology, and innovative inventions to community resilience, ocean exploration, and conservation, these passionate Saints have found ground-breaking and creative ways to protect the environment, foster sustainability, and preserve the future health of our planet.

We hope their stories on the following pages will inspire you to join in these ongoing efforts so vital to us now and for generations to come...

SAVING THE WORLD  
IT'S IN THEIR JOB DESCRIPTION (CONTINUED)



## Karl Bourdeau '71

WASHINGTON, DC

- Principal Attorney (retired), Beveridge & Diamond PC
- Member, Advisory Boards, U.S.-China Green Energy Council, National Brownfields Association, Bureau of National Affairs *Environmental Due Diligence Guide*
- J.D., Harvard University; B.S., Muhlenberg College

A longtime environmental attorney in Washington, DC, Karl said his entry into that arena was entirely serendipitous. While his history classes at Canterbury planted the seed of an interest in government policy making, it was not until his undergraduate and graduate education that he was introduced to environmental issues and their complexity, particularly from a policy-making standpoint.

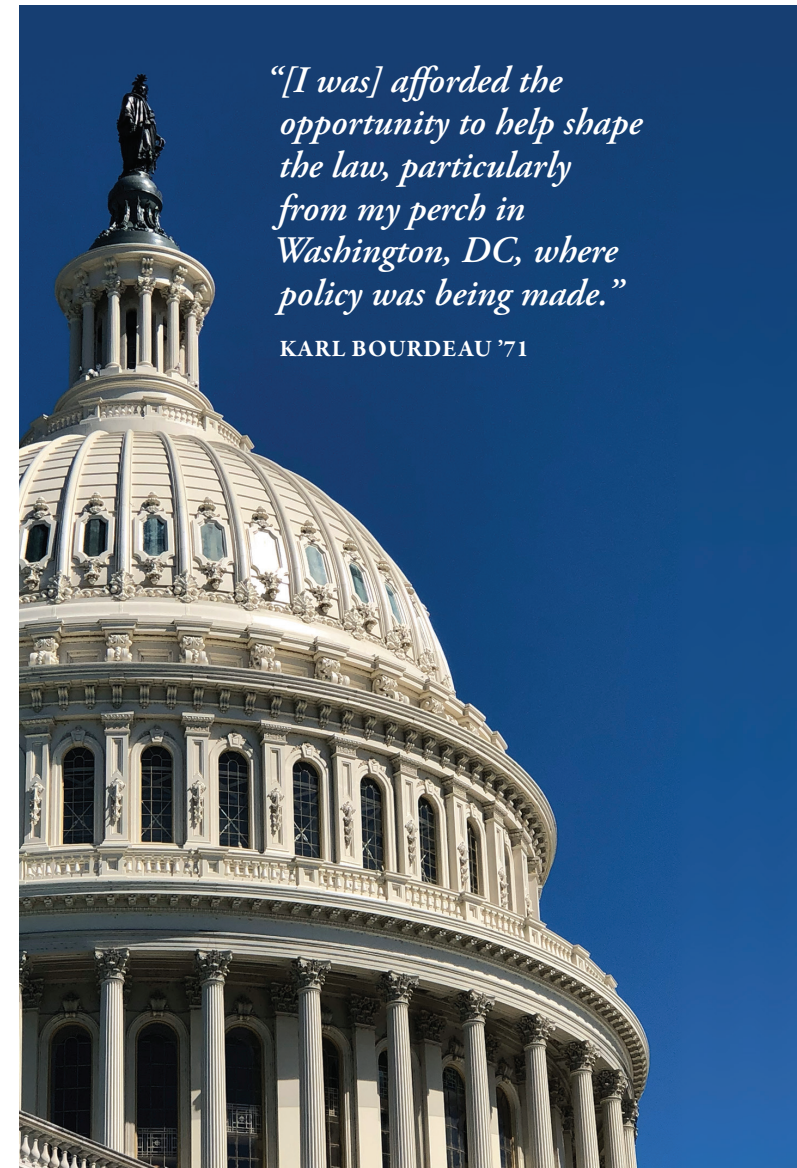
“Modern environmental law was just emerging at the time I graduated from law school. It was a whole new realm of policy making and legal matters of first impression,” he explained. “For me, it was exciting professionally to get in on the ground floor of a brand-new area of law that had tremendous societal significance. Also, environmental law necessarily involves so many different disciplines when you are either making policy or applying it. In effect, it is not just law—it is science, economics, and addressing public perceptions of health risk. It was more intriguing and intellectually appealing to me.”

Coming out of Harvard Law School, Karl joined what is today known as Beveridge & Diamond PC—a firm that addresses virtually every type of contemporary environmental legal matter—and stayed there until his retirement two years ago. “I ended up where I started. One of the most satisfying aspects of my career was that I not only participated in the evolution of environmental law in the U.S., but also assisted my firm in developing a sophisticated international practice as other countries crafted their regulatory regimes,” he said. “Being an integral part of the largest private environmental practice in the world at the advent of present-day environmental law afforded me the opportunity to help shape the law, particularly from my perch in Washington, DC, where policy was being made.”

He credits some of the values he took from the hilltop with helping him navigate those waters. “The cross-fertilization of divergent viewpoints encouraged at Canterbury provided a useful guidepost for appreciating the fundamental importance of engaging diverse stakeholder opinions to develop sound and publicly acceptable environmental policy,” Karl said. “My Canterbury education was fundamental in demonstrating the need for thoughtful examination

of a wide universe of intellectual thought and endeavor prior to reaching conclusions of potentially far-reaching consequence.”

Considering he became widely recognized as one of the most esteemed and successful environmental law attorneys in the world, that education certainly served Karl well.



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KARL BOURDEAU '71



*“Our path became very apparent when we realized all that was happening climate-wise and that there was technology available to turn that around.”*

THOMAS ESPOSITO '80

## Thomas Esposito '80 AND Joseph Novella '81

NEW YORK CITY

**Thomas Esposito '80** (above left)

- President, VRF Solutions
- Town Councilman, Town of New Milford
- Political Science & Government, Villanova University; Marketing & Political Science, Western Connecticut State University

**Joseph Novella '81** (above right)

- Partner, Chief Building Scientist, VRF Solutions
- B.A., Economics & History, Fairfield University

Through their company, VRF Solutions LLC, Tom and Joe are dramatically changing the landscape of building engineering with state-of-the-art heat pump technology.

Joe, the company's Chief Building Scientist, is excited about the possibilities. “People are starting to realize that we do not need any new technology,” he explained. “The heating and cooling technologies are there; the building products are all there. We just have to do it. It makes great financial sense to invest in energy efficiency. Conservation measures improve occupant comfort and indoor air quality while reducing or eliminating the carbon footprint of our buildings. There is no downside at all.”

And both graduates are eager to spread the word that this is a rapidly growing field with plenty of opportunities for young professionals. “We are putting in the best technology that is available today and will be for quite some time to save the planet,” said Tom, VRF's President and Director of Business Development. “This is a clean, sustainable way to heat and cool your residence, your houses of worship, your schools and universities, and your apartments and commercial buildings. It could be a great field for Canterbury students coming out of school with an eye toward sustainability and building science.”

The two have been an effective team since they first met at Canterbury more than four decades ago, and Joe said that

friendship helped lead them to the professional success they enjoy today. “Twenty years ago, I was in real estate development. Tom had a mortgage company and was doing financing for my projects. We were working collaboratively,” he recalled. “When the real estate market crashed in 2008, we both focused on what we thought was going to be the future. It was good to have each other to work with, to have that friendship, but also have the varying backgrounds of construction and finance.” Their future focus was spot-on. The company they started together has gone from installing \$3,000 single-split systems for peoples' living rooms to doing the largest electrification retrofit in New York City—the \$3.5 million Belnord Apartment Building. An already robust client list continues to grow, and Tom and Joe are entrenched in the upper echelon of the energy efficiency decarbonization community in New York City. Plus, they have the added satisfaction of making a positive difference in the world, something Tom insisted came directly from their Canterbury education.

“One of the greatest lessons that came out of the School was doing the right thing no matter what,” he said. “Joe and I were both brought up conservationists. We are skiers, scuba divers, fishermen, and hikers. We have seen the climate change firsthand in the last 40 years. Our path became very apparent when we realized all that was happening climate-wise and that there was technology available to turn that around. It was an easy decision for us to move in this direction.”

SAVING THE WORLD  
IT'S IN THEIR JOB DESCRIPTION (CONTINUED)



## Asa McKee '01

BOULDER, COLORADO

- Regional Director—West, EarthShare
- Co-Founder & CEO, Khala & Company
- Inventor, award-winning 100% plant-based reusable food wrap
- Co-Chair, Front Range Steering Committee, 1% for the Planet

Not many people—if any—can claim to invent something that replaced millions of square feet of plastic. But that is exactly what Asa did as the owner of Kahla & Company. “I actually invented a natural alternative to plastic wrap and did really well,” he said. “I started it in our kitchen just messing around, and then it snowballed. The next thing I knew, I was winning awards from Patagonia Founder Yvon Chouinard’s One Percent for the Planet, Treehugger, and all these different organizations. We literally replaced millions of square feet of plastic in our calculations! It was very cool that we had a tangible measure of our effect.”

After six years, the timing and the price were right to sell the company and move on. Asa now works for an environmental nonprofit called EarthShare. “We help businesses and organizations with their nonprofit giving,” he explained. “We are currently spearheading a project in Connecticut called Common Ground where we are working to help the state protect its open spaces and public land. I may be based in Colorado, but Connecticut is pulling me back!”

And for Asa, it was great to be back in a place that has meant so much to him throughout his life and career. A lifelong skier, he needed to find a way to continue that while at Canterbury and found the perfect solution. “I volunteered for an Adaptive Program at one of the local mountains, teaching skiing to disabled adults—and it was one of the greatest things we did. Between playing football and lacrosse, performing in theater, and working with the adaptive ski program, I have great memories of Canterbury.”

He continued skiing, even professionally, after leaving the hilltop and began to detect a difference in the experience. “Winters

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ASA MCKEE '01



were not what they used to be. I started noticing these trends and changes in the seasons, started hearing about the ozone and wondered what was really going on. It sparked my interest; I thought, ‘I need to dig into this.’ And that is how it started.”

Like many of his peers, Asa benefited from the values he gained at Canterbury. “I was allowed to discover who I was and experienced a lot of personal growth there,” he recalled. “Respect and compassion are values I brought with me from Canterbury, especially important in today’s political climate. There is no point in getting angry; you just have to listen, understand, and respect each other.”



## Joanna Wozniak-Brown '02

GROTON, CONNECTICUT

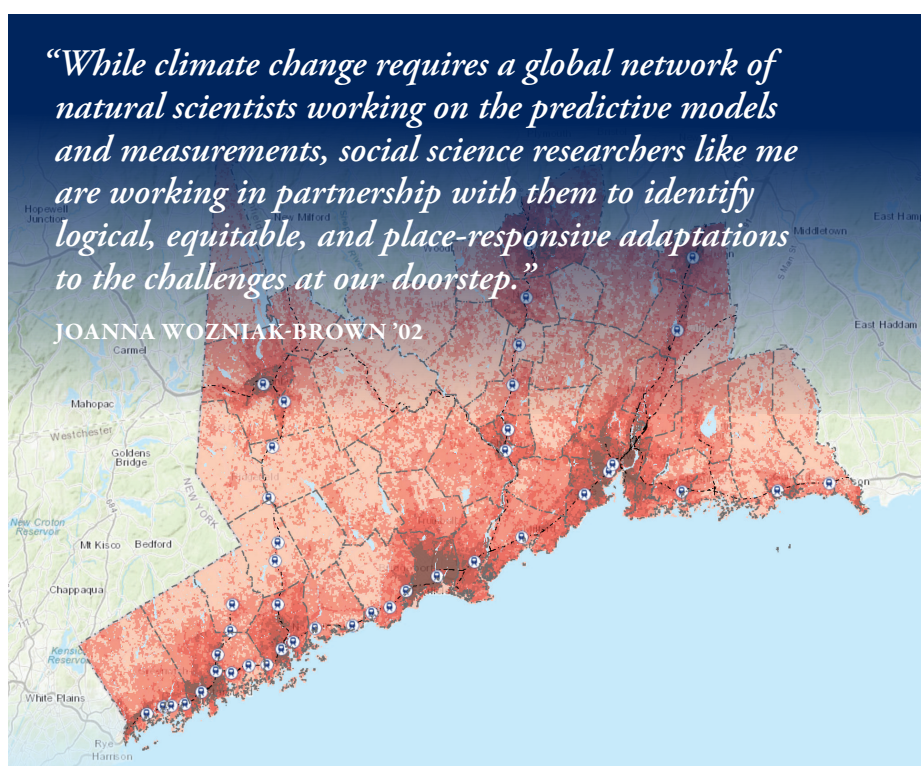
- Climate and Infrastructure Coordinator, Connecticut Office of Policy & Management
- Assistant Director of Resilience Planning, Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation (CIRCA), University of Connecticut
- Ph.D., Environmental Studies, Antioch University New England; M.S., Environmental Planning & Management, Johns Hopkins University; B.S., Political Science, American Studies, European Studies, Drew University

As Assistant Director of Resilience Planning at the Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation (CIRCA), Joanna wears many hats. She coordinates with local, regional, and state agencies; conducts climate adaptation and geography research; and provides planning expertise to CIRCA’s Resilient Connecticut project. It is a role vital to the Institute’s mission to increase the resilience and sustainability of communities vulnerable to the growing impacts of climate change on the natural, built, and human environments.

“In my capacity at CIRCA, I served on the Governor’s Council on Climate Change and the EPA’s Long Island Sound Study Equity Working Group,” she said. “While climate change requires a global network of natural scientists working on the predictive models and measurements, social science researchers like me are working in partnership with them to identify logical, equitable, and place-responsive adaptations to the challenges at our doorstep.”

She is currently deeply involved in two vital projects for CIRCA. Resilient Connecticut is a statewide climate vulnerability assessment and resilience planning project. According to Joanna, the second project, the Connecticut Environmental Justice Map, “will be a first for Connecticut. It is modeled after other states but goes a step farther with deeper community engagement and representation.” Its goal is to identify vulnerable populations that may be disproportionately impacted by programs, policies, or projects and to inform initiatives for creating healthy communities. She has been developing cutting-edge research on adaptive capacity, not just for resiliency, but changing the ways we even think about our environmental challenges.

With a Ph.D. from Antioch University New England in Environmental Studies, professional certification from the American Institute for Certified Planners, and experience as a Resiliency and Conservation Consultant under her belt, Joanna is well-equipped to make a difference in people’s lives. Her time at Canterbury helped cultivate her interest not only in environmental issues but human justice concerns as well.



“I have always been interested in the environment, particularly the complex and multi-scalar interactions between humans and the natural world,” she said. “At Canterbury, I was President of the Environmental Club and a member of a club that worked on equity, diversity, and inclusion issues. I started to learn how science and policy cannot exist in a vacuum without regard for the people both have to serve. Plus, the supportive faculty and staff who mentored me still inspire me to this day.”

Given the important work that Joanna is now doing and will continue to do in her new role as Connecticut’s Climate and Infrastructure Coordinator, you can count her among the biggest supporters of both our planet and its inhabitants.

SAVING THE WORLD  
IT'S IN THEIR JOB DESCRIPTION (CONTINUED)



*“There is a gap on the map; no data exists here right now; we do not know what is there—let’s go see it!”*

KASEY CANTWELL '06

## Kasey Cantwell '06

SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND

- Operations Chief—Expeditions & Explorations, National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
- Environmental Protection Specialist, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- M.S., Marine Affairs & Policy/Marine Geology; B.S., Marine Science & Biology; University of Miami

When she is on the job as Operations Chief at the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Kasey is truly a deep thinker. As in, 6,000 meters deep!

“Our office does exploration in the absolute purest sense,” Kasey explained. “There is a gap on the map; no data exists here right now; we do not know what is there—let’s go see it! Most of my work has been with Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs). The space that we work in—the deep sea—is typically 2,000 meters to 6,000 meters so using an ROV is best for that. We sit in the control room with 17 giant TV screens showing the video images. I prefer that to cramming my face up to a tiny porthole in a manned submersible.”

Kasey and her team have made some significant discoveries. “My favorite was an area off the southeast coast of the U.S.,” she recalled. “There was this big hole on the map, and I said, ‘There! I want to go there!’ We ended up discovering

the largest deep-sea coral habitat found anywhere in the world. At last count—we have only mapped about half of the area—it was 6.9 million acres of deep sea coral habitat. All of it is under the Gulfstream, which is arguably the most studied oceanographic feature on Earth—and we had no idea this was here! That is what I love about what I do. It is always driven by base curiosity and basic science foundations.”

Such curiosity came to Kasey at a very young age. “I have always loved the ocean. It was something I felt a strong connection to going to the beach as a child,” she said. “At Canterbury, I started to learn about coral reefs and kept following that thread. My advisor, Mr. Richardson (Science Teacher Derek Richardson), encouraged me to take more science classes and see what could be out there.” That path led Kasey to the University of Miami, where she ultimately earned a master’s in Marine Affairs and Policy/Marine Geology.

As she continues her important work, Kasey is not only having the time of her life, she is feeling completely fulfilled in her job. “I am proud that the Northeast Canyons Marine National Monument was largely created based on data that we collected. The Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument was expanded due to data we collected. There are new habitat areas that are of particular concern for species, all based on data we collected. It is incredible!”



## Chris Aldrich '07

GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT

- Director of Stewardship, Greenwich Land Trust
- Forestry Technician, OneWorld
- B.S., Natural Resources, Concentration in Sustainable Forestry Management, University of Connecticut

Chris is the quintessential outdoorsman, so his job as Director of Stewardship for Greenwich Land Trust puts him right where he has always wanted to be. “My interest in the environment was fostered by my upbringing. I was lucky to spend a lot of time outside,” he said. “Canterbury has a beautiful campus, and there is a lot of open space in the area. I was able to explore the Pratt Center and other nearby preserves, which was an important part of my journey.”

It did not take long before Chris’s career path crystalized. “I have always been passionate about open space,” he explained. “Forestry is one of my main interests, and I wanted to do something that was impactful where I could utilize those principles. Conservation is particularly important because it has such a positive effect on quality of life in an area.” After graduating from the University of Connecticut with a B.S. in Natural Resources, Chris held positions at the UConn Extension Office, working to reduce fuel loads and improve sage grouse habitat in Nevada and at the Cumberland Gap National Historic Park in the Southeastern United States, where he focused on resource monitoring and invasive species control.

In his current role, Chris is responsible for managing the Trust’s portfolio of fee-owned properties and conservation

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CHRIS ALDRICH '07

easement. “We do a lot of work centered around the improvement or installation of wildlife habitats,” he shared. “We are always looking towards future acquisition projects focusing on protecting lands with high conservation value. That is an important part of my job, and the impact is significant.”

The same could be said for Canterbury’s influence on his life and career. “I received a great education in general, but particularly from Mrs. Roffe (Science Department Chair and Director of Sustainability Cammy Roffe P ’12, ’15),” he said. “She did a wonderful job of explaining environmental issues and encouraging you to think globally. She was so passionate about it; that impacted me for sure!”

Today Chris brings that same passion to the environmental arena. “I want to continue focusing on conservation,” he said. “There is always more land to protect. We can always do a better job of stewarding the land that we do protect.”

And he had some final words of wisdom to impart: “I encourage people to be mindful; to take time to visit a preserve and go for a hike. You might discover some very rewarding things. Making sure we are preserving open space and, in turn, protecting the environmental services that they provide is key to a sustainable future.”