

# SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

## Alumnae Profile

### Anna Mack Hardison Severn '00

**Co-Owner**

**Rush Bowls, Raleigh & Durham, NC**

Born in Wilson, NC, Anna Mack Hardison's parents moved their family to Raleigh in 1989. She and her little brother Joe grew up in the capital city enjoying an idyllic time when the town was much smaller and quieter. After attending college at Carolina and living in Denver for more than a decade, this serial entrepreneur has now come back with a family of her own – and a new business just down from Saint Mary's on Hillsborough Street!

#### An Entrepreneur is Born

Dr. Mitch Hardison and his wife Marianne settled in Wilson, NC, to raise their family in the 1980s. When Anna Mack was six, the couple relocated to Raleigh so Mitch could join Boylan Internal Medicine.

"It was a wonderful time to grow up in Raleigh," Anna Mack explains. "The city was much smaller and quieter. I remember 'Alive After Five' and runs to Krispy Kreme on Peace Street, and when Second Empire came to town. People were thrilled and were like 'Wow! Raleigh's getting a real downtown restaurant!' It was a great time to be a kid."

In ninth grade, Anna Mack enrolled at Broughton High School. "It ended up being not the best fit for me," she recalls. "My mom started researching local schools since we knew a lot about the city. So, when she suggested Saint Mary's, I applied and transferred after my application was accepted. I've never once looked back."

She loved her new school from the very first moment. "It's where I met lifelong best friends Michaela Idhammar Ketpura and Wendy Aves, who were also part of the Class of 2000," she explains. "It's also where I first discovered I had great ideas and learned to be a leader."

"The Three Musketeers" – as they were known – would drive down Hillsborough to eat at the Applebee's. "We'd use up gas just cruising around, singing at the top of our lungs because there wasn't a lot else to do. Raleigh today is a much bigger city with much bigger opportunity," she says.

At Saint Mary's, Anna Mack enrolled as a day student. "Saint Mary's was a very close-knit, supportive community," she says. "I was a member of Beacon, competed on the Cross Country team, was chair of the Judicial Board, and worked in Kenan Library for my first job."

After Saint Mary's, Michaela enrolled at her dad's alma mater, UNC Chapel Hill, where she studied business and international studies and took two years of French and Japanese. "Michaela was my suitemate at Carolina, and it was wonderful to experience college with my best friend."

During college, Anna Mack planned to study abroad for a year in Tokyo. "But, then 9/11 happened and everything was shut down."

With plans changed, she took an internship in Raleigh working for College Works Painting. "The organization gives undergraduates an opportunity to build a competitive resume and gain marketable skills by teaching them how to manage their very own painting business," she explains. "I did this for two years, learning how to run my own business and building skills in business, ethics, communication, organizational management and sales."

With a firm understanding of the mechanics of leadership applicable to any profession, she managed her own projects during that time and essentially owned her own house painting business. In 2004, she graduated with a bachelor's degree in business and international studies and a concentration in Finance and Asia.

#### New Options & Life's Roller Coaster Ride

"After I graduated, I was hired at Cisco in Raleigh in tech sales where they provided a one-year training program," she recalls. "Then, I was offered a position in their Denver office."

Anna Mack worked four years for Cisco in business development, sales, and was eventually promoted to Account Manager. "Denver was where I met my future husband, Jason," she says. "He purchased a camera from me through a Craigslist ad, and the rest was history!"



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It then that Anna Mack and her best friend Michaela decided to start their own business called, "Mick and Mack." The handmade kids' clothing shop had great success, and the duo even had an online shop and mall kiosks. "We ran the business from Denver while Michaela was in Sweden, and then later after she relocated first to Denver and then Aspen."

After a few years, the girls decided to dissolve the business because each had new opportunities to explore. "I created a blog called 'Way of the Glue Gun' and also opened a craft supply store on Etsy," she says. "I ended up growing the business into a Top-10 Etsy supply shop!"

Things had been going well for Anna Mack and Jason in Denver when the unexpected happened. Her father, Dr. Mitchell D. Hardison, was on vacation with their family when he passed away, leaving everyone in shock. "In 2007, dad had left Boylan to start his own practice, which my mom managed," she shares. "After his death in September 2015, we decided to close our online store and come back to Raleigh to be close to my mom."

Anna Mack had always known she'd come back to her hometown, and despite the circumstances which had led her home, she looked forward to being back in Raleigh. "Jason had to stay in Denver for six months to sell our house," she says. "I took a position with Bronto (Oracle+Bronto) as a senior account manager while I started to get to know Raleigh again."

Unfortunately, just as things were getting to a new normal, her mother Marianne passed away. "It was already quite a roller coaster year, and it continued to be because not only did I lose my mom, I was also celebrating being newly pregnant with our first child."

Their son, Cole, arrived in early October. "He was a preemie but grew quickly over the next few months."

Anna Mack recalls that time with wistfulness. She took a few months off and during that time watched their son grow and finally leave the NICU. Then in January 2018, she and Jason created CPS Group NC. "Jason and I became partners in the business, and I left Bronto in March to go to work for LogMein to help 'pay the bills' while we began to plan our next entrepreneurial adventure."

By November, Anna Mack was fully focused on their new franchise, Rush Bowls. The idea had been born in Boulder, CO, near where Anna Mack and Jason had lived. "That's where we first discovered them. And, we decided to bring Rush Bowls to the Triangle. Our first location opened in Raleigh on Hillsborough Street in the midst of NCSU's campus," she says and laughs. "After all those years wearing Saint Mary's and Carolina light blue, suddenly there was a lot of red!"

The couple is also currently under contract for a second location in Durham near Duke University, which is set to open in early 2020 and have plans for a third that will soon be announced. "That means Duke blue – it's also the wrong color!"

In reflection, Anna Mack says, "People who are entrepreneurs like me are 'loco'. I often ask myself, "what was I thinking" when I make a big move, relocate, or open a business. We're busy people, we have our home, family, friends... But, if you're wired this way, then you never fully feel the same as when you're your own boss, building your own business, and are in charge of your own success."

As for working with her husband every day, she laughs again and says, "We're two peas in a pod. True partners; he's the only person I've partnered with who thinks exactly like me and who gets along with me always. We are eerily similar."

As an alumna, Anna Mack stays connected and engaged by attending events, coming back to campus with her friends, and making annual gifts to Saint Mary's. "I'm also interested in supporting Saint Mary's Career Night by serving on the entrepreneur's panel this fall and next spring," she says. "I want to share my 'swerve' story with the students and let them know you don't have to get a degree and do the same thing all your life. Instead, take risks, embrace change, and see where life takes you. Ride the roller coaster and jump when you're ready."

She's also excited to partner with Saint Mary's to bring her business to campus. "Rush Bowls are all-natural fruit blended extra thick and creamy bowls, to which are added nutrients, protein, juice or milk and an assortment of decadent yet wholesome ingredients. To top things off, there are crumbles of crunchy granola and a drizzle of the most delicious honey you've ever tasted!"

Saint Mary's alumnae like Anna Mack graduate with the skills, knowledge, and integrity they need for success. Whether furthering their education, pursuing professional careers, raising their families, or leading as volunteers, our alumnae are agents for positive change in their communities. Anna Mack, Jason, and Cole live in Raleigh with their three dogs Bruce, Wyatt, and Andy Stumps. Her story demonstrates the power Saint Mary's women who are resilient, resourceful, intelligent, and passionate, and nurturing, and we are grateful for the impact she's having on the world.

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