

SAINT MARY'S SCHOOL

Alumnae Profile Series

by Chelsea Ward '09

Nina Cheney '81HS

Executive Director

Andee's Army

Atlanta, Ga.

The Importance of Giving Back

Nina Cheney '81HS was born and raised in Raleigh, N.C., specifically in the Old Rex Hospital located on Wade Avenue. She attended Ravenscroft School before finding her way to Saint Mary's through personal family connections to the school.

"My grandmother, Bertha Anderson, graduated from Saint Mary's in 1923 and was a Saint Mary's girl," Nina explains.

Her other family connections to Saint Mary's include her younger sister, Elizabeth Anderson Purrington '85HS, and now, Nina's daughter, Lucy, who is a current junior boarding student at Saint Mary's.

Some of Nina's favorite memories from her time at Saint Mary's are those involving the friendships she formed with in-state and out-state students.

"It was nice to have friends from all over the North Carolina and other states. Our shared experiences were a lot of fun," she says.

As she reflects back, Nina also recalls how faculty and staff shared their own perspectives with students in and outside of class.

"Dr. Hume taught one of my history classes and he really encouraged students to relate what they were learning to the real world. There was freedom of thought," she adds. "I enjoyed having the opportunity to take college courses and the opportunity to take a deeper dive into the subjects."

As a student, Nina participated on the Saint Mary's fencing team and spent a lot of her time off campus doing community service work. It was during Nina's childhood that she learned about giving back and volunteering.

"My parents focused on the importance of giving back and showed us that volunteering was very important. That truly helped shape who I am today," she explains. "Different threads of experiences become the fabric of your life, and you create a tapestry that is really you."

A Career Devoted to Helping Others

After graduating from Saint Mary's high school program, Nina enrolled at Salem College, another women's school. After obtaining her degree, she moved to New York City (NYC) where she worked in Public Relations at PR Media H+K Strategies Affiliate.

"I oversaw several major accounts, including Frito-Lay, Proctor and Gamble, and Mastercard."



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Through her public relations work, Nina had the opportunity to become involved in many different events. "I helped organize the first James Beard Award ceremony honoring American chefs," she says and smiles.

After working seven years in Public Relations, Nina was offered the opportunity to help design and open the Creative Discovery Museum, a children's museum located in Chattanooga, T.N. She became involved in every aspect of the museum, from exhibit creation to architectural design and marketing.

"I loved the process of creating something from the beginning and leaving my imprint on something so meaningful," she shares.

After several years in Chattanooga, Nina relocated to Atlanta, Ga., to begin working on another museum project. Nina continued to focus on giving back through her profession and personal volunteerism throughout her life. She served on the Children's Museum of Atlanta board for eight years, creating the museum's main fundraiser.

"I'm also passionate about the Forward Arts Foundation," Nina adds. She says she's remained connected to the organization to this day. In 1965, the nonprofit was founded by twelve women with a mission devoted to the propelling artists living in the greater Atlanta area.

Most recently, Nina was recruited in 2017 as the Executive Director for Andee's Army, a non-profit focused on providing funding for rehabilitation and recovery to children who have suffered from brain or spinal injuries.

Continuing to Inspire

Nina believes in Saint Mary's mission and the importance of women's education, even now, 178 years after the school's founding. Through Nina's personal experience, and now her daughter Lucy's, Nina feels the impact of what a women's education can have on a family and its importance.

"There's a sweet spot for girl's education, even now," she says. "Saint Mary's is a safe place where girls can be themselves. A place that nurtures, a place to safely learn things and have a voice – to say whatever they're thinking."

In reflection, Nina has some advice for current Saint Mary's girls (including her daughter).

"I hope students stop and enjoy every moment while they're at Saint Mary's and that they take advantage of all the opportunities available at the school," she says. "Dream and think big, and everything is possible!"

She also says it's a wonderful ride along the way. "Let your journey take you to where you want to go. Treasure your friends and you can make a difference wherever you decide to be. There's value in everyone," she says.

Nina truly embodies what it means to be a servant leader and has made volunteerism her life work. She makes a difference through her profession, community participation, and her connection to Saint Mary's as an alumna and parent.

Saint Mary's alumnae like Nina Cheney '81HS 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. Nina's story demonstrates the ability of Saint Mary's women to do big things no matter where they land, and we're glad to share her story.

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