

CNR Alumni Spotlight Christine LaSala, SAS '72



What brought Christine LaSala to the College of New Rochelle was an advertisement in Time magazine in 1967 that read, as best she can recall, “If a college does not ask you for money, it is because it wants your daughter.” Chris was intrigued by that ad and, as a result, became interested in CNR. Chris attended a public high school in Aliquippa in western Pennsylvania and had never heard of CNR. Being the oldest of seven children,

Chris applied to several state colleges and universities, the University of Pennsylvania and the College of New Rochelle. She was surprised when CNR accepted her and, to her father’s dismay since she was accepted at Penn, decided to attend in the fall of 1968, never having visited the campus until the day she arrived for her freshman year. As Chris settled in at her dorm, her father walked around the campus. When he came back to her room, he told Chris “This is a very good college – all of the fathers I met are thrilled that their daughters are here”.

When asked how she would describe her four years at CNR, Chris instantly replied “on balance, I loved it”. From the very beginning of freshman year, Chris began friendships with a group of women who remain her closest friends today – sustaining is how she describes those friendships. She arrived on campus probably, in her words, a little more conservative; hence, CNR was eye opening politically. And Chris became very attached to New York City while at CNR, seizing on every opportunity to go to the city. Not surprisingly, Chris has resided in New York City for decades with her spouse Ellie Lipshitz and their adopted daughter Sophie. Chris graduated in 1972 and left CNR feeling completely comfortable, self-assured and very attached to people and she credits the institution for creating such an enriching and supportive environment.

Chris’ immediate focus upon graduation was getting an apartment in Manhattan with a classmate and a job. As a philosophy major, Chris thought it might be challenging but nonetheless pursued a job in the insurance industry. In interviews, she emphasized that, as a philosophy major at a rigorous liberal arts college, she learned how to think critically, to write well and to make convincing arguments. And it worked – she got a job. Chris believes CNR completely equipped her to enter the workforce – “there was a presumption at CNR of preparing young women to be successful in the workforce and in life” - and that gave her confidence.

Chris has over 45 years of management, client leadership and financial experience in the insurance industry as an underwriter, an insurance broker working with large corporations and public institution clients, as the president of the World Trade Center Captive Insurance Company and as a non-executive director. Currently, Chris is the Senior Independent Director of the Board of Directors of Beazley Group, a role she assumed in March 2019. Chris was appointed to Beazley's Board in July 2016, and now serves on the Nominating and Remuneration Committees. Chris retired as Chair of Willis Towers Watson North America. In that role, Chris worked closely with the leadership of Willis Towers Watson on business development and aligning WTW's global resources to deliver services and solutions to the firm's global clients.

Prior to joining Willis in early 2014, Chris was, for 10 years, President and CEO of the WTC Captive Insurance Company, a not-for-profit corporation providing liability insurance to the City of New York and over 100 private contractors. The WTC Captive led negotiations for the landmark settlement of over 10,000 environmental tort cases against the City of New York and the private contractors that undertook rescue, recovery and debris removal work after the 9/11 terrorist attack. In agreeing to serve as president of the WTC Captive, Chris came out of retirement after a long and successful career as the only woman partner of Johnson & Higgins. She was president of Johnson & Higgins New York, president of the firm's tri-state operations and served on its Board of Directors. She managed Johnson & Higgins' largest operations and provided advice to many of the firm's largest clients.

However, Chris' professional life has paralleled her work in the not-for-profit world. From her perspective, what is most connected to CNR is her multi decade commitment to the not-for-profit world. In 2001-2002, Chris was acting Head of School at the Children's Storefront, a tuition-free, independent school in Harlem, where she also served as president of the Board of Trustees from 1997 until 2013. Chris has also been very active in other not-for-profit work, including the YMCA of Greater New York, New York City Outward Bound and Classroom Inc. From 2002-2008, Chris was on the Board of Trustees of the College of New Rochelle, serving as Vice Chair in 2007-2008. More importantly, Chris has supported CNR and its students with her time, talent and treasure. When CNR faced its financial crisis in 2017, Chris was asked to rejoin the Board of Trustees. Without hesitation, she joined the Board and served again as Vice Chair, working tirelessly to save the college. Chris explained, "When I rejoined the Board, the trust was naturally in place."

Reflecting on her recent 50th reunion, Chris said, "There was a richness and fullness in talking about our lives and that can be attributed to our experience at CNR".

Christine Morrison, SAS '72
CNR Alumni Communications Committee