

ANA HEBRA FLASTER

A Member of the Rivier University Board of Trustees

Michelle Marrone
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Ana Hebra Flaster is a freelance writer, editor, and communications consultant. She strives to honor her family's story and Cuban-American culture through her writing, which has aired on NPR and been published in *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, and other publications. Ana serves on Rivier's Board of Trustees and is Chair of the Advancement Committee.

Ana was five in 1967, when her family fled post-revolutionary Cuba and found refuge in Nashua, New Hampshire. As a first-generation college graduate, she gives witness to the transformative power of education.

How were you first introduced to the Rivier community, and what prompted you to become involved?

Ana: My longtime Nashua friend, Joe LaPlante, told me about the incredible work that was going on at Rivier. My sister earned her master's in Education here, and my mother did coursework to advance her business career. We also had a family friend from Cuba who taught at the University for a while. I'd been looking for a way to give back to Nashua, and joining Rivier's Board of Trustees seemed like the perfect choice.

When you consider education as an agent for change, how do you view its role in society and the role it plays in individuals' lives?

Ana: We came here as refugees in 1967. I was five. Education was the way my generation was able to make a big leap in socio-economic status compared with where my parents began. Besides the practical impact of a good college education on a person's job opportunities, there's the massive enrichment to any life that comes from broadening the mind, expanding horizons, and nurturing a love of learning—all of which are fundamental to a liberal arts education.

You've shared that you're a first-generation college graduate. Has that contributed to your decision to support higher education?

Ana: Yes ... the road to and through college for students like me poses special challenges, so I'm specially interested in supporting that group of students. I think the University is doing a great job of reaching out to that cohort and extending support where and when it's needed.

Your Rivier University Fund donations are designated to scholarships. Why is this important to you?

Ana: My working class family could never have afforded to send me to college without generous offers of scholarships, financial aid, and work-study programs. On top of that I took out loans, worked every vacation, and my father took on an extra shift at his factory job. All these years later, it is a tremendous honor for us to help a family like ours give this life-changing opportunity to their daughter or son.

As Chair of the Advancement Committee, how can you inspire others to become involved through philanthropy?

Ana: This topic is such a personal matter and each individual should decide what works best for him or her; and even that decision will change over time. My own history of giving reflects that. I remember being floored when my alma mater sent the first donation request after I graduated. Here I was on a starting salary, paying off massive debt, and having sunk our family's treasure into the school, and yet here they were requesting more. Being a first-generation college grad, I didn't know about the tradition of donating to one's alma mater. I didn't give at first, then I gave tiny amounts, and over the years those amounts grew. Once I began giving, I gave every year. It felt like the right thing to do, given how much they had done for me. Over time I learned the crucial role that giving plays in building excellence at a liberal arts institution.

Given your perspective, how do you view Rivier and its future?

Ana: With Rivier, I see a small and transformational institution on the move, doing amazing work in so many areas, nurturing a hardworking, diverse student body, and working strategically to make every dollar it receives as impactful and useful as possible. All of this is happening and benefiting a city and region that is dear to my family and me. With this in mind, we recently shifted the majority of our budget for giving to the University. We decided it's Riv's time now, and we're excited to be a part of the forward momentum of this institution. ■