

Spider in the Spotlight

An interview series with Richmond alumni sponsored by the University of Richmond Alumni Association.
Students are encouraged to learn about the career paths of fellow Spiders and connect with the Richmond network as they get started on their own path.



Jim Detwiler, B'74

Executive Director, Packaging and Purchasing
Chanel Inc.

Leading a team of developers, engineers and purchasers in collaboration with designers and artists, Jim Detwiler, B'74, is Executive Director of Packaging and Purchasing at Chanel, responsible for packages and promotional support for one of the most famous fragrance, cosmetic, and fashion houses in the world.

What did you learn at Richmond?

I learned how to balance, how to focus, and how to set priorities. Every minute of every day I have to prioritize and determine the end game—quickly and efficiently. Richmond taught me how to be successful in today's business environment.

Can you describe what it's like contributing to a fabled brand like Chanel?

It's been an incredible experience, one that I hope will continue for many more years to come. Chanel has evolved, since I started, from a well-run family-managed business to a global powerhouse and leader in the luxury fashion, fragrance and beauty markets. We are sort of 'the Ultimate House of Luxury' and take great pride in the development and quality of our products. There are so many brilliant and creative people I get to work with that I feel it's a privilege just to be part of the team. Sometimes it feels more like a fantasy than simply working for a company.

What advice would you give current Richmond students?

Make your own decisions. Live, but know you are responsible for the consequences of your actions. Set goals and focus on them. There are many opportunities. Build collaborative relationships with professors and students. Participate. Have fun. Enjoy the experience.

How did being at Richmond prepare you for this time in your career?

In the movie *South Pacific*, I have always remembered lines from the song "Happy Talk" that says, "You gotta have a dream, if you don't have a dream, how you gonna have a dream come true?" I feel that Richmond was—and probably still is—a place where you could dream freely. You were encouraged to dream big and take some risks. You were in a safe environment that was there to help you set the foundation for your dreams and put them into motion.

Richmond allowed you to fail, but to do so in a constructive way. It helped me to learn how to fail, and to know how to recover. It taught me how to adapt to change. It taught me the life skills that even today help me to get through some very hectic days.

I know that my Richmond Business School education and Track and Field experiences helped set my life's dreams and focused me on taking actions to accomplish them. Many have been realized to date and I am still dreaming and working towards others. The foundation was set during my time at school.

Can you say something about those other dreams?

Once my career in the cosmetic and fragrance industry comes to an end, I would love to work with college track and field athletes and assist in a coaching role. I know that playing golf and fishing won't hold my attention for long as a retiree. I have always thought that it is important to give back to others as others have done for me in my life.

How do you network?

I look for every opportunity I can to build relationships. Find commonalities: I try to think critically about a way in which to start a conversation with someone so as to start the interaction and build the relationship. Listen. Ask questions. I try to remember that life is not something you get through easily all by yourself. It takes working with others to achieve anything meaningful.

What is your favorite memory of Richmond?

I ran track, so it is definitely my time on the track, with my teammates, former Head Track Coach Fred Hardy and Coaches Jordan and Reid. My mentor was All American Hurdler and Decathlete Carl Wood, who is still a good friend today.

What is your favorite thing to do when you are not working, if you are ever not working?

I am not sure I am ever not working—at least subconsciously. My favorite thing to avoid doing is reading and answering e-mail messages on weekends. The moments I enjoy most are those spent with my wife and sons, working to fulfill their dreams. I particularly enjoy supporting my children in their careers and providing opportunities to improve their lives and take them on different adventures.

Favorite song on your iPod?

I have a lot of country music stored on it. Some AC/DC, Eagles, Beach Boys, Three Dog Night and some Earth, Wind and Fire. Not sure I could pick one favorite from the entire collection. I like music with a beat!

Who is the one person – dead or alive – you would like to meet?

Jesus Christ. I want to shake his hand and thank him for saving me.

Favorite place in the world?

Anywhere near the water, particularly the New Jersey shore and the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

How do you show your Spider Pride?

The school was very good to me. And I am grateful for the scholarship assistance I received, so I feel strongly about giving back. Financial support is one of the best ways I know of to support the school and the current students. Participation in Homecoming events and Track & Field functions is always rewarding and fun. It brings back many fond memories.

What is your favorite place on campus?

The track, of course. I stopped on campus in July while en route to the beach and met a classmate at the track. I was very excited to see the new Robins Stadium and was completely blown away as to how magnificent a facility it is. Certainly a far cry from the cinder track I ran on in 1970. I am sure there will be plenty of records broken in the future and many alumni will enjoy celebrating lots of Richmond victories.

— Mike Field reports from Baltimore

Where are you headed? Visit the Office of Alumni and Career Services online at richmond.edu/oacs to get started on your path.