

SERVANT LEADER AWARD WINNER

ROB JONES '20

Executive Director, Groundwork RVA



Honors a member of the previous year's Leadership Quest class for creating impact in their community and exhibiting the attributes of a leader that serves first. Nominated and selected by their fellow classmates.

In which locality do you reside?

The city of Richmond!

What brought you here, and/or what has kept you here?

I came to Richmond when my then-wife, a born and bred Virginian, got fed up with New York City (where I was born and raised). I couldn't imagine living or raising a family in a place with no center, sidewalks, or urban fabric. Richmond had all those things, along with a history and legacy as the Harlem of the South.

Who has inspired you along your leadership journey?

I cut my teeth as a student activist at Columbia University at the height of the Free South Africa Movement in the '80s. After college, I wound up working for the Anti-Apartheid movement full-time. And yes, working there did allow me to shake hands with my ultimate hero and inspiration, Nelson Mandela, as the world celebrated his release from prison.

How has LMR helped you become a stronger and more impactful leader?

My LMR experience was nothing less than spectacular. Our 40th Anniversary (Best Class Ever) was full of engaged and powerful leaders from all walks of life. Watching my classmates struggle with ideas that were new, be vulnerable in deeply personal ways, and keep reaching out to LEARN what they didn't know was humbling.

What project(s) are you currently working on?

Groundwork RVA! Opening more space for the voices of young Black and Brown people to be heard and shape environmental conversations and work – especially around how to mitigate climate change in heat and flood-impacted neighborhoods. Creating a "Green Apprenticeship" program for young folks to succeed in urban greening and green infrastructure fields.

What is your vision for the future of the Richmond region?

Simple. Let's create a Richmond Region that works for all in a deeply equitable way. More and more people want what we have. Let's use that demand to drive us towards living wages and a truly affordable mix of housing options.

What's the best piece of advice you ever received?

The "what" and the "how" will reveal themselves over time. If you want to lead, be crystal clear about the "why."

What is one piece of advice you wish to share with other leaders in the Richmond Region?

We really are in this together. The people you look up to are often willing to help if you ask. We all need more help than we realize most of the time.

Remember, we really are in this together.