

Alfred University alumnus, spouse create emergency fund to help LGBTQX students

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Rick Russo, left, and Luis Lifschitz created The Stonewall Fund to help Alfred University students.

ALFRED, NY -- Rick Russo, a 1992 graduate of Alfred University, planned to do something for the University, but after reading a recent opinion piece in the New York Times Russo and his spouse, Luis Lifschitz, knew what it would be.

They have created The Stonewall Fund at Alfred University to assist students in need who cannot rely on their families due to discrimination or intolerance with respect to their sexual and/or gender identity. The income from the endowed fund will provide assistance with food, housing, basic healthcare, textbooks, transportation or other emergency needs.

Russo and Lifschitz have committed to match all contributions to the fund, up to \$25,000.

“Luis and I read an article in the New York Times about a young gay man named Dylan. When Dylan was outed, he lost the support of his parents and found himself homeless. Thankfully, an aunt and uncle took him in and he was able to enroll at the University of Mississippi. Dylan describes his experience at Ole& Miss as saving him,” Russo said.

Russo is currently the associate vice chancellor of undergraduate education at the University of California at Berkeley and sees students struggling on a daily basis to meet financial needs. “Berkeley supports a largely low-income student body and funding is a constant concern for many. Berkeley does all we can to support those students,” Russo said. And he knows the problem is exacerbated when the student is cut off from help from his or her family.

He also knows that short-term emergency assistance can make a huge difference, pointing to a fund at a State University of New York campus where an emergency fund was able to help 89 percent of the recipients stay in school.

Russo knows how difficult it can be for an LGBTQX student to fit in and thrive in college. “Coming out for many people can be difficult and even dangerous. Finding a support network of other LGBTQX people and supporters is the most urgent and key element in staying safe and feeling better. Most communities have LGBTQX centers and resources,” he said.

The advice he would offer students who find themselves in that difficult situation is to reach out to those who offer help.

Russo, who earned his degree in accounting from Alfred University, joined UC Berkeley in December, 2005 as director of summer sessions. In July, 2011 he began serving as dean of Summer Sessions, Study Abroad, and Lifelong

Learning before moving into his current role. Prior to his tenure at UC Berkeley, Russo was employed by Boston University as a budget analyst, director of finance and administration and as the executive director of administration.

Many people at Alfred University had an impact on his life, he said. “I am absolutely sure that my career in higher education has so much to do with the wonderful administrators that I interacted with as a student. Being president of the Student Alumni Association put me in regular contact with President Ed Coll, Director of Annual Fund Carla Miller, Director of Alumni Relations Melody Blank (McLay), Dean of Students Norm Pollard, and Director of Student Life Bob Miller. All of these folks had such a big impact on me and showed me what the profession of higher education was all about.

“After I graduated, I was working as a CPA at what is now PriceWaterhouseCoopers and I called one of my accounting professors, Dr. Dan Acton. I told him I was interested in combining my accounting background and a career in higher education. He gave me some advice that I&ll never forget and have since given to other young professionals. I took his advice and about six years later I was standing in front of my first financial accounting class at Boston University.”

His fellow students also “made some lasting impressions. I am still in contact with many of my Alfred friends and Luis and I just celebrated his graduation from UC Berkeley at Jeff Denecke&s ‘94 restaurant (Social Restaurant and Bar) in Boston, MA. Not only was Jeff there, but Annmarie Rowlands ‘92 and Danielle Jurdan ‘92. Dr. Tom Rock ‘91 celebrated with us the week before in New York City and Tom and his husband Terry have become supporters of the Stonewall Fund.”

Russo was very active as an Alfred undergraduate, participating as a student resource person for the Board of Trustees and in student government. He was also in the Pacioli Society, Saxon Ambassadors, and Who's Who In American Students. He completed his M.B.A. in international business in 1999 from Boston University and is a certified public accountant.

He and his husband Luis married in Maui, Hawaii, in 2014. The couple resides in Oakland, CA.

Donations to the Stonewall Fund, which Russo and Lifschitz will match, may be made by visiting <https://alumni.alfred.edu/giving/specific-donations> and choosing “Stonewall Fund” in the drop-down menu. Checks may also be sent to Alfred University, 1 Saxon Drive, Alfred, NY 14802. Please mention “Stonewall Fund” in either the memo line on the check or in the cover letter.

Additional information about the Stonewall Fund may be obtained by contacting Amy Jacobson at jacobsona@alfred.edu or calling her 607-871-2144.