Brian Adams

When Brian Adams graduated from The University of Alabama in 2002 with a bachelor's in management, he left behind several entrepreneurial ventures he'd started while earning his degree, having dabbed in T-shirt printing, graphic design, e-commerce—and clean clothes.

His first business, Bama Butler LLC, picked up and delivered college students’ laundry.

Upon graduation, Adams headed to the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, and was with that group for six months before moving to Houston to get married, and deciding to become an entrepreneur. “I couldn’t go to work for anyone because I’d be a horrible employee,” he said. “Working for myself is the only way I know.” He fell back on prior experience to create Restoration Cleaners LLC, now a multimillion-dollar cleaning company aimed at restoring fabrics and electronics. It’s managed by Adams as part of his private holding company, BA Investments, through which he also runs Rumber Materials LLC, a manufacturing entity.

His achievements haven't gone unnoticed. Adams was named to the Houston Business Journal’s “40 under 40” and Inc. magazine’s “30 under 30.” He received a 2010 Outstanding Leadership Award from the U.S. Leaders and Entrepreneur’s Association and was included in the 2014 Empact Showcase, which highlights the role...
of young entrepreneurs in the economy and recognizes each recipient at an event held at the United Nations headquarters in New York. Adams’ key to success is as timeless as it is true. “I work hard,” he said. “I go to work, and work 60 minutes every hour.”

**Lindsay Blakey**

Bringing joy is her job. As a seasonal character performer for Walt Disney World and entertainment coordinator at Give Kids the World, a nonprofit resort for children with life-threatening illnesses who are visiting central Florida’s theme parks, Lindsay Blakey uses her 2014 public relations bachelor’s degree from UA to create smiles. For the past three years, after a semester at the Disney College Program, she has performed as several Disney characters, including Mickey Mouse; Minnie Mouse, who she said she can transform into in just three minutes; Stitch; Donald Duck; and Pocahontas. “You get to see the kids’ reactions, and they really believe that you’re that character,” she said. “You’re just a professional hugger, so that’s my fun job.”

After graduation, Blakey moved to Florida for an internship with GKW, which has since turned into a full-time position. As entertainment coordinator, she is charged with anything that’s enjoyable for the kids. The resort works with 250 national and international wish-granting organizations, like the Make-A-Wish Foundation, to make children’s dreams come true.

As part of their visit to the 70-acre storybook resort, the children and their families get to participate in themed parties, planned by Blakey, each day of their week-long stay. “We have Halloween, Christmas, Candy Land, birthday parties, Village Idol (which is like karaoke), a tea party, and a pirate and princess party each week,” she enumerated. “We do that just in case they don’t get to celebrate their birthday party or Christmas or Halloween one last time, or they’ve been in the hospital, dealing with treatments or therapy. The kids love it.” Blakey hopes to either move up the ranks at GKW or at Disney, she said, so she can continue to “turn my degree into pixie dust.”

**Jenna Brayton**

For most of her life, Jenna Brayton saw herself as a professor. Brayton, who graduated from the University in 2011 with a master’s in political science, imagined she would be spending her days instructing college students. Instead, she is passing her time in the White House, serving as the associate director of digital strategy.

There is no normal day for Brayton, who works on social and digital media campaigns under U.S. President Barack Obama. “Every day is different,” she said. “One of the really unique things about working in the White House is you can plan for whatever you want, but it ultimately depends on what happens that morning.” Brayton first joined the president on his 2012 re-election campaign. Having grown up in Chicago, she was a long-time fan of Obama. “It’s a dream come true for me to be able to work for him at the highest level of government as my boss,” she explained.

During her tenure, her team has handled several large-scale projects, including the changing of the White House’s photo policy. Effective July 1, 2015, guests are now able to take photos on tours. At work, she draws on the people skills she learned in college to thrive in an industry based on relationships. “Politics is such a people industry, so UA really helped me with that,” she said.

Brayton is not sure of her next step after the administration leaves office—perhaps she’ll return to her teaching plans, in a region with warmer weather than Washington, D.C., she said. But she’ll take valuable lessons with her. “It used to be that I would get a little distraught if things would go off plans, but things happen at the White House in two minutes,” she explained. “I’ve learned to be flexible.”

**Nick Burroughs**

Nick Rashad Burroughs was in a math class in 2014 when the trajectory of his life took a dramatic change. The UA musical theatre major, preparing for graduation, received a call that he had an audition for the lead role of Lola in the Tony Award-winning musical Kinky Boots. He stepped on a plane that same day. After seven callbacks, Burroughs received the phone call—he was cast not on the national tour, for which he had auditioned, but in the Broadway production itself, to understudy Billy Porter in the lead role. “It’s been the biggest dream come true to be able to do a show like Kinky Boots, where it relates to my life,” he said. “One of the lyrics in the songs is, ‘You change the world when you change your mind; when you change your mind about someone and accept them for who they are.’ It’s a beautiful story to tell.”

He had a week to pack his things and relocate to New York City. It was his foundation in the theatre and dance department at the University, he said, that allowed the entire whirlwind experience to begin in the first place. “In musical theatre, they work personally with each student—they have different strengths—and really prepare us for how to take on an audition like that,” he explained. “I’m always very grateful that they pushed me really hard.”

Burroughs never imagined that he would land on Broadway immediately after college. In fact, he had a week to pack his things and prepare us for how to take on an audition like that,” he explained. “I’m always very grateful that they pushed me really hard.”

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**Henry Busby**

Henry Busby’s first project after his 2012 graduation from UAs telecommunications and film program hit close to home. He and Marcus Tortorici, ’12, filmed a spec commercial on boxer and Tuscaloosa native Deontay Wilder, who has since gone on to be crowned the WBC heavyweight world champion. And recently, Busby teamed up with Clayton Collins, ’12, to film a 30-minute NBC special on Wilder. “That was one of the best whirlwind experiences I’ve ever had—the whole thing came about in such a seemingly fated way,” he explained. “Once we finished that commercial, that’s what led me to New York—that’s what led into me doing what I do now—and then to have that same story come full circle three years later was pretty wild.”

Busby, based in Brooklyn, directs and shoots commercials, music videos and TV shows, and also works as a photographer. “There’s not a normal day,” he said of his profession. “A lot of it is the boring stuff that people don’t really think about that comes with being your own boss and running your own business. There are a lot of days where I’m in the apartment all day. But when I’m gone, I’m going to be gone for weeks.”

He has worked with high-profile clients such as Nike, Verizon, Nestle, Everlast, Castrol, Frenchkiss Records, Billboard, Refinery29, Runner’s World, Boston magazine, Birmingham magazine and Billy Reid. Each task, he said, has the potential to bring two levels of satisfaction. The first comes from simply executing a successful project, but the second rises from a deeper level, when working on subjects that touch the heart. “You’re making something for someone else, but you’re making it for yourself,” he explained. “For me, to be that attached to something and to put it out in the world is really satisfying.”

**Cameron Diver**

Since 1982, Cameron Diver has supported the Crimson Tide. Watching his first Alabama football game on TV as a boy, at the end of coach Paul W. "Bear" Bryant’s career, Diver became a fan, and still follows Crimson Tide athletics, from almost 8,000 miles away.

Originally from New Zealand, Diver currently resides in New Caledonia, where he is deputy director of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, an international organization founded in 1947 by the United States, Australia, New Zealand, France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands to improve social, economic and sustainable development in the Pacific Islands. In his role, Diver is responsible for the operations management side of the organization, which includes finance, human resources, IT, translation and interpretation, publics and general administration. He also looks after four of seven technical divisions, including public health, fisheries, statistical development and social development.

When he had the opportunity to further his professional development, he chose courses in management and leadership studies offered through UAs’ College of Continuing Studies. He completed the certificate program in 2015. “I found it quite
useful as a means to revisit my own practice as an executive, and to allow me to have a look at myself from a third-party perspective to see what I can do to improve the way that I interact with staff members and colleagues, and the way I lead change," Driver said. The best part of his career is working for an organization that actively influences the region, he added. "It's interesting to work for an organization where you can see the impact of what it you're doing quite concretely when you're in the field," he said. "You can actually see the impact the work is having in the lives of people on a day-to-day basis."

Dr. Andrea Duke picked up distance running as a way to relieve stress from her job at the Pentagon following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, and never slowed down. Duke, who graduated with a PhD in security studies from George Washington University in 2016, has become an elite runner when she qualified for the trials after recording a time of 2:41:12 in the Rock 'n' Roll New Orleans Marathon held Feb. 13, 2016. She had become an elite runner when she won the Rock 'n' Roll New Orleans Marathon in February 2014, and then decided to put her talents to the ultimate test. "What makes me a little different is the fact that I had been running for almost 13 years in the marathon, and it just came around all of a sudden," she said. "I just decided, 'Let's see what I can do,' and ran the qualifying time."

Throughout the training process, Duke has won multiple hats, balancing a life as a businesswoman, professor and mother of two. "I had to schedule strength training, PT, recovery, work and kids," she said. Currently sponsored by Oiselle Running Apparel, she has become a popular figure in the marathon world. "I find that I'm becoming an inspiration and a motivator for other people, and what keeps me going is the fact that people are looking to me," she noted. "On the flip side, I'm being inspired and motivated by them. I want to be a good role model for my kids, my teammates and the people who follow me, and show that you can start at 4:30:00 and get where I am. You can have really bad days, but turn around and it will be okay."
shared with a company.

Devastated, she dreamed up the beginnings of EnovationNation while still in elementary school. Today, her company aims to give inventors and entrepreneurs a place to develop, protect, share and ultimately monetize their ideas. By providing a platform for people to publish their work, those seeking patents can document ownership of ideas, preventing others from patenting them in accordance with recent changes to U.S. law. "The new law now states that it doesn't matter who has the idea first, it's all about who publishes or documents that they had the idea first," she explained. "People with more access to resources have the ability to document ownership faster than others with no or limited resources. EnovationNation empowers small innovators to compete in the race."

Immediately following graduation, McWilliams joined Aflac, an insurance company. Four years later, she moved to Silicon Valley to pursue a master's degree in computer science at Stanford, though those plans hadn't reached fruition because she received initial capital investment for EnovationNation before classes began. Lowe was drive a car. Brian McWilliams, who received a BS in biology from UA in 2011 and has also been featured in USA Today, The Wall Street Journal of Education and Pedagogy. While attending the University, she participated in activities ranging from teaching writing, speaking and intercultural communications to coaching debate teams. "The best part of any job abroad, in my opinion, are the people you meet," she shared. "Ho Chi Minh is such an international city, and the business administration, organized a 5K race at age 15 to offset medical costs for a family friend's son, who was paralyzed from the waist down. "The family had been doing some level of fundraising to defray medical costs, through T-shirt sales, but nothing that was going to take a big big chunk out of the financial burdens that they had been placed under," McWilliams said.

The race, in its sixth year, has exceeded his expectations, and is now a regular fundraiser for the Team Alex Fund, which helps children affected by spinal cord injuries and illness. The first race raised $30,000 from its corporate sponsors and 800 runners, and the next five brought in another $125,000 combined to fund therapy and mobility equipment not covered by insurance, providing anything from a wheelchair ramp for a minivan to equipment for a spine bifida camp.

McWilliams said the Team Alex Fund is an example of what he aspires to continue in his future career: creating new ideas and helping meet people's needs. He hopes to use his UA degrees to be a "move and shaker" in the business side of medicine. "In the future, I think there are going to be more and more intersections where physicians in the business are going to need to understand the economic factors at play in medicine, and the business professionals are going to need to know the medical elements of the business they're trying to run in order to deliver care in the most effective way that they can," he said. "To build both of those skills was the most I could hope to get out of any university education anywhere."

### Caroline Nabor

Since graduating from UA with a bachelor's degree in Spanish and international studies in 2010 and a master's degree in applied linguistics in 2012, Caroline Nabor has found herself on two different continents other than North America. She joined the U.S. Peace Corps after finishing her graduate work at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in Bluefields, Nicaragua, and has lived in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam since January 2015.

Nabor relocated to Vietnam to begin a fellowship sponsored by the U.S. State Department and George-town University, serving as the English Language Fellow in Ho Chi Minh City, splitting time between the cultural affairs office at the America Center and the University of Education and Pedagogy. While working at the center, she has developed workshops and trained teachers who were recognized and the sales team saw her alma mater boxes of fabric, leftovers from creating her most recent fashion collection. "I need to get a box down to the fashion students, so they can have some fun stuff to play with, considering I really enjoyed when that happened," said Smith Sinrod, a 2009 graduate of UA with a bachelor's degree in apparel and textiles. She learned almost everything she needed to become a fashion designer in college, she said. "I knew how to doodle before, but that was about it," she laughed. While at the Capstone, she learned how to draw fashion illustrations, make patterns and drape fabrics. These are the basics, Sinrod noted, that are taught at any fashion school—except UA, also had the added bonus of great football games.

After launching her brand, called by Smith, in 2010, Sinrod is now based in New Orleans, and her line is produced in the Garment District of New York City each season. She designs two collections each year, meaning she has now debuted more than 10, each featuring Thai silk, her signature material. Her work, which she said is inspired by her Southern roots, is sold in upscale stores domestically and internationally, and has been featured in several fashion shows and media outlets, including E!, Regis and Kelly, Town & Country, Real Simple and Southern Living.

Besides having to break the language barrier to get her first collection manufactured in Thailand, Sinrod said adjusting to the combination of designing and selling her products was her biggest challenge. "I started to realize that I had to be a business woman, too. Now, that's the main part of my job, driving the products and running the business. Designing is probably the smallest thing that I do—but it has the biggest impact."