

## March 2022

### Rhianna Johnson, Class of 2011, and Alex Konyha, Class of 2010

March's alumni spotlight is a double feature! This month, we recognize Rhianna Johnson, Class of 2011, and Alexander Konyha from the Class of 2010.

While a common idiom for an eventful journey may include the traveling of winding roads, it's more fitting to say that Rhianna's and Alex's journeys mirror more of an airline flight map during a holiday season. As they each have shared an abundance of individual success, their paths crossing again in 2014 sparked a relationship and the start of building a life together as they explore dream career opportunities.



Beginning her Catholic education in the west valley, Rhianna attended St. Thomas Aquinas Elementary School in Litchfield Park, Arizona. At Bourgade, Rhianna was a member of the inaugural swim team in 2008 and played tennis all four years with the beloved former coach, Donna Stossel. With fond memories of slip-n-sliding through the center quad of campus after finishing the state tennis finals her senior year, Rhianna didn't know at the time that much of the traveling ahead of her would not include much land or water.

With a couple of semesters at Glendale Community College thrown into the mix – during which she played tennis for the Guachos – Rhianna ended up earning a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Northern Arizona University (NAU), in 2016. Rhianna currently attends the University of Colorado Denver in pursuit of a master's degree in biology, with hopes of applying for a physician's assistant program either this fall or next.

While attending NAU, Rhianna worked as an intern in Florida with the Disney Company at the recommendation of a friend who found her hospitable and energetic personality to be a good fit for the industry. Rhianna

cherished the experience, specifically the people she met along the way, but she knew her future was destined for something different. The exploration continued when Rhianna became an enology and viticulture intern in the Napa region of California. Enology is the study of wine, while viticulture is the process of cultivating and harvesting grapes in a vineyard. The opportunity lasted two years and included a 6-month stretch in Australia. Upon returning to Arizona, Rhianna connected with a sorority friend who had recently become a flight attendant. Like with the Disney experience, the friend thought that Rhianna's personality would be a great fit for flight attending. Taking a leap of faith, Rhianna endured the very-intense application and training processes in January of 2019, earning her flight attendant status and a job with United Airlines. In addition to traveling the world, Rhianna quickly fell in love with the stories of her coworkers and the people she's met along the way. She has cherished the opportunity to interact with people of all backgrounds while seeing new places.

Despite her love for travel and being a flight attendant, the end game is still ahead of Rhianna. As she continues to pursue her master's degree, her goal of enrolling in a medical program is the focus right now. Rhianna's father served as a physician's assistant for 25 years in the United States Navy, and other family members have pursued careers in the medical field, serving as an inspiration.

A little more than 15 miles west of St. Thomas Aquinas, Alex began his Catholic schooling at Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Glendale, Arizona. Like Rhianna, Alex shares fond memories of Bourgade, especially his guitar class with Mr. Smith. After graduating from Bourgade, Alex attended Embry Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona, studying space physics. The joke that accompanies figuring out a less-than-complex solution often exclaims, "It's not rocket science!". Though Alex's career choice was not a difficult decision for him, it ended up being, quite literally, rocket science.

Before graduating from Embry Riddle, Alex participated in two internships with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The first was at NASA Ames Research Center, and the second was at the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory. Alex's experiences in the internships heavily influenced his post-graduation experiences. Out of college, Alex first worked with Raytheon Technologies, which specializes in aerospace and defense tech. Alex then moved on to Lockheed Martin Corporation and now is a senior systems engineer at United Launch Alliance (ULA). Alex is currently involved with a team working on the Artemis Program at ULA, which involves a series of missions focused on bringing human space exploration back to the moon. Alex's focus in the Artemis Program is on various integration efforts for building a complex launch vehicle. With Artemis set to launch this year, Alex is excited to see the fruits of the team's labor. Alex is excited for whatever future opportunities may be available to him in rocket sciences.



With their work schedules begging so much of their time, Rhianna and Alex are always looking for time to spend together. They have taken an interest in several outdoor activities, including hiking and biking. Growing up in the shadows of his dad's road biking interest, Alex has invested himself competitively by joining a team and winning a few Denver-area races including a Colorado state championship. When not skiing and adventuring through other outdoor activities, Rhianna and Alex enjoy catching up on a good tv series or movie.

Each on their own incredible journey, Rhianna and Alex have found comfort in their support of one another. Pardon the pun of these two Golden Eagles soaring high. The Bourgade Catholic community wishes them well in the chapters ahead. Congratulations to Rhianna and Alex on all their successes, and a heartfelt thank you for their willingness to be featured as our March Alumni Spotlight!