

# ALUMNI UPDATE

ST. DOMINIC SCHOOL

**FROM SDS  
to CEO:  
Alumni  
Entrepreneurs**



O'Neil in 5th grade (below)  
and today (top).



## MARK O'NEIL

**CLASS OF 1972**

Mark O'Neil, an entrepreneur and business owner, spent his childhood in places as far-flung as Santiago, Chile and Caracas, Venezuela, but he calls his time at St. Dominic School a highlight and a formative experience. An honorary member of the Class of 1972, a group that maintains close ties and just held their 50th reunion, he says that he had the most memorable group of friends that worked together as a class and formed lifelong friendships.

Most of the teachers when O'Neil attended St. Dominic School were Dominican sisters, who instilled discipline. His favorite teacher, Miss Ferrera, had him memorize the poem "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere" while he served a detention for talking too much in class. He shared that he was not always listening and was a "terribly disruptive kid." Perhaps it was that in-class restlessness that led O'Neil to become someone who felt comfortable taking chances on business ideas later in life.

O'Neil left St. Dominic School in 8th grade when his father, who worked for General Tire, was transferred to Venezuela. The family had already moved seven times before O'Neil graduated from 8th grade. He didn't live anywhere for four consecutive years until he went to college. He returned to the U.S. for high school and college and then worked for a few years before getting his MBA at Harvard Business School.

Just a few years after he earned his MBA, he found himself in the fortunate position of serving as president of a car dealership group. He was approached by the CEO of Circuit City to collaborate on a new business venture, a company called CarMax. The idea was, as O'Neil says, "To treat people differently when they buy a car. Give them a fair price and make it a pleasant experience." Their plan to offer cars with no negotiating of prices was controversial at the time, as was their 110-point inspection, which is now an industry standard. The company was highly successful and O'Neil began looking for his next opportunity.

After a brief stint with online car sales, O'Neil found himself, once again, in a position to help build a new business. This time, he worked with a consortium of banks to create DealerTrack, which is software that automobile dealerships can use to determine customer creditworthiness.



## O'Neil cont.

What O'Neil most values about his role as an entrepreneur and businessperson is that he has had the opportunity to create jobs for people. He says, "When you can see the impact you have on people's lives, it's enormously rewarding." He would advise anyone interested in business to remember that life is a two way street and the more you give, the more you get.

He also encourages people to work with others who are better than you, a lesson he learned at St. Dominic School. His classmates, some of whom he remains close to even now, taught him how to collaborate. They worked together as a class, and he says it's the largest friend group he's ever had. The entire class was close, as evidenced by their regular reunions.

St. Dominic Church and school played a big role in O'Neil's childhood. One of seven children, he and his siblings all attended St. Dominic School when they were living in Shaker Heights, and they were actively involved in the church. His parents, he says, taught him that the two most important things in life are faith and family. He remembers serving as an altar boy and that at the end of the school year, the altar boys would get to go to Cedar Point. He says, "St. Doms was a terrific foundation."

Today, O'Neil lives in Virginia, with his wife Monique. They have three adult children. He has not slowed down despite being semi-retired. He serves on multiple boards and invests in new business ideas, an opportunity, he says, to pay it forward.



# MADISON SNIDER

## CLASS OF 2006

Madison Snider, a 2006 St. Dominic School graduate, is the owner and CEO of Fewer Finer, a fine jewelry business she founded in 2018 in Brooklyn, NY. The brand was created around the idea that there's an emotional component to those pieces of jewelry you choose to invest in—with time and love they become a staple part of who you are. Madison has always loved jewelry. She started with a small collection, which she expanded to include vintage, custom, and bridal collections.

The best part of being an entrepreneur is the relationships you have with people. Snider credits St. Dominic with laying a foundation for her rooted in faith, fairness, and the Golden Rule. She says, "Specifically in my business, which is very relationship-oriented, and strongly built on trust, these things have held much importance." She also adds, "Building a team and a business that supports many craftspeople and contractors have been the highlight of my career thus far as a business owner."

After St. Dominic School, Snider attended Beaumont High School. She took a gap year to study cooking in Ireland and then attended Fordham University. She started out designing jewelry that she herself enjoyed, particularly delicate gold pieces. The business has really taken off due to a strong presence on Instagram, and she now leads a team of four people. What she loves about Fewer Finer is that "jewelry is sentimental in nature and this business has allowed me to learn so much about people - we create pieces to celebrate their greatest achievements and their most beloved."

Snider advises anyone considering a career as an entrepreneur to go for it if they have an idea. She says, "Everything is possible if you want it!" She also advises that the more people see, the more they can go after. She says, "Expanding your worldview and understanding all the many many options for your future, allows you to dream up a life beyond what you may see in your home and community."

During her time at St. Dominic School, Snider says she most loved having siblings in the grades above and below her, which was really fun. She remembers dressing as her favorite saint, St. Francis of Assisi, and she also appreciates a project she did in 6th grade -- the World's Fair project -- in which she spent time all year learning about India. Snider was recently married and says, "Getting married in the church and going through the preparatory stages for the sacrament gave me a new opportunity to explore what I want out of my faith not just for myself, but with my husband and for our future family. I was so lucky to have Father Tom Fanta as the priest who officiated our wedding. I have known him since my days at Saint Dominic and it was incredibly meaningful."



Snider today (left), during her time at SDS (center), and as St. Francis (right).

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