

# HASLAM



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## MARTY AND ANN BROWN'S VOLUNTEER SPIRIT

PLUS

Haslam's Upward Trajectory

New Horizons in Accounting

The AMAze™ Marketing Group



KELLI ROSS

## Growth and Opportunity

**B**y the time Kelli Ross began her senior year, she'd accumulated an impressive number of achievements. She'd been a 1794 Scholar, received multiple scholarships, and earned dean's list and summa cum laude honors every semester. She'd spent the summer as an intern at JPMorgan Chase & Co. and forged a clear path to a corporate finance career.

Then one day some fellow students visited one of her classes to talk about Torch Fund.

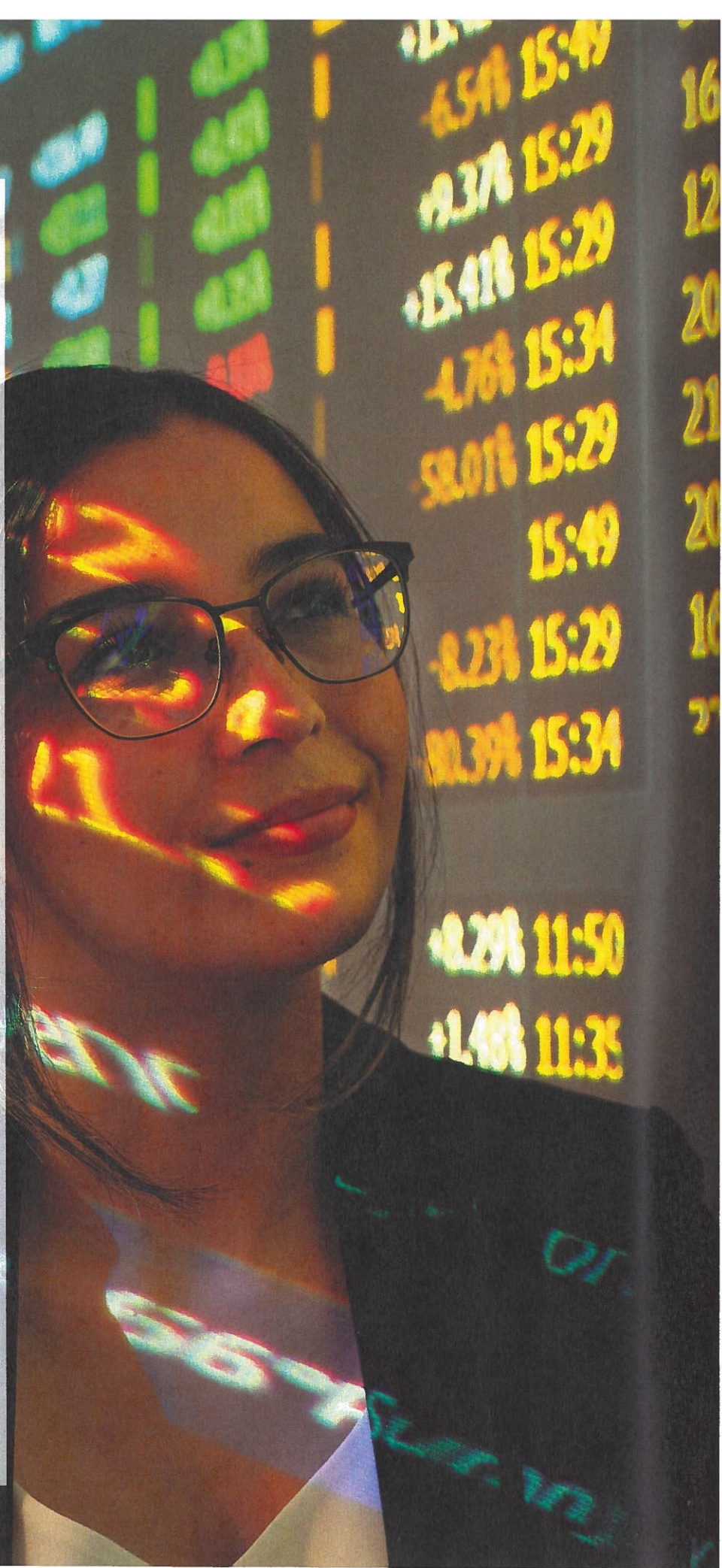
"I thought it would be a great opportunity to widen my knowledge," she says. "I knew quite a bit about real estate and corporate finance, but stocks and equities were my biggest weaknesses."

She applied for the program, and by the time she'd spent one semester managing the value investing McClain Fund, her career plans had changed.

"This was everything I'd been looking for, and I didn't even know it until I was given the opportunity," she says. "There's always more to learn about the stock market. The idea that no matter how hard I try, there's still more to learn and opportunity to grow, is amazing to me because I can do that for the rest of my life."

That growth mindset is something Ross developed early. A double major in finance and business analytics originally from Harlingen, Texas, she grew up knowing that her parents expected her to be the first person in the family to go to college.

After spending a few years living in Mexico, where her mother was born and raised, Ross attended her last two years of high school in Rockwood, Tennessee. While most of her classmates were choosing trade schools or community colleges, she was exploring university websites and online forums, learning to navigate the application process by herself.





"My parents are incredible, and I'm so thankful they've always pushed me to be independent and figure out my own path," she says.

She applied to some Ivy League schools but wanted to attend UT because of its proximity to her family in Rockwood and because of Haslam's reputation. She'd become interested in business while she was growing up, watching her father run his own company.

"I really like the idea that whatever I'm learning, I can apply it to a business, but I can also apply it to my own personal life," she says of her decision to major in finance. "I can take care of myself as well as the firm I'm working for."

She later added a business analytics major after sitting in on one of Brian Stevens's classes. Although she's never actually taken a class from him, she enjoys watching his educational YouTube videos.

"He makes it incredibly fun," she says. "I'm so thankful we have those types of professors at Haslam, and we have the opportunity to learn from people like that."

After seeing Ross's performance in Torch Fund, program director Ryan Farley told her he thought she would be a perfect match for a role at Eagle Capital, a premier value investing asset management firm in New York City. As a first-generation student preparing to enter the job market, she didn't know what to expect. Farley helped her navigate the company's extensive interview process, and she accepted an equity research analyst position that begins this summer.

"I never, ever thought I would have the opportunity to interview for things like this, much less get offers," she says. "I'm so fortunate to have had the experience of working with Dr. Farley. Haslam has given me so much in terms of resources and incredible people to help me grow into the person I've become."

Farley credits Ross's positivity, curiosity, and drive with making her a successful leader in Torch Fund, despite her initially limited knowledge of investing.

"Kelli never shies away from taking on big challenges and pouring her time and considerable intellect to get deep into the details and execute at a high level consistently," Farley says. "Every student and faculty member I've spoken with echoes that she's as likable as she is bright and hard working—precisely the type of student that makes careers in academia so rewarding."

Those challenges include skydiving, which Ross, Farley, and a few other Torch Fund members did together in Chattanooga in March. They've become a tight-knit group, despite Ross's initial feelings of intimidation when she entered the male-dominated program. She says that with media representations such as *The Wolf of Wall Street* perpetuating gender stereotypes about finance, she understands why many women might think the field is not for them, but she encourages them to pursue it.

"I would love for more girls to get into finance and Torch Fund. I talk to girls and tell them, 'It's not just a guy thing,'" she says. "Pushing yourself outside your comfort zone is where you grow the most."

That trailblazing spirit is what inspires Ross to use the knowledge and experience she's gained at UT to help her younger brother as he begins making plans for college.

"I'm really excited to guide him through all that," she says. "My family is completely astounded with what I've been able to do with my time here and the opportunities I've had."

After graduating in May, Ross will spend a month traveling in Europe for the first time and then relocate to New York to begin her job at Eagle Capital, where she looks forward to showing people what it means to be a Tennessee Volunteer.

"I'm not trying to be better than anybody else, but I want to be better than the person I was yesterday, whether that means learning something new, or being kinder, or doing something for someone," she says. "I want everyone to know that Vols work hard, and we put time, energy, and quality into the work we do." ●