



CONTINUED SUCCESS: KATIE (TRACY) KISHORE REMAINS A LEADER IN CHARLOTTESVILLE

During her athletics career at UVA, Katie (Tracy) Kishore was a leader, and a rare one at that.

It's not often that college athletes participate on two teams, but Kishore not only did that, she was elected a captain for both the soccer and basketball squads during a career that spanned from 1997-2001.

Despite being recruited in both sports, she chose soccer — at least initially. Then she showed up on Grounds, the basketball team needed some additional bodies and Kishore obliged because it allowed her to accomplish what she figured was just a childhood fantasy.

"If you asked me in fourth grade what my dream was, it would've been to play soccer and basketball at UVA," she said. "... It still gives me chills to talk about it.

"I do think it was a gift to be a captain of both teams. When you are a leader of your peers, you take a different perspective of what leadership is. You can't be the boss of them, you have to be a captain. You are a leader without being a boss, and I totally use that today."

Though her college career wrapped up in 2001, and her playing career not much longer after that — she played two years of professional soccer after being taken No. 5 overall in the 2001 Women's United Soccer Association Draft — Kishore continues to lead in unique ways.

The latest is Kindness Cafe + Play, which aims to be "the friendliest coffee shop" in Charlottesville. Another mission of the non-profit business, which will open late this fall in the lobby at the Brooks Family YMCA in McIntire Park, is to "provide meaningful employment for adults with cognitive disabilities while creating a joyful, inclusive community space."

Kishore was first inspired after seeing a 90-second video about Bitty & Beau's, a coffee shop in Wilmington, N.C., that opened in 2016 with a similar mission. It spoke directly



Kishore established Kindness Cafe + Play, which aims to be "the friendliest coffee shop" in Charlottesville and "provide meaningful employment for adults with cognitive disabilities while creating a joyful, inclusive community space." More information is at KindnessCafeCville.com.

PHOTO COURTESY KATIE KISHORE

to her because her 5-year-old daughter Kiran has Down syndrome, in addition to a cousin with mitochondrial disease.

After road-tripping to Wilmington with her kids, Kishore made it her mission to bring something similar to Charlottesville.

She was especially drawn to the shop's unique experience of providing "a space where people with and without disabilities interact as peers, where connections are made and lives are transformed."

In addition to affording adults with cognitive disabilities employment and a space to find others in a similar situation or willing to help, she believes "it will challenge our perceptions, inspire us as individuals and transform our community."

Though the obvious lessons of captaining two sports at an academically demanding college — leadership, time management, work ethic and balance — have followed Kishore everywhere in life, the curveballs thrown her way have developed a new passion.

Her husband's passing from cancer in 2014 and daughter's diagnosis served as two main inflection points that gave her a different perspective.

"After my husband's death and having a daughter with Down syndrome, the most

important thing isn't how hard I work, it's mostly about the relationships I have with people, and that is the priority and that is Kindness," she said. "That is what we want to bring to the community."

After the idea came about, she knew she had to do it close to UVA and its athletics program — something she still calls "my world."

She has even benefitted from the assistance of fourth-year football star Jordan Mack, who interned with her this summer. Though she never expected a hulking 6-2, 230-pound gridiron warrior to get involved, Kishore talked about her vision to a class Mack was in, and he immediately offered his support.

"He sent me an email, the only one I've gotten of this kind from someone young — I get a lot of emails from moms and people my age," Kishore recalled. "He just said he was really touched by what we were doing and wanted to be helpful."

It's just one of the many times Kishore has gone back to relationships built during her time on Grounds and with others associated with the school to bring her life full circle.

"People are everything," she said. "I feel like I am one of the most well-supported people. From former teammates and former coaches to people in the athletics department who weren't even here when I played, the support that I have gotten in life and in pursuit of starting my coffee shop has been instrumental.

"We want this to create ripples throughout Charlottesville and throughout the University community. My hope is that students will come as well and help create that ripple. Getting important people around the community to help with that has been amazing.

"There is a beautiful grouping of adults with disabilities, successful athletics and Kindness that I think can be very powerful. They aren't normally paired together."

But normal isn't the standard for Kishore, whose athletic experiences should translate into leading another successful venture in Charlottesville.

— Ryan Tice



Kishore served as a captain for both the soccer and basketball squads during her time at University of Virginia from 1997-2001.

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