

CNR Alumna: Embodies *Serviam*

Joan Fiori Blanchfield CNR SAS '64

By Annalinda Ragazzo CNR SAS '74



Photo provided by Joan Fiori Blanchfield CNR SAS '64

Just two weeks shy of her 80th birthday, Joan Fiori Blanchfield CNR SAS '64 walked across the stage at the State University of New York at Albany to receive her doctoral degree in history. A sculptor, professor, museum curator, polyglot, wife, mother, grandmother and volunteer, Joan shows no signs of slowing down and gives new vigor to the term Renaissance woman.

Growing up in the idyllic enclave of Sea Cliff on Long Island Sound, Joan recalls how she and her four siblings all helped their parents renovate their 100-year-old house. From her parents she learned how to sew, embroider, refinish furniture, work with tools, solder and lay tiles. These skills, which Joan still relies on, laid a solid foundation for her future art career.

While attending St. Dominic High School in Oyster Bay, Joan's artistic talents were recognized by her high

school teacher, who recommended that she attend The College of New Rochelle (CNR) after graduation because of its excellent art curriculum. Joan remembers visiting the campus with her parents. As luck would have it, the campus tour was given by Sister Dorothy Ann Kelly, the innovative and beloved former president of CNR. The campus and Sister Dorothy Ann impressed both Joan and her parents. When she won the four-year art scholarship, there was no question that Joan was CNR bound.

At CNR, Joan took advantage of all aspects of college life: singing with Glee Club (one of her greatest thrills was performing not once, but twice, at Carnegie Hall with the CNR Glee Club); working with Props N Paints designing lighting, constructing sets and gathering props; co-directing the Junior show; and writing for the literary magazine and college newspaper. As a CNR student, Joan

also became involved in the civil rights movement, participating in lunch counter sit-ins in Baltimore and rent strikes in New York City. She was also part of a group of CNR art majors who set up an art studio in Harlem for use by residents. At CNR, Joan was encouraged to participate in activities and take leadership roles that might only have been available to men at a co-ed college. Joan credits CNR in helping her to understand the position of women in society and in encouraging her to work for women's advancement in the art world.

Since earning her bachelor's degree at CNR in Studio Art and History of Art, Joan has gone on to earn two master's degrees, one in Studio Art/Sculpture and the other in Art History, in addition to her doctoral degree in History. She has had a professional career as an award-winning artist/sculptor, as a professor of art and art history, and as the director/curator of the Edith Barrett Art Gallery at Utica College of Syracuse University.

She has also led a life of exemplary community service for organizations as diverse as the National Organization for Women, C.O.R.E., the Utica Public Library, the Chamber Music Society of Utica, and Open Hand Children's Theater in Syracuse. Joan continues to donate her time and talent to CNR, having served as Class Agent for the Class of '64 since graduation. In 2019, at the class of 1964's 55th Reunion — the last CNR class reunion to take place on the CNR Campus — Joan was elected class president.

For Joan, *Serviam*, CNR's motto, means helping others persevere to achieve their goals and be successful. Since 2014, she and her husband of 58 years, Bill, have volunteered with On Point For College, an organization in Utica that advises and helps individuals, including non-traditional students, students from refugee families and students with other disadvantages, apply for and successfully attend and graduate from college. Joan currently serves on the organization's Board of Directors.