

Iona College

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ENTREPRENEURSHIP @ IONA

The New **Hynes Institute for Entrepreneurship & Innovation** Builds on a Legacy of Successful Alumni

The United States was founded and settled by innovators and risk-takers who were willing to sacrifice old certainties for new opportunities. Entrepreneurialism, deeply rooted in the country's history, is the engine that drives the American economy.



The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that in 2015 there were more than 679,000 businesses that were less than one year old, evidence of the ongoing entrepreneurial spirit. In a 2016 State of Entrepreneurship address, Wendy Guillies, CEO and president of the Kauffman Foundation, whose areas of operation focus on education and entrepreneurship, noted that with millennials entering the labor market and coming into their peak age of business creation, the country could be on the verge of a boom in start-up activity or entrepreneurship.



The Speed of Business

As an institute of higher education, Iona College values an openness to change, innovation and entrepreneurship.

This value, among others, is a core of Iona's teachings. Earlier this year, Iona College announced the launch of the Hynes Institute for Entrepreneurship & Innovation (see more on page 22), which will provide students of all majors with the resources and knowledge to pursue entrepreneurial paths during and after their Iona years.

It is no surprise that Iona alumni, across the U.S. and abroad, from all majors and walks of life, have ventured on entrepreneurial career paths. Here we share stories of just a few who have found success as entrepreneurs.

For **Bill Parisi '90**, what started as one athletic speed training business, has expanded to more than 90 locations in the U.S. and abroad.

"Whenever you want to start a business, you have to look at the need," said Parisi. "What are the needs? What are the problems people have?"

As a track & field athlete at Iona and beyond, Parisi was on a quest to compete at a high level. He wanted to excel as a javelin thrower, which he knew required both speed and agility. While on a trip to Finland his sophomore year, he noticed training methodologies there were different – athletes really worked on fundamental skills and movement techniques.

With the most fundamental component of athletics being speed, the problem he saw: no one was teaching speed at a high level. Recalling how he, as a track & field athlete, would break down the biomechanics of speed, he realized no one was doing that for movement for general team sports.

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Having worked with athletes on strength conditioning with the NY Giants while in college, and at the University of Florida immediately after graduating, Parisi realized he wanted to help athletes of all ages reach their goals. He had a product that he knew could change lives. His solution: Parisi Speed School.

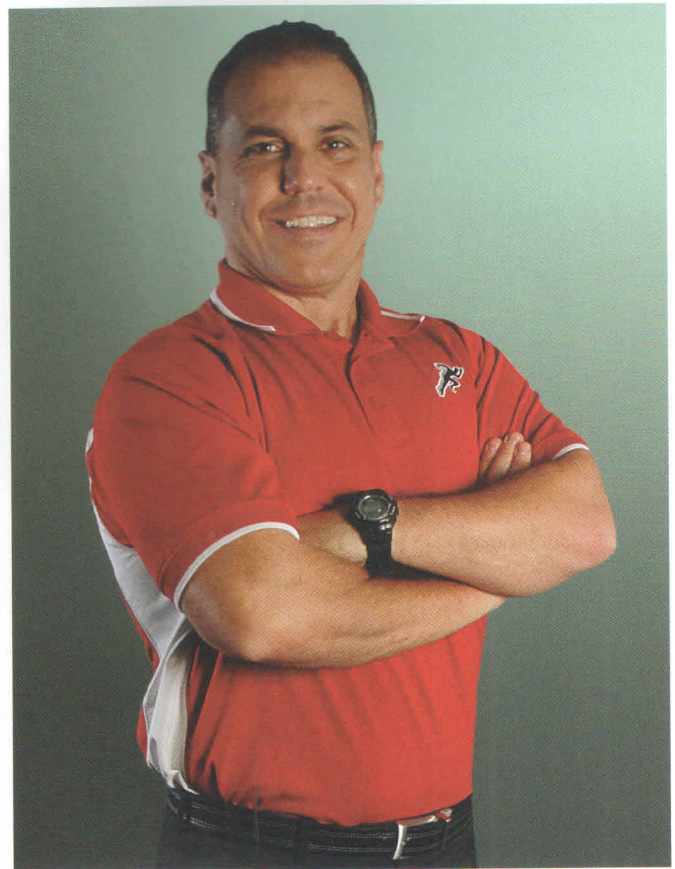
Beginning in 1992, he started giving free clinics and seminars on speed training and motivation at local high schools and youth recreation departments. By the fall of 1993, Parisi opened his first facility, a 3,000-square-foot training location, which specialized in youth sports performance speed development. Since then, the Parisi Speed School system has been making a difference in the lives of young athletes and boasts several alumni who have gone on to achieve great success – including NFL players Chris Simms and Wayne Chrebet, and Olympic Bobsled medalists Valerie Fleming and Shauna Rohbock.

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– Bill Parisi

“The Parisi Speed School is really about empowering kids with confidence. That’s our underlying product,” said Parisi. “Speed is the product that ultimately delivers the outcome. We want to get kids faster, and we get kids faster, but the outcome is greater confidence.”

Parisi continued to grow his business and by 2005, he began franchising Parisi Speed School and his methodology. In addition to the Speed Schools, Parisi has had ventures in creating a DVD series focusing on athletic speed improvements, working with nutritional supplement companies on a line for athletes, as well as launching a customized online training platform for coaches, Gamespeed.com. When looking toward the future of his business, Parisi sees himself continuing to push the threshold as technology evolves – finding new ways to deliver the product and content to consumers.



As a finance major at Iona, Parisi got his first experience at building a gym when he helped reconfigure the College’s weight room. To Parisi, having a business degree gives him a leg up in his industry, as he is one of few that do. As a student, he interned on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange getting practical knowledge of the business world. At an Iona Career Day, he crossed paths with a recruiter for Northwestern Mutual Life – where he ended up working for about a year after graduating, while also moonlighting as a personal trainer. That connection was invaluable, and he recalls gaining practical experience about running a small business from the individual who recruited him.

“I think without that fundamental knowledge of business, without that roadmap and experience at Northwestern, my experience at Iona, and my experience that led me to Finland – it’s all interconnected – none of this would have happened,” Parisi said. “There would be no Speed School.”

Parisi attributes his success to several things, but the main one is his underlying passion and belief in wanting to help people. That passion has helped him stay true to his core product. He advises others to follow suit. “Really stay focused on a core product that solves a problem and specialize in something that the market needs. But more importantly, don’t deviate too far from your core. Stay laser-focused.”

See more of Bill Parisi’s story and Parisi Speed Schools. 