

STYLE

WEEKLY

Local, Virginia

Top 40 Under 40: Carol Anne Lajoie, 39, Director
of Development, VCU's Institute for
Contemporary Art
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Carol Anne Lajoie, Director of Development at the Institute for Contemporary Art at VCU Photo by Scott Elmquist

Carol Anne Lajoie grew up a Navy brat, moving around and never staying in one place too long.

After graduating from high school, her world suddenly blossomed when her family

moved to the Middle East to live in Bahrain for a year.

“That really piqued my interest in ancient cultures — it was mind-boggling,” she says. “And I thought growing up going to Williamsburg was cool.”

After studying archeology and anthropology at Virginia Commonwealth University, she started at the front desk of the Virginia Historical Society. There, she began learning what it means to be a professional fundraiser and how to find financial resources.

Since then, she’s followed her passions at several other nonprofits, with campaigns always tied to some need in the community. That includes working at YWCA, where she raised money for health and human services. Her biggest success there was winning the Impact 100 grant in 2013, which she wrote and presented, winning \$100,000. “That was intense and amazing,” she says, noting that the experience was so moving she’s remained a leadership volunteer.

But her most recent work has been taking over the \$37 million capital campaign for the Institute for Contemporary Art, where she has about \$1.8 million to go before the scheduled opening in late 2017.

Her philosophy regarding fundraising? You should “always substitute pride for apology when asking for money” — a quote attributed to Hank Rosso, she says. “Any good fundraiser will tell you it’s about relationships and really listening,” she says, adding that you also need to know the donors and where their interests lie, taking a long-term approach to the relationship.

She’s passionate about the institute’s mission: that contemporary art can change the Richmond community in huge ways. The biggest challenge, she says, has been the lack of a programmatic history on which to build a reputation.

“I can’t wait until we can start discussing the upcoming programming,” she says. She’s so into her field that she’s in the middle of a new and unique graduate program at Indiana University — the first in the nation to focus on philanthropic studies.

“I geek out on this stuff just as much as reading Bruce Springsteen’s new autobiography,” she says, laughing. “I’m just doing it for funsies.”