Mayor Samuel Parham and his good friend, Sean Robertson grew up in Petersburg, VA where they attended school together from their time at Stuart Elementary to RBC where they graduated in May of ’96. Sharing his experiences at RBC, the Mayor fondly looks back at the school and the foundation it gave him: “Growing up in Petersburg, I have always loved this city. I met some of my best friends here, including Sean. I remember staying late with him after elementary school to help my mom, who was a teacher, crank the mimeograph machine.” The two friends gravitated toward each other during school, playing sports and video games as some of the first Madden NFL interactive series kids.

In high school, Mayor Parham worked in the family business where his father encouraged him to attend RBC to pay less for a quality education close to home. Mayor Parham says, “My dad offered to help keep my sister and me out of debt. He would say, ‘you’re getting more bang for your buck at Richard Bland while adding the necessary tools to your belt to get you to the next level.”

Robertson’s mom gave Mayor Parham gas money to give him a ride to campus every day, and the friends’ college adventures began. “We spent most of our time in the commons between classes, hanging out and eating taco salad. Before our afternoon classes, we would head to the gym to play intramural basketball,” remembers Mayor Parham, adding, “Time was a lot slower back then.”

“Every professor wanted us to succeed. My history professor, William Jefferson, and communications professor, David Majewski, were some of the best professors I’ve ever had.” With the support of faculty, the friends started a Multicultural Alliance Club to unite all ethnicities and nationalities on campus, organizing dances and fashion shows to gather students.

He says, "Graduation was a bittersweet moment for Sean and me because it meant we wouldn’t be riding to school together or seeing each other every day. He went on to Virginia State and I transferred to Virginia Commonwealth, and I was separated from my brother by a school for the first time.”

"Robertson went on to become a Sports Anchor for Channel 6 News, and Mayor Parham is serving his 6th term in office. Because of the mayor’s love for the city and his desire to revitalize it, he is developing a program to get the next generation involved in city government where high schoolers can shadow first responders and local government departments. I didn’t have a clue what was going on in the city’s government when I was growing up. I want to lay the groundwork for the next generation of leaders by exposing them to current events and potential career paths," says the mayor. "RBC is helping to revitalize the city of Petersburg by educating students who can enter into the city’s labor market.”

The two friends thoroughly enjoyed and grew in their few years at RBC, which prepared them for where they are in their careers today. Their lifelong friendship and experiences at RBC are special memories and a testament to the nature of RBC.

Robertson’s mom gave Mayor Parham gas money to give him a ride to campus every day, and the friends’ college adventures began.

As a Richard Bland College Alum, the Mayor of Petersburg shares memories of his college life-long friendship with Sean Robertson, Class of ’96.

*Inside Alumni Relations* by Abigail Holmes
Inside Alumni Relations

2 FRIENDS: SEAN ROBERSTSON

Sean Robertson grew up in Petersburg, VA with his single mom and attended Petersburg County Public Schools K-12. During school, he met one of his best friends, Samuel Parham, who would later become the Mayor of Petersburg. Robertson remembers, “I knew Sam from Stuart Elementary School. His mom was a teacher there, and mine was a secretary. After about 35 years of friendship, we’re still friends.”

Robertson decided to attend RBC because of a program called Project Opportunity Group that gave students a stipend to take three core classes the summer after graduating high school. When he heard that his friend, Mayor Parham, was also planning to attend RBC, they planned their courses so that they could ride together. “I didn’t have a car, but I was a shotgun driver,” says Robertson. “My mom took care of Sam’s gas in exchange for giving me a ride to classes.”

“Starting at Bland instead of a four-year was the best thing that ever happened to us. The professors worked with us to help us do well, and Sam and I motivated each other.” The two friends only had a handful of classes together, but they would meet during lunch and hang out. They desired to bring the lively campus closer together and started a club called Multicultural Alliance.

When graduation came in May of ’96, the graduates were sad to leave their beloved college, which was a holding place for so many good memories. “Statesman gym was packed with people that day. Once the ceremony ended, Sam was the first person I sought out after my family. We both exclaimed, ‘We did it!’” shares Robinson.

Robertson and Mayor Parham went separate ways for the first time since they met. Their friendship no longer relied on having a school in common but thrived none-theless. Mayor Parham went to Virginia Commonwealth University, and Robertson studied at Virginia State University, becoming a PA announcer for the women’s basketball team and later an intern and employee for the campus radio station.

After six years at VSU’s radio station and working full-time as the station’s Sports Director, another director at the station put a word in for Robinson at CBS 6 News in Richmond. He says, “I received a call from the Channel 6 Sports Director offering me a freelance position. I would do weekend shifts when their weekend person wanted time off, but when that person left, they asked me to be the Weekend Sports Anchor.”

“Even when Sam and I were kids, I wanted to work in sports broadcasting. Now, if you had told me in high school that Sam would be the Mayor of Petersburg, I wouldn’t have believed you. Looking back, our conversations about sports and the city propelled us toward our careers,” comments Robinson.

Studying at RBC was a massive step toward success for the two friends, “Coming to RBC prepares students for a four-year degree. You can be your own person, live in the dorms, and participate in extracurricular activities,” recognizes Robertson. “I will never forget my RBC friends and how much the faculty cared. I recently spoke to my English professor, Miss Floyd, and she told me how proud she is of me. She helped me to become a better writer and person.”

Robertson and Mayor Parham began as elementary school buds bonded by video games. They continue as professionals and brothers, celebrating more than 35 years of friendship.