

# BARN. BUSINESS. LEADERSHIP.

**Cyane Dandridge '84** found her love of leadership in AM Barn. Since her time at Putney figuring out how to get the best work out of sleepy high schoolers, she's started eight different businesses. One of those—The School of Environmental Leadership (SEL)—is now in its 27th year. SEL seeks to transform public education by building leaders for a just and sustainable world, through an innovative model which is sustainability-focused, equity forward, and centered in rigorous, interdisciplinary problem-based learning. Dandridge spoke with us about the rigors of being barn head, how it nurtured her interest in entrepreneurship, and how Putney was the perfect place for her to grow.

**Did this experience spark your interest in entrepreneurship?**

I did already have those proclivities—my father was an entrepreneur. But what Putney enabled me to do is to test it out and make a lot of mistakes, but in a very safe place. So I could be barn head and try and roll people out of bed and have them absolutely refuse. And then I had to figure out what to do. Putney didn't give me a list of things and say, okay, this is how to be a barn head. They said, you're a barn head. You need to have your crew at the barn or else everybody's going to have to take up their work. And so how do I motivate somebody, a teenager, a teenage boy who doesn't want to get out of bed? And then when I get in there, all he wants to do is lean on his shovel and sleep. What do I do with that?

**And how did the experience with barn inform your most enduring ventures, The School for Environmental Leadership and Strategic Energy Innovations (SEI)?**

The whole focus of my job and everything that I do is about sustainability and climate protection. A lot of it is centered around the built environment and building energy efficiency and climate work. But that's all with the really core vision of that our earth is a system. It's the Gaia principle. How can we make sure that our world is supported and that we're reducing our impacts on the earth? I was already on this path since childhood, so Putney was absolutely pivotal for me. That was absolutely the place that I wanted to go and where I wanted to be. ■



**You were barn head when you were a student?**  
I did two terms as barn head. That's how much I loved it.

But I also did a lot of other things around the farm. I was really involved. I did maple sugaring and just loved it. It was so much fun—going around and drinking the sap, which I'm sure was really bad for you, but right out of the bucket. And then going in and getting the early cup of hot sap that was just kind of barely warmed through, just a little bit more sweet. And then having a cup of actual syrup.

I remember driving the tractor and getting stuck in the mud and having to figure out how to get out. All of those different things were just amazing.

I actually really liked the winter barn. That was one of my favorite parts.

<< Dandridge in a poncho she wove, collecting eggs from Putney's farm.