Alumni Spotlight

Stephanie O’Connor ‘03

When applying to colleges Stephanie O’Connor C.P.A. ‘03 had narrowed her search to two colleges: Ramapo and Marist. The deciding factor was Ramapo’s track program and coach. She ran Cross Country and Winter Track her first year at the college. For three of her years here, she commuted from New Milford. She met her best friend, Noelle Decoro ‘03, during First Year Experience and they’re still close friends. Decoro, who is in graphic design, was O’Connor’s maid of honor.

An Accounting course in high school piqued her interest in the subject. At Ramapo, she continued her studies in this area. During her junior year, Professor Ray Rigoli recommended O’Connor for an internship with Ernst & Young, then in Lyndhurst, NJ and she fit right in. In fact, she was so successful that they extended her position through the end of her senior year. O’Connor was grateful for an opportunity to work at a big firm. "In public accounting the goal is to have a big name on your resume in order to get the most widespread experience," she says.

After graduating from Ramapo, she accepted a full-time position with Ernst & Young in their New York City office. There, she met recent grads from bigger, and more known, colleges. O’Connor remembers feeling proud that she was able to hold her own, skill wise, in comparison to her colleagues. She worked there for six years, first as a staff auditor and rising to manager before she was the victim of a round of lay-offs in 2009. Professor Rigoli again helped O’Connor by putting her in touch with recruiters and arranging interviews. Only a few weeks later she was offered a position at RotenbergMeril as an audit supervisor. She began her tenure there in January 2010 and was promoted to manager a year later. She handles audits, reviews and compilations of financial statements. "It is a niche market with smaller SEC companies."

O’Connor fondly remembers Professor Constance Crawford. "I liked her style and felt comfortable with her. I grew more confident that I had chosen the right path and as a woman, Professor Crawford was a great example for me."

O’Connor has had the benefit of valuable experience at both large and small accounting firms. "At a larger firm, you work on a smaller aspect of the client’s needs. At a smaller firm you are able to see interesting transactions and understand the bigger picture of the company."

She reminds Accounting majors that “firms usually hire for the fall after graduation. Study and take the CPA exam in the summer right after graduation-- before you start the job, get busy with work and don’t have time."

O’Connor has been married to her high school sweetheart, Michael Norcia, for four years. The couple has two dogs.

Keith Zeig ’02

Keith Zeig’s ’02 ties with Ramapo College are based on family and friendship bonds forged at Tappan Zee High School in Orangeburg, NY. Older brother Chris Zeig ’98 majored in Political Science, as did Keith. Chris gravitated toward corporate life and Keith to the political.
Keith transferred to Ramapo after two years at Rockland Community College. His two best friends from high school, Paul Witherell '03 and Scott Fener '02, are Ramapo alumni. Keith married high school classmate and Ramapo alumnna Kelli Cassetta-Zeig '03. They live in Tappan, NY with their two children.

At Ramapo, he completed an internship with McLaughlin & Associates, a national survey research and strategic services company. He arranged the internship himself after a chance meeting with the company's owner whose daughter Keith knew from high school. Dr. Jennefer Mazza, Keith’s enthusiastic supporter, helped him receive credit for the experience through the Cahill Center. He considers the professor a mentor and credits her teaching style of talking and debating with shaping his professional skills.

While vying for a position working on a political campaign arranged by Mazza, he asked his supervisor at McLaughlin & Associates for a letter of recommendation. The answer: “No.” Keith’s momentary shock was replaced with excitement when he was offered a full-time job that he accepted on the spot. Keith was eager to begin his professional career at McLaughlin & Associates. Immediately after classes ended he was on a plane to Arizona for computer training. His position at McLaughlin is surprisingly just the second one he’s held, the first was working retail at Captain Video.

Keith, executive director at McLaughlin & Associates, is an integral part of the company’s overall operations. He develops questionnaires, analyzes demographics and survey results and oversees data collection, all to provide sound strategies to clients. The firm is built on several principles, ones that Keith employs in his personal life and views as crucial: trustworthiness, confidentiality and teamwork. He urges students seeking permanent positions to embrace these principles as well.

Since joining the company in 2002, he has participated in numerous corporate and political campaigns. He has worked closely with the Alabama Republican Party, the National Republican Congressional Committee and the New York State Senate Republican Campaign Committee. In addition to his political experience, Keith has done public opinion research and strategy for corporate clients such as Verizon Communications, Public Concepts and the New York Jets.

Looking back on his time at Ramapo, he fondly recalls Professor Hayashida, who he describes as laid back; Professor Ariannus, who stressed writing and note taking, Professor Gong, in whose course Keith took his first polling class; and Italian Cinema with Professor D’Angelo.

Keith’s advice to students when seeking employment is to “work hard and do anything that is needed, work as a team and get along with people. There is something out there for you. Show you are committed, keep meeting people and, eventually, it will work out for you.”

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