A CONVERSATION WITH > Joseph Borrino ’90CBA, ’97MBA

A proud graduate of St. John’s Staten Island campus, Joseph Borrino ’90CBA, ’97MBA has enjoyed a unique career. He currently serves as Chief Financial Officer of Jay Z’s Roc Nation, LLC, one of the most successful full-service entertainment companies in the world.

But Borrino’s journey from college to career didn’t happen overnight. We recently caught up with him to discuss Roc Nation, how his SJU education gave him a leg up in the professional world and why he remains connected to the University he loves.

Not everyone can say that they interact with Jay Z on an everyday basis. How did you get started working in the entertainment industry?

Well, I was actually working at Grant Thornton for a while and, after a few years, started looking for a different opportunity. I answered an ad in the New York Times for an entertainment company — it was called Polygram, at the time — and two of the individuals who interviewed me were fellow St. John’s alumni. I’m sure that helped me get the job, and I was fortunate enough to continue to progress through the company as it expanded.

When I was later working at Island Records, we acquired Def Jam, which featured Jay Z as one of its artists. I knew him vaguely, but when he eventually became the President of Def Jam, he and I started working very closely together. Years later, he called me up and asked if I’d like to come over and work for Roc Nation with him. I couldn’t pass up that opportunity, knowing what a good guy he is to work for and what a visionary he is.

One of Roc Nation’s artists is SJU alumnus Jermaine Cole ‘07CPS (J. Cole). Have you two ever bonded over your St. John’s experiences?

As a matter of fact, when I first met J. Cole, we immediately started talking about how we’re both St. John’s guys, and we had a fun conversation about the Men’s Basketball team. This past year, he had another number-one album, so we’re really excited to watch his career continue to grow.

How did your St. John’s education help you get where you are today in the professional world?

One of my professors, Ray Zollo ‘82MBA, had a big impact on me. He was actively working in the business world on the days he wasn’t teaching, so he was able to share his real-life experiences with us in the classroom, adding on to what we learned in the textbooks. There are so many professors like that, and I think that’s the real beauty of a St. John’s education.

You were recently honored at the 34th Annual Staten Island Golf Outing, due to your tremendous career and impact on the community. Why do you think the Staten Island campus is such a special place?

I was incredibly honored to have been chosen for that, and it was a humbling experience. The Staten Island campus is pretty small — only about 3,000 students when I went there — but that’s what makes it great. I was able to develop some very strong relationships, plus I met my wife of 18 years there. You always feel a warmth and friendliness when you step foot on campus, so it’s really an amazing place.

Why do you choose to support St. John’s and remain involved in the University community?

First and foremost, St. John’s gave me the building blocks and the base for my career. I try to come back to campus as often as I can and serve as a guest speaker for different classes, because it’s important for alumni to give back to current students. College is like the gift that keeps on giving — we all received so much from St. John’s, but the only way we can ensure the University remains strong is if we put back in. It’s simply a great place filled with friendly people, so I enjoy staying connected.