Alumni Take an Active Role in University Recruitment

For many alumni, their connection to the University doesn’t end at graduation. They enjoyed their experiences as students, and are grateful for the role that St. John’s continues to play in their lives.

One of the ways in which an ever-increasing number have chosen to show their pride in the University is by sharing it with potential students as members of the St. John’s Alumni Recruitment Team (START).

START is a volunteer-based program that is managed by the Office of Undergraduate Admission. It offers alumni an opportunity to be a part of the University’s future by engaging in the recruitment process of potential students, and also serves to strengthen the connection between the alumni and St. John’s.

“The START program is a way for our alumni to be involved with the University and also to act as reflections of the value of a St. John’s education,” said Samantha Hastler, Senior Associate Director of Admission. “Their presence at recruitment events allows them to share their personal stories as members of the University community, first as students and now as active alumni. It’s a powerful message that really resonates with potential students and their families.”

Alumni can participate as START volunteers in a number of ways. They can serve as St. John’s representatives at off-campus college fairs, either alone or in the company of a professional Admission Counselor, and provide both printed information and personal interaction with high school and transfer students who are considering applying to the University. They can add an alumni component at on-campus recruitment events, such as the Fall Open House and Spring Accepted Students Day.

Alumni from outside the greater New York metropolitan area can connect with incoming students in or near their hometown by attending geographically-based area receptions for accepted students. Although most area receptions are held in local restaurants and hotels, the program is always eager to hear from alumni volunteers who are interested in hosting events in their offices or homes.

In order to assist START volunteers, the Office of Admission has developed a training program to prepare them for the types of questions they can expect to encounter from potential students.

“At least once a semester we provide an opportunity for our alumni participants to come to an on-campus training session,” noted Hastler. “It’s usually in the evening and on weekends to try to make it as convenient as we can. We ask that if at all possible our alumni volunteers either attend the training session or train in person by going to a college fair or other event with an Admission professional. We also provide a START manual that has lots of quick facts and information that would be relevant for them to know in recruiting students. In the future we’re hoping to do several Webinar trainings for out-of-town alumni. It would be the same training that we do on campus, but we would be doing it electronically.”

Alumni have responded to the program with enthusiasm. More than 300 have already volunteered, and from all reports their experiences have been pleasant and satisfying.

Ashley Falzone ’10C enjoyed her time at St. John’s, and decided that becoming a START volunteer would be a good way to share her love for the University with future students who might one day follow in her footsteps. She frequently attends college fairs at high schools on Long Island, offering potential students a glimpse of what St. John’s is like through the eyes of a recent graduate.

Falzone strongly believes that alumni involvement adds a unique dimension to the overall recruitment process.

“It think it’s very important for alumni to be involved in admission initiatives,” she said, “since as former students we have a different and more personal perspective on the University because we went there. We can really speak to what being a member of the St. John’s family is all about, and let potential students and their families see that we’re still connected even after we’ve graduated. I really enjoy being able to communicate with high school students about their goals, and tell them why St. John’s would be a great choice for their college experience.”

Participating as START volunteer is a way for Geoffrey Sims ’83MBA to show his appreciation for what St. John’s did for him, both personally and professionally. He recognizes that alumni have a valuable perspective to add to the recruitment process, and is happy to do his part by sharing his story with future students.

“START is an excellent program which ultimately benefits both the student and the University,” he said. “I am glad to contribute as I am a huge fan of St. John’s, and fully recognize and appreciate how important the school has been to my career success.”

To learn more about becoming a START volunteer, contact Samantha Hastler, Senior Associate Director of Admission, at (718) 390-4327 or e-mail hastlers@stjohns.edu
Alumnae Guide
Students Towards Future Success

All young people face challenges as they enter the workforce for the first time, and those challenges can be particularly daunting for women.

Fortunately, St. John’s alumnae have not forgotten what it was like when they began their careers after graduation. Their willingness to mentor the students who may soon follow in their footsteps is a way to remain connected to the University that has played such an important part in their lives.

Margaret Keane ’81C, ’87MBA remembers that although she lived at home and had to work a number of jobs to pay her tuition, she always tried to take advantage of everything that St. John’s had to offer. Now Chief Executive Officer of GE Capital Finance, Keane is in the process of establishing a Women in Leadership Scholarship to assist students who are today where she once was.

“Because I came from a big family, my parents could not afford to send me to college, so I paid my way,” she explained. “I think it’s important that, since I’m now in a position where I can give back, I can give someone in need some financial aid, and allow that student to spend more time studying without having to worry about the financial burden of education.”

Keane enjoys coming back to campus to share her story with today’s female students. She believes that women need to become aware of the realities of the business world while still planning their careers, so that they will be better able to make a smooth transition from the campus to the office.

“I mentor a lot of women,” she said, “both inside my company and outside, and the thing that I always tell young women is that they need to have confidence. Sometimes women get very hung up on whether they should get married, have children, get promoted, or whatever. I stress that if they’re going to move up in a company, it’s hard work, and they’re competing against men. And I remind them that their career will probably last for 30 or more years, so they don’t have to do everything all at once.”

Augusta Sanfilippo ’85Svc, ’94MBA is another alumna who enjoys returning to the University to advise current students.

Following graduation, Sanfilippo spent a few years analyzing data within the Youth Bureau of the Office of New York City Mayor Edward I. Koch before transitioning from government service into the private sector. During the past 25 years she has held key positions in some of the world’s most prestigious investment banking corporations, including Credit Suisse, JP Morgan and Salomon Brothers.

She is currently Managing Director, Investment Banking Information Technology – Operations IT at Citibank, where she is responsible for an annual budget of over $200 million and 1,700 employees across 16 global locations.

“I’ve been a huge proponent of mentoring over the years,” she said, “and now I’ve taken a newfound affinity toward sponsoring — advocating for women and helping them with their careers. The biggest challenge I see facing women today is that when women get out of school, they are incredibly eager and are sort of thinking too far ahead. They think, ‘Will this job help me in 10 years, when I have to juggle a nanny, when I have a child?’ And I tell them not to think about that until they’re ready for it.”

Both Keane and Sanfilippo were panelists at a recent Women in Leadership event, designed to give St. John’s students an opportunity to meet and network with a group of successful alumnae who hold key positions as female executives. The program highlighted the evolving role of women as financial decision-makers and industry leaders while examining the special challenges facing professional women.

“It is one of the many ways that alumnae give back to the University by reaching out to current students.

“Our alumnae have such a powerful message to share,” noted Victoria Shoaf, Ph.D., Dean of St. John’s The Peter J. Tobin College of Business. “Their observations about how things are a little different to be a woman in the workforce are very useful, and their advice about how our students should be looking at their career preparation, and not holding back or being set in one path, are incredibly valuable.”

Students are eager to take advantage of what the alumnae have to offer. They realize that these successful women have a wealth of information to share with them, and are excited to follow up in ways that will keep them connected in the future.

“Networking is so important,” noted Boryana Yordanova ’15MBA. “I’m going to e-mail these alumnae and keep in touch with them to build long-lasting relationships. In a year when I graduate, I may reach out and ask them for advice about where they recommend I apply for jobs and what industry they think would be best for me. Those relationships and that mentoring, is what helps a person go the distance in the professional world. It’s all about making the personal connections.”
Manhattan Campus Sale Enhances University’s Financial Profile

Taking advantage of the strong New York City real estate market, St. John’s University recently announced the sale of its Manhattan campus, located at 101 Murray Street in lower Manhattan. The University will continue to occupy the building for the current academic year, and will welcome students to a new Manhattan location in time for the start of the Fall 2014 semester.

St. John’s has occupied the Murray Street location since June 2001, following its merger with The College of Insurance (TCI). Through the merger, TCI became The School of Risk Management, a component of the University’s The Peter J. Tobin College of Business.

The 10-story building was sold for $223 million, qualifying it as one of the largest real estate transactions in the history of lower Manhattan. While a portion of the proceeds from the sale will be used to enhance the University’s academic offerings and improve facilities, the largest share will be used to augment its endowment, which will allow for a significant increase in ongoing financial aid for deserving students.

“The University takes great pride in our presence in Manhattan, and the overwhelming success of this transaction allows us to ensure the strength of that presence for generations of St. John’s students to come,” said Martha K. Hirst, St. John’s Executive Vice President, Chief Operating Officer and Treasurer.

As a result of this successful real estate initiative, Moody’s Investors Service has raised the rating of the University’s outstanding revenue bonds from “stable” to “positive”. Moody’s indicated that the improved rating was based on the fact that the sale could more than double St. John’s unrestricted financial resources and greatly improve operating flexibility.

“We are extremely pleased that Moody’s has raised its credit rating outlook for St. John’s,” noted Sharon Hewitt Watkins, CPA, University Vice President for Business Affairs and Chief Financial Officer. “Particularly in these challenging times in higher education, the fiscal strength of the University is critical to ensuring our students’ success.”

Moody’s considered a number of other factors before issuing the new rating.

Of major importance was St. John’s established, but highly competitive market position as a large, private Catholic university that has a track record of favorable operating performance and solid fundraising.

The evaluators also reacted favorably to the University’s commitment to cost containment and sound budgeting practices as reflected in its history of consistently balanced budgets. They noted that “St. John’s financial management team has built in operational flexibility on the expense side with contingency planning and conservative budgeting.”

Moody’s concluded the evaluation by stating that a clear strategic plan and liquid investment strategy for the use of proceeds of the building sale could result in an additional upgrade for the University in the future.

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Administrative Changes at St. John’s

During the past few months four individuals have been named to fill key administrative positions within the University. Russell J. DiGate, Ph.D. was elected by the University’s Board of Trustees to serve as Dean of St. John’s College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences; James O’Keefe, Ph.D. ’79SVC was appointed Vice Provost for the University’s Staten Island campus; Joseph E. Oliva ’91CBA, ’94L, who currently serves as St. John’s General Counsel, assumed additional oversight responsibilities for University Athletics; and Edward M. Kull ’05MBA was named as Acting Vice President for Institutional Advancement.

It was St. John’s commitment to academic excellence combined with the University’s unique mission of service that convinced Dr. Russell DiGate to accept the position as St. John’s newest Academic Dean.

“For me, the Vincentian mission is the most engaging aspect of St. John’s, because I’m very interested in health care disparities,” he said. “This is so important in a profession that, by its very nature, serves underprivileged populations. That’s what the Vincentians are about, and that’s what the health professions should be about. My goal is to make sure that every one of our programs has overt components that are linked to the University’s Vincentian mission.”

Prior to coming to St. John’s, DiGate served as Provost at University of the Sciences in Philadelphia, PA. He came to the University of the Sciences from the University of Maryland, where he served as Chair of the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Education, and Acting Dean within the School of Pharmacy. An internationally recognized expert in the field of topoisomerases and DNA replication, he earned a Ph.D. from the University of Rochester (NY) and conducted postdoctoral research at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center (NY).

Joseph E. Oliva ’91CBA, ’94L
A tenured Associate Professor and former Associate dean of the college of Professional Studies, Dr. James O’Keefe will return to St. John’s in January following completion of a two-year leave of absence, during which he served as a Deputy Commissioner for Training in the New York Police Department (NYPD). In that role he focused on providing the 51,000 sworn and civilian members of the NYPD with the finest and most advanced education and training. His responsibilities included training new recruits as well as providing promotional training for sergeants, lieutenants and captains. He also offered in-service tactical training; civilian training and executive development.

In his new position as Vice Provost, O’Keefe will be the senior academic administrator assigned to the Staten Island campus.

“I am delighted that Jim will be applying his outstanding leadership skills, his past experience as a faculty member and administrator on the Staten Island campus, and his most recent experience as Deputy Commissioner to this critically important academic leadership position,” said University Provost Robert A. Mangione, R.Ph. ’77P, ’79GP, ’93PD, ’99Ed.D.

O’Keefe earned his B.S. in Criminal Justice from St. Vincent’s College of St. John’s University in 1979. He also holds an M.S. in Political Science and Administration and Ph.D. in Criminal Justice Administration from Sam Houston State University (TX).

Joe Oliva’s oversight responsibility for Athletics is in addition to his long-standing position as St. John’s General Counsel, in which he provides legal guidance to the Board of Trustees, the President and other administrative offices of the University. Experienced in all aspects of athletic compliance, he played an integral role in St. John’s recent negotiations involving the new BIG EAST Conference.

“This is an exciting time in the history of St. John’s athletics,” noted Oliva. “The new BIG EAST Conference, the new television contract with FOX Sports and the new sponsorship arrangement with Under Armour are creating a buzz within the University community as well as within our fan base. I look forward to serving St. John’s in this new capacity as well as in my role as lawyer.”

Oliva is a double alumnus of St. John’s. He earned his bachelor’s degree in Finance, summa cum laude, from the College of Business Administration in 1991 and graduated magna cum laude from St. John’s School of Law in 1994.

Over the past decade, Ed Kull has developed a strong bond with St. John’s alumni and friends. He first came to the University in 2003 as Associate Athletic Director for Marketing and External Affairs. He left in 2007, joining fellow alumnus Mike Repole ’91SVC at his start-up company, Glacéau Vitaminwater. Kull’s efforts helped to transform Vitaminwater from a small venture into a national brand. The company was later acquired by Coca Cola, and Kull remained with the new parent company, taking advantage of the opportunity to learn valuable corporate marketing skills.

He returned to the University in 2011 as Director of Development for Men’s Basketball, then served as Associate Chief of Staff for Athletics and Institutional Advancement. In the latter position he was involved in many athletics initiatives, including creation of the new BIG EAST Conference and identification of FOX Sports as the University’s TV partner and Under Armour as St. John’s new athletic apparel partner. Kull received his bachelor’s degree in Finance from Stony Brook University and earned his M.B.A. in Executive Management from The Peter J. Tobin College of Business in 2005.

In his new role, Kull is responsible for all aspects of alumni relations and fundraising. “I am excited to be leading Institutional Advancement as we move into the future by building upon the accomplishments of the past,” he said. “The opportunities to engage our alumni, coupled with the ever-present need to generate the resources necessary to advance the University’s unique mission, are more important today than ever.”

“My goal is to make sure that every one of our programs has overt components that are linked to the University’s Vincentian mission.”

— Russell J. DiGate, Ph.D., newly-elected Dean of St. John’s College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences

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History in the Making: Lapchick Statue Coming to Campus

The late Joe Lapchick holds a special place in St. John’s Men’s Basketball history. And through the generous efforts of alumnus Kevin Reed ’75C, this former head coach’s legacy will soon be on full display on the Queens campus.

With the help and support of fans and St. John’s administrators, Reed spearheaded a project to construct a life-sized statue of Lapchick and ultimately place it across from Carnesecca Arena in an area slated to be called ‘Legends Plaza’. The statue will be unveiled during a special ceremony tentatively planned for Spring 2014.

“The idea came to me while I was watching a documentary on MSG Network about Joe Lapchick,” Reed recalled. “It highlighted the ways Coach Lapchick left an indelible mark on not only St. John’s, but on the entire game of basketball.”

In 20 seasons as head coach of SJU Men’s Basketball, Lapchick captured four NIT championships (during a time in which the NIT was the nation’s premier collegiate basketball tournament). Additionally, Lapchick was a player on the original Celtics and later served as coach of the New York Knickerbockers, breaking the color barrier in the NBA by signing the league’s first African-American player, Nathaniel “Sweetwater” Clifton, in 1950.

“By all accounts,” Reed continued, “Joe Lapchick was a Hall-of-Fame coach and a Hall-of-Fame person. I began to wonder: ‘Why are there no prominent monuments on the Queens campus honoring Lapchick’s legacy?’ And that’s precisely how this statue idea got off the ground.”

To make his dream a reality, Reed reached out to a handful of Lapchick’s former players, including Gus Alfiere ’59C, ’64GED, the author of Lapchick: The Life of a Legendary Player and Coach in the Glory Days of Basketball. Reed also befriended Lapchick’s son, fellow alumnus Richard Lapchick, Ph.D. ’67C, ’01HON, who has himself enjoyed a remarkable career in academics, studying how athletics can combat racial, gender and social inequalities.

It all culminated in a fundraising dinner in May, hosted by Reed to support the Lapchick statue. Dr. Lapchick served as the guest of honor and spoke about why he feels it’s important for St. John’s to remember its roots.

“I think that the younger generation does not necessarily have a great sense of history,” Dr. Lapchick noted. “This statue of my father will serve as a unique way of bringing them that history, of understanding whose shoulders they’re standing on, and I think that’s very important.”

Funding for the Lapchick sculpture has already been secured, but Reed and SJU administrators hope to add more statues to “Legends Plaza” in the near future. As Dr. Lapchick was quick to point out at the fundraiser, there is certainly no shortage of legendary Men’s Basketball figures for the University to honor.

“There are so many great people associated with St. John’s, such as Lou Carnesecca ’50C, ’60GED, ’00HON, Jack Kaiser ’49C and others,” he explained. “Those two men in particular are perfect reflections of the mission of the University, embodying the warm, family feeling you get when you step foot on campus. It’d be truly amazing to honor individuals like them with statues one day, too.”

Reed, meanwhile, is thankful to all of the fans, alumni and administrators who helped him raise funds for the Lapchick statue.

“As always, the St. John’s community joined together to honor its rich history,” Reed said. “Hopefully ‘Legends Plaza’ will serve as a wonderful addition to campus and teach today’s students about a very special figure in our Men’s Basketball tradition.”

— Kevin Reed ’75C

Want to support future additions to ‘Legends Plaza’? Please contact Kevin Barry ’06MBA at (718) 990-6147 or Rino Grzinic ’77SVC at (718) 990-6787
Students Carry the University’s Mission to Guatemala

Graduate students in Speech Pathology gain real-world experience during a unique study-abroad opportunity that combines classroom learning, practical experience and service to others.

This unique initiative began in 2009 when Nancy Colodny, Ed.D., C.C.C.-S.L.P., an Associate Professor of Communication Sciences and Disorders in St. John’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, decided to give her students a first-hand opportunity to witness the need for efficient medical care, treatment and supplies in an area different from anything they’d ever experienced.

For the past five years, children at an orphanage in rural Guatemala have benefited from the expertise of this compassionate professor who specializes in speech disorders. She and her students volunteer there for 10 days each May to help children whose health problems hinder their ability to swallow.

The hands-on experience is part of her graduate-level course, Management of Pediatric Dysphagia in a Developing Country. The class represents a collaboration between the Offices of Academic Service-Learning and Global Studies.

“Our goal is to develop a learning community,” said Colodny. “Our students learn theories and practical applications and serve as role models for the hospital staff by demonstrating the correct feeding practices for infants.”

She noted that the students who go to Guatemala see medical conditions and practices they may not encounter in this country. Children at the orphanage are at risk for dysphagia, or difficulty swallowing, which can lead to malnutrition, choking and pneumonia.

“This program is geared towards those individuals who aim to achieve practical skills in the theories of early intervention and patho-physiology,” she explained. “It is a wonderful opportunity for the students to integrate theory and practice and learn the importance of making recommendations with limited equipment, supplies and staffing constraints.”

According to Colodny, the program will help students foster their skills as future Speech Pathologists and obtain positions in hospitals, clinics, outpatient centers, private practices and schools. Speech Pathologists are experienced in diagnosing and treating feeding and swallowing problems as well as a variety of speech-language and communication problems across the lifespan. Students often join Colodny to duplicate their experience in Guatemala during the year. While this provides a valuable experience for the students, she noted that the greatest benefit is for the facility’s patients and staff. In the midst of their day, students not only assist with feeding, but also change diapers, wash dishes, mop floors and help in any way they can. They also spend time interacting with the children, most of whom have very little human contact.

Students agreed that while it might be initially disheartening to meet so many children facing complex health issues, there were many happy moments and small victories. Elena Damiani ’14G recalled a nine year-old boy named Henry whom everyone believed had limited communication skills.

“One day, she recalled, “Henry said, ‘Hola,’ and I was in shock. Then he asked, ‘How are you?’ In English, and I called everyone over. It was amazing to discover that he could speak Spanish and English. There were other children who couldn’t speak as well as Henry, but could communicate in their own way.”

Since the opportunities for service in Guatemala began, Colody has brought over 800 specialized spoons, therapeutic feeding bottles and a variety of other needed items to the facility. She also has participated in fundraising to purchase special medical equipment such as pulse oximeters and suction machines.

She applauds the University for its extensive support of the program.

“The beauty of it is the collaboration between Global Studies and Academic Service-Learning,” she said. “Both offices have embraced the program and have asked me to give presentations. It’s wonderful to have that kind of support, and the students feel that as well.”

— Nancy Colodny, Ed.D., C.C.C.-S.L.P., Associate Professor of Communication Sciences and Disorders in St. John’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences