

HURD IMMUNITY Setting the bar

Unless you've experienced memory loss or grown up incredibly entitled, you probably remember your first job. Mine is quite vivid despite the fact that it only lasted three weeks.

I was hired by a local landscaper named Ralph Zimmerman. Ralph had built an impressive reputation for quality and dependability. He had done that through a hiring process that would screen-out overzealous impostors. On rare occasions, one would sneak through.

It would sometimes take up to three weeks to correct the mistake.

In my defense, landscaping was never a good fit for me. I never gained an appreciation for pulling weeds and spreading manure (although there are many who might contest that second one). What it ultimately came down to was an absence of passion. Sometimes it takes a special person to help pull that passion to the surface.

You'll notice a list of college students elsewhere on this page who came to the Chamber as interns during the past twenty years. A number of them arrived with high hopes and great enthusiasm. Probably an equal number experienced some sort of trepidation or were simply intent on fulfilling a graduation requirement. What they all got was more than they bargained for.

That gift was courtesy of Linda Stotler.

Linda has been the VP of Communication and Marketing for more than two decades. With all the events and programs that the Chamber does, promoting them is a task that often morphs into a chore. She hardly needed to be handed the additional responsibility of recruiting, interviewing and assigning meaningful work to interns. She could have done what many employers do and chained them to a copy machine or sent them out for coffee. That's not acceptable in Linda Stotler's world.

Chamber interns, it seems, have a number of things in common. I only know that because I surveyed a cross-section of them for the story that accompanies the list. As college students doing an unpaid internship, they expected to be fawned-over, even coddled, for their willingness to donate their time and abilities to a grateful non-profit. Then Linda and reality both showed-up at the same time. And the interns were never the same again.

One of them mentioned in his answer to my survey that nothing in his education challenged him more than to have someone in his ear who genuinely cared about whether he succeeded.

We need more of that.

Seltzer's step-up to create impact

Alex Seltzer has never doubted the devotedness or the ferocity of his older sister Alison.

"On several occasions, when we were young, she stuck up for me," he pointed out. "At one point, she punched a friend on my behalf. That's a day I'll always remember."

To put the older-sister, younger-brother relationship into its proper context, Alison is actually eleven minutes older than Alex. "He pushed me out," Alison kidded. "He's been referring to me as his older sister ever since."

Having the same birthday is far from the only similarity that the Seltzer's share. Most recently they have turned their desire for community involvement into leadership roles. For the past year – ending in July – Alex has served as president of Altoona Ambucs. For the next year – starting in July – Alison will serve as president of The Rotary Club of Altoona. They each took different paths to the top.

"I've been a member of Ambucs for the past 34-years," Alex acknowledged. "I figured I was long overdue to step-up as president.

It's typically a one year term but as luck would have it, they added an extra two months. That might have been a punishment for my avoiding it for so long."

Alison, however, was on the fast track. She wasn't even inducted into Rotary until 2018. When a vice-president position opened-up, she was asked to consider filling it.

"I was ecstatic," she disclosed. "I had joined Rotary to spend more time with my father (Irv) as he was growing older as well as to find an organization in which I could grow and give back to the community. I would have done anything they asked me to do."

She had big shoes to fill. Not only had her father gained legendary status within Rotary but her older brother Steve had served the Altoona Club as president.

"I likely inherited my leadership abilities via genetics," Alison admitted. "I was taught how to be independent, resilient, determined and not afraid to step outside my comfort zone. My mother also exemplified the very same qualities."

Alex benefitted from



Alison and Alex Seltzer have taken leadership roles in organizations that require energy, creativity and commitment.

many of those same familial associations but with more of a close-up view.

"Being in the family business for more than 40 years, it's easy for me to forget the coaching, mentorship and support dad gave me in those early years," he disclosed. "I was very green starting out and he made sure that I understood the important aspects of leader-

ship that were non-negotiable. The experience of working with him all those years helped me in so many ways."

Overall, Alex and Alison are one another's biggest fans.

"Alison was always the brave one," Alex noted. "She didn't hesitate to try new things or explore. It's her curiosity that I wish I

had more of. She'll make Rotary proud."

"Alex has a very gentle heart, soul and spirit," Alison said. "He has been courageous, stellar and always steady. If he didn't know how to do something he wanted to do, he would take lessons to learn how to do it better. If he had a desire to challenge himself, he had no fear."

Chamber Internship Program still flourishing

It's been twenty years since the Blair County Chamber decided to create a program that would allow college students majoring in business or marketing to spend up to a semester getting some hands-on experience.

"One of the best decisions we've ever made," acknowledged Chamber President Joe Hurd. "Our intention was strictly altruistic – to help augment the classroom learning that was taking place. We had no idea what a great benefit it would be to our organization."

Linda Stotler, the Chamber's Vice-President of Communications and Marketing drew the assignment of interviewing and overseeing the day-to-day duties of the interns.

"We wanted it to be something of value that they could use as a resume-builder," Stotler pointed out. "We had no idea whether they'd enjoy it or pray for it to be over quickly. We were prepared for the worst, just in case. The worst, as it turned out, never happened."

The very first intern in 2002 was Megan (Dively) Lehman.

"I reached-out to the Chamber during my junior year at IUP about an internship," Lehman pointed out. "Being their first intern gave us all the opportunity to create an experience that was mutually beneficial. The internship exceeded my expectations. It opened doors." (Lehman is now Community Relations Coordinator for the PA Department of Environmental Protections' Northcentral Region.)

Kim Helsel interned at the Chamber in 2006. As a

student at Penn State Altoona, she was looking for an internship that would provide real-life work experience as part of a team.

"I had heard that some interns at other places were assigned the tasks that no one else wanted to do," she admitted. "Working with Linda Stotler at the Chamber, I had the opportunity to complete worthwhile projects that were actually contributing and building my confidence and marketable skills." (Helsel is Director of Development/Marketing Communications for UPMC Home Healthcare of Central PA.)

Courtney (Wentz) Kantoski interned in 2009.

"My internship allowed me to build a professional network by attending various networking events that the Chamber held," Kantoski noted. "Working alongside industry professionals gave me an incredible advantage when it came time to look for employment in my field." (Kantoski is a Career Counselor at Penn State Altoona.)

Matt Eberhart was a Chamber intern in 2010.

"This internship was my first job outside of cutting grass around the neighborhood," he disclosed. "I was hoping to have a chance to do something on the marketing side and it certainly provided more than I could have hoped for. The internship also taught me to take ownership in the quality of my work. Nothing but the highest quality was accepted by the Chamber. (Eberhart is the Pricing Director at The Hite Company.)

Brandon Peters interned with the Chamber in 2013. "I had the opportunity to



Kim Helsel, a Chamber intern in 2006, has used the experience to advance to a director's position at UPMC Home Healthcare.

work with the Chamber when it was launching the Buy Here. Live Here. program." Peters stated. "Since it was new, I got a chance to play an important role in its development. I gained so much from the relationship in terms of leadership experience and relationship building. (Peters is the Director of Planning & Community Development at SAPDC.)

Tori (Liebal) Montler has the distinction of being one of five Chamber interns who were actually hired as employees by the Chamber after their internships were completed. She also was the only intern to be invited to return for an additional semester.

"I love the work the Chamber does and I love the staff," she said. "I am a huge believer in the value of internships. I'll always treasure that time." (Montler is Director of HR Services for KIZ Resources.)

Chamber Interns

Megan Dively '02	Jim Swope '09
Chrissy Korman '02	Jennifer McCloskey '10
Amanda Stoehr '03	Matt Eberhart '10
Katie McCloskey '03	Marissa Cortez '10
Kevin Knapick '03	Brittney Nyiri '10
Trish Betzler '04	Janelle Ayers '11
Craig Jackson '04	Maureen Oswald '11
Marisa Harteis '04	Brandon Peters '13
Andrea Greenleaf '04	Rachel Litzinger '13
Kanayo Anekwe '05	Ashley Teeter '13
Lauren Hopkins '05	Nikki Coleman '13
Angie Leap '05	Jon Papp '13
Eddie Ruiz '06	Michelle Browell '14
Kim Helsel '06	Tori Liebal '14 & '15
Kelly Over '07	Katie Reed '15
Lori Emig '07	Anna Jacobeen '15
Sarah Harteis '07	Taylor Trail '16
Andrew Newhouse '07	Kimberly Elter '16
Joe Grabowski '07	Sandy Pentland '17
Emily Wible '08	Emma Greenland '19
Adrienne Weyandt '08	Dayton Grassmyer '20
Kristen Stormer '08	Dominic Frucella '20
John Moore '09	Mitchell Longstreth '21
Courtney Wentz '09	

GROUP TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

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May 10, 2023 Moses at Sight & Sound Theatre

June 22-30, 2023 Ocean City Maryland

July 19-21, 2023 West Virginia Rails



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