

# Sharing My Experience

By Ricci Minella

I've felt the entrepreneurial spark in me since I've been about 13 years old. I saw a great opportunity happening on my street at about that age and knew that I had to jump on board or I would miss the boat. My neighbor Lee Hlavay had a lawn mower, a weed whacker, a blower and one customer. I asked him if I could do the weed whacking and the rest is history.



We were both wide eyed, ambitious and eager to expand our operations. Before long we had a large portion of the landscaping business on our street and saw that it was time for a real expansion. My Dad bought the family a small pickup truck just as we were purchasing some new equipment for our freshly named landscaping business, “Foxwood Landscaping”. At this point we opened up our operations to anybody who would trust us with a lawn mower, traveling sometimes 30 to 40 minutes to cut a lawn. We were so eager to acquire a new customer that it didn't even matter to us that we might have been losing money on the deal. We made our fair share of blunders and got burned pretty severely a couple times, but, we learned priceless information about people, the business world and most importantly ourselves. By 2008 we were netting around \$13,000 for the year.

I can't say that owning my own landscaping company brought me to Duquesne University but it most certainly directed me in choosing my focus of study. The first time I looked at majors during the summer transition from high school to college the Entrepreneurship program stood out to me. At first I was afraid of choosing it as a major due to the uncertain nature of the field. After discussing the program with some of the students that were in the major I knew that it fit my personality pretty well and decided to give it a shot. Here I am, a senior Entrepreneurship major with no regrets about the decision I made.

As president of the Duquesne Entrepreneurial Alliance I wanted to create an event that would support National Entrepreneurship Week 2009. We chose to collaborate with the Small Business Development Center, and the Pennsylvania partners for National Entrepreneurship Week to combine powers to facilitate an event that would bring about awareness of entrepreneurship as a viable career at the spring career fair at Duquesne. I thought it would be a great place to talk to students and try to get them to understand that even though college and society channels you to find a job with good companies (which is not a bad thing), there is another path out there for those who dream a little bigger. We ran the idea by the University and they gave us the go ahead so we started planning immediately.

When the Career fair finally rolled around, we had all cylinders firing. Our booth was equipped with outstanding signage provided by Eric Boris, CEO of BCI Sign and Design. We had plenty of informative literature to hand out to the students. We even had a huge LCD TV set up so that we could show a video that showcased an event in Philadelphia, “Unleash Philly”. Above all the tangibles that were at the booth we were able to bring something that you cannot put a price on. We had the opportunity to give first hand advice to students that had open ears.

More than anything, I learned the importance of using my experiences to give back to others. I was able to give real life helpful advice to students that were unsure of where they were heading. It was great to watch some of these students' reactions when I told them how simple it is to start a business. I let them know that you don't have to have a huge blue chip idea to create a flourishing business. All you need to start a business is customers. I really feel this event was successful in opening the minds of student to entrepreneurship□

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