

Alumni Pride: Journalism grad's expertise, creativity help nonprofits

by Sheng Lee - Tuesday, August 23, 2011

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Planting the seeds of his career in Milwaukee as a copywriter at several advertising agencies, Michael Fredrick '97, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh alumnus, now flourishes as the creative director at Bader Rutter, the largest advertising agency in Wisconsin.

For the past 10 years, Fredrick has led a group of associate creative directors, art directors and copywriters working with top Fortune 500 clients, including GE Healthcare, Pfizer Animal Health and Dow AgroSciences.

“As with most businesses, we only assign our top talent to our biggest clients,” said Jeff Young, executive vice president of Bader Rutter.

Not only does Fredrick excel in his field, but he also has put his creativity to use by helping Milwaukee-area nonprofit organizations with their advertising needs.

He has volunteered his services for Adaptive Sportsmen, an organization that provides outdoor recreational activities to physically challenged people; Greyhound Pets of America, an adoption service for retired racing greyhounds; and Guitars for Vets, a group that distributes free guitars and lessons to help military veterans cope with injury and trauma.

“The range of his volunteer efforts is impressive,” said Mike Cowling, UW Oshkosh’s journalism department chair.

For Fredrick’s exceptional work in his career and community, UW Oshkosh will honor his efforts with an Outstanding Young Alumni Award at a reception and dinner on Friday, Oct. 21, during Homecoming 2011.

Every semester, Fredrick comes back to UW Oshkosh to work with advertising classes.

“I am committed to helping mentor the creative leaders of tomorrow,” Fredrick said. “My goal is to help the students create campaigns that they can include in their portfolios, which will ultimately help them land an advertising job after graduation.”

Fredrick also volunteers his time to advertising classes at Marquette University.

“Fredrick exemplifies the qualities our department of journalism seeks to inspire in all advertising students: innovative creativity, clear thinking and a commitment to service,” said Sara Steffes Hansen, UW Oshkosh assistant professor in strategic communication. “He’s amazed me with his insights, energy and time dedicated to improve our students’ experiences.”

In his own words:

Activities/ hobbies:

I enjoy camping, kayaking, biking and boating.

Describe the achievement(s) you are most proud of.

Advertising is a funny business. We work our butts off, so we find it necessary to indulge in self-congratulation. While the truly important achievements are all about helping our clients grow their brands and, in turn, their businesses, we spend a lot of time celebrating our own achievements with award shows. And I have to admit, I participate in these self-indulgent displays as much as the next ad guy. While I've won plenty of local, regional and national awards for my creative work, that's really not what makes me most proud. And while I find an enormous amount of pride in helping my clients succeed, those are still not the achievements that make me the proudest. I'm most proud that I get to walk into work every morning and love every minute of what I do. While this is one crazy, stressful, chaotic job, I couldn't imagine doing anything else. It's the most fun you could possibly get paid for, and that's what truly makes me most proud. Having the rare opportunity to spend my working life doing something I absolutely love.

What is your favorite UW Oshkosh memory?

My favorite UW Oshkosh memory is meeting my future wife.

What does your UW Oshkosh education mean to you?

I wasn't a model student by any means. I cared as much about learning outside of the classroom as I did in it, and UW Oshkosh gave me that opportunity. It enabled me to strike a perfect balance of educational lessons and life lessons. I'm not sure if it was the size of the school, the location or just the myriad of opportunities on and off campus that helped. Coming out of high school, I had the choice to attend a number of different colleges, but I'm very happy I chose UW Oshkosh. I think it was the people that made the difference. There's not a lot of pretense or ego associated with UW Oshkosh. It's just friendly people looking to learn and have a good time, and that truly was the perfect foundation for my future. It fits my job perfectly too, because advertising is truly a mix of business and fun.

What advice would you give today's UW Oshkosh students?

Be well-balanced. Find opportunities to learn and grow on and off campus, and to discover who you are and who you want to be. Don't take things too seriously. This is a time in your life that is supposed to be fun too, and you'll never experience anything like it again. But also make the most of it. Find something you truly love to do and pursue it passionately because you'll be stuck doing it for a long, long time.

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