

SCEF Spotlight on Alumni/ae questions:

What is your most vivid memory of Bellport High School?

My most vivid memories of Bellport High School involve the work that I did for the Key Club. I loved doing community service, and in fact, I still do quite a lot. One of my favorite Key Club activities was volunteering at a weekly soup kitchen. The people that we worked with and served were incredible and it was great to know that we were really making an impact on the community!

What was your favorite class?

My favorite class was an Economics class taught by Mr. Melo that I took my Senior year. That class first introduced me to the world of “business” and was one of the reasons why I decided to go on to be a Business major in college at Indiana University. Mr. Melo was an amazing teacher – tough, yet he really cared about his students. I had, and still have, a lot of respect for him.

What are some of your more recent activities?

After graduating from Bellport, I went to college at Indiana University, which really was the quintessential college experience; a large university in a small college town with sports, academics and a huge student activities presence. It was important for me to break out of my shell and push myself to try something new. I had known only Bellport for the first 18 years of my life and wanted to see what else was out there. It was probably the single best decision that I’ve ever made. I met people from all over the country, got a great education and a received a well respected Marketing degree.

I spent the first few years after college graduation working as a Retail Sales Planner for Mervyn’s and Guess?, Inc. in California. While I loved working in the fashion industry and my work was fulfilling, my job was also highly analytical and I missed being creative. I started thinking about pursuing another line of work.

It was about that time that the idea for Bellport.com came along. My father had the foresight to buy the domain name more than ten years ago with the thought of someday creating a website like Bellport.com. I had taken web design classes in college as requirements for my major, so I had a reasonable understanding of web design. However, much of what I now know I learned just by trial and error. Our goal was to create a site that showcased the positive aspects of the Bellport area, including the schools, local organizations and the local businesses. There are a lot of great things about Bellport that unfortunately people just don’t hear about. Our goal was the get the word out! We started the site on November 1, 2005 wondering how we would ever get people to visit us. Now, a year and a half later, we average 15,000 visits per month and we’re still growing!

Bellport.com is a family-run operation, which it needs to be in order to function with our current geographic situation. I still live in California with my husband, Josh, who is the Director of Public Relations for the Los Angeles Dodgers. Unless the Dodgers decide to move back to Brooklyn, it looks like we’re staying put in L.A. for now. The beauty of the internet is that I don’t physically have to be in Bellport to work on Bellport.com. The majority of the correspondence that we do for the site is done over email; which means that all I need is my computer and a good internet connection and I’m all set.

My parents, Larry and Eileen, take the majority of the photography that you see on the site, as well as have any urgent face-to-face meetings that come up. I come back to Bellport every few months for a week or two to meet with people and spend some time catching up on what is new in the area. It’s actually been very nice to have a connection to “home” while living 3,000 miles away.

How did going to Bellport prepare you for your life and profession?

Now that my job involves knowing everything that is going on in Bellport, it obviously helps that I have lived in Bellport and had lots of hands on experience. Bellport High School itself taught me a lot about diversity and how there's room for everyone in this world. After going to school in the Midwest, I realized how there are large parts of this country where communities are not diverse. It made me appreciate even more my early exposure to different races and religions.

What is your advice for BHS students?

I actually have three pieces of advice:

1. If you have the opportunity to go to college, if at all possible, I would strongly suggest that you go away to school. You'll learn so much more about yourself living on your own and having to be self-sufficient. You'll end up appreciating "home" a lot more if you have something else to compare it to. You'll also meet people who have had different life experiences and can teach you what they know. My best friends in college were from all over the country, and my husband, whom I met in college, was from California. I never would have met any of them if I hadn't decided to try something new.
2. Learning is ALWAYS a good thing. I guarantee that you are either taking classes right now or will take classes in college that you think you will never, ever use in real life. While you might be right, you might also be very wrong. I never would have guessed that those web design classes that I took in college would ultimately guide my career, but they did.
3. Don't be afraid to change your mind. Just because you go to college thinking that you'll be one major, that does NOT mean that you can't decide to change your major (just try to make that decision prior to your senior year.) It also means that just because you pick one career path once you're out of college, you're not stuck. Trust me, I never planned to go from doing profit analysis for retail companies to designing websites. It seemed like the most agonizing decision at the time to go from what I knew to the great unknown, but looking back, I was 24 at the time and I really couldn't make any mistakes.