UAlbany Weekend MBA Stories – Scott Harrigan
Executive Vice President, The Fort Miller Co., Inc.

One of 13 children, Scott Harrigan grew up on a dairy farm in Ellenburg, northwest of Plattsburgh, New York. “I’m fourth from the bottom out of 10 boys and three girls,” he explains. “Growing up on a farm, every day of the year was a work day. As my father would joke, I became ‘useful’ by the fourth grade when I started getting up at 4:30 a.m. to do chores before school.”

It wasn’t until about the 10th grade Scott started thinking about college and career. A typical rural, agricultural part of the state, Ellenburg didn’t send a lot of high school graduates to college. In his family, he was one of three who decided to pursue further education.

At the time, guidance counselors didn’t steer students by asking what they enjoyed doing but rather, focused only on standardized testing. “Because my scores were high in math and science, I was told I should become an engineer,” shares Scott. “I applied and was accepted to the engineering program at Cornell University.”

Scott headed to Cornell’s orientation in Ithaca early, not knowing how long the drive would take. Near Cortland, he saw a sign at Tompkins Cortland Community College (TC3), advertising OPEN HOUSE TODAY. Since one of the majors listed was engineering and he had time to spare, he drove onto the TC3 campus to investigate.

“I’ll never forget,” Scott reminisces. “Standing there was a 5’6” guy with a beard and big eyes, who remarked, I love new students!”

“Oh, I’m not a new student,” Scott clarified. “I’m going to Cornell.”

The department head smiled, explaining several of the community college professors also teach at Cornell, himself included. “What you’ll get here is a lot more personal attention.”

“After considerable discussion, he basically convinced me right on the spot to attend TC3,” admits Harrigan.
That wasn’t the last time Professor Dabes would influence Scott’s journey. “He taught me never to close my mind and allow room for a plan to change for the better,” Scott asserts. “None of the college plans I had set for myself happened – except I did become an engineer.”

“As I was finishing my degree at TC3, Professor Dabes challenged me to reconsider Cornell because of the fierce competitiveness that drove students to focus only on personal success rather than helping others be successful. He recommended I consider Clarkson University. I liked what I discovered and ended up becoming a Clarkson Golden Knight.”

As a college student, Scott worked one summer with a handful of other engineering students at the New York State Department of Transportation (NYS DOT) as a Transportation Construction Inspector II. “The Engineer in Charge, Don Gordon, taught me a great deal about potential,” Harrigan points out. “He helped change my perception and encouraged me to work hard for what I wanted.”

As various DOT projects were being assigned to the summer hires, most did not appeal to Scott. “Fortunately, I landed a bridge replacement assignment in my hometown of Ellenburg and was able to exercise my passion for design engineering, working with precast, footings, paving, striping, curbs and abutments – everything as far as construction is concerned.”

After earning the highest grade on the required test, Scott waited weeks with anticipation of landing a permanent job with NYS DOT before realizing no hiring was being done because the state budget didn’t pass yet. “I thought to myself, I’ve been going to school for 17 years and do NOT want to graduate and not have a job!”

It was then Scott remembered his seven-year-old niece had taken a phone message several weeks prior that read, Peter Smith called from Fort Miller. “At the time, I put the message to the side because I’d convinced myself I wanted something else. I was mistaken.”

In June 1989, with a freshly earned Bachelor’s degree in civil engineering, Scott began his lifelong career at The Fort Miller Co., Inc. as a Design Engineer. “The company is founded on innovation,” Scott says with a smile. “I found my career home.”

In December 2012, after watching Scott Harrigan embody the culture of the organization for nearly 25 years and transition through progressively more responsible positions, The Fort Miller Company implemented a five-year succession plan to transition him into the role of company president.

With encouragement from the company’s owner, Scott pursued his MBA to widen his business scope and graduated in May 2015. “I had the engineering piece down pat,” Scott explains, “I also understood the importance of developing as a leader in the various aspects of business in order to best affect growth and change.”
“I chose the University at Albany’s Weekend MBA Program because the 22-month weekend program with a cohort structure of diverse professionals was extremely appealing,” he shares. “My cohort was a very diverse group of people. We were not all engineers or accountants, allowing for diverse outlooks and opinions. It’s ideal to learn alongside people who each excel in a certain subject area.”

For 20 years, Scott’s mantra has been, *Attitude Is Everything*. “Who you are and what you do affects everyone around you.” The cohort structure of the UAlbany Executive Program equipped the class to work and learn in teams. “We bounced ideas off each other and helped the team with our individual strengths and real world experience. Diversification is hugely beneficial in a higher learning environment.”

If you ask Scott how he keeps his balance and steers clear of stress, he’ll retort with a chuckle, “Being stressed is for the weak.” Harrigan says life is too short to be too serious. “My advice is to nibble away at your priorities. It is critical to have people skills and the ability to interact with others in a productive way. Make mistakes. It means you’re trying. I practiced this in the UAlbany Weekend MBA Program and am a better leader and person because of it.”

Perhaps his biggest stabilizer is his wife of 26 years, Shann. “We met in high school and from day one, she helped me embrace the idea of not taking myself or life too seriously,” he offers. “Life got busy and stressful with me pursuing my MBA. Shann kept me and our family grounded. Without hesitation, she took the lead in our home and with our two sons, Connor, age 18 and Caleb, age 15. I couldn’t have done it without her and I am grateful.”

Scott Harrigan’s advice to professionals considering the UAlbany Weekend MBA Program? “Begin with the end in mind. As you start something – no matter what it is — understand how you want it to come out in the end.”

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