Alumni Kick Off Summer with a Night at the Winery

In June, the BGSU Firelands Alumni Advisory Board held its first social event for Firelands alumni and friends.

Paper Moon Vineyards co-owners and BGSU Firelands alumni Richard ’78 and Sheryl Cawrse ’78 were gracious in hosting nearly 50 individuals for the Friday evening event.

With warm temperatures and a cool breeze, Firelands alumni and friends spent the evening socializing, listening to local musician Emily Keener, and sampling many of Paper Moon’s best wines. Firelands alumni of all ages were in attendance.

Former Starz CEO to Assist in Firelands 50th Anniversary

November 19, 2015, will mark the 50th Anniversary of BGSU Firelands College and the date when the BGSU Board of Trustees approved the request for a full-time branch campus in Erie County.

Planning for a year-long celebration (which will begin in the fall of the 2015-16 academic year) has already begun and one familiar, and highly successful, face has already agreed to be a part of the festivities.

Robert Clasen ’66 & ’69 earned a bachelor’s degree in education and a master’s in college student personnel/counseling psychology from BGSU. He was also the director of student services in the early years of the BGSU Firelands campus; however, today he may be more widely recognized for his entrepreneurial accomplishments.

Clasen is the retired Chairman and CEO of Starz, LLC, a multi-media entertainment company headquartered in Colorado. Starz consists of 17 American cable TV channels which serve more than 56 million subscribers.

According to Clasen, he is often asked how a student services director becomes an entertainment mogul, and his answer is simple. “What I discovered was when I left BGSU, although I didn’t recognize it at the time, I was already a pretty complete package.”

Clasen admits that he gained valuable experience through his employment at BGSU, but adds that he appreciates the experiences as a student at BGSU as well.

“The toughest job I ever had was president of Sigma Chi, my social fraternity while I was a student. Managing one hundred testosterone-charged 20 year olds during the late 50s and early 60s was no easy task,” said Clasen with a smile.

That experience led to a position in the office of admissions at BGSU and eventually to the director of student services at the new BGSU Firelands campus. “The management and leadership skills I gained from these opportunities prepared me well to go on...
Dean’s Corner

Greetings from BGSU Firelands! It’s been another successful year at Firelands and we celebrated the many accomplishments of our students.

During the May 10 Commencement Ceremony at BGSU Firelands, we recognized 436 associate degree candidates and 87 bachelor’s degree candidates who successfully completed their degree requirements on the Firelands or BGSU campus during the 2013-2014 academic year. We welcome these recent graduates to our thriving alumni base, and we congratulate them on the completion of their degrees.

One of the many highlights of the Commencement Ceremony was listening to BGSU Firelands graduating student, Talon Smith, who was selected by the faculty to address his graduating class. Talon discussed his personal journey in overcoming many obstacles towards completing his Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice. His comments were moving and relayed the importance of hard work and commitment in achieving both academic and life goals.

BGSU Firelands also recognized 22 students at the college’s end-of-the-year Annual Recognition Program who received awards for their accomplishments in theatre, academics, and student government. Five students were inducted into the Society of the Flame and two students received the Building Blocks to the Future Award. The contributions these students made to the college community will leave lasting impressions for years to come.

Please join me in congratulating these students for their accomplishments and all BGSU Firelands students for their individual successes throughout the year.

William K. Balzer, Ph.D.

Alumnus Works with Veterans for 9th Congressional District

After serving more than four years in the US Army and being deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Sergeant Jacob Smith ’07, ’09 & ’11 returned home in the winter of 2004 to Perkins, Ohio. His plan was to take advantage of the GI Bill and enroll in college full time in the fall of 2005; but waiting seven months to start his education became less and less appealing as each day passed.

Smith decided to enroll in classes at BGSU Firelands immediately with the goal of earning relevant credit hours which would transfer to a larger institution the following year. But a strange thing happened on his educational journey.

“I fell in love with Firelands,” stated Smith. “The personal relationships I built here with the outstanding faculty, staff, and diverse student population made me want to stay.”

Smith spent the next two years at BGSU Firelands and earned an associate of arts. With an established relationship with BGSU, he decided to continue his education at the Bowling Green campus and eventually earned a master’s degree in public administration.

“My BGSU experience had been so positive both at main campus and at Firelands, obtaining a post-graduate degree at BGSU to enhance my career opportunities seemed like the best option for me,” said Smith.

Throughout his educational career, Smith’s interest in politics grew and he became active in various political campaigns. He served as campaign manager for Dennis Murray in his successful race for Ohio State Representative in 2008, and during his postgraduate work, he completed an internship with Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur.

According to Smith, it was a wonderful experience and led to full-time employment. When he graduated in 2011, Congresswoman Kaptur offered him a staff assistant position in military and veteran affairs within her 9th Congressional District.

Smith is combining his education and experience in the military to assist veterans with their VA claims and to investigate and analyze issues pertinent to veterans within the district.

“I know the sacrifices veterans make, and I’m passionate about helping them find the benefits and assistance needed to survive and succeed,” said Smith proudly. “I’ve assisted in formulating legislation to make the Ohio Veterans Home and other state veterans’ homes eligible for homelessness grant funding from the Department of Veterans Affairs,” he added.

Smith also is helping to gain exposure for BGSU Firelands and the veteran’s here on campus. Last year Smith successfully encouraged Congresswoman Kaptur’s staff to utilize BGSU Firelands for an event related to the 2014 Military Academy Nominations for the 9th district.

“Congresswoman Kaptur has been a strong supporter of our veterans, and I am honored to serve both the Congresswoman and the veterans within the 9th district,” said Smith. “I love what I do for a living, and I’m living proof of what BGSU Firelands can do for your career,” he added.
Evening of Champions Honors Students of Diversity at BGSU Firelands

BGSU Firelands and the Office of Multicultural Affairs recently hosted the first Evening of Champions event on the BGSU Firelands Campus. Developed to recognize students of diversity who excel academically, the initial event recognized 124 students who achieved a 3.0 GPA or higher in the fall semester of 2013.

The event has been a tradition on the BGSU campus for several years and through the efforts of the Office of Multicultural Affairs was brought to BGSU Firelands in March.

Students were honored with certificates, pins, light refreshments, and a chance to mingle with faculty, staff, and family members to celebrate their academic achievements.

Dean of BGSU Firelands Bill Balzer congratulated students and stressed the importance of recognizing and celebrating diversity on the Firelands campus. He also noted that 40 percent of students of diversity attending BGSU Firelands were invited to attend the Evening of Champions.

The event also featured BGSU Firelands alumnus Marcus Harris ’09, who offered the keynote address and words of inspiration to the students. He discussed his personal struggles in obtaining a four-year degree, and how “giving back” to his community through the non-profit program First Book provided him the chance to help those who are less fortunate. Harris is currently in management at Starbucks Corporation and serves on the BGSU Firelands Alumni Advisory Board.

Former Director of Alumni Affairs and Executive Director of the BGSU Alumni Association Mo Cotton Kelly ‘94 & ’04 spoke to students about her personal journey at BGSU. Starting as an undergraduate student at the age of 17 to leading alumni relations efforts for more than 170,000 BGSU alumni worldwide, Kelly offered her own personal success story.

She encouraged alumni to “always be open to different career paths,” and to “take advantage of everything BGSU and BGSU Firelands have to offer students.”

Marcus Harris was a featured speaker at the the Evening of Champions.

Alexakos Presented with a College Alumni Award

Lee Alexakos ’78 was recognized on March 29 at the University’s College Alumni Awards event.

Alexakos, who received her bachelor’s degree in business administration from BGSU but also attended BGSU Firelands for two years, is the corporate vice president for marketing and advertising at Cedar Fair Entertainment Company and Cedar Point.

Following the acquisition of Paramount Parks in 2006, Alexakos was instrumental in implementing Cedar Fair programs across all the parks and maximizing synergies and efficiencies with emphasis on the advertising program. At Cedar Point, she oversees all aspects of marketing including planning, marketing strategy, advertising, pricing, sales, digital marketing, and public relations.

Alexakos is active in the local community and is past chair of the Board of Directors for the Erie County Chamber of Commerce, recipient of the Chairman’s Award, and serves on boards for the Firelands Symphony Orchestra and Teen Leadership Corps. She was named a Woman of Excellence for Erie County in 2011.

The BGSU College Alumni Awards recognize individuals who personify the University’s tradition as an institution of excellence through outstanding achievements and civic, cultural, and charitable contributions.

2014 Distinguished Teacher Award
Julie Didelot

2014 Distinguished Part-Time Teacher Award
Ginger Packert
Recently married? Proud of a professional accomplishment? Had a baby?

Let us recognize your accomplishments or those of a fellow BGSU Firelands alum! Email the BGSU Firelands Alumni Affairs Office at llesnie@bgsu.edu to include updates in an upcoming newsletter.

Clasen has agreed to be a member of the planning committee for the BGSU Firelands 50th Anniversary and is excited to return to campus for the celebrations in 2015. “It’s a great opportunity to be a part of such a wonderful event. I’m looking forward to seeing former colleagues, community members, and alumni at the celebrations next year,” he said.

Additional information regarding the 50th Anniversary celebration will be provided as the date approaches. Although in the early stages of planning, the celebration will include events and activities to engage all factions of BGSU Firelands and the community.

Located in Vermilion, Ohio, Paper Moon Vineyards offers customers a range of sweet to dry red and white wines. “The BGSU Firelands Alumni Advisory Board was grateful to Paper Moon Vineyards and the Cawrses’ for supporting and hosting our first Firelands alumni social event, and we encourage Firelands alums to visit Paper Moon Vineyards the next time you’re in the area,” said Board President Craig Rathbun ’83.

BGSU Firelands is hosting a Quick Enroll night for new students, transfer students and re-enrolling students. During this one-stop event, interested individuals can enroll, register for classes, and work with financial aid counselors. Bring transcripts.

www.firelands.bgsu/admissions/quickenroll.html

Connie Smith ’71 & ’73, Dick Smith ’74, and Jamie Skelly ’09 enjoy beverages and cool breezes at Paper Moon Winery.