

EARLY RISERS

YOUNGER GRADS LEAVE THEIR MARK

Statistics indicate that 75 percent of ASU's alumni are age 45 or younger. With that in mind, we decided to take a look at that demographic to see what these Sun Devils had achieved. We found a dynamic group of "younger alumni" who are making a difference in their communities. What's an ASU degree worth? We think it's priceless.

**Jennifer Liewer, 29,
'99 B.A.**

Helping out at Ground Zero

Everyone remembers their first trip to New York City, but it's unlikely Jennifer Liewer could ever forget the images from her first visit to the metropolis. She visited Manhattan in the days immediately after 9/11 as a Red Cross first responder. Working as a staff member, she handled public affairs and communications duties for the relief organization, as well as unloading trucks, making up aid kits, and setting up shelters during her "down" time.

"It was the hardest work I've ever done in my entire life," she said, reflecting on the 18-hour days she put in for the first three weeks after the terrorist attacks.

Liewer was hired by the Red Cross in Phoenix shortly after graduating with a degree in communications studies. During her years on staff at the Red Cross, she also handled communications duties for the Rodeo-Chedeski fires in 2002, the Oklahoma tornadoes of 2004, and directed local phone banking efforts by the Red Cross after the horrific hurricane season of 2004.

Liewer recently changed jobs and serves the public as marketing/communications manager for the City of Glendale, Ariz., but she remains on call one month of the year for work at national Red Cross disaster sites, and continues to volunteer her nights and weekends to assist the local chapter with smaller scale relief efforts, such as those provided for victims of house fires.

Amanda Borden, 28, '03 B.A.E.

Heavy medal winner

Amanda Borden was captain of the U.S. Olympic gymnastics team, which took home the gold medal at the '96 Games. Almost 10 years later, she considers it among her proudest honors.

"I still look at that medal with amazement," Borden said. "The chances of going to the Olympics are slim. Actually taking home a gold medal is even slimmer."

While still basking in Olympic glory, Borden made the decision to return to school, starting as a 21-year-old freshman, after years of devoting all her energies to her athletic career. Today Borden has combined her educational training with her athletic prowess as the owner of Gold Medal Gymnastics Academy, located in south Tempe. She keeps one foot on the national stage as a gymnastics commentator for CBS, Fox Sports, and ESPN.

Though she is proud of her past, Borden says her focus now is on the next generation of athletes. "My goal is to touch the lives of children all across Arizona," she said, "to help them reach their goals, whatever they may be."

Raul Monreal III, 33, '95 B.S.

Technology tactician

Raul Monreal has a demanding end-user for the software programs he collaborates on as a program manager for General Dynamics C4 Systems. American soldiers literally make life-or-death decisions based upon the vast amount of battlefield sensor data that his programs manage.

Monreal's project, Sensor Data Management, is a component of the U.S. military's core program to bring technology to future combat troops. The software provides military personnel with actionable information by processing and fusing all of the available sensor data from different sources.

A summer internship with General Dynamics after his freshman year catapulted him into work with the armed forces, and he has continued working with the company ever since.

Monreal said he was proud of his involvement in military projects and asserted soldiers, military families and ordinary citizens (who may benefit from the technology as it is applied to homeland security operations) should rest easier knowing that our military is becoming more and more laced with technological innovations.

"Soldiers and families should feel better knowing that the best technology is being delivered as soon as possible to the battlefield," he said.



Photo by Dan Vermillion

Jessica Irwin, 30, '03 B.A.

Cracking autism's code

Intrigued by the challenge of seeing autistic children who wanted desperately to connect with others but couldn't, Jessica Irwin knew there had to be a way to help. While still an undergraduate student, she developed her own program for a six-year-old autistic boy she worked with, and she was thrilled to see him blossom.

She did therapy with him daily for four years, long enough to see him enter public school, and continued acting as a "habilitator" for other disabled children, developing a sensory diet to help autistic kids cope with their environments. Two years ago she started her own agency to provide services to children with developmental disabilities. She now has more than 100 employees, and her business, S.E.E.K. Arizona, has a waiting list of more than a hundred families.

Irwin says she's always been a "caretaker," bringing in animals off the street when she was a child and shepherding younger girls through Girl Scouts as a troop leader.

Her career absorbs her, soaking up 90 to 100 hours a week. Her Friday nights are spent analyzing videotapes of her young clients, many of whom have severe behavioral problems. Weekends are devoted to training her two young dogs, Chloe and Patrick, to become therapy dogs.

She's about to take out her first loan to purchase a building and move the business out of her home. She wants to find out the key to each child, and to intervene early, by the age of two or three, to help crack the code of autism that imprisons a child.