

Tuesday, June 8, 2010

Lynn Gross: alumna extraordinaire

Every university should have a Lynn Gross, SBA '87, in its corner motivating alumni to support their alma mater through planned activities and scholarship fundraising. Certainly, Oakland University would not be the same without her. She has served on the Oakland University Alumni Association Board (OUAA) since 1995 and will be its chairperson for the 2010/2011 and the 2011/2012 school years.

"As an alum, I've been able to get more involved in a broader sense," says Gross. "As a board member I have engaged alumni with the university to get them interacting with students and socializing through the organized activities."

Gross is on track with the fundraising goals. In April, based on the group's desire to host a silent auction that would directly benefit the OUAA scholarship fund, Gross and the OUAA teamed up with the Alumni Relations department to present the Grizzly Gala. Results of this first-time event brought in \$23,000 for the endowment that boasts more than \$1.2 million. Not only did the gala get a green light for next year, it also pleased Gross that so many alumni participated in making it a success.

"We are thrilled with the Grizzly Gala outcome. Through OUAA leadership almost \$17,000 worth of tickets were sold," says Gross. "Additionally, we were able to find sponsorships, unique product donations like tickets to an Ellen DeGeneres show, and a beautiful venue in downtown Rochester's Royal Park Hotel."

In the mid-1980s when Gross started working toward a computer science degree, she didn't know that OU would become such an integral part of her life; she just knew that being on campus felt right. She chose OU because campus was not overwhelmingly huge and she wasn't interested in going too far from home. (Gross grew up in Troy, the oldest of two children in the Westfall family.)

It didn't take long for the outgoing student to carve out her niche. She switched her major to economics then charged ahead at making friends by joining a sorority (Phi Sigma Sigma), forming cherished friendships that would last well beyond her days on campus. By the time she was a sophomore Gross lived on campus starting out at Hill House and then West Vandenburg Hall.

"I didn't like just going to classes and heading home right afterward. I learned I had to be proactive if I wanted a well-rounded college experience," says Gross. "I would absolutely do it all over again in just the same way. I learned what I'm capable of accomplishing and how to balance school, work, career and personal life. I don't know that I would have felt so comfortable at any other university."

Upon graduating, she worked as an assistant branch manager for Comerica Bank then Michigan National bank but soon fulfilled her childhood dream of becoming a lawyer. She attended night school for four years at the Detroit College of Law (now MSU College of Law).

When she landed her first job at Lewis, White and Clay, Gross learned that David Baker Lewis was a charter member of the first OU graduating class. It was Lewis who urged her to join the OUAA. Gross has been a member ever since.

"At that time, it was tough to get alumni out to the events but over the years we've really defined our goals. The board has grown and improved in part because we are better focused due to the support of the OU Alumni Relations department," says Gross, who has alumni asking her when she's vacating her spot on the board.

As her leadership role expands to chairperson this year, Gross is committed to maintaining the current OUAA chairperson's success at building alliances with the faculty, staff and the Deans of the schools on campus. Her main goal will be to increase the endowment fund so the board can offer scholarship money for students.

When she's not busy being a shining example of an OU alum, Gross's priorities include family and her executive role at JP Morgan. However, thoughts of OU are never far from her mind. She plans to bring her family to OU Day at Comerica Park on Aug. 4 when the Detroit Tigers face the Chicago White Sox. And she is doing her best to recruit her 12-year-old daughter to carry on the OU tradition. Gross thinks she caught her attention when she spoke at the SBA commencements last year.

"It was such an honor to speak at commencements, and it was neat to share that experience with my daughter," says Gross.

By the way, the theme of that speech – of course - encouraged graduates to be involved alumni.

SUMMARY

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