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Pair of OU grads named to Crain's 40 under 40 list

By Dawn Pauli

Two Oakland University alumni were named to this year's *Crain's Detroit Business* 40 Under 40 list.

Leanne Bowen (BGS '97), project manager at Jones Lange LaSalle, and John Lesser, partner, Plante Moran Financial Advisors (SBA '92) both spent the week following the announcement reading e-mails and congratulatory notes from colleagues, and business and community leaders.

"It was a shock, and a great honor," said Bowen. She was named to the list because of her success in the male-dominated construction industry. She has oversight of large, ground-up construction projects such as the WPP Group, Ernst & Young, the State of Michigan and MasterCard. Bowen entered Oakland University as a journalism major. "I was the editor of my high school yearbook and newspaper and I thought I knew exactly what I wanted to do."

She worked on *The Oakland Post* student newspaper for two months and decided to explore other majors. "Reality set in...it wasn't like high school," she said.

While attending Oakland, she was working as a receptionist for Denn-Co Construction Inc. She began taking courses in the business school, as well as a construction course in the Occupational Health and Safety department. With the assistance of an advisor, she tailored a Bachelor of General Studies degree to include a heavy concentration of business and construction classes.

After graduation, Bowen moved into a purchasing manager position at Denn-Co for a couple years before applying to Turner Construction, which employed mostly civil engineering and construction management professionals.

"I was wondering if I would get hired, but I did," she said. "At the end of the day, I had the best degree. I had a lot of business classes, and we were running a business. My coworkers who didn't have the business background had to learn hands-on."

Bowen, a Rochester Hills resident, moved to her current position at the Detroit office of Chicago-based Jones Lang LaSalle in 2004.

In addition to her busy career, she will be president of the Commercial Real Estate Women next year, and recently became accredited under the LEED program through the U.S. Green Building Council. She is also on the board of directors for CoreNet, as the vice president of sponsorship.



Leanne Bowen



John Lesser

A managing partner at Plante & Moran nominated Lesser, 39, to *Crain's* for growing a financial advisory business for Plante & Moran P.L.L.C's wealthier tax clients from a staff of five with \$500,000 in revenue to a staff of 22 with \$7.3 million in revenue.

"It was fantastic and flattering to be nominated," said Lesser, a Shelby Township resident who earned a dual major in accounting and finance. "The response has been overwhelming, and the recognition for the firm has been great, especially considering what's going on with the Michigan economy."

As an Oakland student, Lesser was active in Beta Alpha Psi, a fraternity for business financial information professionals, and credits that experience for putting him on the right track.

"When you're in your third or fourth year of college, you're not really sure what the industry is like," said Lesser. "Through Beta Alpha Psi, I had exposure to firms and partners, and I was able to look up to those folks as leaders and mentors. It was outstanding from that perspective, I could see what I wanted to do."

Lesser landed at Plante Moran through on-campus recruiting at Oakland. His first job was on the audit staff, where he worked for three years before transferring to his current position. He made partner in 2002.

Lesser's next goal is to replicate his success in the Detroit market to other offices throughout the company, including Illinois and Ohio. In his position with Plante Moran Financial Advisors, he advises clients on everything from investment consulting, estate planning, trust services, insurance consulting, philanthropic advice and income tax planning.

He has counseled charitably-inclined clients to consider making gifts to Oakland University. "When we talk about philanthropy, we mention OU," he said. "We remind our clients they can make a bigger impact right here in the area, than perhaps directing their gift to a larger university."

Lesser and his colleagues at Plante Moran put Oakland University graduates at the top of their lists when recruiting.

"There are probably a half dozen partners at Plante Moran who are OU alumni, and we interview at OU all the time," he said. "We have high respect for the program. The faculty does an outstanding job of bridging the gap between class work and preparing the students for the real world. We know the folks from OU have a high probability of being successful."

SUMMARY

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