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University, 1990) is making the world a
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Kevin Steidel (left) is the Robert E. Ness Chair of Entrepreneurship at Wittenberg University. Teaching in the areas of entrepreneurship, marketing, research methods and analytics at Wittenberg, Steidel has introduced his students to the business and entrepreneurship programs at an early stage in their educational careers through his work with the university's First-Year Seminar program.

INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION

Kevin Steidel spends three seasons each year inspiring college students and the fourth mentoring high school students who work for his concession stands.

BY JANINE WAMPLER

On the first day of first grade, Sullivan Steidel's teacher asked the age-old question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

At an age where aspirations commonly include everyday heroes like police officers, firefighters or astronauts, Kevin Steidel's son aspires to walk in his father's footsteps. For Sullivan, the simple question has an equally simple answer. "I want to be an owner."

Sullivan and his three younger siblings are enjoying childhood with a father who is present in every aspect of their lives. A father with a solid work ethic, a drive to

succeed and a determination to make his family his number one priority. His father is an owner.

Ironically, when Kevin Steidel (Ohio University, 2003) was growing up, he thought he would be a firefighter, just like his father. But that flame was quickly doused." He said, "No way," Steidel said. "My dad told me, 'When I was 20, I thought going into a burning building was cool. Then when I was 30, I thought, Wow, this is really dangerous. And when I was 40, I thought, I don't want to go in there. That's not the career for you. You're going to find something else to do.'"

Fast forward to his college days, where his exposure to business owners left

him feeling that entrepreneurs were like superheroes. It wasn't until after graduating from Ohio University in 2003 that he realized this was far from the truth.

After seven years of working for others in a variety of positions, he opened his first of four businesses in 2008.

"I've learned a lot as I've gone," he said. "I heard somebody say that opening your own business is like raising a child, and it definitely is. And speaking from experience of doing both, there were amazing things going on with all the businesses I've owned, but there were also hardships with them all, just like raising a kid."

With the sale of his third business and a non-compete agreement, Steidel

knew he needed to give careful consideration to a new direction. A “Forbes Magazine” article naming Wittenberg University as one of the top 30 colleges for future entrepreneurs caught his eye. Because he was familiar with the university, he found himself perusing the campus website.

“I saw they had entrepreneurship as a major,” he said. “Then, I saw they had an opening to teach an introductory class.”

One thing led to another, and Steidel found his new direction.

“I have always enjoyed the college atmosphere. Universities are places of energy,” he said. “I went from a one-course adjunct to a full-time professor to an endowed chair position in four years.”

One of the things Steidel finds himself talking about in the classroom is his Delt experience. “Ninety-nine percent of my college stories and experiences involve Delta Tau Delta,” he said. “I was part of our executive board doing problem-solving. You could not pay for that kind of experience. There were over 40 guys in my chapter, and every single day there were new challenges and new problems to solve. It is exactly like running your own



Kevin Steidel and his wife, Brittany, at one of the concession stands they operate during the summer.

business. I convey that to my classes across the board.”

Today, Steidel has found the best of two worlds, doing what he loves. At the university, he works to inspire young people to do what they love in life. And at home, he practices what he preaches.

Along with his university role, he also sits at the top of his career as an entrepreneur with a successful and growing business. During the summer months, he owns 365 Concessions, a company that operates concession stands throughout his community.

Steidel and his wife, who left her corporate career to join the entrepreneur life, have built a successful and growing business that is truly a family affair.

“I do love working with young people in a mentoring, tutoring and leadership role. And it has been financially very successful,” he said. “Those two things together have been really good.”

So, what does a successful entrepreneur who spends three seasons each year inspiring college students to follow their passion, and the fourth

mentoring his high school employees to set goals and make them happen, do next?

Publish a book, of course.

Steidel is in the process of writing a book aimed at helping others find independence and retire early. “The world is full of self-sufficient people who have done this before, and they are truly happy,” he said. “Some of them have tens of billions of dollars, and some of them have hundreds of dollars, but they are ultimately fulfilled and love what they do every day. To me, that’s true retirement.” ▲

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