

PAE

FRIENDS OF PORTLAND ADULT EDUCATION NEWSLETTER

Where are they now? Graduates take different paths

The path at Jill McGowan, Inc.

Working at **Jill McGowan, Inc.** is an international experience and most employees there have PAE connections. Jill McGowan started her business in 1994 after training at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York and working several years as a patternmaker at C.F. Hathaway Co., a shirt-maker in Waterville, Maine. Her sister, Jolene, joined the business in 2000 after working for non-profits and then in public affairs at LL Bean. Both sisters, plus two additional sisters, learned to sew from their mother, but it was Jill who launched the business in her spare room and it grew quickly.



Jill McGowan

Jill met an employee of Catholic Charities after she admired Jill's shirt. That conversation led Jill to hire new Americans from Cuba and Bosnia who had stitching skills. "Thirty years ago we would have had the option of hiring American stitchers as [workers in Maine] had those skills," Jill noted.

When McGowan opened a retail store in Freeport in 2011, she needed to expand her workforce at her in-town location. Four talented sewers, recent immigrants, have been hired. All her immigrant employees have taken English classes at Portland Adult Ed. "PAE was very important to them. it's a big deal," said Jolene, who added, "We value what you do [at Portland Adult Ed] and we want others to value it too."

Jolene seeks an employee who is "open-minded, takes feedback well and has the confidence to ask and learn. "If you are open to learning, we will invest in developing an employee's skills. We will do whatever over and over again until they learn it – it is worth it." Jolene emphasized that other employers would be impressed by Portland Adult Education students' "openness to learning, flexibility, and skills."

With their new employees they have created a "micro-factory" using a production-line approach to gain efficiencies and flexibility. They produce samples, prototypes, and special orders in Portland. The number of employees varies between 15 and 25, depending on the season.

Two of these new employees are well known at Portland Adult Education.

Jean Mukabera, an employee for eight months, is still taking classes at PAE. She earned a high school diploma for sewing technology and attended college for 2 years in design and making fabrics in the Congo.

Kamal Karimi, from Iraq, learned tailoring from his brother while they were in prison in Iran. He is a Kurd from northern Iraq. He did tailoring in the prison for 7 years making men's suits by hand and then spent 5 years doing alterations while he was in Turkey. Kamal earned his high school diploma from PAE this June. Kamal does stitching for Jill McGowan and is being trained as a cutter – experienced cutters "a dying trade" and he is being trained by a semi-retired man from Gorham who worked in Maine's mills. When asked what he likes about his job, he said his co-workers and employers who are so kind. "I like to learn new things" he added.

McGowan is always a season ahead of her customers. This summer she is designing for the spring of 2015 preparing for trade shows in September. She begins with a sketch, then develops a flat pattern which is tweaked many times before the final samples for the trade shows are sewn. Fabrics come from small factories in Europe and help provide inspiration. Each season she keeps about half her styles and creates at least a half dozen more.

Jolene said that working at Jill McGowan "is a great cultural experience" for all of them. Jill would like to find ways to deepen the relationship that Jill McGowan, Inc. has with Portland Adult Education to ensure that her employees continue to learn and succeed in Portland.



More graduates on page 2

Letter from Friends of PAE's President



FPAE is making a difference! Through generous donations from more than 90 individuals, 11 donor advised funds, 6 corporations and 8 grants from 6 foundations, Friends of Portland Adult Education has provided critical support to the adult learners and professional staff of Maine's largest adult education program over the past two years.

So far in 2014 we have received new grants totaling \$64,950. We are projecting our total grant income for 2014 to be \$114,700. Because we are a new nonprofit, we are

required to prove to the IRS that we can be sustainable by raising 30% of our donations from public sources, which include individuals, corporations and donor advised funds by December 31, 2014.

FPAE's accomplishments include the following:

- Improved student intake process to reduce the waiting list
- Supported building renovations to facilitate the unification of academic programs accomplished through the generosity of individual contributions
- Established a Tuition Assistance Program
- Supported highly skilled immigrants to prepare for their careers in Maine

Thank you to all of the volunteers, donors, community partners and friends who support the terrific work of the staff, teachers, and learners at Portland Adult Education.

Rob Wood, Board President, Friends of PAE

Grants

· **Betterment Fund** — Friends of Portland Adult Education have received a new grant from The Betterment Fund of \$35,000 for 2014, \$25,000 for 2015, and \$15,000 for 2016 to support the New Mainers Resource Center's Skilled Health Professionals Expansion Project.

· **The Emanuel and Pauline Lerner Foundation** Update— This critically important three year grant helps Portland Adult Education find ways to impact the student waiting list. It has allowed Valerie DeVuyst to take on the role as intake counselor, giving her time to focus on improving this process.

2013-2014 brought substantial changes in the way we do intakes and assessments. We have assessed more new students than ever, 523, but we have reduced our wait lists to a low that we haven't seen in more than 2 years.

In the spring semester 2014, we placed 142 people into classes from the wait list. However, at the end of the spring semester, there were still 23 people waiting. Fortunately all of these people had the opportunity to study English in the JT Gorman computer learning lab. At this time last year, there were 189 people still on the wait list, and we had placed only 59 in classes.

Scholarships

· The **Tuition Aid Project** was established by FPAE to help students with the cost of courses needed to reach their employment goals. When they have no other source of support this aid assists with course fees. It is funded through the generosity of the **Evergreen Foundation** and the **Nine Wicket Foundation**.

Scholarships are available for the winter and spring terms and applications can be found in the office at Portland Adult Education.

· Friends also awarded a **\$500 college scholarship to Hugues Ingabire**, in honor of Rob Wood's retirement after 37 years at Portland Adult Education.

· **Rockefeller Scholarship Fund** Congratulations to two Portland Adult Education students, **Lucy Shulman** and **Van Thi Phuong**, who were both awarded Rockefeller scholarships. Lucy is attending the University of Southern Maine and Van is attending Southern Maine Community College.

The James and Marilyn Rockefeller Scholarship Fund was established at the **Maine Community Foundation** in 2002 to provide scholarship support for non-traditional students who are taking steps to change their life for the better through

education. The Fund plans to award 25-40 scholarships each year from \$2,000 to \$5,000.



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FPAE Board

Friends of Portland Adult Education Board is so pleased to have Joseph Luciano, Branch Manager of Key Bank on Commercial Street, join the board as the Treasurer this summer. The current Board includes:

Rob Wood, President
North Yarmouth, ME
Anja Hanson, Vice President
Portland, ME
Joseph Luciano, Treasurer
Kennebunk, ME
Martha Burchenal, Secretary
Cape Elizabeth, ME
Maxwell Chikuta
Portland, ME
Tae Chong
Portland, ME
Valerie DeVuyst
Windham, ME
Carolyn May
Scarborough, ME
Ellen Van Fleet
Cape Elizabeth ME

Summer at PAE

For the first time, job classes were offered over the summer at PAE through the **New Mainer's Resource Center (NMRC)**. The six week sessions were focused on communications with a total of 30 students in pronunciation, 20 students in public speaking, 19 students in telling your story, and 14 students in interviewing. Every class was filled to capacity. As a result of participating in these summer courses and working with Sally Sutton from NMRC, **Justin Nizeyumukiza**, is now working at Catholic Charities Refugee and Immigrant Services as an Employment Case Manager.

Justine describes the impact of these courses, "My colleagues had told me that immigrants are doomed to do "survival" jobs only, because their degrees and experiences have no value in USA. The interview class not only brought to my knowledge how to look for jobs, apply for them and prepare interviews, but also it built my confidence. Sally also played a vital role in preparing the interview for my current job.

Briefly, these classes were for a great importance and value in my integration and career shaping in Maine as an immigrant. "

SMCC Connect IT training

This course focused on interviewing, Customer Service, Microsoft office skills, as well as IT and A+ certification over eight weeks. It had 15 participants and 10 of them were PAE students. Students who completed SMCC's Connect IT training



program received certificates and met with representatives from about 10 companies in a reverse job fair. Student participants set up booths (photo is of Tam Thai) to promote themselves to potential employers. Connect IT was a joint effort between **SMCC—Maine Quality Centers, Portland Adult Education, Goodwill, and Mobilize Maine**.

Year-end Celebration

On June 27, 2014 PAE held a year-end celebration, which included a health fair organized by **Health on the Move**, an initiative of the Cumberland District Public Health Council dedicated to bringing health services and resources directly to underserved communities in Cumberland County. At least 150 people visited "stations" which provided screenings for blood pressure, diabetes, vision and oral health. The most popular stations were vision and oral health. About 120 people left the event with new *self-adjusting* eyeglasses. Over 30 teachers, students and volunteers from PAE helped to make the event a success. We hope this is the beginning of a partnership that will provide much needed health services to PAE's students.

Robbie Harrison, Summer Intern for the JT Gorman Computer Lab

Robbie first came to PAE his freshman year at **Bowdoin College** during a student-led Alternative Winter Break and served as a volunteer tutor and classroom aide throughout college.

After graduation, he sought out a scholarship through Bowdoin to allow him to

work at PAE. This summer Robbie supervised the JT Gorman computer lab.

Without Robbie's calm and savvy assumption

of this responsibility, the lab would have sat vacant for two months; instead, up to 25 students three days a week found structure for independent language learning.

Robbie organized and taught his own small intermediate English language group. He even collaborated on a survey of alumni from PAE's College Transition program as a preliminary step toward building an alumni association for students. Soon Robbie will be heading to Chile to teach English, but we will gratefully celebrate his talent as an educator and await his next visit.



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