

Building Networks for 10 Years

The Real Estate and Construction Alumni Chapter

Mentoring and networking are just two assets of the SJU Real Estate and Construction Alumni Chapter (RE&C) that have appreciated in value in the decade since its founding. Beginning in the Fall 2016 semester, with the RE&C's support, the University began a real estate finance minor. While the program is the first formalized academic course of study in this area, Saint Joseph's alumni from various backgrounds have established long and successful track records in the field.

— Kevin Kaufman

A VERY Good Deal



RE&C Advisory Board member **Elizabeth Convery '05** (B.S.) had a successful career with a global commercial real estate firm but couldn't ignore her entrepreneurial ambitions.

"I didn't want my career to be dictated by other people's decisions or external circumstances," says Convery, a finance major who traveled the world making lucrative deals for several Philadelphia- and New York-based

commercial real estate firms. "You can stifle that entrepreneurial spirit for just so long."

In 2013, on the verge of turning 30, the Washington Township, New Jersey, native made a move.

Armed with a master of management in hospitality degree with a focus in real estate finance and investments from Cornell University, along with a Pennsylvania broker's license, Convery returned to Philadelphia and founded VERY Real Estate (veryre.com), a Center City-based boutique real estate brokerage firm.

Convery's father and VERY Vice President Joe '71 (B.S.), who worked at Cigna for two decades, urged her to give her business concept one year to see if it would be sustainable. Three years later, the firm is thriving.

VERY's hospitality-centric approach to buying or selling a home tailors each transaction to fit clients' needs and leaves them with a lasting impression to share with friends. Convery asks agents to focus on building long-term relationships that lead to repeat business.

"Regardless of the company name on the business card," she says, "people want an intimate experience. Buying a house is usually the largest investment they'll ever make." Her philosophy has worked: 100 percent of VERY's business comes from word-of-mouth referrals, a residential real estate rarity.

Convery plugged into the local market by reconnecting with SJU through the RE&C. She works to link industry and academia, facilitating guest speakers for classes and imparting industry advice to faculty on how to make SJU students more marketable.

Brokering Alumni Connections



Photo: Kim Sokoloff

One of the RE&C's most active members is **Dan Gummel '98** (B.S.), vice president of PernaFrederick, a Philadelphia real estate brokerage specializing in tenant and landlord representation and investments. He is devoted to helping SJU undergraduates discern their career path because of the circuitous route he took to his successful real estate career, which includes listing Philadelphia

office properties like Two Penn Center, 400 Market Street and the Bourse.

"I tripped into real estate," says the Wallingford, Pennsylvania, resident who began his career with an entry-level ad specialties sales job. "I was fortunate to have a number of great mentors throughout my life."

The criminal justice graduate worked for M.S. Fox for a decade before moving to PernaFrederick in 2012. "It motivates me to help students, especially those thinking about their future and attending events or meeting with alumni for advice," he says. "I'm amazed at some of the younger students who are thinking about their careers and planning so far in advance."

Today, students and young alumni seek out Gummel from all fronts: through SJU Connects (alumni.sju.edu/connects), the alumni association's online career advising platform, with mutual connections made at RE&C networking events, and on shadow days. He is on campus regularly, working with the student-run SJU Real Estate Society.

"I've had the pleasure of seeing some of the students I've spoken with transition into the workforce," he says. "I tell them, 'You get from it what you put into it. There is a wide range of opportunities within the real estate business. Try to find the sector that is best suited for your personality.'"

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