WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

AMY CHANG, MICHAEL MAYBERGER & JAKE MANN

In celebration of the 20th issue of The Park Place Economist, this year's Alumni Editors are thrilled to feature three outstanding alumni who made significant contributions to the successful publication of the very first issue.

Bruce T. Bennett, former Editor-in-Chief of *The Park Place Economist*, proudly shares his thoughts on the origin of the publication, and memories of the first editorial staff.

In the first issue of *The Park Place Economist*, Lisa Kumazawa (former Alumni Editor) said, "The idea of developing this journal took shape in the weekly Society meetings." Later on, while developing the tenth edition of the publication, George Coontz ('04) and Alexis Manning ('04) describe it as beginning over a cup of coffee shared amongst faculty in the Dugout. When asked what he personally recalls about the journal's inception and the challenges it faced along the way, Bennett said, "For me, it started after a conversation with Dr. Michael Seeborg at [what used to be] the Economics Department, located across from Shaw Hall on Park Street." While it has been twenty years since that initial discussion, he remembers that, during the span of their 45-minute conversation, the concept of the inaugural edition of *The Park Place Economist* was enthusiastically developed into a concrete reality. "Wasn't that always the case when Dr. Seeborg approached you with an idea?" he added playfully, and "Needless to say, it was a brilliant idea, as evidenced by its longevity and academic vitality".

Bennett continues by explaining that the time was right for the publication to be launched in 1993, due to several factors. First of all, the amount of academic research was growing as a result of the Senior economics projects and Research Honors programs. Second, the number of students pursuing an economics degree at IWU was also increasing. Initiation into the department's academic honor society, Omicron Delta Epsilon, grew from seven to eighteen initiates from 1990 to 1993. Finally, the quality of the academic work was improving because the university was attracting a higher caliber of students. Also, competition within the student body was increasing, as more of them decided to study economics at IWU. All of these factors contributed to an environment that facilitated and supported the launch of an undergraduate journal.

"As with any blank canvas, the first step was to put a team into place. Dr. Seeborg and I felt that, before we set any tone or policy of the journal, it was important that we design the team to help set the tone and direction of the journal and, at the same time, promote involvement," Bennett said. They systematically examined each function of an editorial board and formed a team based on individuals' skill-sets and their ability to work cohesively, all while also identifying a succession plan for the second edition of *The Park Place Economist*.

While *The Park Place Economist* has evolved and improved over subsequent editions, Bennett is most proud that the main focus of today's journal still represents the original intent: "to provide a medium for students and alumni alike to publish comprehensive and stimulating articles or commentaries pertaining to the field of economics." To this day, Bennett believes that his editorial team laid a solid foundation from which future editorial boards could customize the journal to fit the times. "In hindsight, we had a great team on the inaugural editorial board—and along with some hard work—we had a good time together. Speaking for myself and the original editorial board of *The Park Place Economist*, we are pleased to see the continuation of this successful publication, and look forward to the next twenty years of successful publications".

Bennett graduated in 1993 with a double major in Economics and English. He continues to work at Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) in Decatur, Illinois, where he started his career as a grain merchandiser. He later joined the Lecithin Division, where he gained sales experience both domestically and internationally. In 2002, he moved into asset management. Today, he is the General Manager of the Protein Specialties Division with global responsibilities for assets, sales, and strategic planning.

Paul S. Davies reminisces twenty years after attending IWU on his experience with *The Park Place Economist* (PPE) and its lasting benefits.

Upon being asked about his Economics degree at Illinois Wesleyan, Davies said, "The economics training I received at IWU gave me the foundation I needed to succeed in graduate school and to have a productive and very rewarding career in public service." After graduating from IWU in 1992, Davies attended the University of Colorado at Boulder and earned his PhD in Economics in December 1996. Following graduation, he began working as an economist at the Social Security Administration in Washington, DC. His research focuses on the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Disability Insurance (DI) programs. Davies specifically examines SSI eligibility and participations, the effects of SSI policy options on poverty, the provision of SSI benefits to children with disabilities, and interrelationships between SSI and DI. Davies has published papers in Research in Labor Economics, the Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences, the Journal of Aging and Social Policy, and the Social Security Bulletin. In 2006, he was nominated to become a member of the National Academy of Social Insurance.

Davies commented that he is "fortunate to have had an opportunity to move into the management ranks at Social Security. " He is currently the Director of the Division of Policy Evaluation in the Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics. His division consists of fifteen professional and technical staff, who conduct research and policy evaluations, regarding Social Security beneficiaries, SSI recipients, and the working-age, disabled, and elderly populations, more generally. Davies manages a multi-million dollar program of extramural research, including the Retirement Research Consortium (RRC). The RRC is a grant-based research enterprise that conducts a broad research program on Social Security, retirement, and disability issues. The goal of the RRC is to bring together the academic and policy communities to increase objective, policy-relevant research, and to inform the public and policymakers about alternative policies and their consequences. His division is also responsible for producing a popular data book, Income of the Population 55 or Older.

He has two favorite memories from the first publication of the PPE. First, Davies remembers "I was honored to have my senior research honors project published in the PPE in 1993, the year after I graduated from IWU. It was a thrill for me to see that the first editorial board chose to include my paper." Davies also remembers Dr. Seeborg using his senior research paper for several years as an example of how to produce a successful research paper, even when the results he found were not what he expected. He recalls, "[having] an upward sloping demand curve in that paper, but [I] managed to salvage the paper with some creative arguments about why the results turned out as they did."

Davies still keeps in close contact with Dr. Leekley and Dr. Seeborg. Davies was invited back to IWU in March 2009 to give the Guest Lecture for the ODE New Member Initiation Ceremony. He spoke about one of his papers to Dr. Leekley's econometrics course, and also gave a presentation to the ODE group on topics that spanned over several of his research papers. President Wilson attended his presentation and Davies remembers that he "sent me a 'thank you' email the next day—how cool is that?!"

James Joslin, a graduate in Economics and a contributor to *The Park Place Economist*, reflects his thoughts on the economics program at Illinois Wesleyan and *The Park Place Economist*.

Since its inception in 1993, *The Park Place Economist* has been a symbol of superlative scholastic achievement, for both the Economics department and for Illinois Wesleyan University. The journal, which features original undergraduate research from Illinois Wesleyan's most dedicated Economics majors, is truly special, not only for this reason, but because it fosters an environment of both creativity and curiosity. Both of these terms are synonymous with a liberal arts education, and are essential in all areas of academia.

To James Joslin ('93), these attributes have been paramount in his life, ever since the first pages of the journal's first edition were off of the press. Specifically, he advocates that his "economic training at IWU helped [him] to develop [his] analytical reasoning skills," in addition to teaching him the benefits of being a "concise writer."

His piece, entitled "Bill Knows Politics – Not Economics," is a witty take on the unfortunate tradeoff that exists in our society between good politics and good economics. In less than a thousand words, Joslin cleverly enlightens readers on then-President Clinton's economic agenda. Between the lines, the article exudes wisdom so strongly that it seems to drip off of the page. It seems as though the author is sharing a lifetime of experiences with the reader, even though we know he was only twenty-two years old at the time. This is precise evidence of how original research publications, like *The Park Place Economist,* give students the ability to critically think about the world around them.

Twenty years later, Mr. Joslin is using his perceptiveness in the courtroom, as a Chief Litigation Counsel for Honeywell International's largest business group – Automation and Control Systems. Mr. Joslin explains that the practice "is a $15 billion business with more than 75,000 employees worldwide," in which he "manages Honeywell's litigation on all corners of the globe." It is partly the combination of analytical rationale and concise communication skills that help Mr. Joslin in his everyday job; skills that are crucial in the lives of most economics majors at Illinois Wesleyan University. As you read through the pages of the twentieth edition of *The Park Place Economist*, keep these two points in mind, as they are fostered in an atmosphere of creativity and curiosity.