

REAL WORLD

By Pat Filip

Photography by Dennis Wolverton

Six young alumni make their way in Oregon's Big City

Scott Cook spends his workdays with Hellboy and Conan and sometimes hangs out in Sin City. After six years at Oregon State, a 2005 bachelor's in applied visual arts and two post-graduation internships for a Portland design firm, Cook landed his dream job: junior designer at Dark Horse Comics.

Like the nearly 200,000 others who have stepped from the commencement platform with an OSU diploma in hand, Cook has entered the real world.

No more lazy afternoons sunning in the quad or midweek runs to Newport. It's time to trade dorm rooms for cubicles and pop quizzes for performance reviews. Recent grads who tossed their mortarboards skyward on graduation day found that when the caps came down, they faced a work-a-day world marked by outsourcing, downsizing and other 21st century challenges.

Do they tread with trepidation or take the world by storm? Well, it depends. In Portland-area locations from Starbucks to the 32nd floor of the Wells Fargo Building, half a dozen young alumni discussed their fledgling steps into life after college.

Landing a job

For many new graduates, college internships prove pivotal to getting that critical big break. But Cook, '05, with his degree and his training as a graphic designer, found that despite two internships with the same design company, a job failed to materialize. Last spring he tried craigslist.org, the popular online classified service, and saw an ad for a job at Dark Horse in Milwaukie, south of Portland.

In a profession where even a chief financial officer might wear sandals and shorts, he heeded his design professor's advice about keeping it casual during interviews.

"Overdoing it is a big no-no," he said. "Everyone's just too mellow."

He's pleased with his salary—\$12 an hour, with medical and dental benefits and a chance for merit raises. He has only \$20,000 in student loans (not bad, he figures, for six years of school) and he's already started to pay them down. One of his first moves after landing the job, was out of his mother's house and into a place he shares with his brother. He's excited about his work, designing promo-



tional materials, ads and various other collateral items to support comic books. His goal is to design comic book covers.

"I can say that the environment here is really fast paced and high energy," he said. "Plus, I am working in a field I have enjoyed ever since I was a kid. It is awesome."

Rob Banagale, a computer engineering major, had a smoother transition to the workplace. He interviewed at Mentor Graphics, which specializes in computer design tools, the day after he graduated in 2003 and then left for Europe. "I stayed at hostels because I didn't know if I was going to have a job," he said. "I was at a hostel in Spain that smelled like rat poison when I got an e-mail saying Mentor wanted to talk to me."

He called Mentor from the hostel and was hired. "From then on I stayed at much nicer places," he said. "I totally upgraded my experience." Banagale returned from Europe on a Friday and began work the next Monday. "It was a magical way to transition."

A change of plans

Some young alumni find that career plans are made to be broken. Math major Jessica Kincaid, '05, wanted to be an actuary, a person who uses statistics to calculate insurance risks. But she learned at an OSU career fair that she might enjoy a more people-oriented occupation, working with claims. Now, as an examiner for Sedgwick Claims Management Services, she specializes in bodily injury claims for the Costco chain of giant discount stores. When someone files a claim after slipping on a grape or colliding with a shopping cart, she works with physicians, attorneys, and Costco managers to figure out what happened.

"I get a puzzle put on my desk every day that I have to investigate," she said. "There are five different versions of the same event I have to sort through."

The native of Prairie City, near John Day, graduated debt free, thanks to scholarships, and used her first paychecks to buy a new truck. As a new employee, she was mentored by fellow Beaver Shawna

Arndorfer, '90, and finds college rivalries to be an integral part of the office culture. She had to deck out her cubicle in green and yellow after the unfortunate result of last year's football Civil War.

Still searching

Jamie Richter, a 2005 business graduate, is finding out what she wants to do by slowly eliminating jobs she doesn't like. After graduation, she tried working at Banana Republic and then Nordstrom, before getting her current job at Wells Fargo.

"I went to one of those career fairs in Portland, where I decided to see what Wells Fargo Financial was all about," she said. "The next day, I went for an interview in Hillsboro. I knew as soon as I walked in the door I could work there. Everyone was young, happy and most were OSU alumni."

But after growing up in tiny Powell Butte, between Redmond and Prineville in Central Oregon, she found living in the Portland area not all that comfortable.

"The hardest thing since graduation was moving up here," she said. "I always thought I would like to live in Portland, but it's just too big."

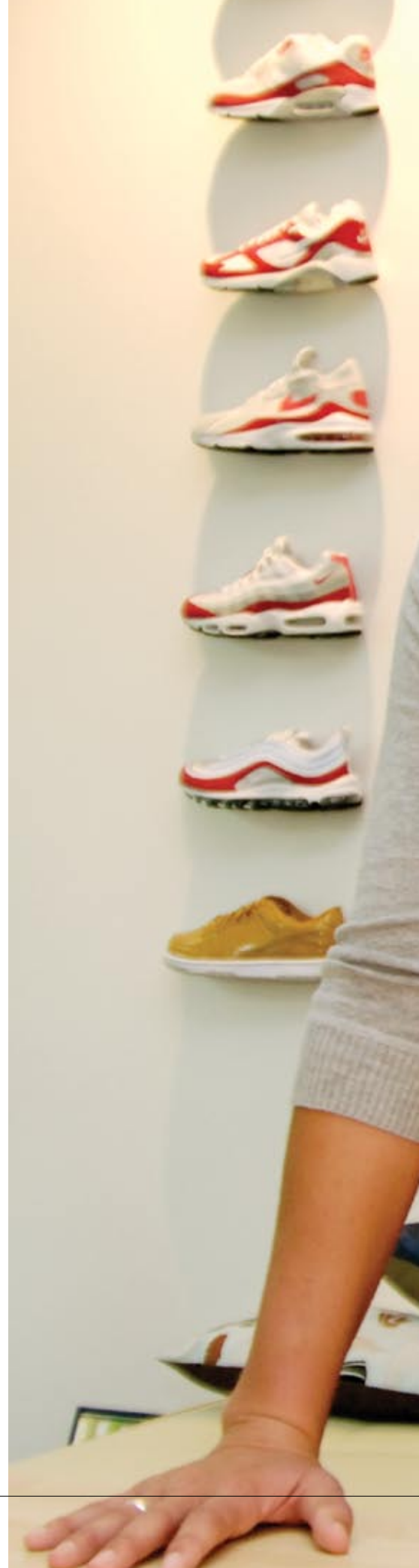
She is studying for her real estate license and hopes to move back to Powell Butte eventually to help her parents develop land they own. Richter, who was president of her sorority and active in the O Stater Club for student alumni, definitely misses friends and times at OSU.

"I'd go back in a heartbeat," she said.

Finding her niche at Nike

Just a few years ago, Nikki Neuburger, '04, was spiking the volleyball in Gill Coliseum. Now she's brushing shoulders with Spike Lee. The former captain of OSU's volleyball team was in New York City this spring to help promote a new Nike iPod Sport Kit that transmits a runner's pace, distance and other data from a shoe sensor to an iPod.

As a marketing specialist in global sport culture at Nike, she works to promote products to "influencers"—the graffiti artists, bloggers, media representa-







tives and fashion designers who, from a street culture perspective, wield global influence. That's how she met filmmaker Lee, one of the 30 "influencers" invited to the New York event.

"My passions are pop culture, street culture, fashion, music. What I'm working on now speaks to that directly," she said.

Wearing crisp white Air Max Ones, she strolls from her office on the Nike campus, where amenities include an athletic club with swimming pool and basketball courts, as well as restaurants, stores, a laundry and even a cobbler.

Neuburger set up the Nike opportunity with extracurricular work that included not only volleyball, but an internship at Fox Sports NW television, hosting "On Campus with the Beavers."

"I trained for volleyball on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, then would go up to Seattle on Friday nights to work the Fox shows and come back on Monday in time to make workouts and classes."

She majored in business with international and marketing focuses, then minored in fashion merchandising and spent a fifth year studying in Denmark. She interned at Nordstrom and Nike. She turned down an initial offer from Nike, waiting for the right position to open. She has a condo in Portland's Pearl District, a mortgage, car loan, credit cards and college loan payments, making her, she said, "a real adult."

"It's all very exciting," she wrote to her mentor Hal Koenig, OSU associate professor of business. "I feel very fortunate to be where I am at as it is exactly what I would have described as a dream job right out of the gates."

Life is good

Like Neuburger, Ryan Hildebrand maximized his college experience. He was president of his college fraternity, the OSU Student Alumni Association and the OSU Student Foundation Board of Directors.

A 2004 graduate with a bachelor's degree in business with options in ac-

counting and international business, he recently received the College of Business Distinguished Young Business Professionals award. With a title of experienced associate for PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, he performs audits for public corporations and has worked with venture capital firms and start-up companies.

He is involved in various Portland-area entrepreneurship programs and also is active in OSU's Austin Entrepreneurship Program. Two years ago, at age 22, he purchased a condo in the same Pearl District complex as Neuburger. When he's not on the road, as he was 20 weeks last year, he can survey the city skyline from his offices on the 32nd floor of the Wells Fargo Center in Portland.

"Life is good," he said. "I can't complain."

Giving back

It might seem that charity would be the last thing on a new graduate's mind; for Rob Banagale it was one of the first. After he began working at Mentor Graphics, he called OSU to set up a scholarship for students who work with the Memorial Union. He had served as vice president of the MU Program Council.

"Getting involved in college was the most important thing I did," he said. "I graduated without debt, found a great job right away and wanted an opportunity to give back."

In addition to the scholarship, Banagale speaks to classes for graduating seniors, taught by Don Johnson, MU assistant director.

Hildebrand also keeps close contact with OSU. He is a mentor for the Austin Entrepreneurship Program, a member of the OSU College of Business Roundtable and recently judged a business competition contest on campus. He received a Ford Family Foundation scholarship as an undergraduate and plays an active role in the Ford Family Foundation alumni group.

Neuburger, too, is involved with her alma mater. She was the only former player to serve on the committee that selected

OSU's current head volleyball coach.

What's gained and lost

For Banagale, one of the most challenging things about life after college is the notion of endless possibility.

"It's so infinitely open," he said. "You can do anything you want."

He's trying out different positions at Mentor Graphics. Eventually he wants to start his own company.

He follows the Dave Matthews Band around the country, and he climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro this summer. Yet despite the exhilaration of new challenges, there's also a sense of missing his college community.

"You don't have the broad structure of college to keep connected to friends," said Banagale. "When you get out, the dynamic between you and your friends changes. Getting together means planning."

Jamie Richter said it has been hard to get used to working all day, every day until six o'clock.

"Four o'clock comes and I wonder what my friends are doing in Corvallis," she said. "When the weather changed this spring, I kept remembering all the good times I used to have."

Although Neuburger found the transition from college athletics to a sports company smooth, she too misses friends.

"Athletes are like a tight family," she said. "I miss the connection with my team. It was like having instant sisters. I miss living in an apartment complex with 20 of my best friends." She is younger than her workmates and finds it difficult to meet people her age.

"College is a fantasy world," Neuburger added. "A scholarship check comes in every month. You live next to friends. You only have two or three things to do every day."

"Despite the fact that I'm only two years older, I feel 10 years older," she said. 🍌

Pat Filip, '71, is a contributing writer for the Oregon Stater.