

# TAKE TWO

B Y L I Z M A S S E Y

## *Insight, flexibility crucial to career transitions, alumni say*

Not everybody is ready for a career change, even when they need one. Just ask Doug DeVoe's former client.

DeVoe, a senior career specialist in ASU's career services department, tells a story about a woman he counseled years ago, who told him that she hated what she did for a living so much that she threw up every morning on the way to work. He thought she'd jump at a chance to change into a new profession. He was wrong.

"I told her, 'let's get you out of there,'" he said. "She said to me, 'No, I've got 8 years in there, and 22 to go until my retirement!'"

However, the number of people who follow the course of the upchucking job-hater is on the wane these days. Census figures indicate that most Americans change occupations at least once during their working life, and career change is no longer viewed as unusual. We asked several Sun Devil alumni who've changed careers to share their secrets for finding a new, more fulfilling vocation.

### ASU EXPERTS OFFER CAREER-CHANGING TIPS

All fired up to leave your current profession for a new one? Three ASU career advisors had this to say about the process of preparing successfully for a career change.

**Money isn't everything.** "(Career change) is rarely about money," Jan Pagoria, director of the CLASWorks career program for College of Liberal Arts and Sciences students, said. "Money is a driver starting out, but it won't keep someone there if 'there' isn't a good fit."

**Keep it in the family.** Before a career transition gets off the ground it's essential to discuss what changing one's line of work will mean to one's family, said ASU Career Services Career Specialist Doug DeVoe. Without family support,

a career changer faces a much tougher time. Consider family counseling if the potential change produces major turbulence.

**Fix what's broken, keep what isn't.** It's as important to understand what does work in your current career as it is to be clear about what doesn't work. Linda Nassen, a career specialist at ASU Career Services, urged potential career changers to find common threads between their interests, enjoyable aspects of previous jobs and the most compelling elements of the careers that they are pondering.

**Back to school.** Nassen and DeVoe both cautioned that without a clear plan of how to turn a degree into a job, returning to school as part of a planned

career change could result in frustration and wasted money.

"Don't come back to school unless you're committed, know your values and you've done your research," Nassen said.

**It pays to associate.** Pagoria suggested that career changers lacking paid experience in a new field join a professional association relating to their target career. Members can teach newcomers important "initiation" steps in a field, as well as be a source of job referrals and professional mentoring.

"If you attend conferences and build your network, when you cast your line across to the other side, you can let them (people in your network) reel you over," she said.

# RANDY BIGOS

## *Getting in the swing*

**A**fter graduating from ASU with a degree in accounting, Randy Bigos '98 B.S. thought he'd already found his second career in a hobby: computer programming. Although he enjoyed the intellectual challenge and the plentiful opportunities offered by programming in the late 1990s, after the post-2001 business slump, Bigos wanted out. Many programming jobs were being offshored, and he says there was a pressure on the part of his contract employer for him to take increasingly unpalatable assignments.

After deciding to leave programming work, Bigos started his quest by researching fields that interested him, including the sport that he calls "my passion" — golf. Reading a careers book published by the National Golf Foundation, he realized that he wanted to find a way to make a living in that industry.

"I knew that (golf) would be part of my new career, but I wasn't sure of the format," he said.

Soon after, Bigos saw an ad in a golf magazine for the San Diego Golf Academy, which has a branch in Chandler. Although he made a joke about attending the school, Bigos didn't seriously consider leaving his well-paid profession until his wife came home with a packet from the academy.

"She said to me, 'you could make money at this — why not try it,'" Bigos said. "She saw I was stressed out and she just wanted to see me happier."

Bigos attended the academy and began working in the pro shop at the Western Skies golf course in Gilbert, where he now teaches lessons. He acknowledged that it was possible to become a golf pro by working one's way up the chain of command at a golf course, but asserted that going back to school to refine his skills in the sport allowed him to tap into several assets available only in a formal educational setting.

"School helps you understand how managers do things at other golf courses; it gives a broader perspective," he said. "And all the good schools have active alumni you can contact later to network."

Although he is currently making only about half what he did as a programmer, and is busy with lessons, pro shop work, and golf club repair from 3:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. during the winter, Bigos says he loves what he's doing. He's happy to wait and see if the money follows later.

"If you love all aspects of a job, you may work a lot of hours," Bigos said. "I'm not watching the clock and saying 'I'm on hour 16 and a half' — it just flies by!"



Photos by Dave Tevis



# JENNIFER MURRAY

## *Starting over early*



**W**hile some workers arrive at the career crossroads by choice or through following their curiosity, many are driven there by job dissatisfaction. Jennifer Murray ('94 B.S., '98 J.D.) sensed that dissatisfaction so early in her career that she started planning for her second career before she had started practicing her first.

Despite finishing her law degree and practicing for a year as a domestic relations lawyer, Murray said that she began applying to library science graduate programs before the end of law school. Her year of practice affirmed what she had already discovered as a law student— she enjoyed helping families solve problems, but she never enjoyed the tension associated with legal battles.

"In this area of law you see good people at their worst," she said. "People get very vindictive and angry during a divorce, and that was hard for me."

Murray attributed her need to retool so early to the fact that she had equated her lifelong interest in the law with the field being a good match for her. She ignored concerns expressed by family members that her low-key personality might not be suited to the intense conflict of courtroom drama, and went directly from her bachelor's degree to her law degree, something she says meant her career decision wasn't tested by life experiences until it was too late. Once she accepted her discontent, differentiating interest from aptitude was essential for her to find a second career that didn't repeat the mismatch of the first.

While searching for a new line of work, Murray looked back at her undergraduate and law school employment and found a clue: stints at Hayden Library, followed by work for Westlaw (a vendor to the ASU law library) as a law student. She spent three years training to be a librarian at the University of Arizona while also working full time in the university's libraries. The new profession sprang from previous interests; and, perhaps ironically, Murray realized during library school that she wanted to use her training as an attorney to work as a law librarian.

"I still wanted to use that knowledge base I had," she said.

After finishing her Master of Library Science degree and working as a law librarian for the University of Southern California and ASU, Murray was hired in 2005 by the law firm of Greenberg Traurig in Phoenix. She relishes the freedom from the long hours that are part of many attorneys' lives, and the respect her law degree brings her with the lawyers she assists at the firm. Most of all, she says, she feels free of the burden of working in a system that didn't work for her.

"My best day practicing (law) was worse than my worst day at the library," she said.

# MIKE OWENS

## *Keeping something in the pipeline*

Consider the paradoxes of Mike Owens' life: he received his bachelor's degree in education from Arizona State University in 1975, yet he's never taught more than two consecutive years at a stretch in a conventional public school setting. He's a Carter-era "West Winger" who helped create the U.S. Department of Education and is equally at home discussing construction permits with oil barons in west Texas. And he's used his "deskside manner," those counseling qualities every good teacher hones, more often on adult employees than students.

Yet to Owens, who has been at various points in his career a teacher, a political consultant and a businessman, it's all of one piece. Becoming involved with educational funding issues soon after he graduated, Owens had a chance to work on Jimmy Carter's presidential campaign in 1976 and followed the peanut farmer to the White House as a special assistant who worked with Robert Strauss in setting up the education department. He said he figured having the political savvy would make him a better teacher, since his knowledge of the "system" would allow him to advocate for public schools — something he still supports strongly.

"Politics made me even more passionate about education," he said.

After the Reagan revolution in 1980, Owens took his talents elsewhere. Eventually, he returned to Dallas, his hometown, and managed the burgeoning instructional television channel for the city's school districts. Budget cuts canceled the television gig four years later, and Owens turned his presentation skills, his research ability and his larger-than-life extrovert's personality (fitting for his imposing 6-foot-5-inch frame) toward helping his fellow Texans through the oil pipeline permitting process.

Building oil pipelines might seem a far cry from teaching history and government classes, but Owens asserts that his teaching skills assist his work in the energy sector.

"Pipeline projects take three and a half years to permit and nine months to build," Owens said. "What are you doing those three years? Educating politicians, environmental groups and other groups...it's mounds and mounds of paperwork, and if there's one thing I learned in teaching, it's how to keep up with paperwork."

For the last several years, Owens has worked for the Pacific & Texas Corp., an energy platform company, becoming president of the Tempe-based business in 2001. Owens says his public-sector experience is an asset, not a liability, at his current job.

"As CEO, I'll be in a meeting with people who are pure business or pure finance, and I'll tell them, 'you live in a bubble on Wall Street World — here's the real world,'" he said.

"Corporations use some form of education every day to succeed."

