



No one knows better than these local residents that when we make **career decisions**, we are also making life choices, whether it's networking, retiring or going back to school.

A BETTER CAREER CHOICE

By Kevin Fritz

It's another new beginning and a new chance for keeping those customary New Year's resolutions, which, by their very nature, are geared toward bettering oneself and building self-esteem. So it comes as no surprise that one of the more popular resolutions is to make a better life by either going back to school or through career transition.

"There is definitely a higher demand to attend any type of career improvement seminar or workshop at the beginning of the year," says **Winter Park** resident **Giselle Moratin**, an adjunct professor at DeVry University in south Orlando and a career transition workshop instructor at The Knowledge Shop in Casselberry. "It is definitely something that people make as a New Year's resolution."

Indeed, such resolutions are usually prompted by self-realization and motivation and, at times, pushed along by a simple twist of fate.

Creating a Better Life

Stephanie Bolin-Rivera is employed as a front office medical assistant/receptionist in **MetroWest** at the Pain Management Center of West Orange. To kick off the new year, she will be attending Everest University (EU, formerly Florida Metropolitan University), working toward a bachelor's degree thanks to a scholarship from the school. She already received her associate of science in medical assisting from EU in 2007.

"I have always wanted to help people," says Bolin-Rivera. "I like to make the hurt feel better."

But things haven't always been so rosy for this 26-year-old mother of three. Her childhood was "not the best life," and, by the time she was 16, she was a high school dropout. A year later, she became a teenage mother. "My self esteem was not great," she adds. She eventually got married, had two more children and worked several part-time jobs. Then, four years ago, a college recruiter changed her life forever.

Bolin-Rivera explains that her husband, Ruben, had decided to get a degree in criminal justice from EU to make a better life for his family. While she was on campus with her husband during the enrollment process, a recruiter asked why she was not interested. Scoffing at her reason—being a high school dropout—he convinced her to take a placement test. She was able to enroll that day. "I

didn't think it was possible," she says. "I had given up on the possibility of ever going back to school."

Bolin-Rivera not only embraced the opportunity the recruiter had given her; she dove right in, graduating with a 3.46 GPA, and was chosen to star in EU's television commercials. Soon thereafter, she was honored with the school's Dream Award and a \$2,500 scholarship to pursue her bachelor's degree. "I can honestly say it has changed my life dramatically," she says. "I am not the same Stephanie I once was."

More poignant is how she treasures being an example to her children and to others. "People use kids and marriage and life as obstacles," she says. "But anyone can do it. I am a testimony to that."

Life-Changing Decisions

Natalie Casey of **Altamonte Springs** was following someone else's dream of becoming a doctor. "I wasn't happy," she admits. So, more than four years ago, she gave up her pre-med track at the University of Florida and pursued a degree in interior design, much to the chagrin of her family who believed she was going against their more traditional career wishes. "I had to fight for making this a career choice," she says.

Today, Casey loves to go to work each day as an interior designer at RLF, an architecture, engineering and interior design company in Winter Park. She believes no one should just settle on a career, but pursue their dreams to the utmost. "It's a change in mindset," she says. "Everything I do in my life, I want to do to my fullest extent."

For **Longwood** resident **Marvin Friedman**, executive director of the Jewish Community Center of Greater Orlando (JCC) in Maitland, his career transition has already begun from the work-a-day world to retirement scheduled for Sept. 1. "It's exciting and scary," Friedman says after spending the past 36 years as the head of the JCC.

While his career transition may be leaving the working world as opposed to advancement, it is still a life-changing career

decision. Now it's time for him to enjoy the fruits of his labor. "I'm going to plan the most exciting trip and take off," he says. "I'll go to Thailand or some other exciting locale." He also plans to volunteer at other non-profits in the area and work part-time hours at the JCC in 2010.

Friedman gained help with his transitioning from the Rollins College Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership Center headquartered in Winter Park, which assists executives with smooth successions for the next leadership. He says they also help with the natural feeling of loss and how to let go and allow for an orderly transition. "It's time to pass on the torch," he says. "It's the end of an interesting chapter in my life and the beginning of a new one."

Networking Advice

Moratin, who teaches career development and transition to students looking to get their first job and to those who have returned to school in hopes of advancing their careers, says the key to success is self-branding. "My biggest advice is networking," says Moratin.

She notes it's not always about finding the right person to solicit as much as talking to everyone about your aspirations because you never know where it may lead. "From your hairdresser to your uncle," she says, "these kinds of contacts sometimes make things happen."

Moratin says that those looking to move up within their company should try "informational interviews" with a person in that department, finding out their likes and dislikes about their particular job. She says it is also the best way to get the attention of a prospective employer when you are networking.

"Most people are open to give you 15 minutes of their time," she says. "But just handing someone a résumé is a turn off."

More than anything, Moratin advises patience since looking to better oneself is not an overnight affair. "It can take months," she says, "but it all starts with a meaningful contact." ■



Moratin



Bolin-Rivera



Casey



Friedman



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