

2011 Outstanding Young Alumna Award Shelly Smallman-Nielsen '99



Shelly attended Fulton Elementary for kindergarten through 5th grade and Evergreen Middle School for 6th - 8th grade. She grew up in a rural area of Fulton County she commonly refers to as the Fulton County 'Bermuda Triangle'! "I had a Swanton telephone number, a Delta zip code and attended Evergreen schools!" said Shelly.

Upon graduation from SUA, she attended the College of Engineering at the University of Toledo and obtained her Bachelor of Science degree in Bioengineering, through an internship she completed during that time took her outside the United States.

During her sophomore/junior year, she accepted an internship at Aarhus Kommune Hospital in Aarhus, Denmark, where she contributed to a research team conducting spinal research. "That opportunity not only provided the opportunity to have my research published internationally, but also eventually, I brought home a little bit of Denmark ... my husband!" said Shelly.

Her mother was a great influence in her career choice, as her mother worked within the College of Engineering at the University of Toledo. During Shelly's sophomore year of her public high school, her mother introduced Shelly to Dr. Patricia Relue, a female bioengineering

professor. She immediately became intrigued with the engineering field and knew she wanted to become a bioengineer. However, she needed the proper academic preparation. In 1997, she left the public school she had attended since kindergarten and officially became an SUA Arrow.

Upon graduating from the University of Toledo, Shelly accepted a position at NAMSA, a medical device contract research organization specializing in the safety evaluation of medical devices (class I, II and III), device and packaging materials, and drug/device combination products. She began her career as a research associate in the In Vitro Toxicology laboratory where, "I conducted cytotoxicity testing, hemolysis testing and reverse bacterial mutation studies. Through this testing, it was my responsibility to ensure that medical devices currently on the market remained bio-compatible, as well as to test new devices that were to be submitted to the FDA for market approval. I am currently working as a corporate engineer for NAMSA. My primary job function in this role involves time savings and automation projects within the laboratory. This includes validating state-of-the-art equipment and processes that allow laboratory personnel to complete testing more quickly, minimize errors and comply with regulatory guidelines," said Shelly.

"I knew I was going to be an engineer before I attended SUA. However, I do feel the culture at SUA encouraged my determination and confidence to pursue this career. SUA provides such a nurturing environment for women to be independent, confident and to reach for the stars no matter how distant they may seem. I truly believe my experience at SUA changed me for the rest of my life. I was 15 and transferring from a public high school when I entered SUA. Cliques were already formed, and I had to find a way to fit in for the next two years. SUA was such a welcoming school, and it didn't take me too long to feel at home. To me, that experience helped give me

the courage and determination to make so many choices in life, whether it was packing my bags and moving to a foreign country for a six-month internship, career challenges in a male dominated field or facing personal challenges."

"I would tell young women interested in pursuing an engineering career that it is a most rewarding career because it gives you the knowledge and opportunity to turn problems into solutions every day, no matter what field of engineering you pursue. I believe that is what makes engineering a truly gratifying career ... to know that your service is in some way giving back to humanity and making this a better world for the next generation."

"Regardless of their career choice, the best advice I can give students at SUA is that it is OK to fail. Some of my hardest but most valuable lessons in career and life have sometimes come from failures. It has always given me the strength and determination to try harder and ultimately succeed."

Life is a journey, not a destination, so I don't believe it is meant to be lived with regrets. I do pause periodically to glance backwards, but only to see how far I've come, where I am and where I'm going. The choices I have made both professionally and personally have been at times so interlaced, I couldn't imagine changing one thing without its significantly impacting another. I believe that at the end of the day, each of us is responsible for our own happiness. I pursued my happiness with an engineering career, which ultimately led me to my husband. Through that marriage we now have a beautiful 2 year old son, Tristan, who is our greatest treasure. If I had to do it all over again, I most definitely would and I wouldn't change a single thing.