Center for Spartan Engineering celebrates a decade of students helping students

As the country heads into the holiday season, Michigan State University’s Center for Spartan Engineering got a head start on the festivities with a recent reunion that was full of laughter, warm remembrances and, of course, amazing food.

The center hosted a 10th anniversary Career Peers Reunion Weekend in October, honoring the center’s former students who worked as advisers and trainers during their college years.

Garth Motschenbacher, director of Employer Relations & Career Engagement, said the Career Peers have been at the “core of everything” in the Center for Spartan Engineering.

“They have served as career guides and mentors to our students,” Motschenbacher said. “They have handled the front desk inquiries, resume critiques, initial career search advice, mock interviews and assisting with company connections. They helped plan and lead career events, spring break corporate tours and even assisted in the planning and delivery of experiential education classes, like The Detroit Semester. Today, some of them serve on their company’s recruiting teams and host college and university functions in their home areas,” he added.

Eva Reiter, who serves as campus recruiting lead for GE at Michigan State, said her time as a Career Peer is a testament to the power of preparation and initiative. She is a 2009 mechanical engineering graduate.

“A magical part of being a Career Peer was truly gaining perspective of how early career development works. We learned about the basic skills for success - a strong resume, a concise elevator speech, taking advantage of networking contacts, and fostering strong relationships with those around you who are subject matter experts.

“Watching fellow students reach their career development ‘eureka’ moments and then be successful in their endeavors was, and continues to be, incredibly gratifying,” she added.

Visit the Career Peers Reunion Photo Gallery.
About 40 Career Peers returned for the 10th anniversary reunion, with alumni from every year, 2007 - 2017. Among them were:

- Justin Roe, '15, materials science and engineering, who works at Textron in Baltimore,
- Katelyn Dunaski, '16, applied engineering sciences, who came from Cupertino, California, where she works for Apple,
- Michele (Marinich) Rogers, '08, chemical engineering and materials science, who with her husband, Chad Rogers, '09, chemical engineering, are owners of Dimes Brewhouse in Dimondale.

Kimberly Fortenberry, who works for General Motors in Vehicle Performance – Energy, said she especially enjoyed seeing the Career Peers who returned to Michigan for the event.

“I love having this network of friends,” she noted.

An authentic six-course Italian dinner

Spartan Engineer Joseph Gentile wears his white chef’s coat – with a green embroidered “Chef Engineer, MSU ’64” on it – with a lot of #MSUPride. When Motschenbacher began to think about how to celebrate a decade of Career Peers - he knew “Chef Engineer Joe” could cook up something special.

That was when he and his wife, Karen (’67), built a wood-fired outdoor pizza oven in their backyard, and a favorite avocation began. Elegant dinners in support of Hospice and other charitable fund-raising activities helped his food prep techniques sizzle.

Gentile’s chef skills were tested and praised during a unique MSU celebration in October – the Center for Spartan Engineering’s Career Peers 10th Anniversary. The evening’s carte du jour, an authentic six-course Italian dinner – was served in MSU’s historic Cowles House.

“Back in 2012, the staff from the college’s Center for Spartan Engineering came to my house for some wood-fired pizza. We had a ball. Photos were texted back to East Lansing and the students working in the center starting saying, ‘hey, why aren’t we there?’
“So the early Career Peers came over once, then again, and on and on. That was the start of this. I jumped at the chance,” Gentile said. “It was a great opportunity to see folks I’d met through the years and to work with the Cowles House Chef Brad Curlee. He was so gracious and taught me several things.”

The two chefs prepared around 60 meals.

“The ingredients were so authentic, we had to order them from an Italian market near Detroit,” he explained. “I couldn’t have done this without 100 percent participation from the great staff at Cowles House,” Gentile said, with appreciation. “They just did a beautiful job.

“This was a Spartans Will event – and we created an extraordinary reunion,” he added.

Gentile has dedicated many years to the MSU College of Engineering. He joined the advisory board in the Department of Chemical Engineering and Materials Science in 2000 and has served as its chair since 2002. He is a past member and past chair of the college’s Alumni Advisory Board, a group he served for nine years, retiring in 2014. He received the Chemical Engineering and Materials Science Red Cedar Circle Award for distinguished service to the profession and community in 2011, and he received his alumni 50-year pin in 2014.

Added Gentile, “I’m just glad I’m not competing with these Spartan Engineers now. It was a lot easier 60 years ago.”

Center for Spartan Engineering

Founded in 2007, the Center for Spartan Engineering was the idea of former College of Engineering Dean Satish Udpa to create a space for engineering students that provided “backpack to briefcase” services. It is designed to help students establish networks and enhance their MSU experiences through experiential learning - like co-ops, internships, undergraduate research projects, career development programs, and education abroad.

Jennifer Jennings, who is now the college’s associate director for corporate and foundation relations, joined the college as its first career consultant in April 2007. The center opened in the Fall of 2007 when Motschenbacher and Bernadette Friedrich, the center’s academic lead, joined the center following national searches. And next came the
Photos courtesy of Stephanie Motschenbacher.

Related Website: Center for Spartan Engineering
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