

(Outreach)ing for the stars

By Neeka Eghbali | neeka7@vt.edu | 703-309-5380



Photo by Neeka Eghbali

Senior Addie Orrison in front of Shanks Hall, home to the Department of Communication at Virginia Tech and the PRSSA office.

BLACKSBURG, Va. – Some individuals may find fundraising to be tedious work. For senior Addie Orrison, community outreach chair for Virginia Tech’s chapter of the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA), it is what she would prefer to spend her time doing.

Orrison has been a member of PRSSA for the past two years, solidifying her interest in the public relations and marketing sectors. With graduation rapidly approaching in May 2017, she has decided to make the most of the rest of her time

here while crossing a few, if not all, items off of her senior year bucket list.

NE: What are your responsibilities as community outreach chair and what are you excited about?

Orrison: I’m really excited for it. It hasn’t really been a position that’s been around for very long. I’m the channel between the community and our chapter of PRSSA, so I’m doing fundraising with different organizations. I want to do three fundraisers each semester. I already had two bake sales and I want to set up Frosty Parrot and Chipotle sales this semester. If that doesn’t happen, then I’m definitely going to set it up next semester.

I also want to do a better philanthropy than we did last year. We raised 52 items for the Women’s Resource Center last year, and this year I want to raise over 100. As soon as I get the date, I’m going to hit the ground running for “Elevations,” the networking event.

I really like my new position because it’s very hands-on. Before, it was a lot of the president, Melanie [Ford], asking me to gather things for a meeting. I was very much an errands person for her, which was a lot of fun, but I’m really excited that this year I get to do what I want to do. I get to set up events and run the philanthropy. I’m super excited.

NE: What lessons did you learn from going to the PRSSA conference in Atlanta last year?

Orrison: As good as you think you are at what you’re doing, there’s always going to be somebody better and there’s always going to be somebody worse. So, it’s really hard to gauge where you are and what you’re supposed to be doing. You go there and you have your business

cards and your padfolio, but then there are people who have 50 resumes and whole containers of business cards and gifts to give people.

One girl had candy taped to her business card. There were also people with awesome questions. This one guy that was doing PR for Coca-Cola said, "Everybody who gets hired is supposed to have a Coca-Cola memory." He gave us a few examples of people that he had hired and then at the end some girl asked him, "So what's your Coke story?" Everyone was like, that's awesome.

There are going to be people that have all their ducks in a row and you're thinking, "Oh my gosh," but then there are also going to be people looking at you like that. It was a pretty humbling experience overall.

NE: I know you have secured a job; where will you be working?

Orrison: Devil's Backbone. It's a brewery and I worked there over the summer and it was amazing. I did a lot of marketing for them. At first, I started out working in PR and they asked me to do a couple feature stories and write a couple of press releases. They had just unveiled a couple of projects that they had been doing, and I wrote press releases for newspapers.

Then, I started doing marketing and event planning and it was so much fun and they were so great. With marketing, I got to do the event planning part and got to advertise and market this Family Beer project.

Last summer, everyone who worked at Devil's Backbone broke into 12 teams and each team got to make their own beer. They got to make the name, the ingredients and the package on it.

The company picked five of them out of the 12 and put them all in packages and sent them out, so now you can buy an adventure pack with all five of those beers that they picked. On each of those bottles, it says what it's called and who it's brewed by. I really liked that part.

They told me to tell them whatever I wanted to do and they'd let me do it. I was the only intern, so they made me a priority.

NE: How did you score the opportunity with Devil's Backbone?

Orrison: I applied to a bunch of places in D.C. to intern and almost all of them said they could do \$10 an hour maximum. I thought that was not enough money for me to move to D.C. for the summer. I went ahead with three of them, and all three of them said they were only looking for someone part-time and at \$10 an hour.

So, I ended up looking closer to home in Lexington. Lexington is Devil's Backbone's outpost, so where they brew all this beer and they have their office spaces. My dad does engineering for them sometimes. He gave me Steve's email, who's the CEO of Devil's Backbone. I emailed him wondering if he'd take an intern and told him I wouldn't need to get paid since I'd be living at home. He responded saying I could start at \$15 an hour full-time and that he'd make a position just for me. It was so exciting.

NE: What is your position going to be at Devil's Backbone after graduation?

Orrison: I don't know yet. I think they're going to make a position for me since every position is pretty much filled.

Craft beer is awesome because it's so flexible. There's no hard deadlines. Everyone just says, "This is coming out around this time so if you could do this around this time, that would be great."

It's so much fun because craft beer is new, exciting and modern and it's not rigid at all. Everyone who works in it is so nice and flexible. If I ever do agency work, I'm not going to be prepared at all.

NE: If you could live an ideal life, how would you describe it?

Orrison: I would travel all the time. The best thing I can think of is doing marketing for some tourism agency where they have places all around the world that they're trying to get people to go to. I would just go and do marketing from all these places and say, "This place is awesome because you get to do this and this." I want to do so many weird things, like I want to swim with sharks. That's my dream and it always has been. It sounds really weird, but when I was a kid, we would go to the beach and I'd want to see a shark. I would read all of these books about sharks before I went to the beach and my mom thought I was crazy. I also want to learn how to surf and get a scuba diving license.

NE: How has PRSSA affected your life? What memory stands out to you?

Orrison: In one word, Melanie. I went to a couple PRSSA meetings freshman year and I met her but I didn't know her. I stopped going because I wondered why I was going to sit for an hour when I didn't have any friends in PRSSA.



Photo by Neeka Eghbali

Orrison writes on the board before a PRSSA meeting. Meetings take place each Wednesday from 7-8 p.m. in Surge 104D and alternate between general and committee meetings.

Sophomore year, I went to two meetings and thought I didn't need to be a member yet. So then at the end of

sophomore year, I started talking to Melanie and she told me I should do all of these things and I thought, "That's crazy, I'm not doing any of those things."

She would send me the internship emails that PRSSA members would get even though I wasn't part of PRSSA yet. She would tell me which internships were perfect for me and she ended up getting me the internship with Director of Administrative Services Laura Neff-Henderson, which was awesome.

This summer, when I was talking to Brody, the HR guy for Devil's Backbone, I told him all of the stuff I did at the internship with Neff-Henderson and he thought that was great. I told him it was because of Melanie and then I went on this emotional spree because she had just graduated. Now I have a job out of it and it's all because of her.

NE: Tell me about your family.

Orrison: My mom and dad live in Lexington, Virginia, which is an hour and a half away. My brother Will goes there. He is the most awesome kid. We did not get along until he got bigger than me and I thought we might as well be best friends.

My dogs' names are Cole, Shadow and Speck. They're all teeny tiny dogs and all mutts. Shadow looks like a black boxer, but his tale curves up instead of being bushy. Cole is a Jack Russell-Corgi, so he's shaped like a Corgi but has the coloring of a Jack Russell. Speck is a little Chihuahua-Boston Terrier mix, so he looks like a Boston Terrier if you shrunk it all the way down to a Chihuahua size. He only likes my mom and he'll act like a cat. He'll sleep in your lap all curled up.

My favorite is Shadow by far. He'll love anyone that pets him and he does this thing where if you're petting him, he'll beg and put his paw in your hand because he likes his paws scratched instead of any other part. I want a big dog; my mom only wanted small dogs. I want a German Shepherd and I want to name it either Radar, Quincy, Micah or Oden.

NE: What is your senior year bucket list?

Orrison: I want to hike all of the hikes, including the ones that nobody really does. At the beginning of last year, I had only done the Cascades and I wanted to do all the major hikes. We did Dragon's tooth, McAfee's Knob, Bald Knob and Butt Mountain.

You drive the whole way for Butt Mountain but it gets really scary at the end. There were huge ruts in the road and my car almost flipped. This year, I want to do more outdoor stuff. We went camping and tubing, but I want to rock climb and do more intramurals now that I have time for it.

NE: What is something you have learned from your time at Virginia Tech?

Orrison: Being nice will get you farther than anything else. Even opening a door for someone can lead to a conversation or just smiling at someone.

In Lexington, I was so used to saying hi to people I didn't know. Here it's magnified. I'll see someone smiling at themselves across the street and it makes me smile. It's so much easier to be nice than to be anything else.