

5-8-1995

## 05/08/1995 - Dreams Come True For Urbana Man.pdf

University Marketing and Communications

Follow this and additional works at: [http://thekeep.eiu.edu/press\\_releases\\_1995](http://thekeep.eiu.edu/press_releases_1995)

---

### Recommended Citation

University Marketing and Communications, "05/08/1995 - Dreams Come True For Urbana Man.pdf" (1995). 1995. 217.  
[http://thekeep.eiu.edu/press\\_releases\\_1995/217](http://thekeep.eiu.edu/press_releases_1995/217)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Press Releases at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in 1995 by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact [tabruns@eiu.edu](mailto:tabruns@eiu.edu).

96-137

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

May 8, 1996

DREAM COMES TRUE FOR URBANA MAN

CHARLESTON -- Getting a college degree had been Joe Epstein's dream for most of his married and professional life.

But when the 46-year-old human resources professional from Urbana learned he had pancreatic cancer last November, his dream of one day walking across a commencement stage to receive a four-year degree vanished.

Joe had envisioned the day when he could fulfill the promise he made to his mother, Elizabeth, of Allentown, Penn., that her oldest son would some day graduate from college and use his education to have a successful career.

He had just completed the fall semester at Eastern Illinois University when he learned about his illness. He lacked 12 credit hours to graduate from Eastern, where he had been enrolled in the Board of Governors Bachelor of Arts (BOG/BA) degree program since fall 1994.

Joe was enrolled in EIU classes part-time and had completed a written portfolio of his work experience while working full-time as employee relations manager at Kraft Foods in Champaign. He was able to take most of his EIU coursework through off-

-more-

campus classes at Parkland College in Champaign. He previously took college classes in Pennsylvania, where he lived and worked before moving to Champaign-Urbana.

"I did not want to take the risk of advancing my illness due to fatigue from additional coursework, and wanted to spend quality time with my wife, Kathleen. So, I decided to cancel my spring classes and put behind me the dream I had carried for the last eight years of my married and professional life," Joe said. "I had resorted to the fact that I'd have to live with the satisfaction of knowing I could have had a degree."

Kaye Woodward, director of Eastern's BOG/BA program, learned about Joe's circumstances from a Kraft colleague, Bob Seed, who graduated from the BOG/BA degree program in summer 1995.

Because the BOG/BA degree program evaluates college-level learning outside the classroom and assesses and recognizes such prior learning, Joe had his knowledge tested under an alternate format.

"Joe is a very quiet spoken man who came to Illinois and approached the completion of his degree in a vigorous manner and achieved academic excellence. It seemed a shame that his illness would keep him from achieving a life-long dream. It was a pleasure and honor to work with Tom Waskom, acting chair of technology, to develop a different means for assessing Joe's prior production experience. After all, that's what Eastern is about -- making people's dreams come true," said Woodward.

Instead of attending the four classes he needed to graduate, Joe, a 15-year

Kraft employee who was quickly promoted from production worker, to distribution warehouse supervisor, to employee relations manager, was able to complete his remaining coursework through an evaluation by industrial technology faculty.

His experience in materials handling, quality control, human resources management and related areas was assessed.

"What Eastern did for me was the spark I needed to give me that positive attitude which is so important in dealing with an illness such as mine. Thanks to Kaye, my dream has now become a reality. She has been a tremendous support throughout this, as have been all my friends and colleagues at Kraft," said Joe, who will receive his bachelor's degree at Eastern's spring commencement on Saturday.

"Had I turned down Kraft's offer to come to Champaign and remained in Pennsylvania, I never would have been able to achieve my educational goal. It's unfortunate that Pennsylvania does not have a program similar to Eastern's Board of Governors degree," Joe noted.

"The degree is just as much for my wife, as it is for me. She has lived with my 15-hour work/school days and sacrificed the weekend excursions to all the great places in the Midwest we talked about seeing because the weekend study time was just too valuable to give up," he added.

Joe, who is already sporting an EIU class ring given to him by his wife, says he expects to have "butterflies" on Saturday, but imagines that it will be one of the happiest days of his life. "What a proud day it will be for my wife who has stood by me so bravely and for my daughter, Christina; son, Greg; and stepchildren, Susan, Timothy and Jason."

Up to 30 family, friends, and co-workers are expected to attend the ceremony, with a celebration planned at Joe's Urbana home on Sunday. Then, he and his wife plan a weekend trip to Hannibal, Mo.

Since his chemotherapy treatments are going well and he is in good physical condition, Joe hopes to return to work soon. "I want to be able to use my degree, and who knows, more education may be down the road."

One of the most meaningful trips he will make is to Pennsylvania to visit his mother in the nursing home to read her the words on his diploma.