



Cynthia Tessien chooses different path but support for WFU has always been steadfast

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." This is the mindset that Cynthia Tessien ('82) has embodied since she was young.

Growing up in Greensboro, where her mother was a high school guidance counselor and her father was a civil engineer and business owner, she always enjoyed exploring things off the beaten path. When it became time to start looking into colleges, Cynthia's thought process remained the same - she knew she wanted to take a different path.

While many of her classmates seemed to be interested in applying to the same school, Cynthia set out to explore various other colleges in an attempt to find the best fit. "I looked at Wake Forest because I wanted to look at something different," she said.

On her first visit to campus, Cynthia fell in love with all that Wake had to offer. Aside from the size and reputation of the school, Cynthia connected with the feel of the campus as she walked around, immediately convincing her that

this is where she belonged. Her love of Wake Forest may have been born on that day of her campus visit, but it has lasted through the years, only growing as time goes on.

An avid pianist with a strong love and passion for music, Cynthia wanted to be a rock and roll star. Although her dream of being a professional musician didn't become a reality, it left the door open for Cynthia to explore other career options. Not knowing exactly what she wanted to major in upon entering college, the liberal arts foundation at Wake Forest was extremely appealing.

As classes began, economics stood out, and Cynthia thought that might be the subject she ended up majoring in. At the time, however, there was a required prerequisite course in accounting that Cynthia had to enroll in. It was at this point that the uncertainty that fogged her mind dissipated, and the realization that accounting was the perfect choice as a major became clear. Cynthia largely attributes that revelation to Dr. Lee Knight, who was the professor of that accounting class and who continues to act as a valuable mentor for Cynthia to this day.

Cynthia's love for Wake Forest Athletics began during her time as a student and has continued to evolve over the years. One of her finest athletic memories from her undergraduate years is the football team playing in the 1979 Tangerine Bowl in Orlando and having the opportunity to travel down to Florida with friends to watch the Deacs take on LSU.

After graduating from Wake in 1982 and passing the exam to become a Certified Public Accountant, Cynthia once again traveled in her own direction. At that time, most of her friends found jobs and moved to Charlotte, but Cynthia chose to go to Raleigh instead, where she spent 10 years with EY, formerly known as Ernst & Young.

In 1992 she moved back to the Piedmont Triad for personal reasons and specifically chose to live in Winston-Salem so she could easily attend Wake Forest basketball games. Shortly after coming back to Winston-Salem, where she was transferred to the local EY office, she was offered and accepted a job with Inmar. By 2005, Cynthia was putting in many long hours at work, and she and her husband, Bill, had just had their third child. With that said, she didn't

feel that the pace and demands of her position were conducive to the lifestyle she was looking for.

Contemplating other options that would be a good fit for her, Cynthia decided to contact Dr. Jack Wilkerson, who was the Dean of the Wake Forest School of Business at the time. While inquiring what it would take to get a PhD, Wilkerson introduced Cynthia to the concept of professionally qualified faculty and invited her to consider applying for a faculty position.

In the fall of 2010, Cynthia finally decided to make the career change and started teaching at Wake Forest. Although she never thought she would be a teacher, Cynthia has found it to be something she truly loves and hasn't looked back since.

"What I tell students is that I came to Wake Forest for me, but I stay for them," she said. "The relationships I have with the students and being able to follow their successes is very truly one of the most rewarding aspects of my life."

In her current position, things have come full circle for Cynthia. Not only is she now a colleague of Knight's, her first accounting professor that inspired her to go into the profession, Cynthia now has the opportunity to act as a mentor and help shape the future of current students, including many student-athletes.



At the beginning of every semester, Cynthia makes sure to ask the student-athletes whom she teaches which sports they play. Once she gathers this information, she makes every effort to attend their competitions and watch them play. Cynthia's continued support of Wake Forest Athletics and the student-athletes has even landed her the opportunity to act as a guest coach for volleyball and women's soccer on two separate occasions.

Cynthia's support of Wake Forest Athletics doesn't stop there, however. In addition to encouraging the student-athletes on the field and in the classroom, she also shows her support through the Deacon Club, where she has been a member for 23 years.

Realizing the value and need for it to

be a priority, Cynthia and Bill have both made career changes that allow them to be involved in education, including a tutoring center they own in Clemmons, NC called A Step Ahead Academic Center. Cynthia and Bill's contributions to the Deacon Club go hand-in-hand with wanting to help kids learn and grow, while obtaining a quality education.

"When I came to Wake Forest, my family didn't have much money at all, and I know what a struggle it was," she said. "Wake Forest provided a window to a larger world, and I want to help students have the same great experience that I did."

Looking ahead to what's in store for Wake Forest Athletics, Cynthia realizes the importance of providing our student-athletes and coaches with the resources they need to succeed both during competition and in the classroom. "We have to be mindful to continue bringing the resources necessary to make our programs competitive," she said.

Cynthia's journey to Wake Forest started with her traveling off the beaten path, and that same mindset ultimately led her back to Wake years later.

"As Deacs we get to stand apart and be different," she said. "We don't have to follow the mainstream. We get to stand for something higher. We're proud to wear our Black and Gold!"

DEACON CLUB PHOTOS

Deacon Club members are encouraged to submit photos for publication in the Gold Rush. Send your photos in digital format to deacclub@wfu.edu. Submission of a photo does not guarantee that it will be published. Thanks for showing off your Demon Deacon pride!



Charlie Knott, grandson of Deacon Club members Chip ('65) and Sarah Owen, spends time with the men's basketball team.



An impressive crowd followed the Deacs to the College Cup in Houston and enjoyed a tailgate with the Streakin' Deacon.



Deacon Club members cheer on the Deacs at the Military Bowl in Annapolis on Dec. 27.