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UNCW





A Seahawk at heart

“There is no substitute for meeting someone face-to-face.”

by Megan Kiger '13

Lee Grant '00, president and owner of Wilmington-based Coastal Chemical & Paper, is a UNC Wilmington alumnus who is making a difference.

Grant graduated from UNC Wilmington in 2000 with a degree in exercise science. Since then, he has taken a different career path, while keeping strong connections to the university, even employing other UNCW alumni, like himself.

After graduating, Grant says his initial plans were to “get into coaching at the college level.” But, he admits, “Those types of experiences are pretty limited.” Inspired by his father’s career in distribution, Lee started his company in his garage with only one supplier.

“I started the company with basically not much money,” Grant says. “I am a big fan of keeping debt low, which creates more opportunities down the road. You can offer the customer what is best for him or her, and it’s not just another sell to help pay down some debt that has accrued.”

Coastal Chemical & Paper has transformed into a business with a 20,000-square-foot warehouse, six delivery trucks and a flourishing reputation in southeastern North Carolina.

“It was tough early on,” Grant says, “but being competitive as can be, I was up for the challenge.”

With help from his wife, **Sommer Hart Grant '00**, an information systems graduate, Coastal Chemical & Paper has become one of the best suppliers of cleaning, packaging, food service and janitorial products in the state. The business strives to educate its customers on green cleaning, as well. “We promote a healthy work environment with healthy sustainable products and methods.”

As a student-athlete, Grant has been able to tie his experiences on the baseball field into his work as a businessman.

“UNCW was an awesome experience,” he says. “Being a part of the baseball team, you have to learn to be incredibly disciplined between your studies and practice. UNCW gave me work ethic, teamwork, discipline, integrity, things like that.”

Taking personal and passionate approaches in his business plan, Grant puts his customers first, telling his workers to never lose sight of the customers’ priorities. Grant has built his business and its reputation using the “old school word of mouth,” and reaches out to some customers through his involvement with UNCW.

Grant takes pride in building relationships with his customers. He’s strived to keep things close and trusting, to ensure that his customers are getting the best care possible. “In this business, we sell to the same businesses every week, every month. It’s a continuous sale, so the customers need to be able to trust you,” he says.

With six UNCW alumni working on Grant’s staff and his participation as a member of UNCW’s Alumni Association Board of Directors, Grant has been able to keep close ties with the university.

Starting Coastal Chemical & Paper was sparked by his athletic competitiveness and his knowledge of the business world. Regardless of his success in business, he still considers convincing his wife to marry him the best sales job he ever did. Having a family has helped him focus on other pieces of his life that are important.

“Sommer and I started a family. Then the importance became about giving our kids the best life we could. The bottom line is, creating this business has been fun to me. It gives me an outlet to still be competitive in the workplace and provides stability for my family.”

