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Alumna brings exposure to life in Detroit

By *Rebecca Wyatt Thomas*, OU Web Writer

Armed with a background in journalism and experience in recruiting and real estate, Heidi Hedquist serves as editor of After5Detroit.com, a Web site for Detroiters looking for a place to connect with each other and the community. She combines her communication and business skills to inform young professionals that Detroit can provide opportunities for networking and social interaction like any other metropolitan city.

"We are a user friendly place for everyone working in and around the City of Detroit. We want to send a message to people that there are amazing things going on in and around our city. You don't have to move to Chicago or New York to experience them. There are incredible things happening here," Hedquist said.

Hedquist grew up in Troy. Her mother was an opera singer for the Michigan Opera Theatre so she was exposed to the cultural side of the area from an early age. She has traveled a lot throughout her life and spent four years in England but has always been drawn back to Detroit. After graduating, Hedquist remained in the area and is now helping others find the same fulfillment in opportunities available in Detroit.

The After 5 Detroit Web site was started by Kerry Doman, a Detroit-area native who moved to Chicago and returned to the area only to find all of her friends were gone. She went online looking for places to meet others and network. When she didn't find one, Doman created After 5 Detroit.

At the time, Hedquist was working in real estate and was considering advertising on After 5 Detroit, but inquired about writing opportunities. In November 2006, she was hired as editor, a role she credits to her experience at OU.

Hedquist visited OU's Career Services as a student looking for help selecting a major. She chose journalism and served as editor-in-chief at The Oakland Post and completed an internship in print.

"I gained so much from The Oakland Post. Not only did I earn a degree in journalism, but my time at Oakland helped me develop a business background as well," Hedquist said. She said as a student she sat down with OU's president regularly and interacted with administrators, which taught her the importance of professionalism.

Hedquist also is able to stay connected to the university through student interns that come from OU.

"My job involves updating the site, maintaining the content, writing articles, supervising interns and photographers and working with clients and advertisers," Hedquist said.

One of the unique things about Hedquist's job is her ability to work from anywhere. The Web site is based on a content management system that Hedquist can access from anywhere. After attending events in the evening, or if the mood strikes her early in the morning, Hedquist can write and post information.

"I am completely untied to an office. I work most of the time from my home. I'm often online at 11 p.m.," Hedquist said. "It takes a lot of discipline, but it's so much fun."

Hedquist said the designers and staff at After 5 Detroit help make the site easy to navigate for users and easy to use for those who keep it updated.

"We keep the content updated daily. We change things up and really try to stay on top of what is relevant. We don't want to be just a mass guide. We don't put anything on our Web site unless we've been there and we can say 'this is great,'" Hedquist said. "We want to put out a product people can trust."

Through partnerships with Crain's Detroit Business and Fusion, the Detroit Regional Young Professionals and Entrepreneurs organization, After 5 Detroit offers information, resources and events for those in their 20s to their 40s.

After 5 Detroit sponsored a broomball tournament in Campus Martius in March through their new program Connect After 5. In the future, Hedquist said they hope to have monthly events like basketball, progressive dinners, pub crawls and other social networking events.

"People get off work at 5 p.m. and they race home. We want to keep people downtown and show them the great stuff going on down here," Hedquist said.

As part of her job, Hedquist spends many evenings at events and meeting with others to keep the pulse of the Metro Detroit area, and while it can be exhausting, she said she wouldn't trade it for any other job.

"Some nights, there are three or four events we could go to. There are times when I think 'I wish I could be home watching 'Grey's Anatomy' right now,' then I slap myself and realize that I have the best job in the world," Hedquist said.

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