

Former Editor Credits Stater Experience for Career Preparation

By MEGHAN CAPREZ



“Getting the call about winning the Taylor Award was incredibly humbling.”

That’s what the cool and collected **CHRIS PLONSKY, ’79**, said with a tightness in her throat. The women’s athletics director at The University of Texas, Plonsky is the School of Journalism and Mass Communication’s 2015 William D. Taylor Award Journalism Alumnus of the Year.

“It’s an honor to be associated with Kent State and the impressive group of journalism alumni,” Plonsky said. “I’m still a little bit stunned. I appreciated my undergraduate days so much... great memories came rushing back.”

The Taylor Award is presented annually at Homecoming to an alumnus who is well established and well respected in the media and communication industry and has

given back to JMC students and/or the School. Plonsky graduated from JMC with a degree in journalism.

While at Kent State, Plonsky played women’s basketball, but her love for athletics dates back to her childhood.

“I was a classic tomboy. Back then, I’d rather be outside than indoors,” Plonsky said. “When we moved (from western Pennsylvania) to Ohio, most of my neighbors were boys. We’d go out and play touch football and every other sport, so I learned about competing in that way.”

One individual helped shape her experience competing in sports at the college level, though: women’s basketball coach and women’s athletics director Judy Devine.

“She was my mentor and coach,” Plonsky said. “You can’t imagine everything she was doing for women in sports back then. She was teaching physical education classes, coaching women’s basketball and field hockey and working hard to provide opportunities for women to receive scholarships and services. Judy is among those AIAW (Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women) and early NCAA-era administrators who deserve a lot of credit for where women’s athletics are today.”

Plonsky herself is extraordinarily dedicated to the men and women student athletes she serves at

Texas. They are the reason she loves what she does, she said.

“I’ve worked in the higher education environment right from the start of my career,” Plonsky said.

“Education is THE game-changer in our country. Intercollegiate athletics is a gateway for many young people who never even thought about pursuing a college degree. Sports can serve as a front porch for our universities. They unify and galvanize loyal alumni, students and fans to socialize and support their universities. When I see students competing not just in athletics but in the classroom as well, it’s very inspiring.”

Plonsky previously worked in the athletics department of Iowa State University and as an associate commissioner and public relations director for The BIG EAST Conference. Before she graduated, though, she had a taste of working in Kent State’s athletics department.

“I was a student athlete, but I didn’t know everything that went on behind the scenes until working in Sports Information,” she said.

“Learning about media relations and being part of a great team and staff at the *Daily Kent Stater* represented a double positive.”

Plonsky served as the editor of the *Daily Kent Stater* as a senior, working with previous Taylor Award winners **CONNIE SCHULTZ** (2005) and **WAYNE DAWSON** (2014).

“The School of Journalism and Mass Communication was really intense,” Plonsky said. “The expectation was that you’d be working on the *Stater* or any other number of publications. We were taught by the best faculty, and the *Stater* truly was a lab paper. It was a true news vehicle, and we were proud of it.”

Plonsky said her time in class and working for the *Stater* helped prepare her for her future career.

“In the School of Journalism, you had to learn how to think critically, and that’s something I use every day in administration, which is a business of working with people,” Plonsky said. “In my days as a publicist, having a degree in journalism helped me because I knew how to think like a reporter and not just the person pitching a story.”

Knowing how members of the media operated was a huge advantage as a publicist, Plonsky said. Her job was challenging, but she viewed media relations as just another competition.

“Many believe the relationships between media and college athletics programs are adversarial,” Plonsky said. “I don’t think that’s the case, necessarily. Yes, it can be tough to get the stories you want in the right places, but I look at it as a challenge. Being a publicist felt like a competitive basketball game –

only the game wasn't physical any more...it was mental."

Plonsky advises current JMC students to take advantage of the opportunities they have while they are in college.

"Have a lot of fun," Plonsky said. "Remember your work can have a global impact. It's different now; your work can go viral in an instant, so you don't have to depend on a physical newspaper to get your work out there."

Plonsky has family that lives in Ohio, so she is able to visit and see advancement at both the University and the School level at Kent State.

"It's just so exciting," Plonsky said. "Kent is at the forefront of journalism and mass communication education. It's a department of excellence. Graduates will be among the most sought-after professionals because of the training they receive."

"The soul of me is at Kent State," Plonsky said. "You never really leave where you went to school. You leave a piece of your heart there. I am so appreciative of the KSU Alumni Association and the School of Journalism for their alumni relations work. No matter how often I've moved, they've found ways to keep me in the loop."

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