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A \$1.4 Million Senior-Experience

06.03.2009 | Business Like many first-year students at the University of Dayton, Jessi Neff wanted to get involved in campus life. Four years later, as CEO of Flyer Enterprises, she's in charge of a \$1.4 million student-run company with seven divisions and 180 employees operating campus-wide.

"To be honest, I never envisioned being the CEO," Neff said. "That was never my goal. But I always wanted to be more involved on campus, and Flyer Enterprises, with its student focus, allowed me to put my business skills to good use while becoming part of campus life."

Neff oversees seven divisions including coffee shops, snack bars, cafes, and convenience and clothing stores for the company, one of the largest student-run businesses in the country. She counsels division executives -- all students -- helping them increase sales and develop as businesspeople. This year, a new nonprofit arm will help nonprofit organizations in the Dayton area.

The St. Louis native also will teach the Leadership Development Program, a business course for weekly freshmen and sophomores.

"It's a bit overwhelming to think I'm overseeing the entire company, but realizing what a great responsibility I have is definitely exciting," Neff said. "I get to advise executives, work with employees and help manage all different departments. Furthermore, we (Flyer Enterprises) have built a good, solid foundation over the past few years, with communication, marketing, finance and other areas being run by students passionate in their work."

Neff, an accounting major who will graduate with both an undergraduate degree and an MBA, was the logical choice for CEO, according to professor Ray Lane, faculty advisor to Flyer Enterprises board of trustees.

"Neff was a dedicated employee of Flyer Enterprises with considerable experience and understanding of the entire organization through her role as vice president of accounting," Lane said. "She demonstrated organizational and multitasking abilities in her former position, a key set of skills for successful CEOs."

For the coming school year, Neff estimates Flyer Enterprises projects a \$15,000 growth in sales. The new philanthropy arm, initiated by the School of Business Administration, will offer business and management consulting to Dayton-area nonprofits.

She would also like to start a nationwide association and network of student-run businesses to share business tips and marketing methods. Neff said Flyer Enterprises has worked with student-run businesses for the past eight years and has informally shared information with Georgetown University, St. Mary's University, the University of Pennsylvania, Virginia Tech and other universities from California to England.

Along with the L. William Crotty Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership, Flyer Enterprises is a critical component of the University of Dayton's entrepreneurship program, ranked fourth in the nation by *The Princeton Review* and *Entrepreneur* magazine.

The University's entrepreneurship program was cited for the numerous hands-on opportunities students have to run businesses, both as part of the classroom experiences offered by the Crotty Center and through extracurricular opportunities such as Flyer Enterprises.

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