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Huntsman Student Assists with First Lady's Luncheon in D.C.

Huntsman Post

Huntsman Student Assists with First Lady's Luncheon in D.C.

By Allie Jeppson



Huntsman student Jamie Pickett was doing an internship in Washington, D.C., when she was invited to work on organizing and hosting The First Lady's Luncheon, an annual celebration and fundraiser that has been held since 1912. The event is hosted by Washington's Congressional Club — a club for the spouses of congressional members — and exclusively entertains more than 1,000 VIPs and special guests.

On the day of the event, Jamie was busy with a radio and clipboard in hand, assisting with head table seating arrangements, a VIP reception, the introduction of honorary guests, and other preparations.

Jamie is an international business and economics graduate from Cove, Utah. She was approached in February 2013 about helping with the May 15th event by Ann Santini, the wife of former congressman James D. Santini of Nevada, and chairwoman of the First Lady's Luncheon Head Table Committee.

Jamie became acquainted with Ms. Santini during her internship in Washington D.C. with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' Public and International Affairs Office. About a month after the internship began, Ms. Santini asked Jamie to help her with the luncheon.

"Needless to say, I was happy to take the job," Jamie said.

Though simultaneously managing the duties of an internship and planning a Congressional Club event called for long workdays, Jamie was able to handle both loads.

"For the internship, I did a lot of your everyday office tasks like answering phone calls, keeping track of files, working with the database, and helping with correspondence," she said. "In addition, I drafted letters, attended congressional hearings, researched the news, and created briefings for the office."

Jamie's duties in relation to the luncheon were slightly different.

"In preparation for the luncheon, I called all of the offices, on behalf of the Congressional Club, of the head table guests to find out the best way to correspond," Jamie said, noting that a few guests of the head table included Ms. Deborah Boehner, Ms. Jane Roberts, Ms. Teresa Heinz Kerry, and Ms. Landra Reid, to name a few.

"Because of this, I was their main contact for the event," she said. "If they had any special food requests, changes in their schedule, or questions about details, they had my cell phone number, and I would make those arrangements."

On the day of the actual event, Jamie arrived at the Hilton Hotel early in the morning to brief a 10-person staff that would assist with the head table. Jamie said that she prepared flash cards on each guest for herself and the staff, complete with names, photos, titles, and protocol order, and informed the staff of name pronunciations and any special circumstances.

Jamie also was prepared with seating charts, diagrams of the hotel, program scripts, and a timeline broken up into five-minute increments on the First Lady Michele Obama's whereabouts.

"The entire time I had back-up plans and blank seating charts so I could change quickly in case a person did not arrive," she said. "Our staff was continuously on the radio updating each other on various things that came up during the event. For example, since Ms. Obama was delayed, we had to change a lot of the script at the last second since it was written as if she were sitting there."

Jamie said that though her responsibilities with her internship and the luncheon were very diverse, both jobs taught her to work professionally over the phone, be part of an organizational structure, and how to recover from mistakes while working quickly and efficiently.

She also noted that without her education and skills that she learned at the Huntsman School of Business, she wouldn't have had the opportunities that she did.

"The Huntsman School taught me how to network, be proactive, and manage my time well," she said. "I don't think I would have had this opportunity without those three things."