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3-4-2018

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Recommended Citation

Griffin, Margaret, "Alumnus Helps Connect UM Students to Luxury Travel Industry" (2018). *University of Mississippi News*. 289.

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Alumnus Helps Connect UM Students to Luxury Travel Industry

Networking event brings global executives to recruit best and brightest hospitality management majors

MARCH 4, 2018 BY MARGARET GRIFFIN



James Strong (left), a 2015 graduate of the UM hospitality management program, reconnects with faculty and students, including lecturer Candis Varnell, at the 2018 Talent Engagement Pursuit. UM photo by Sarah Sapp

OXFORD, Miss. – **University of Mississippi hospitality management** students recently spent a day making valuable connections with officials from the luxury travel industry, thanks to the efforts of a UM alumnus and his father, a prominent travel agency executive.

Jim Strong, president and owner of Strong Travel Services in Dallas, organized the 2018 Talent Engagement Pursuit, a networking and educational event at the Graduate Hotel, in partnership with the travel consortium firm Virtuoso. Strong Travel Services has been a member of Virtuoso for 30 years.

Some 50 students met with industry leaders from across the nation at the event, which provided information on internships and careers in the luxury travel industry. Jim Strong was on hand, along with son James Strong, who has worked for his father since graduating from the UM hospitality program in 2015.

"I believe this event was a huge success for us, the travel executives and the students," James Strong said. "This was a great opportunity for students to come out and learn more about the travel industry, potential internships and job opportunities."

The luxury travel industry provides fairly new and unique career opportunities in comparison to the typical travel industry, said Mary Roseman, professor and director of the Ole Miss hospitality management program. Luxury travel is more exotic and complex, she said, noting the importance of students experiencing networking events such as this to fully understand those benefits.

"We are very fortunate to have a premier company, such as Strong Travel, so invested in our hospitality management program and willing to provide special opportunities for our students," Roseman said. "Today the hospitality industry, like many other industries, is all about networking."

Cindy Choi, assistant professor of nutrition and hospitality management, advises students to focus on the uniqueness of the luxury travel industry.

"In order to find a career in luxury travel, students should understand the needs and wants of the luxury travelers, which are very different from regular travelers," Choi said. "In order to gain the knowledge, taking classes related to luxury travel, such as Service Quality Management and Hospitality Marketing, would be a good idea."

Virtuoso works with Strong Travel and other travel agencies to promote and market their services. Christy Green, regional sales director for Virtuoso in Fort Worth, Texas, was among the industry leaders who attended the 2018 Travel Engagement Pursuit.

Her firm, along with the entire industry, is actively seeking new talent, Green said. Every summer, Virtuoso hosts a networking event for students in Las Vegas called Virtuoso Travel Week, often relying on Strong and other industry leaders to bring new people to learn about the industry's opportunities and programs.

Strong Travel sponsors a small group of Ole Miss students and a faculty member to attend Virtuoso Travel Week each year.

Claire McCraw, a senior hospitality management major at Ole Miss, attended last summer's event.

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Campus Briefs

Civil Engineering Professor Receives Most-Cited Paper Award

OXFORD, Miss. – Peer recognition is a rewarding experience for anyone, but University of Mississippi researcher Amir Mehrara Molan was elated when an article he co-authored recently received the Most Cited Paper Award at the 102nd Transportation Research Board meeting in the nation's capital. The International Journal of Transportation Science and Technology presented the civil engineering

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Young Alumna Gives Back to School of Accountancy

OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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Reuters: Keep an Eye on the Money Supply

U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to

"For four days we had the opportunity to interact with thousands of professionals who were helpful in giving us information about the travel industry," McCraw said. "It was an unforgettable experience, and I am so thankful that I got to be a part of it."

Strong Travel sells more than \$50 million of travel services annually. The company's employees constantly travel the world to build relationships and experience all aspects of trips they could potentially sell.

"The key to our success is matching the right client to the right product," Jim Strong said. "Strong Travel takes several trips a year to go out and experience the products. I recently took four team members to London for about three days, and we saw 26 hotels.

"Being able to understand the hotel, products, ambiance, stature and location at the luxury level is huge when talking to the client making selections."

James Strong decided to study hospitality management at UM after growing up in Dallas surrounded by the travel business. While earning his degree, he completed several internships around the world that helped prepare him for his career.

"I interned in London at the Corinthia Hotel as a junior butler for four months, which was great exposure to that side of the hotel industry," James Strong said. He also interned at a tourism agency in Istanbul and later at the Courtyard by Marriott in Oxford.

Jim Strong said he continues to visit and support UM because is responsive to emphasizing and highlighting the sale and promotion of travel. He said he enjoys being a part of the campus life and feeds off the energy in the classrooms.

Many students are seeking internships and jobs related to luxury travel or travel agencies after being inspired by Strong's networking events and class visits, Choi said.

For more information about the hospitality management program, email Mary Roseman at mroseman@olemiss.edu or visit <http://nhm.olemiss.edu>.

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