

## Seneca Alums: Making History On Their Own

The idea behind this story was to feature some of the amazing entrepreneurs who once walked the halls of Seneca High School. I thought that alumni, young and old, would be interested in learning how Brant Stevens built not one, but two successful technology businesses; how Andy Eggers grew his public relations firm from his ability to develop strong client relationships; how Steve David went from bartender to CEO of his own successful restaurant development company; or how David George bought the automotive repair shop where he once worked. But then Parris Communications in Kansas City caught my attention. I wasn't just intrigued with Parris Communications because I consider the founder, Roshann Parris ('75) a dear friend (fact is, I am also crazy about Brant, Andy, Steve and David), I simply couldn't help but share her story once I learned she was a central part of the team accompanying the First Lady, Michelle Obama to London for the 2012 Olympics. According to Melissa Winter, Deputy Chief of Staff to the First Lady (as interviewed by the Kansas City Business Journal), Roshann is called in for the "big complicated" projects, projects that demand a skilled negotiator who is "able to negotiate issues that are difficult and require diplomacy."

O.K., admit it, political convictions aside, this has got to be one of the coolest jobs on the planet!

But here's the amazing part, as I did a research on Roshann and her public relations firm, I learned that the recent trip is just the tip of the iceberg! And as my dad, used to say, "this wasn't her first rodeo." She has over 30 years' expertise in public relations and strategic corporate communications. Her career path has ranged from being a researcher on U.S. Middle East policy for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee to working on Capitol Hill as a staff member for United States Senator Walter D. Huddleston (D-KY). While working with Senator Huddleston, she did her first of what would be many international trips as a member of an official advance team.

According to the Parris Communications website, "Throughout the entirety of the Clinton Administration, while managing her public relations firm (founded in 1988), she also served as a lead advance person on the White House Presidential Advance Team, accompanying President and Mrs. Clinton to over 50 countries on their travels worldwide. She led teams on behalf of the President and First Lady throughout Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Russia, China and Africa, including historic visits to peacekeeping troops in Bosnia; to Greece for the Olympic Torch Lighting; to London for

Princess Diana's funeral; to Calcutta, India, for the funeral of Mother Teresa; and to Belfast, Jerusalem and Gaza in support of diplomatic peace efforts."

She must be pretty good at this stuff for "in the summer of 2008, Parris led a team to Europe to coordinate then-Senator Barack Obama's first overseas trip. Since that time, she has served the White House in several capacities, including coordination of the President and First Lady's recent visits to the NATO Summit in Strasbourg, France and Baden-Baden, Germany and Moscow, Russia," not to mention the recent visit to London for the 2012 Olympics.

Her hard work, dedication and entrepreneurial spirit has resulted in a myriad of awards and acknowledgement of her contribution. She is a 1999 recipient of the Kansas City Spirit Award, a 2000 recipient of the Central Exchange Firehouse Award, was named Kansas City's 2003 Woman of the Year, honored as the 2004 Public Relations Professional of the Year, and named Athena Award winner by the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce in 2005.

Those of us who have known her since Seneca, know Roshann as a deeply caring person willing to get involved. In high school, her bright mind was matched only by her big heart. She was a good friend and confidant for many of us. And apparently Seneca touched her too. In a speech to a group in Kansas City, she said, "I always joyfully credit my years at Seneca as having played a major role in creating a love for rich, high-energy and diverse environments. For me, Seneca was a choice -- I was bussed 5 miles there even when I had a high school 2 short blocks away. And I wouldn't have traded that experience for anything because of the incredible people it gave me the chance to grow up with. The things I learned at Seneca went far beyond what we learned in class, and that's a gift that has -- and will -- stay with me forever."

Well said Roshann. Well said.