

# Alumni Take Ownership Role

As our graduates leave UNI, most must feel at least a moment's doubt: Do I have what it takes? Can I make a mark out there, lead a good life and maybe even earn a little money? Growing up and stepping out to compete in today's market is tough. UNIBusiness graduates, however, have the advantage of a solid education built on a foundation of traditional values including hard work, honesty, and respect for others.

**Kevin Steere** (Accounting '69) might have been one of those uncertain graduates, but if so, he quickly learned that he was prepared to compete at the highest levels. After graduation, Kevin left Cedar Falls, his childhood home, for work in Chicago where his core values were soon tested. (See UNIBusiness 2005 for Kevin's story of leaving a job where company ethics did not measure up.) Kevin moved on, but challenges remained. Could he compete with the "big guys" from the "brand name" schools; the guys who may not have been entirely respectful of Kevin from a little town somewhere in Iowa. Kevin, however, had some cards to play: He had learned a lot of accounting, and he was willing to work hard. He consciously decided to put his head down, play by the rules, and show his worth.

As UNIBusiness Dean Farzad Moussavi explained in his message on page 1, our many successful alumni, like Kevin, have acknowledged the value of their *essential business knowledge* and their *traditional work values*, but they join our faculty in believing that we need to do more. We need to help our students acquire at an earlier age the savvy, assertiveness, confidence, critical thinking, and the



Kevin Steere

like – what we are labeling *contemporary professional skills* – that will prepare them to quickly, aggressively stand up with their co-workers and competitors to take the lead in building a better life for themselves and others.

We recognize that our distinctive educational mission must be offered in three parts, calling for three parallel strategic directions:

- 1. MAINTAINING OUR TEACHING EDGE.** UNIBusiness has always taken pride in delivering a great education focused on *essential business knowledge*. Offering that demanding functional education has long been a strategic imperative requiring our faculty to design rigorous courses and requiring our students to work harder than ever before.
- 2. FOSTERING MIDWEST VALUES.** *Traditional work values* are an indispensable piece of the educational blend we promise to employers. We must help our students maintain and celebrate their core values as a competitive advantage in the workplace.
- 3. DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL SKILLS.** More than 90 percent of our students are from Iowa and many of them have not been offered the experiences that provide *contemporary professional skills*. Enhancing our students' ability to interact professionally with the business community is a new area of emphasis at UNIBusiness. As Dean Moussavi says in his message, "We want our graduates to hit

the ground running as professionals, just as they are able to contribute immediately in technical preparation and hard work."

We believe our *contemporary professional skills* initiative will add a vital new ingredient to our students' preparation. That vision cannot be achieved, however, without alumni support. Our alumni have "been there and done that." We cannot replicate that wisdom in the conventional classroom. Rather, we must ask our alums to help us translate their experience into the *professional skills* our students need to be fully competitive as they leave us.

## TAKING THE INITIATIVE

How exactly can our alumni help? In conversations with the dean's Executive Advisory Board and many graduates over the past year, we have learned that our alumni are ready to take ownership of the strategic imperative to develop the *professional skills* of our undergraduates. Kevin Steere has stepped forward as a key partner challenging UNIBusiness alumni to join him in this effort. Kevin

has played a central role in the strategic planning process as a member of the UNIBusiness Executive Advisory Board, and he has taken the indispensable next step as well. As another board member put

it, Kevin has "laid his wallet on the table" to make the talk a reality.

With startup funds secured by Kevin, a program to systematically enhance students' professional skills has been initiated, and a pilot group will begin the program in the spring semester of 2008. Look for reports on the progress of this new effort in future issues, and let Dean Moussavi know if you would like to help.

**UNI** Thanks **UNIBusiness** Kevin Steere and Sara Schroeder for their support of the new professional skills initiative, and to their employers **Guy Carpenter & Company** and **Marsh & McLennan Companies LLC** for matching their gifts.

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