

# EWU Graduates and their Regional Impact By John Soennichsen

EWU graduates. Ever wonder how successful they are at landing jobs?

An EWU survey of recent graduates shows that – within one year of graduation - 83 percent are employed and 71 percent of those are working in professions closely related to their degree. Another 13 percent are pursuing graduate programs.

One reason that so many EWU grads successfully land employment is that employers see some special traits in these students.

“The folks we meet there are more prepared, more polished than from other schools,” says Eric Magbeleta, a human resources consultant with the Washington State Department of Revenue.

“They are prepared, have good resumes, dress well and ask good questions.”

“Employers are always excited about the established work ethic of our students,” says Robin Showalter, career planning and placement officer with the university’s Career Services Department. “Many work 10–20 hours or more per week while in school.”

We talked to a number of employers in the Spokane area who regularly hire Eastern graduates - and asked them to tell us about their companies, their relationship with EWU and why they employ so many graduates from Eastern.

## Xn Technologies

“When I came here in the early ‘80s,” says Alan Hale, president of Xn Technologies, “I had retired from the service and essentially moved here so my wife could be near her family. I ended up teaching at Eastern in the Computer Science Department as an engineering and hardware specialist. My background was in flight testing and I began working with NASA on a faculty fellowship. Cooperation between NASA and EWU seemed natural, and so we got some research projects going at Eastern for four or five years.”

Out of this, explains Hale, public domain technology was developed. Rather than NASA farming out this technology to other companies to create these products, he decided to just start his own company. A few EWU graduate students came to work with him at the beginning. Two of them are still there – his director of development and an executive vice president.

Among the company’s initial challenges were accessibility issues with flight instrumentation, communication between parts of the instrumentation



Steve Dahlstrom, STCU

information as it was being gathered, rather than after.

“The most interesting problem with shuttle launches regarded winds aloft,” says Hale. “The old method of testing was to send up a weather balloon – but results weren’t accurate and were sometimes up to eight hours old.”

So Hale and his research students designed a unit that fit in the cockpit of an F104 fighter jet and could yield results just minutes before a launch, not hours. Plus – results were obtained for every 10 feet of altitude – not every 100 feet as had been the case.

The company has branched into many areas, including medical technology, signal routing and switching systems for a variety of clients. Xn products are found in the home theaters of Michael Jordan and Bill Gates. They are also found in facilities as diverse as jails, banks, restaurants and software companies.

“We hire people from all over,” says Hale. “Proximity is important to us, and that’s one reason we hire EWU grads, but curriculum is even more important, as is our ability to help advise on the curriculum offered. We have a strong project

created educational scholarships and continuing education programs.”

In the engineering/technology area, 50 percent of Xn people come from Eastern. In the business/executive area, half are EWU graduates. In the Industrial

Technology group, 100% are from EWU; the same is true with electronic technicians and software people.

“We also have a program that helps with the tuition of employees who are currently going to Eastern,” says Hale. “We have an employee in our shipping department who is in the choir at Eastern. One of our former software people worked here while returning to EWU for his master’s.”

As with other companies employing EWU grads, their presence benefits the local economy.

“We do contribute a lot to the economy here,” says Hale, “and because so many of our employees are from EWU, Eastern grads are contributing a good deal to the local and regional economy. We are a primary company, which means that key employees work here – we’re not just a production or distribution place. So we have some large

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-Alan Hale

salaries here, and those people pay taxes and spend money here in the Cheney/Spokane area.”

Hale continues to maintain ties with Eastern. He has been a longstanding chair of the EWU Foundation Mini Grant Program, and a former board member.

“I also serve on the advisory board of the Technology Department at EWU,” Hale says. That gives me input as to the curriculum offered. The value of industry input on curriculum is to add more practical aspects to the academic component – the theoretical side of things.”

The existence of specific courses and majors at Eastern is appreciated by more than one employer seeking applicants for jobs.

“As a recruiter for the IRS,” says Richard Ped, “I seek qualified applicants for a variety of career opportunities. One of the most challenging positions that we have to offer is that of Internal Revenue agent. The revenue agent is a professional accounting position that has a lot

accounting careers. Last year the IRS hired about three EWU accounting grads, while this year we have hired at least one so far.”

### Spokane Teacher’s Credit Union

Kathleen Kozlowski’s job with Spokane Teacher’s Credit Union (STCU) is to foster good feelings between the organization and its members. She also maintains relationships with community business partners — large companies who have special agreements with STCU that allow their employees to join the credit union.

With more than 75,000 members and more than \$500,000,000 in assets, STCU is the fifth largest credit union in the state. The company started in 1934 when teachers at Lewis and Clark High School wanted a way for people with limited salaries to obtain loans.

“In those days,” says Kozlowski, “you would pull a cord that rang a bell, and before long a cigar box would descend by a rope. It was in this box that you placed your deposit or received any loan monies.”

Eastern grads working here,” says STCU president Steve Dahlstrom (MBA ’94), “is simply because they meet our needs. Eastern produces high quality graduates. But another factor is that when employees decide they need to go back to school to increase their knowledge and skills, most decide Eastern is where they want to go.”

The STCU tuition reimbursement program is a good incentive for employees to return to school for job-related degrees. These employees don’t have to choose EWU, but Dahlstrom notes the influence of the university’s continually growing reputation.

“Once you hire Eastern grads,” he says, “they tend to attract other ones. There is a sense of camaraderie, of shared experiences. What’s more, people who have attended Eastern and are in the position to recommend or hire people themselves, know that EWU graduates are likely to be high quality employees.”

“Eastern students who work here are long-term, dependable employees,” adds Kozlowski. “They always seem to have a real positive work ethic.”

But the relationships between STCU and Eastern go beyond employment aspects.

“Three years ago the Eastern Foundation made a presentation to SCTU and invited us to become involved in some university programs,” she explains. “Steve Dahlstrom was especially excited about the idea of bringing a one-room schoolhouse to campus, so we made a commitment to provide \$62,000 over a five-year period for that purpose.”

The schoolhouse (found in the woods of northeast Washington and transported to campus in August 2000) was also produced in miniature for traveling around to schools, malls and such, since not everyone can get to the campus to see the new Cheney Normal School Heritage Center. This summer the miniature replica was displayed at both the Spokane Valley and Northtown malls, and this fall began touring Spokane area schools.



Doug Kelly, Avista Corp.

to offer in terms of training and advancement opportunities. Unfortunately, accounting students from other schools often do not meet our minimum qualifications because their schools’ curriculums do not offer some all the classes required by the IRS.

This has not been the case with EWU students. The accounting curriculum at Eastern satisfies the IRS’s requirements. Furthermore, the accounting program at EWU is rigorous, and it produces graduates that are well-qualified for

From these humble beginnings, STCU has grown to an institution with seven branches in the Spokane area and 240 employees at last count. The company continues to break records in loans and deposits, something Kozlowski credits to high levels of service, convenience of branch locations and cutting-edge company technology.

It also is an enterprise employing a high share of EWU graduates, at least 10 percent of total employees.

“Part of the reason we have many

Part of the reason EWU graduates are successful in the job market lies in the help that the Career Services Office provides. Career advisors help students clarify their interests, abilities and values as they explore their career options. Students are helped to create an employment action plan, develop workplace skills that employers value and learn to market themselves with effective job search strategies.

“As a career planning and placement

officer at EWU, Robin Showalter enjoys what she does and it shows!" says John Holman, a regional human resources representative for the Sherwin Williams Company in Vancouver, Wash.

"She should be commended for her involvement with helping students find a job once they graduate. All colleges need a Robin Showalter."

### Avista

Doug Kelley, regional account executive for the Avista Corporation, knows a lot about looking for jobs after college. He also knows that careers often begin in a round about way.

"I had been race director for the first Bloomsday race in Spokane, and had formed some definite career concepts in the area of recreation management," recalls Kelley. "So I went to Eastern and met Howard Uibel, then head of that program. With his help of that of other faculty members, I got my degree in 1983 and set out to find something in that field."

His original idea was to work someplace like Nike or Coors as a sports promotion person.

"But that wasn't in the offing," he says, "so I answered a blind ad and interviewed with Washington Water Power (now Avista). It was a job as a customer service representative and seemed so unrelated to what I wanted to do that I turned down their offer."

Two weeks later they called him and said the job was still open. They also asked him to give the job a chance, saying that in time, he could possibly apply some of the things he had learned in the area of recreation management.

"And you know what?" says Kelley. "I discovered a basic rule about choosing a career — the bottom line is to think about your passions and your core interests, because you *can* channel them into a number of areas. My passion was for communicating with people. With Bloomsday, I channeled that passion into encouraging people to participate in the event. At WWP, it was dealing with people, providing them with information and helping them solve their problems — so there was a definite connection."

As a regional account executive, Kelley helps business clients use the company's products by determining their needs and providing solutions. He calls on existing businesses and those new to the region, and does a lot of economic development work. He is active with Spokane's Economic Development Council, and has participated in many activities directly related to his alma mater.

Kelley first got involved with Eastern

when Howard Uibel called him and asked if he would serve on an advisory committee for the College of Education and Human Development.

"I had enjoyed such a positive experience at Eastern that I wanted to give back to the university if I could," he says.

He currently serves on Eastern's



Robin Showalter

Alumni Board, an advisory board for the Physical Education and Recreation Department and on the *Perspective* editorial board.

One of Kelley's fondest activities was becoming involved with the Spokane Regional Sports Commission. Eastern came to that group with a challenge — how to promote a football game at Albi stadium between EWU and the University of Montana.

"The question was how we could create an event surrounding this football game that would attract more people and spotlight Eastern as the key contributor to this Spokane-area economy."

The result was the now-annual Governors' Cup football game, which attracts thousands of fans from Eastern as well as from the University of Montana and Montana State University. This is one of the most eagerly awaited Fall sports events in the Spokane area, and the 2002 event will be held November 16. For tickets, call 1-800-4GO-EAGS.

In working with such events and on committees, Kelley has met and befriended many EWU faculty members and administrators.

"I have an incredible respect for Dr. Jordan," he says. "He came to the university and things immediately began to turn around under his leadership."

Well over 100 of Avista's Spokane area employees (12-13 percent of its workforce) says Kelley, are EWU graduates. They hold positions ranging from area managers to human resources directors to company accountants.

Given this number of Eastern graduates, their economic impact is significant. "In this region," says Kelley, "EWU probably has a greater economic impact than any other university."

EWU President Stephen Jordan, agrees.

"Eastern is the fastest growing public university in this state," he says. "Our enrollment is up by 22 percent since 1997, and still climbing. The direct expenditures by these new students has put \$24 million into our regional economy; and if you use a very reasonable economic multiplier of two, that's \$48 million that is being spent in our economy that wasn't here just four years ago."

As a result of Eastern's prominent position in the region, Avista offers ongoing tuition support for the university, and the company backs employees who want to pursue continued education.

Kelley's advice to career-seeking students — "know your passions, make sure they are part of your consideration when looking for work. Skills are nice, but people are more interested in who you are than what you are."

Many local businesses hire Eastern graduates because they were for the most part raised in the region and have a good sense of the community — they know the people who live and work here.

Jim Leffel, shareholder with Leffel, Otis, Warwick, CPAs, notes the significance of these "local ties" when hiring.

"Being a local firm, we are a lot of times looking for people who have grown up in this region. We have offices in small towns and unless someone knows about life in small, rural regions, it's hard for them to know what living and working in these towns is like.

"But it's more than that. We are consistently impressed with the grades of Eastern grads, their backgrounds, work ethic and motivation to get right out of school and get a job.

"We have a good working relationship with Eastern as well. Robin Showalter with the Career Services Office is good about calling us when she thinks she has candidates who are particularly well suited for us. We don't hire on a seasonal basis, but all year round. So knowing when there are likely candidates graduating from Eastern really helps us in our hiring efforts."

"Our alumni are your employees, your customers, your neighbors, your sons and daughters, and your business owners and civic leaders," says President Jordan. "This close connection to our own community is a big reason why we remain committed, and in fact have redoubled our commitment—to serving this community, and this region."