

BRIGHTLIGHTS

[Mike Boylan ('76)]

Personal relationships are central to success

BY COLLEEN DIXON

Mike Boylan's degree in early childhood education launched his career as a kindergarten teacher. But to hear him describe his journey of starting and building his own global textile business, it is obvious that he has valuable lessons to give beyond the classroom.

Boylan ('76) owns PEKA Textiles Co. Ltd., with offices in Shanghai, Bangkok and Hong Kong that offer imported textiles, global sourcing and distribution, and custom product development.

An international success, Boylan's path to his textile empire was not a straight seam. "I'll never forget my dad's words as they dropped me off at JMU's Eagle Hall," recalls Boylan: "Son, we have done the best we can do; now it's up to you."

His first semester was a disaster. An admitted "social misfit," Boylan struggled with studying in the college environment. To make everything worse he contracted mono as the second semester began. At that time, students with mono were confined to the health center. "This was huge for me," says Boylan, who

literally learned how to study during his illness. "I really had nothing else to do except sleep, eat and read. This was a true crossroad for me."

At the same time Boylan was learning how to be a good student he was also learning how to teach. "JMU's education department was really terrific. The quality of our major professors, Dr. Leonard, Dr. Davis and Dr. Dickenson, was world class." Boylan was hired by the Lynchburg City School system as its first male kindergarten teacher. "I had fun every day," he says, "but the system pushed me to go into administration and I wanted no part of public school administration."

Boylan taught kindergarten for two years, and then moved into a job in the textile business in Brown Deer, Wisc., a suburb of Milwaukee. During the next few decades, Boylan worked for several textile and manufacturing companies. After a less than successful attempt to start a textile trading company, Boylan tried again in 2009. He started his own company with \$10,000 cash and additional funds from an IRA.

"Persistence and timing are key ingredi-

'We decided to invest in people first.'

MIKE BOYLAN ('76),
entrepreneur and owner of PEKA Textiles Co. Ltd.

ents to starting a company. You make your own luck," says Boylan, who got his first textile orders from a colleague who worked for Springs Industries. And Boylan also hired several staff members from Spring Industries who were about to lose their jobs when a company merger closed the factories.

"An important thing I learned at Madison is that personal relationships are central to success, from everyday life to major negotiations," Boylan says. "This is essential for any international business. Each country handles things differently."

During one of his first visits to Indonesia, Boylan and a colleague visited the Pekalongan Batik Museum located in Pekalongan, Central Java, Indonesia. "We ended up developing excellent relationships with the people in factories in this region," he says. "We were so impressed with the beauty of Indonesia and the skill of our factory partners that we decided to promote the name PEKA® Brand fabrics and renamed our company PEKA Textile Co. Ltd."

Boylan's company experienced tremendous early growth in the first two years of existence but it was unsustainable as the business was then constructed. "We grew too fast and did a poor job with our resources in China. We had to make some changes quickly. We decided to invest in people first." The result was a technical staff that was continually present at the factory while PEKA products were made.

"Never say no to an opportunity to develop something. You become an expert on the subject, especially if no one else is doing it. Also, make sure you and your company become so important that your current and prospective customers want to work with you."

Sounds easy, but it is not. Boylan explains, "Always return phone calls. Overnight samples, even if you don't think you need to. Treat customers like they are the only thing that matters. Finally, have the best team you can find and fund."



PEKA develops and sources custom stuffed animals, charm bracelets, watchbands and fabrics. "We have the resources to create new products from a sketch, a picture, a design or a sample," says Mike Boylan ('76). "Our customer has the ultimate choice in decision making."

BRIGHT LIGHTS

[Sang Yoon]

JMU double Fulbright awardee teaches in Korea

BY JANET SMITH ('81)

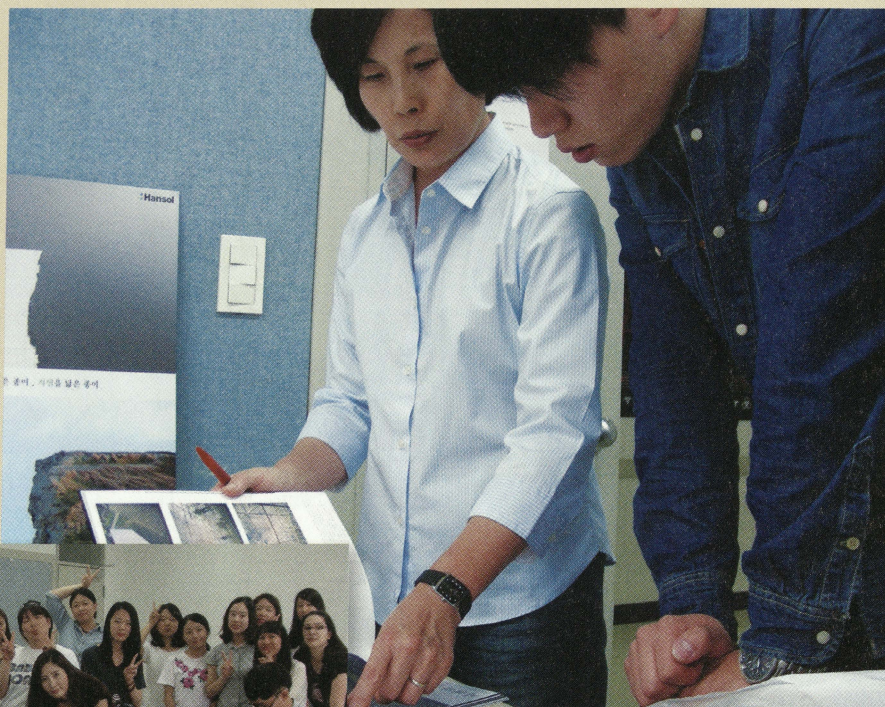
Sang Yoon, professor of graphic design in the JMU School of Art and Art History, is teaching in South Korea for her second stint as a Fulbright Scholar. According to Fulbright records dating to 1998, she is JMU's first two-time Fulbright award winner.

Yoon is teaching as part of the Core Fulbright Scholar Program and sharing her talents and knowledge with students at Kyung Hee University. Her previous Fulbright experience was as a 2007 Fulbright Research Grant recipient. The fruit of her three-month study was "The Street Graphics of Seoul: A Culturally-focused Contribution to the Study of Urban Graphics," a project she has presented at three international conferences in Hawaii, Venice and Athens.

While Yoon taught one course in 2007, her current Fulbright-sponsored residency focuses completely on teaching graphic design to undergraduate, master's and doctoral students.

A native of South Korea, Yoon is teaching in English since students are required to take several courses within their programs of study in the language. She is using revamped content from courses she teaches at JMU to accommodate the curriculum and culture in South Korea. In addition to teaching typography in English and Korean alphabets, Yoon was asked to add Chinese and Korean characters and fonts to the mix. "Since I have worked with English fonts only, it was a challenge to find out what kinds of Korean and Chinese fonts are available for my students," she says.

Yoon is sharing both her work and her JMU students' work with her Korean students, and she says she looks forward to shar-



Before coming to the United States in 1983, graphic design professor Sang Yoon worked as a corporate graphic designer. She earned a Master of Fine Arts degree from Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia in 1988 and joined the JMU faculty that year.

ing her Korean students' work with her JMU students upon her return to campus.

"My KHU students were inspired by the JMU senior students' advanced technical abilities and the professionalism of their pieces," says Yoon. A JMU tradition of student portfolio reviews by professional graphic designers and art directors intrigued Yoon's colleagues. "KHU Professor Mee-kyung Jang and I are planning to invite five KHU graduates now working in design firms to a KHU senior portfolio review."

"In addition to my Korean students, I have several foreign students from China, Indonesia and Romania," Yoon says. "These students' ways of approaching design objectives and strategies are rich and intriguing; and I am excited to share their multicultural and alternative perspectives with my JMU classes."

Yoon is collecting and photographing more samples to continue her research that began in 2007. "I am looking forward to writing a paper to discuss my newest insights into the visual culture of Korea." M

Last year PEKA added the major product line Batik Fabrics. "This product line helps balance our business," says Boylan. "And our website is an invaluable tool when I make initial contacts with prospects. ... It's important to put people first. The textile industry is very old, especially the decorative fabrics business, so we try to be innovators. We specialized in

developing a series of bundles of fabric and Do-It-Yourself kits. Our most recent project was developing printed burlap."

Boylan says he is "honored to have earned a degree from Madison. Even during some not so good times, I was always fortunate to have had the help to get through the bad and embrace the good. My college relationships

are life long and truly special. I come back to campus for Homecoming as often as I can. Over the years, both the university and my fraternity have done a terrific job welcoming us back. There is nothing like the JMU experience." M

→LEARN MORE at pekatextiles.com