

Profile story of Cynthia Stenger Riplinger

By Laetitia Béraud

She was only 15 when she went to Europe for the first time with the Girl Scouts. It seems like young Cynthia Stenger Riplinger knew her career would be international. “There were all these messages” she says. Her family used to host international students, her grand-father traveled abroad a lot. When it comes to culture differences, she calls it “a fascination”.

Cynthia, 44, spends part of her time traveling and meeting exchange partners and prospective students abroad. As assistant director for international outreach at the Alumni Association, part of her job is to assist the Office of Admission and the Office of International Affairs for attracting international students. She plays an active role in promoting the University of Oregon outside of the United States.

Most of the time, she talks to counselors in schools, but sometimes she gets to meet future “ducks” and their parents directly.

“The first thing is to talk about where Oregon is” she says.

Then she usually emphasizes the programs that the university offers. When she talks to Europeans, Cynthia makes sure to talk about the campus experience and school spirit, because “these are things a person is likely to be less familiar if the person has not been in the US much.”

To compete against North Eastern schools, Cynthia also has to talk about what makes Eugene special. Although the city is small, she emphasizes other aspects of this bike-friendly city: the restaurants, the diversity of performing arts, the night life in the student community.

“Some people separate their professional and their personal life,” Kevin Xu, says, an

international student she hosted a couple years ago, “She tries to combine them, it's a different philosophy.”

Kevin remembers a friendly, caring and dedicated woman. Cynthia's job is to interact with international students. “But she goes beyond that,” he says. Kevin arrived from Singapore 3 years ago and he is still in contact with Cynthia and her family. They see each other regularly for special occasions. Kevin says Cynthia is a good cook.

There is never a typical day at the office for international outreach. In her effort to keep former international students in contact, Cynthia spends a lot of time on the computer. “Social media has helped a lot” she says. She is currently testing out the polling functions on Facebook and LinkedIn to ask international alumni questions, like whether they'd like to be called "international ducks" or "global ducks".

She gets “a lot of last minute change” when Alumni come to visit. Sometimes they call her the day they come like this morning. This is one of the things that she enjoys about her job, the variety of people she gets to meet. “It's fun walking around on campus with someone who graduated in the 1960s.” she says.

Languages are a big part of Cynthia's life. She's fluent in German and also speaks French, Italian and Spanish. “I was an exchange student in Switzerland, so I got the idea that everybody educated speaks at least those languages”, she says. Her involvement in the Eugene Opera Chorus and the Motet Singers pushed her to learn more in romance languages.

Originally from North of Albany, N.Y., in what she describes as an “empty area”, Cynthia went to college in the region. At first, she was thinking about becoming a German teacher.

After four years in the Peace Corps teaching German and English in Czech Republic, she realized that she loved teaching her native language. She came back to the USA, chose to go to graduate school at the UO and taught English at the American English Institute.

A little disappointed by the linguistic program, she changed her mind again and got a job as international adviser. “Working at the international office opened my eyes” she says, and she found herself helping students go through “problems and understandings” that she experienced herself back in college when she spend a year in Germany as an exchange student.

Historically the Alumni Association has not focused on international students, but when this new position for international outreach was created in 2004, Cynthia jumped right into it. “It was just the right time for me to make the change again.” she explains.

When Cynthia travels she’s never alone. Usually she travels with other colleagues, representing some part of the university. But when she has the opportunity, she brings her baby Shannon or her mother, like a couple weeks ago when she went to Europe.

Cynthia has been in Eugene for 16 years now. She married another UO alumnus. But she does not exclude living abroad again in the future with her husband and three children. “I could perhaps convince the U of O to make me work abroad” she says laughing.

Friendly, inspiring and sincere are three words that people use to describe Cynthia. If you ask her program assistant Michelle Thompson, she will tell you that Cynthia “is very busy.” But if you spend time with Cynthia, her enthusiasm will make you have a sense of the spirit that led her unique career and still animates her today.