Blending a Passion for Landscaping with Entrepreneurial Drive

Cameron Plona turns internship into a larger opportunity

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CAMERON PLONA '24, AN ENTREPRENEURIAL STUDIES STUDENT AT PAUL COLLEGE, RECENTLY Turned his fall internship at Outdoor Pride Landscape & Snow Management into a full-time seasonal job. He spent his winter break as a winter site manager, leading snow removal efforts at multiple properties.

Whether it was picking up odd jobs around the neighborhood or finding gigs online via Craigslist, Cameron Plona '24 has always enjoyed landscaping.

Through his focus on entrepreneurial studies (https://paulcollege.unh.edu/business-administration/program/ba/business-administration-major-entrepreneurial-studies-option) at the UNH Peter T. Paul College of Business and Economics (https://paulcollege.unh.edu/), Plona is taking his interest in landscaping and plotting out multiple potential career paths.

"I enjoy working outdoors, operating heavy equipment and the hands-on nature of the job," Plona says. "The more I learned about the overall business, the more interested I became in running my own business."

After working at several small landscaping companies through the years, Plona got the opportunity to experience the business operations of a large landscaping company through his fall 2023 internship at Outdoor Pride Landscape & Snow Management (https://outdoorpride.com/) in Manchester, New Hampshire. Outdoor Pride is well-known in New Hampshire and Massachusetts and has a large portfolio of commercial and industrial clients.

What started as a required placement through his Internship in Entrepreneurial and Management Practice course has turned into a paid seasonal position at the company.

https://www.unh.edu/unhtoday/2024/01/blending-passion-landscaping-entrepreneurial-drive
"I've worked for some smaller companies and had plenty of hands-on experience on the operations side," Plona says. "This internship was focused on sales and marketing, and it allowed me to see a new side of the business and opened my eyes to how much work goes into sales and the development of a company of that size."

In his internship, Plona engaged in a range of activities, including attending sales meetings, conducting property walkthroughs and undertaking a mapping project to get accurate square footage of Outdoor Pride clients to enhance operational planning. His role also involved data mining to identify prospective clients for the sales team.

Bill Butts, vice president of client relations and sales at Outdoor Pride, highlighted Plona's blend of practical landscaping experience and business education as key to his success. He also noted the importance of field experience for understanding workflow and customer service.

"I could see Cameron in the future being on a job site and having to go up and have a conversation with a customer or pick up the phone and talk to a subcontractor to help navigate a project. Those are skills that you look for in a candidate and he had them," Butts says.

Butts says he was pleased with Plona's attention to detail and ultimately recommended him for a winter site manager role for a large industrial complex in Durham, and a few smaller properties.

The role requires Plona to coordinate storm response to the properties, ensuring that the right people and equipment get to the sites and that all crews are on the same page. He's also in charge of maintaining the properties and responding to inquiries, even in non-storm events.

"Not only will it be nice to return to the operations side, but it's an opportunity to meet more people at the company and continue to see all sides of their business," Plona says.

Butts is hoping to work with more Paul College interns in the future. He believes the internship experience is not only advantageous for the business but also provides employees with an opportunity to share knowledge with students.

Cameron Plona works during a January 2024 snowstorm.

="My advice to any entrepreneurial studies student is to work for multiple companies before starting your own company," Butts says. "It allows you to look under the hood, the good and the bad, and learn. You can then apply what you learn to your own entrepreneurial experience."

As a native of Barrington, New Hampshire, Plona was familiar with Paul College and felt that entrepreneurial studies would give him a strong business foundation and prepare him for running his own business.

While there were times when working outside seemed more appealing than the classroom, Plona says he "found his groove" and is grateful for what he has learned, especially platforms that are important to running a business, including management information systems, Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Access.

Working with mentors from the Small Business Administration of New Hampshire has also added to his experience, Plona says.

"Entrepreneurial studies is a very tight-knit program. It's easy to build strong working relationships with your classmates and professors, and everyone is willing to support each other," he says. "We also have a lot of speakers talk to us about their start-ups and what it's like to build a business plan from start to finish."

While Plona's goal remains to someday operate his own business, he says he's open to all opportunities after graduation, including building on his relationship with Outdoor Pride.

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