Liesel Reinhart: Alright. What's Bill got going on?

Marisa Fierro: He's got a Mt. SAC baseball cap and allowed a Mt. SAC windbreaker.

Bill Lambert: Wow. Yeah, loud?

Marisa Fierro: Yeah. Yeah. I'm certain he's got Mt. SAC socks on even though he probably just had those handmade 'cause they don't sell those in the bookstore. He lives and breathes Mt. SAC every day.

Liesel Reinhart: Welcome to the Magic Mountie Podcast. This is a podcast that's dedicated to helping faculty and other college employees as they try and navigate the challenging fabric of serving students, especially at Mt. San Antonio College, but everyone's welcome.

Chrstina Barsi: Hi, it's Christina here, and today's episode is one that has a very special place in my heart because it is about Mt. SAC alumni and the foundation and the alumni association on campus. So some of you may know that I'm also an alumni of Mt. SAC, and today we get to feature an old schoolmate of mine, Danee Pye, that went on to do amazing things and is now actually working closely with the foundation to build stronger connections between alums and current students and faculty.

Chrstina Barsi: As Liesel also speaks to Bill and Marisa, the two who head up the foundation and brought Danee onto the project, we get to learn more about how faculty can get involved, one of which is to go visit the website mtsacfoundation.org and click on " ways to get involved". You can also browse the exciting alumni stories there that are now featured, thanks to Danee. I hope you enjoy this episode.

Bill Lambert: I'm Bill Lambert. I'm the Executive Director of the Mt. SAC Foundation, and I have been at Mt. SAC for six years now. Our job in the foundation is to raise money to support students and programs at the college.

Marisa Fierro: I'm Marisa Fierro. I'm the Director of Development and Alumni Relations. I've been here, it'll be five years in January. Bill and I do a lot of the same work, so whatever he's at I tend to be tagging along. I'd say overall throughout the year, our most exciting role is just being a cheerleader for Mt. SAC. I mean, we do that every day in the office, and we do it when we're not here. It's in our own personal social media sites, and it's in every conversation that we're having when we're talking about something else, and something that seems like what would relate back to campus or a program that's happening here, it's always on our mind. I think that that is, I know for myself, is my favorite role.

Liesel Reinhart: So let's talk a little bit about the project that you hired Danee for. We're gonna meet her later in this podcast. Danee is a former student who then went off to Berkeley and ended up getting her doctorate from the University of Texas, Austin, which is an incredibly high ranked program in communication, and she started her own firm. She's one of our really exciting alums, and we've actually now employed her. So tell me how you got connected with her and what she's doing.

Marisa Fierro: What we're doing in alumni association is very much grassroots here at Mt. SAC. We are light years behind four year institutions. So we have some days where we just are spending time, hours, combing through Linkedin and looking for alums. That's how we found Danee. We found her profile. We reached out to her because we knew that we wanted to update our website. We had some interest in rebranding our message and just helping us to educate the community at large, and it's been a great relationship. She's fantastic.

Danee Pye: My name is Danee Pye, and I went to Mt. SAC ... I think I started in 1999 and left somewhere around 2000-2001. So now I own a digital marketing company called Common People United that's based out of Fort Wayne, Indiana, but we work with clients all over, including in California. There is a need for digital marketing services that were more tailored to the digital realm, to social media and how quickly things are changing there. Our tagline is, "Work that matters."

Danee Pye: Bill and Marisa from the alumni association, they were thinking about their own digital marketing, and they know that there are a lot of interesting alumni stories, and they really wanted a platform to tell those stories more broadly, I guess? So they were looking for someone to work with, and because they are so mission driven, they thought it would be great to work with an alum on that. They started kind of stalking me on Linkedin, and I would see them checking out my Linkedin profile, and I was like, "Huh, I wonder what this is all about." Then one day Marisa reached out to me, and we connected, and had a conversation.

Danee Pye: Since then, we've been working very closely with them on a number of projects. The biggest one being that we redid the alumni website that's more, kind of, story focused so that it would allow them that digital platform that they wanted. Then from there, we talked for quite a while and then we eventually even went back out to Mt. SAC. When we did the website for them, we traveled out there and worked on campus for a week and a half, I think?

Chrstina Barsi: Wow. How was it to be back on campus?

Danee Pye: It was awesome! It was so neat. It brought up so many memories. As part of that project, I was also reaching out to alums in my personal social network, so anyone on Facebook that I'm still connected with, which turned out to be quite a few people 'cause I've gone to several different schools since then on my journey. From Mt. SAC I transferred to UC Berkeley, and I was there for two, two and half years before I graduated. Then I went to get my Masters degree at Ball State University in Indiana, and actually that's very connected to Mt. SAC as well because that was on the advice of Liesel Reinhart.

Chrstina Barsi: What was your Masters in?

Danee Pye: Communication. Then went onto get my Ph.D at UT Austin. But the reason I was talking about that-

Chrstina Barsi: Yes.

Danee Pye: Is because when I look back at my social networks from each of those institutions, the one that I have the most contacts that I still talk to is Mt. SAC. Actually when I went to Berkeley, I ended up living with three people that I met through Forensics.

Chrstina Barsi: That being said, what do you think Mt. SAC was doing right for us back then? What do you think they should keep doing?

Danee Pye: At Mt. SAC I had not just the Forensics team. I had that pocket of connections and support when there was not just other students, it was also the entire communication department. I mean, multiple instructors there that were very supportive and that I knew pretty closely. I also had a similar experience in the philosophy department where I had a little cohort of philosophy department students that we were all in the same classes. Then there was the honors students. If you were on the honors track, you were taking classes with a lot of the same people, and those instructors seemed especially supportive as well.

Danee Pye: So I did not have that experience at any of the other community colleges I went to. It's not to say that they didn't exist. I just didn't find those pockets, and I did not have those experiences in my undergraduate university either. I don't know how much of that is just part of the culture there, or if I got lucky or what, but I know that there were just multiple little subcultures within Mt. SAC that I was able to find friendships and support in.

Chrstina Barsi: I found that in my mentors as well, like Liesel, and the theater department. I think that maybe it's a trickle down effect of you have your structure in place, and you have the support of these professors that care so deeply to uphold these programs and care about the students, and then gives us, the students, a safe place to kind of live and lean in.

Bill Lambert: In our industry, the word essentially was that people just aren't loyal to their community colleges. But what we've discovered, and the individual conversations that we have with alums like Danee and so many others, they talk about meaningful and how important and central to their experience, or central to their pursuit of higher ed, that Mt. SAC was. So we know that the loyalty is there, and we just haven't had the mechanism over the years consistently the way a USC, or Stanford, or UCLA has done to engage people and keep them connected.

Bill Lambert: It's interesting I think that Danee is one of the folks that we found because we're happy to discover that she's one of the Liesel Reinhart army and part of your crew because it shows us that there are people out there that if we give them the chance and we engage them, they're going to come back and do really good things for us. We're proud of them. We're so psyched. The experience that I've had working with Danee and her team has just been amazing because we're, not to sound too hokey here, but we're sort of completing each others' thoughts. Marisa and I will have an idea and we'll start talking about it, and then Danee and her team will pick up on it and say, "What about this? How does this work? This is the way that we package this into a social media message in a Facebook post, or a campaign, or something that we can-"

Liesel Reinhart: Or a story-

Bill Lambert: A story, right.

Liesel Reinhart: She's a really good story teller, I think.

Bill Lambert: She's ... Yeah.

Bill Lambert: There are so many wonderful stories among the alumni population at Mt. SAC, and I think the way that this ... It comes a little bit full circle back to faculty and how you all can be involved in what we're doing because you have those connections. You're a wonderful example of that, but there are other faculty around the campus. I think probably all of the faculty have a certain number of alums that they've kept in touch with, that they have talked to, they follow their careers, and you are proud of them just like you are of Danee. So we want to tap into those connections, and officially bring them within the umbrella of the Foundation of Alumni Association. Get them to join the alumni association, update their information, we'll keep in touch with them about what's going. What we want people to do is to keep these relationships strong, and faculty, I think, are a key way for us to do that.

Chrstina Barsi: So you said that they wanted to focus more on stories. Why stories?

Danee Pye: Well, I think there are so many fascinating stories. I mean, when I just look at my own personal network of people that I still talk to, or have some sort of connection to, or know what they're doing, we all went to Mt. SAC. Then I see all these amazing things that they're doing now. Like my friends from Mt. SAC are particularly successful, and I don't mean that in the monetary way, but just doing really fascinating, interesting, cool things that I think, you know, maybe they would've done anyway, but it definitely seems like you can kind of trace some of it back to where I met them at Mt. SAC.

Danee Pye: So Rafael Augstin, who is Forensics with at the same time I was, he went on to do a number of really interesting things that currently is writing for Jane the Virgin, and I believe working on his own show as well. That's exciting to watch that happen. Sona, I think, was on a recent episode.

Chrstina Barsi: Yes.

Danee Pye: Talking about what she's doing, and that's obviously really cool.

Chrstina Barsi: And Sona was the episode who does the show with Conan O'Brien.

Danee Pye: Right. Right. Right.

Chrstina Barsi: For our listeners.

Danee Pye: Yes.

Chrstina Barsi: Yeah.

Danee Pye: Since some of those things are very public, and very interesting, and it's great to have a place to tell those stories. But then there are other people that maybe aren't so public facing like my friend Lisa Chiya [inaudible 00:11:36]. She's helping people have babies, and loves what she does, and it's a very successful company. It's really neat to be able to see her build that business. And my college roommate who I met at Mt. SAC, but ended up being my literal roommate, we shared bunk beds at Berkeley, Angelo, who was in our speech class, Angelo Nikolopoulos.

Chrstina Barsi: Oh, how cool!

Danee Pye: He is teaching at NYU and has published some poetry and living his dream.

Danee Pye: Yeah, it just seems like everyone I met back then is doing something fascinating. Those stories don't get told, I think. To see that other people have done it is also ... And not just other people, but other people who look like me, or other people who aren't the usual people you think of when you think of success in academia, or success in Hollywood, or success in law, or whatever. Someone I think about all these people that I've spoken about, there are so many different backgrounds, and family backgrounds, and country backgrounds, and cultural backgrounds that there's somebody that you can find inspiration in these stories if we tell them.

Liesel Reinhart: So in your wildest dreams, what can faculty do to help make these connections for you? What are some things you'd like to see us do that we could help with?

Marisa Fierro: We think that the four steps that we have alumni do can translate over to faculty. The first one is for them joining the alumni association, so we ask faculty encourage your students who are then transferring, and they're alums at that point, to join the alumni association. It's very simple. We have partnered with Professor [inaudible 00:13:22] for the conference every year.

Liesel Reinhart: Health Careers Conference?

Marisa Fierro: Thank you.

Marisa Fierro: We had hundreds of alumni who joined the alumni association just from simply having that form available, or just having a presence there, and them realizing probably for the first time that there is an alumni association. After that in terms of attending events, we would love to know all of these events that faculty are hosting that you have because we know that you're the ones that are driving these events every year. So if you let us know, we can push it out to the rest of the community, to the alumni, and encourage other people to come back and just make them aware of what's happening on campus.

Bill Lambert: I would say that we're not an events organization. That's not what we do. We're probably at our best when we are piggy backing on what the campus is doing because you guys are doing cool things. Your department in itself does really interesting stuff, and you're bringing back alums all the time to judge competitions and to be involved in that way. What we'd like to do is attach ourselves to that so that we can make some connections and start promoting these other ways that alums can be involved.

Bill Lambert: Faculty don't have to worry about asking their alums for money. That's not something that everyone's comfortable doing, but we are experts at it. We don't have any problem asking people. To us, it's another ... It's a natural extension of the relationship. It's just, it's the way that it's done. A lot of our folks like Danee Pye who's gone on and graduated from many other institutions, she's, I'm certain, getting contacted via Berkeley and by UT and all her other alma maters on a regular basis asking her to be involved. I feel lucky that we've got this connection, that she knows what we're doing, and she's helping us to get the message out there.

Bill Lambert: As far as faculty, I'd make one last pitch to faculty in terms of their own personal philanthropy. There are many faculty members who have supported their college with their philanthropy with through the scholarship program, through a lot of other ways. I would encourage faculty to get involved, include Mt. SAC in their own philanthropy. You can support any program across the campus, you can support the foundation activities, you can support whatever it is that you want. If we're doing it here at Mt. SAC, you can help to support it, and I would encourage our faculty to get involved in that the way many other employees have.

Liesel Reinhart: So what about planned giving?

Bill Lambert: Absolutely. This is a great way for people to make legacy gifts to the campus. They can include Mt. SAC in their estate plans. It's a very simple process, and I'd be happy to talk to anybody about how that works. It's the ultimate gift. After you've built a career here and supported so many students on their journey, it's a really wonderful way to secure your legacy at the college.

Liesel Reinhart: We don't often get to know where all of our students go, and so one of the nice things about the alumni profiles that she's collecting and having alumni connecting to the college can give faculty back some knowledge about what happened after these students left. We see them and we have hopes and dreams for them, and it's really exciting to see when they actually go out and start to achieve their dreams.

Danee Pye: I would never have gone into either philosophy or communications without my experiences at Mt. SAC. I would not have gone to Ball State. I would've have met my husband. The course of my life has definitely redirected in really good ways from my experience there.

Liesel Reinhart: Hey, thanks so much for joining us for the Magic Mountie Podcast. We love your likes, we love your shares, and we love your comments, so please engage with our community. Download from wherever you love to get your podcasts, iTunes, Google, Rate My Professor, we're there. We want you to be back with us next week. Remember, any opinions that are expressed in this podcast do not necessarily represent Mt. San Antonio College or any of its agents. We'll see you next time.