



Tony Tam ('97) and Kelly Gillespie Tam ('98)



This husband and wife alumni couple share the love of a good steak dinner, travel to the nation's capital, and their high regard for their college years at USC Upstate. Tony, a business marketing major from Tampa, and Kelly, a history major from Woodruff, met as students. In fact, Tony describes his favorite memory of his years at Upstate as "meeting my wife Kelly as she is my best friend and mother of my two children."

Tony's degree prepared him for a career in the hospitality business. A ten-year employee of Hospitality America, Tony is the general manager for the Hilton Columbia Center. He was the 2009 recipient of the Hotel Manager of the Year Award from the South Carolina Hospitality Association and he is involved in professional organizations such as the Columbia Hotel Motel

Association, the Midlands Authority for Sports, Tourism, and Conventions, as well as a board member of the University of South Carolina Hospitality, Restaurant and Tourism School.

"The best thing about my job is meeting people," says Tony. "My customers and clients are from all over the country and world. I have met multiple heads of states (including a few US presidents), ambassadors, movie stars, singers, entertainers, and people from almost any type of industry and company you can imagine."

Since the hospitality industry often involves travel, Tony found that he loves visiting Washington D.C. It's a passion that his wife, a history buff, also shares.

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“Having a degree in history, it was obvious that I would enjoy what the city had to offer in terms of historic places, but I also enjoyed the culture of the city and the diversity we found there,” says Kelly. Tony echoes her love for the city: “Although Washington has its share of bad press, it’s still one of the most interesting places in the world.”

When the couple is at home in Irmo, Kelly works as a freelance marketing and event planning consultant, a skill she says she discovered while organizing events for Delta Zeta Sorority. Her passion for events and marketing allows her to “feed her creative side,” she says, adding, “ I can’t imagine doing anything else and I love that my schedule allows me the flexibility to do be with my children while still doing work that I love.”

Highlights of Kelly’s career include presenting a series of marketing workshops to the South Carolina Department of Transportation. “These workshops offered minority and women owned businesses hands on instruction in creating their marketing plans. Being able to assist these businesses in laying the groundwork for their future success was a real honor for me,” she says.

She also learned a lesson herself, about success, from her advisor Dr. James Brown. During her years at Upstate she took several of the classes taught by this “no-nonsense” professor who had a policy to never round a student’s grade, even if the decimal point was in your favor. “I obviously was not a big fan of that policy, especially when it kept me from getting those A’s. Looking back though, it taught me a valuable lesson. No one is going to hand you anything in life, you have to work hard to earn that grade, even to the last decimal point. By my senior year, I had caught on, and if I remember correctly, I may have even squeaked out an A or two, no rounding required,” Kelly says.

When both Tams reflect upon their years at USC Upstate, they both acknowledge the tremendous impact the university had on their success in their chosen careers. Tony says that he had a great social and educational experience and he left Upstate prepared to “think outside the box,” to be more organized, and to express his thoughts with confidence.

Kelly’s words of wisdom she would pass on to current students are to “take advantage of all of the opportunities that the USC Upstate campus has to offer you. From social organizations to professional and academic clubs, the skills that you’ll learn outside of the classroom setting are just as valuable to your career path as anything you’ll find in a textbook.”

In her free time Kelly likes to spend time with their children, Abby, born in 2004 and Carter, born in 2008. She also likes to tackle do it yourself and home improvement projects. Tony makes a point of watching his favorite movie, Casablanca, every time it comes on TV; He estimates he has seen it at least 100 times! And when they’re hungry,

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they'll go out on the town for a steak dinner from their favorite restaurant Ruth's Chris Steakhouse.

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