

Life after Penn State Harrisburg

Graduate students talk about how PSH helped them get to where they are

By **RACHEL SHEPHERD**

Features Editor

Two people: two similar jobs. Both are 1997 MBA graduates of Penn State Harrisburg. Yet Mark Shaffer and Michele Lefever had two different experiences as students of PSH.

Shaffer graduated with a master's degree in American studies. He is now a historic preservation specialist for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDot). "It was enjoyable. PSH was real big on hands-on experience and I like the convenience of being able to go on a part-time basis while I worked full-time," Shaffer said.

Lefever attained his master's degree in public administration and also works at PennDot. He is the chief preservation planner for the Bureau of Historic Preservation.

"I have no particular messages for the school," said Lefever of PSH. "It would have been better if I had more time, but there is limited opportunity for involvement when you work full-time and go to school; intellectual discussion would have been great but there was no time."

"I wouldn't suggest going back to school when you are 46 years old," said Lefever. "It would have been more of an experience if I had been younger. I didn't make lasting friendships or important contacts."

Both agreed that the school was beneficial for the pursuit of their degree and in strengthening their role in their careers. Both Shaffer and Lefever were established in their careers and were looking to go further to enhance their work. PSH was a convenient option for them to attain their master's degrees and stay employed.

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Shaffer's job entails reviewing proposed projects in accordance with state regulations. He focuses on such things as public money on projects, state highway regulations, environmental laws and the protection of resources and reviewing proposed projects. His background is in archaeology, which he said is why he enjoyed the flexibility of the American studies program.

"[The program] is like a big umbrella with lots underneath it," he said.

Shaffer said with a degree in American Studies one can do a lot, from museum work to historic preservation.

He said a highlight for him was being able to complete his master's thesis on work he was doing for his career. He had the opportunity to get involved in a project that led him places he never imagined.

"My office is the first to receive a call when something unusual happens," he said.

In this case, he received a call from a man in Bethlehem who found a skeleton buried in his back yard. After traveling to Bethlehem, he discovered that this man's home was a burial ground for soldiers who died of disease in 1776. Shaffer completed an archeological dig and attended a commemoration in 1996 for these soldiers.

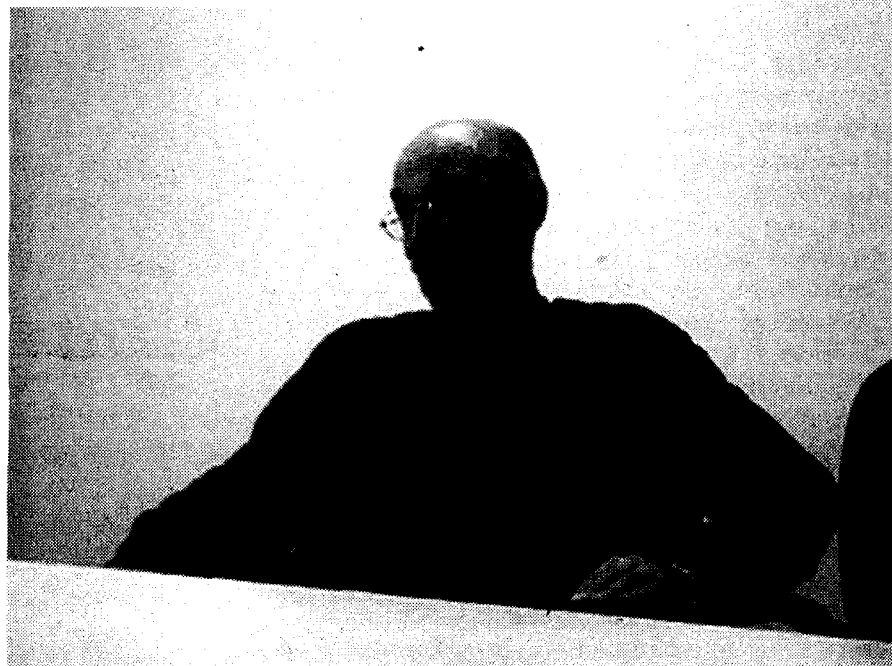
"The opportunity to do fieldwork is seldom," said Shaffer. "I enjoyed this project and archeological digs have allowed me to appreciate diversity."

Schaeffer said he would like to stay in the agency, but there are other things he wants to be doing. He said he cannot see himself doing this indefinitely, because "change is good."

Lefever's position requires implementing federal and state laws regarding preservation and technical assistance. He spends a lot of time traveling and attending public meetings providing technical assistance for local government and historical preservation planning. Lefever said PSH helped to establish a meaning to his career. He said his education reinforced his writing skills and enhanced his knowledge in critical areas such as political science and public policy.

Lefever admitted that going to school in his 40s was difficult and had he gone when he was younger, he believes he would have been a better-rounded person.

"Because I was older than the average student, I didn't get as much information as I wanted," he said. "If I were younger and completed internships it would have been better; I was already made."



ABOVE: Michele Lefever said going to school at an older age took away from his college experience.

RIGHT: Mark Shaffer used PSH's American Studies program to accelerate his career in archeology.



Lefever was not fond of the Penn State campus outside of the classroom. "It was a dreary environment," he said about the former air force base.

"The library was terrible. If I had an assignment to do, I would use the HACC or Shippensburg libraries. It was frustrating when I had to do major research," he said.

One thing Lefever suggested to improve the Penn State campus is a radio station. WPSH is in place on campus, but not yet up and running. Lefever emphasized the importance of a radio station to link the Penn State community. He believes it would be beneficial to graduate students who do not have time to get involved on campus.

"This business of not being involved because of time would be diminished," he said. "Because radio could be the medium to keep that together."

Lefever said he does not have any particular love for Penn State. "It didn't become a part of my life. For some students like me, there has to be some way to get connection," he said.

But PSH alumni will have varying experiences. Take the good with the bad right? Shaffer said he is fortunate to have been through the program at Penn State and made contacts for his professional business.

"In essence, I feel like I owe them [Penn State]," Shaffer said.

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