During her first semester at Assumption College, Janine Rock Somers ’01 learned all about return on investment (ROI) in a very challenging Spanish course. Somers also discovered that the initial value of ROI is not always monetary. The return on her investment of many additional hours of study not only paid off with an “A” in the course, but it also made clear to her that she would take away from college what she put in to it.

“Initially, I felt that I was over my head in that course, even though I had done well in Spanish in high school,” said Somers, now director of marketing at Stonewall Kitchen in Maine. “I considered dropping it, but Professor Rubino encouraged me by saying every day, ‘It will get better. Come back tomorrow.’ I studied harder than I had ever studied before, ended up loving the course and earned my first ‘A’ in college. It set me on the right path. I thought, ‘I can do this.’”

Four years later, the communications and Spanish double major was named valedictorian of her class and Assumption’s first Fulbright Scholar.

“The (Fulbright) fellowship offered an opportunity to blend an academic and cultural experience. I was through-the-roof excited when I got the award letter. Unfortunately, the tragic events of September 11 happened while I was in Spain. It was a scary time to be abroad with so much uncertainty and concern about security. Many of us came home. The Fulbright was a wonderful opportunity, but regrettably, the timing was off.”

Instead, Somers forged ahead on one of the career paths she had considered as an undergraduate – marketing. When she joined the specialty foods company Stonewall Kitchen in August 2011 to direct its marketing efforts, she brought with her a decade of marketing acumen and project management experience from her positions with national brand companies, such as Timberland, Stride Rite and Converse, and from “boutique” marketing agencies where she focused on client strategy and relationships.

“I’ve worked for wonderful companies that I’ve believed in and that stand for something,” she said. “That knowledge has influenced my career choices. The Timberland Company taught me the value of social justice in the workplace, and the importance of having a balance between doing business and giving back. I felt blessed to have the opportunity to utilize my educational background and marketing acumen, but also to know that everything I was doing was for the greater good. At Stonewall Kitchen, it’s the same thing. We stand for quality and innovation, but it’s not just about the bottom line. It’s exciting and challenging to be part of a brand that has true meaning and to work with a group of people that believe in it as strongly as you do.”

For Somers, there is no such thing as a typical week. In a dynamic company with 6,000 wholesale accounts, nine retail stores, a thriving Web and catalog division, and two product launches annually, her days are filled with leadership team meetings, planning the next catalog, strategic planning for online marketing and staff development. The business of marketing continues to change significantly as new technology offers new tools.

“Marketing today is about return on investment and analytics,” she said. “We’re also highly interactive in social media at Stonewall Kitchen. Social media is both a necessary communications platform and a fun tool. If you’re not part of the conversation, you’re letting others determine your brand.”

Somers is also highly active during her time away from the office. She and her husband of two years spend family time having outdoor fun with her young stepson. When she has time to reflect, she is still grateful to Assumption for the valuable work ethic she learned and the wonderful friends she made on campus.

“Academically, I was looking for a college that offered small classes, somewhere I could get to know my professors one-on-one,” Somers said. “Assumption professors make you want to learn by exciting you about the process. Professor Lucia Knoles really brought to life what she was teaching to show us how it would apply later in life and in our careers. In Professor David Thoreen’s courses I learned about the power of writing to your audience. I have taken that with me in every job I have had. Assumption professors took the time to invest in their students and care about them. Recently, I’ve been back in touch with Professor Knoles. She’s still teaching me about life.”

“Assumption had such a strong impact on me,” she said. “I knew I wanted to have a career that would challenge me to think and to be analytical. My experience at Assumption taught me that investing yourself in hard work really does pay off, but that you can have fun as well. I’ve looked for that balance in my work life choices. As I’ve grown my career, I’ve made sure I’m doing something I love with people I enjoy and who challenge me.”
Investing in Success

By Elizabeth Walker