“My Experience? Priceless.”

Prudential Senior Vice President
Chris Cannon Marcks ’77 built her foundation for success at Assumption.

By Troy Watkins

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W henever I hear the opportunl about certain experiences that are "priceless," I think of my four years at Assumption," says Chris Cannon Marcks, senior vice president for Prudential Financial's retirement unit in Hartford, CT. "Growing up in Holyoke, MA, Chris had an idea of where she wanted her life to lead at a young age. "I started taking French in third grade, and added Spanish in ninth grade, so I was interested in continuing to pursue my interest in languages—thinking that would help take me to exotic places," she explained.

Chris soon realized that languages weren't enough and one of the reasons she chose Assumption was the Foreign Affairs major. "It gave me everything I wanted—languages, political science, economics and history all rolled into one major," she said.

"Assumption's small classes and the individual relationships with professors helped me succeed as a student and gave me the credentials to get into a highly competitive graduate program at Georgetown University," Chris said. "My education also drove me to find job opportunities that gave me the chance to experience life abroad. I traveled extensively throughout Europe and Asia during my time at Both the U.S. Treasury Department and Astra. In the course of those travels, I learned to appreciate diversity of cultures, a global view of our world in political and economic terms, and how wealthy and "free" we are in relative terms. It shapes both my conscious and unconscious thought processes on a daily basis."

FACULTY MENTORS ENHANCED HER EXPERIENCE
Her Assumption experience included personal relationships with her advisor, Dr. James McCarthy, an economics professor and the chair of the Foreign Affairs program, and other professors such as George Doyle HD '92, Paul Ziegler, and Kevin Hickey. "They were role models of people who loved to learn, expected their students to engage actively in their process as well but they also knew how to relate on a personal level to the joys and agents of being a college student," she recalled. "Dr. McCarthy had eight children—many of whom attended Assumption—and I think he had significantly more 'adolescents' like me. He took great interest in my academic progress and my life generally. During my sophomore year, I had a bad case of the flu, yet I didn't want to miss any school. Dr. McCarthy took me home to his wife, Barbara, who fed me chicken soup and wrapped me in blankets for a couple of days until I was well enough to go back to school! He also was instrumental in helping me secure my internship in Washington, DC, during my senior year, which had a lifelong impact."

Chris earned an M.A. in Economics with a concentration in International Economics from Georgetown University in 1980, and worked for the Office of the Treasury Secretary on the international side for eight years. "I loved it... working as the Treasury Department lead staff member with the White House and State Department for the annual G-8 Economic Summit Meetings," she recalled. "I wrote economic briefing papers and traveled with Secretaries Regan and Baker and President Reagan to summit meetings in Williamsburg, London, Rome, and Tokyo. My last two years were supporting the Under Secretary as we negotiated with the Japanese to open their financial markets to U.S. firms like Citibank, Merrill Lynch, Bank of America, etc."

She left Washington in 1987 and moved to the Hartford area to raise her children closer to the rest of her family. Chris joined the Investment Division of Astra as an international economist and then moved on to a variety of other roles over the ensuing 17 years. She moved to a new job within Astra about every two years during that time, which offered her great management experience and a broad view of the investment and insurance business.

In January 2005, she moved to Prudential Retirement to run Personal Retirement Services, which is focused on giving individuals financial guidance and advice, particularly as they approach retirement. It's a strategic business unit of about 110 people focused on marketing, advisory services, product development, client service, operations, and financial management. Chris is also the president of Prudential Bank and Trust, which is part of this business unit, and has been asked to expand this business significantly for Prudential.

"This is the kind of challenge I love—I have a particular passion about helping people sort through what they should do at retirement, after seeing my own parents go through it," she explained. "I don't think the baby boomer generation is well educated about how to create a 'retirement paycheck' using investment and risk management products, nor do they understand what they should be doing 10 years before retirement to prepare for days when they no longer have a regular paycheck, medical benefits, and ready access to resources to help understand their options." She notes that "we are always looking for talent at Prudential, so I would welcome my interest from an Assumption graduate or near graduate in opportunities with the firm."

HER BUSY CAREER HAS PRESENTED CHALLENGES
"The hardest thing I have done over the past 35 years is to try to balance career and family," she admits.

Her husband Rich is an actuary, son Brian is a freshman at Middlebury College and daughter Caroline is in eighth grade. "Rich and I supported each other in terms of career and..."