



A design for success

What started as a way to make extra money during college has turned into a booming business for one grad

by KARA PETROVIC

As a kid, Jase Wilson never imagined himself an up-and-coming entrepreneur and business owner at 22.

And he certainly never thought he might be part of a team that helped secure the bid for the 2014 Winter Olympics in Russia.

Growing up in Maryville, Mo., Wilson (B.A. '05) thought he already had his entire life mapped out after graduating from high school. Since the eighth-grade, he wanted to be – or at least thought he wanted to be – an engineer. But upon entering college in his hometown in 2000, he discovered he didn't understand what engineers really did.

"I soon realized I didn't like the path I was headed toward," he says. "When math started to fly over my head, I knew it wasn't something I could continue with."

Although Wilson knew engineering wasn't for him, he decided to look into other engineering programs across the state, including UMKC's program before making a final decision.

While sitting in UMKC's welcome center, waiting for a student ambassador to walk him over to his engineering appointment, Wilson was in turmoil.

Should he continue down this path or choose another major?

"At that same moment, I looked up and this pamphlet caught my eye," he says. "It's like it had a halo around it."

The pamphlet gave a rundown of UMKC's Urban Planning and Design program, which was launching that fall. In a matter of 30 minutes, Wilson knew exactly which direction his future was heading.

"I knew engineering was out," he says. "I didn't even go to my scheduled appointment. From there on out, I was an urban planning and design major."

Wilson officially transferred to UMKC in August 2002, becoming one of the first students enrolled in the new program, and he never looked back. He felt the major would take him to new heights. And it did.

In 2004, midway into his second year at UMKC, Wilson opened Luminopolis, a marketing company focusing on architectural renderings. Its clients include developers, designers and realtors of high-end and mixed-use urban projects. The company, located in the center of Kansas City's booming Crossroads Arts District, resides on the second floor of the Art Incubator Warehouse on 18th Street.

"I opened Luminopolis to earn some extra money," he says. Wilson admits he had "no idea" what it took to start a business when he first started. The company was launched with proceeds from the first few transactions and still remains 100 percent funded by revenue.

Luminopolis took off quickly. Wilson was soon attending UMKC full-time and devoting any free time he had in between classes or late at night to his expanding business.

"I was earning great money for a college kid, but I needed help," Wilson says.

Enter close friend Briston Davidge, Luminopolis' interactive manager, who brought Web components into the mix. A year later, Wilson hired Matt Musselman (B.A. '05), friend and UMKC classmate. Today, Musselman serves as creative director. Choosing Musselman wasn't difficult, Wilson admits, because he'd always admired his classmate's drawings and attention to detail.

Last summer, the team brought 3-D director Eric Solberg on board. Today, Wilson, Davidge and Musselman each own one-third of Luminopolis. And although Wilson was the brain behind the company's creation, he says he wouldn't have it any other way.

"Luminopolis wouldn't be where it is today without Matt and Briston," he says. "This company didn't happen overnight. We were kind of on a rollercoaster there for a while. And we know that we can't always guarantee success. The company still isn't to the degree we'd like it to be at, but we're trying to move it that way."

After graduating from UMKC, Wilson entered the City Design and Development graduate program at MIT. He returned to Kansas City this summer after finishing his master's degree, but he stresses

that Musselman, Davidge and Solberg were the sole contributors for the company's success while he was away at school.

Wilson and Musselman credit much of their success to UMKC. They quickly took the tools they acquired at the University and put them to work for local clients including the Aladdin Hotel, D.E. Lofts, the Nicholson Group and the City of North Kansas City.

"It's an amazing feeling to take the skills I learned and apply them to impact what's going on here in Kansas City," Musselman says. "I know we all can't wait to see where KC goes next."

One of Luminopolis' largest accomplishments to date was helping sports architecture firm HOK Sport win the 2014 Olympic winter games for Sochi, Russia. The team spent nearly eight months contributing design ideas and centerpieces toward the bid process.

"I'll never forget the moment I'd learned we'd got it," Davidge says. "It was last July 4, and I saw a ticker scroll across the bottom of ESPN with the news. I called the guys and shortly after that, we got a call from the client. We definitely like to say we helped HOK win the bid."

Currently, most of Luminopolis' jobs come from word of mouth. The four-man team doesn't advertise its services but is optimistic about expanding Luminopolis' services to larger markets with help in that arena.

"I'd love to see us in Boston, New York and California one day," Wilson says. "But Kansas City will always remain our headquarters. KC's our home, and the prices and the people here are just right."

This past spring, in appreciation of their success and their alma

mater, Wilson and Musselman created the Luminopolis Prize, a \$1,000 annual scholarship, for a UMKC Urban Planning and Design II student. Students interested in the scholarship complete in a competition judged by a panel of Kansas City's finest urban planning and design movers and shakers.

The 2008 scholarship winner, senior Jonathan Woerner, said the competition has been his favorite part of the urban planning and design program.

"There was finally an incentive for students to show their passion and best work in urban design," he says.

This year's competition required students to develop a city center that included retail and services, residential condominiums and single-family dwellings.

"My project in particular has a cultural arts and entertainment concept with the amphitheater as the center of attraction, a museum to house the Hopewell Indian artifacts found at the Renner and Young archeological sites, and rapid transit for connectivity and a pedestrian friendly environment," Woerner says. "I believe this concept is what persuaded the judges to award me the scholarship."

Wilson and Musselman were excited about the competition's success and look forward to a continued partnership with the UMKC Department of Architecture, Urban Planning and Design.

"Our main goal with this scholarship is to put the department on the map," Wilson says. "We definitely hope that our relationship with them and this scholarship will help the department to continue to grow."



Opposite: Luminopolis founder Jase Wilson. Above: Wilson's business partners, Matt Musselman and Briston Davidge.