

## How ASBPA networking led to my position as a Post-Doctoral Associate in Living Shoreline at the Davidson Laboratory at Steven's Institute of Technology

By Amy Williams, Ph.D.

This summer, I received a message from Dr. Jon Miller at Steven's Institute of Technology in NJ saying that his lab was looking for a coastal ecologist post-doctoral associate and that I might be the one. How does this happen? Well, it is a long story that started 10 years ago at an ASBPA Conference.

As long as I can remember, my favorite moments in my life were those spent at the sea. I saw it as a beautiful place that had spiritual and emotional healing for the soul. As a young kid playing the waves, I never imagined that I would spend my career working to protect the resiliency and health of coastal systems.

Like many people in high school, marine biology was the only path to the coastal world that I had heard of. After learning to scuba dive during my semester abroad in Australia, I was hooked. I came back to Rutgers University and added a marine science minor to my course of study. Under Dr. Karl Nordstrom, I conducted George H. Cook Undergraduate Thesis through a Research In Ocean Sciences Fellowship at the Rutgers Marine Science Field Station in Tuckerton, NJ in which I developed a project on the impact of beach raking on arthropods in ecological niches of the coast.

Next, I headed to Texas A&M University to achieve my master's degree with Dr. Rusty Feagin on a project dealing with seaweed in Galveston Island. In 2007, Dr. Feagin suggested that I apply for the Educational Award with ASBPA. I had not heard of the organization and had to spend a lot of time learning what the acronym stood for, but I got the award, attended the conference and met some amazing people in my field. While volunteering at ASBPA's Coastal Summit in Washington, DC, I was exposed to a whole other side of the coastal world – politics and lobbying. I found the Coastal Summit to be the most valuable event I have ever been to. Getting to lobby with ASBPA members in the capitol was exhilarating and I felt that I was in the center of where things happen.

In 2008, I received the Coastal Scholar Award at the Annual Conference in St. Petersburg, FL and continued to attend the Coastal Summits. After graduating with my Ph.D. from Texas A&M in 2010, I moved back to my home state of NJ and made an effort to network with individuals from that area, Dr. Tom Herrington from Steven's Institute of Technology and Margot Walsh of the Jersey Shore Partnership.

Back in NJ, I began teaching earth science courses at county colleges and became involved with a local non-profit organization called Alliance for a Living Ocean (ALO) on Long Beach Island, NJ. In October of 2012, I became president of this organization. Then Hurricane Sandy hit. Our area and myself were personally affected by the inundation of water from Sandy. For that year, my career was second to participating in relief efforts with the international organization Waves 4 Water through local grassroots efforts by Jetty and S.T.A.R.T. (Stafford Teachers and Residents together).

The following year, I went to the Coastal Summit to represent ALO as a coastal stakeholder. I was able to reconnect with some colleagues that I had met in previous years. Some of the most important interactions at these events actually happen outside of the 9-5 time schedule. At an ASBPA happy hour, I reconnected with Dr. Herrington and expressed that I was looking for a full time position in NJ. I spent

time with some of his graduate students for dinner and followed up with my resume when I got back home.

As the Summit happens in February, imagine my surprise when I got the message from Dr. Jon Miller at Steven's. Apparently, my name had still been on the tongues of the Steven's laboratory. I was thrilled to talk with Dr. Miller and be offered a position as a post-doctoral associate to start in September.

I have now been working at my new position for 6 months and am thrilled to be back into academia. I love teaching and outreach which I get to continue while working on living shoreline projects with a variety of organization, such as The Nature Conservancy, FEMA, NOAA and NJ Sea Grant. I am excited to see how my work will be implemented to produce healthier and more resilient shorelines in order to protect the ecosystem that I personally and professional love.

The moral of my story is that you never know where a small conversation in an informal networking event might lead. Without ASBPA, I would not have had the opportunities to connect with individuals in my field and further my career in the direction that I desired. I send a huge thanks to Kate and Ken who facilitate these opportunities for students and young professionals!