

Credit union CFO credits former teacher for influencing career

Jennifer Hunt still treasures the message her former teacher Joe Racioppi wrote in her yearbook back in 1990. In it he praised her for the effort she'd put into the business she and her fellow students had operated from his classroom that year and encouraged her to help future young entrepreneurs.

Nearly thirty years later, Hunt is doing just that.

Although her job as Chief Financial Officer at Campus USA Credit Union keeps her busy, Hunt has spent many hours in local schools as a volunteer for Junior Achievement (JA). She's taught students everything from personal money management to running a business--the same skills Racioppi taught her through his economics course at Hawthorne High School.



"I want to give them the confidence to be whatever they want to be," said Hunt. "I want to inspire them like I was inspired by Mr. Racioppi."

Hunt had taken a career competency test that indicated accounting might be a good fit for her. Then Racioppi recruited her as treasurer of the class t-shirt business, which was a JA project. In the process, he helped her develop many of the skills that ultimately became the foundation of a successful career.

"That really sealed the deal," she said. "Being in his class and being part of that business helped me see how business works in the real world and what it takes to be successful."

"I really wanted my students to understand the basics of economics," said Racioppi, who retired in 2014 after 34 years with Alachua County Public Schools. "I wanted them to have the skills they'd need to survive in the day-to-day world."

Hunt and Racioppi recently met up at Hawthorne High School, just a few weeks after Hunt gave a speech at the annual JA breakfast in which she cited his influence on her career. The two visited their old classroom and updated each other on former teachers and students—many of whom, said Hunt, remember Racioppi very fondly.

"I've talked to some of my classmates, and more than one have said he really made a difference," she said. "He planted a seed."

"It's wonderful to hear that you've affected someone that way," said Racioppi. "It's really a great feeling."

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