



Erin Lewis, '06
Brand Management and Marketing,
Oklahoma City Thunder

For Erin Lewis, the opportunity to combine a few of her loves – for her home state, for sports and for building strong brands – drew her back to Oklahoma after nearly a decade away. A 2006 advertising graduate, Lewis currently oversees brand marketing for the Oklahoma City Thunder. She recently reflected on how her time at the University of Oklahoma prepared her for this role and others in her career, those who have impacted her along the way and more.

What is your favorite memory from your time at Gaylord College?

I made some great friends during my time at Gaylord and spending time together stands out as a favorite memory. The new (current) Gaylord College building opened either my junior or senior year, and I have so many fond memories of being with friends studying, working in the computer lab and hanging out between classes. We loved the new building

What do you consider to be the most significant moments of your career so far?

Two things come to mind....

When I worked at The Richards Group there was a time in which we found ourselves pitching to retain the business of The Home Depot, a long-time client. The long hours and the stress paid off when we won the pitch and retained the business. It was a long, hard fought battle with a sweet victory and was definitely a very proud moment. The Home Depot remains a client at The Richards Group today.

In general, I am proud to be a part of the Thunder organization – something that is uniquely special to the community. Our brand is so much more than just basketball. It has the ability to connect with people globally and locally in really meaningful ways. Locally, there is a deep sense of pride, ownership and loyalty to this brand, which is unlike any

back then and it's really cool to see it now and far it's come.

Do you have a favorite faculty/staff member at Gaylord?

The late Jim Avery will forever hold a special place in my heart. He was a tough professor but cared greatly for and fought fiercely for his students. He was a great teacher, but he was also a great mentor – and he continued to be a mentor to me well into my professional career and adulthood. He saw potential in me as a young college student and I am grateful for the ways that he pushed me and challenged me. There's not a doubt in my mind that he's a big reason I've had the professional success that I have had.

How did your career path lead you to the Oklahoma City Thunder?

After college I went to work at The Richards Group in Dallas as a Brand Planner (and eventually Brand Planning Director). While there I worked on brands including The Home Depot, Chick-fil-A, MD Anderson Cancer Center, Ram Trucks, Grocery Outlet, CAN Capital and with The Richards Group's design affiliate, RBMM.

After a nearly decade-long career at The Richards Group I ventured back north to my home state of Oklahoma, where I currently lead brand strategy for the NBA team the Oklahoma City Thunder – a unique opportunity to combine my love for sports and my home state with my love for building strong brands.

Describe your role with the Thunder.

I am responsible for the development, oversight and implementation of brand strategy and planning, as well as general marketing executions. I'm the gatekeeper and the protector, the disruptor and the problem solver, the point guard and the coach – each day driving more intentionality and purpose; challenging the norm; pushing forward the culture, thinking and ideology; and uncovering new and relevant ways to connect this already beloved brand to people in even deeper and more meaningful ways.

other brand I've experienced. As a strategist, it's fascinating to watch. But as an Oklahoman, it's special to be part of with such a positive impact on this state and its people.

How did Gaylord College prepare you for your future career?

My time at Gaylord taught me how to work hard and how to push/challenge myself. It also provided real-world experiences/assignments for real clients, alumni connections and a mentor (Jim Avery) who proved to be instrumental in my professional career beyond Gaylord.

What advice would you give to current students aspiring to a career in mass communication?

- Don't be afraid to work hard, to work a lot and to ask questions.
- Learn to think strategically and have a point of view.
- Don't be forgettable. Be impressive.

What do you do for fun outside of work?

I love to spend time with my friends and family, travel, practice yoga, ski and get lost in a good movie or a good book (especially when a beach is involved). I also love to explore and discover unique shops and restaurants in OKC's micro-communities.

Are there any other organizations or projects you're involved with outside of your full-time job that you want to highlight?

- 2019 40 Under 40, Oklahoma Magazine
- 2019 CAA World Congress of Sports Eventellect Young Executives Program
- S.A.L.L.T. (Salt and Light Leadership Training), Class 17
- American Marketing Association (OKC), member and committee volunteer
- American Advertising Federation/OKC Ad Club, member
- University of Oklahoma JayMac Alumni Association, member



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