



Jim Dolan, '71
President and CFO, CrossLink Composites

From working in news to starting multiple companies, Jim Dolan has applied the skills he learned while studying journalism at the University of Oklahoma. Currently, the 1971 graduate works as the president and CFO of CrossLink Composites, which develops tailored, low cost carbon fiber. Dolan recently shared about his unique career journey, how OU prepared him for his various roles, why he'd encourage all Gaylord students to also take some business courses and more.

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

The Daily Oklahoman hired me for its newly-created Norman bureau, run by state desk veteran Bob Allen, who was one of those working reporters straight out of "The Front Page" – pencil mustache, ruffled pin-striped suit, hard-drinking, knew everybody on his beat and would work all night to scoop the competitors at The Oklahoma Journal (now defunct.) The Norman

was managing partner of an investment bank in Minneapolis when this carbon fiber entrepreneur walked in the door looking for help raising money. I read her business plan. It sounded like a lot more fun than banking, so I quit and joined Connie Jackson in starting CrossLink.

Describe your role at CrossLink Composites.

I'm president and CFO of the company. Our CEO is a technical genius and I'm the business person. We incorporated in June 2017 and we're closing on a pretty large funding round later this year. We are the world's first and only manufacturer of high performance, low cost carbon fiber. We're building a million-square-foot plant to go into production in 2023 to serve automotive and wind energy markets.

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

bureau officed on the second floor of Copeland Hall. Work and study blended together. Every day I could go back and forth from class to work, putting into practice what I was learning in the classroom. I covered courts and government in Norman and went head to head against the Norman Transcript and the Oklahoma Journal. That's when I knew I had the right major. One day a Transcript reporter, in front of a judge, called me a stupid kid. I beat her on a big courthouse story the very next morning. I showed 'em.

I should also mention that Gaylord helped me get a paying and for-credit summer internship at the Enid News & Eagle, then a two-paper town. Bob Lee was the brilliant managing editor, mentor, coach, disciplinarian and friend. Nothing moved in Enid that we didn't cover thoroughly. It was one of the most satisfying professional periods I've ever had. It completely synchronized with what I was learning at Gaylord. Things I got from Bob were directly responsible for job offers I got later upon graduation.

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

Bob Peterson, who taught news reporting. I got practical reporting advice from him many times. Which was how I beat the Transcript. (See above.)

Joe Holland, who ran the school, took me aside when he learned which job I accepted after graduation. Those San Antonio papers are a little wild, he said, suggesting I take the offer instead from the more respectable Oklahoman. He didn't understand, and I didn't explain, that to me, wild sounded great.

How did your career path lead you to CrossLink Composites?

I spent the first years out of college as a reporter for metro daily newspapers – still, hands down, the most fun I've ever had on the job – and then went into management. After running the newsroom in San Antonio, I moved to corporate development in New York, and then ran an online information company in Chicago. I've gone back and forth between news and Wall Street investment banking. Along the way I've started six companies. Number four had the longest run, starting with a small daily paper in Minneapolis and eventually going public on the NYSE. I

- Moving through the ranks and taking on the top news job at a four-newsroom metro daily operation.
- Coming from behind to overtake and eventually demolish a strong Hearst competitor.
- Corporate development milestones at News Corp in multiple media, most notably buying Fox.
- Taking my company public on the NYSE.
- Changing the world with CrossLink.

How did Gaylord College prepare you for your future career?

The skills I learned there applied not only to journalism but many business situations: Research quickly. Listen carefully. Understand context. Distill to the essence. Verify everything. Get it right. Meet the %^&*! deadlines. Communicate clearly. Tell it as a story, not just a string of facts. Simple as these things are, they woefully absent from so many business situations. Gaylord taught me not only what to do, but how to do it. Because they occur rarely, these things set you up for success in just about any field.

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

I didn't spend much time thinking about business when I was a student. I was having too much fun being a journalist. But I understand now that business is the critical flipside of the news. Business enables journalism. I think every J-student should take a few business courses at the Price College.

What do you do for fun outside of work?

I'm a history buff and I like to travel. It's fun to combine the two – go where the history was made and immerse yourself in it.

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

I'm also co-founder of a software as a service company that uses technology to provide real-time communications between vulnerable people and first responders. Vitals Aware Services now serves nearly 90% of the country. We're saving lives – that's documented – and making life better for caregivers.



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