





LEADING BY EXAMPLE

KATE STICE STEWART '04 TURNED A FAMILY TRADITION INTO A HOLIDAY COMPANY WITH A CHARITABLE MINDSET. >

by Christina Mimms, MANAGING EDITOR

Service to the world community represents an important aspect of Bauble Stockings, the business owned by **Kate Stice Stewart '04**. It also happens to be part of the HIES mission statement. Her idea to turn a family tradition into a holiday company with a charitable mindset translated to success, with more plans on the horizon.

As a child, one of Ms. Stewart's favorite events getting ready for Christmas was shopping for her mother's gift with her father and two brothers. Sometimes the gift was a piece of jewelry (aka a bauble), and other times it was a fun memento. Her mom always opened the last gift in recognition for all her hard work

preparing for the holidays. Leading up to the gift opening, her mom solved a clue that was left in her "bauble stocking," a small needlepoint stocking ornament that her mom hand-stitched which hung on the tree each year.

It wasn't until Ms. Stewart married her husband, Peter, that she realized the bauble stocking tradition was unique to her family. In 2018, she decided to share the tradition with the world, but not just to sell product. She wanted to make a greater impact through her entrepreneurial dream.

The path she chose came with challenges but her previous experiences prepared her for what lay ahead, starting with her time at HIES.

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-Kate Stice Stewart



“Holy Innocents’ taught me how to try. I made my fair share of mistakes but I didn’t have to be the best at everything,” she said. My teachers always had my back. It was expected that I make an effort and by making that effort, I was rewarded with teachers who reciprocated and helped me achieve my goals.”

Her academic workload as well as playing lacrosse, writing for the student newspaper and competing in equestrian events filled her days and took her to college. Ms. Stewart competed on the equestrian team at Florida State University, where she earned a Bachelor of Science in public relations in 2008.

She studied in Switzerland for a semester, which whet her appetite for international travel. After graduating, using money she earned from equestrian coaching, she set out on a six-month adventure around the world on her own. Her stops included Australia, New Zealand, Spain and China.

“Studying abroad made me realize I could do it by myself,” she said. “I didn’t realize what a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity it was at the time, and it was amazing.”

The weekend after she returned home to Atlanta, she accepted a friend’s last-minute invitation to the Georgia Tech-Miami game, where she happened to meet her future husband, Peter, a graduate of Riverwood High School and Georgia Tech.

They married in September 2011 and are the proud parents of Brianna, 6, and Calder, 4.

Prior to launching Bauble Stockings, Ms. Stewart served as director of investor relations for Atlantic Investors Group, as president and COO of Kalu Yala Entrepreneurial Internships in Panama and as a grant writer for Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta. “I’ve gone into all my jobs very curious,” she said.

Her international travels, work experience, motivation to try new ventures and desire to give back created the recipe that inspired her to actualize her dream. She connected with artist Sarah Watson to design the first set of stockings but needed to locate a cost-effective means of mass-producing the hand-stitched creations.

She found that in Good Threads, a manufacturing organization that employs single moms earning fair wages in Haiti. Because the work is flexible, the women can work from home and their children can go to school. Good Threads opened a school for 126 students in the area and also feeds 600 children per day.

In just three years, her company has gone from having 82 stitchers paid fair trade wages in Haiti to more than 1,000, and Bauble Stockings has donated more than \$70,000 total to various charities, including Atlanta Children’s Shelter, Doctors



Without Borders, Animal Haven shelter in New York and the Aflac Cancer Center at CHOA.

“So many jobs are needed in Haiti and there is so much we can do in the community,” Ms. Stewart said. But therein lie many challenges she has experienced with her business, from shipping issues to earthquakes to Covid.

“But it’s worth it,” she said. “People do want to help and my company would not be successful without people believing in us and sharing our story.”

She believes the mission behind her product has led to collaborations with artists and celebrities, who can select their own charity to receive 5 percent of sales from their Bauble Stockings. She has partnered with Draper James, Laura Park Designs, Love Shack Fancy and Alice + Olivia to create exclusive designs for their stores. Nicky Hilton was her first celebrity partner and she is in talks with others. Through her work on the HIES Alumni Board, Ms. Stewart is collaborating with the school to craft custom stockings for HIES which will be available later this year.

“It’s so exciting to create something new,” she said. “I have six whiteboards in my office with to-do lists, guest artists and so many ideas.” Her home office/studio in Sandy Springs is where she and **Kat Tate ’09**, director of sales for Bauble

Stockings, put their ideas into action.

This year, Ms. Stewart was recognized for her work as the recipient of the HIES Distinguished Alumni Award. **Liz Young Hayes ’03**, longtime friend, nominated her for the honor.

The Distinguished Alumni Award recognizes an outstanding alumna or alumnus for their personal and professional achievements and significant contributions to their community. The alumnus embodies the Mission Statement of the School – which states that HIES develops in students a love for learning, respect for self and others, faith in God, and a sense of service to the world community, something that Ms. Stewart has proven time and again.

“I love Holy Innocents’ and I’ve always loved how family-oriented it is. HIES appreciated me for my talents, while encouraging me to do anything I wanted to try,” Ms. Stewart said. “As an entrepreneur, I am far from perfect, but if I’d thought I had to be perfect in the first place, I never would have started. I know no matter what mistakes I make, I can always get back on course if I put in the effort.” ■

Dunn Neugebauer contributed to this article.