



FIJI NATIONAL
UNIVERSITY

FNUNIKUA

MAKING A DIFFERENCE



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CELEBRATING THE SUCCESS OF OUR
ALUMNI – VC

BILASH OVERCOMES BARRIERS TO
ENJOY SUCCESS

CELEBRATING THE SUCCESS OF OUR ALUMNI



There is an old saying in academia that “a university is only as good as its graduates”. Graduates, or alumni, are regarded as the acid test of the worth of a university. If the institution’s alumni routinely find great jobs, build satisfying careers and make a positive contribution to business and civil society, it is a pretty good indication that the university is doing something right.

For this reason, most universities maintain close relations with their graduates, keeping track of the most successful and feting them at alumni reunions to bask in their reflected glory. Harvard University, regularly ranked amongst the top institutions in the world, boasts a glittering list of alumni, including J. Robert Oppenheimer (who designed the world’s first atomic bomb), T.S. Eliot (Nobel Prize-winning poet) and Michael Crichton (science fiction author of, amongst others, *Jurassic Park*).

Interestingly, two of its most famous recent students, Bill Gates (Microsoft) and Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook), are also celebrated as Harvard alumni, even though they both dropped out before graduation. Herein lies the paradox. While Harvard can take pride in the achievements of its alumni, their success is often in spite of going to Harvard, not because of it.

This is because highly selective universities like Harvard choose their students from the world’s best and brightest and they, in turn, have been

educated in the most expensive and exclusive schools by parents who, for the most part, are wealthy and socially well-connected. As the examples of Gates and Zuckerberg highlight, you need to be exceptional just to get admitted by Harvard and graduating may not add much.

For a university like the Fiji National University (FNU), however, the story is completely different. We exist to give the young people of Fiji, many of whom completed secondary school against the odds, the opportunity to gain a tertiary qualification and, in the process, transform their life chances. Boys and girls whose parents were cane farmers or subsistence fishermen and farmers in small, remote communities, can – through the power of an FNU qualification – become skilled electricians or mechanics, teachers or nurses, engineers or lawyers, doctors or dentists.

The success of our alumni, whether they make their way in their chosen profession or set up their businesses, is due to their hard work and talent and the training and education they received at FNU and its predecessor colleges. Without their tertiary education, they would not have the chance to find a fulfilling career, provide for their families and contribute to the economic and social development of Fiji. This is why, at FNU, we take such pride in the achievements of our alumni. This is why, for the academic and support staff at FNU, graduation days are the most important celebrations of the year.

GRADUATION BY PROGRAMME

Programme	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Certificates	711	650	594	572	527
Diplomas	565	380	398	310	73
Trade Certificates and Diplomas	471	443	522	544	396
Higher Education Certificates and Diplomas	698	173	260	157	94
Bachelors	642	969	1,211	1,273	1,572
Postgraduate Studies	146	157	248	222	315
Total	3,233	2,772	3,233	3,078	2,977

GRADUATION BY GENDER

Programme	2014		2015		2016		2017		2018	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Certificates	197	514	222	428	192	402	154	418	206	321
Diplomas	303	262	171	209	178	220	140	170	30	43
Trade Certificates and Diplomas	119	352	118	325	194	328	230	314	191	205
Higher Education Certificates and Diplomas	482	216	112	61	137	123	113	44	75	19
Bachelors	431	211	617	352	786	425	866	407	1,080	492
Postgraduate Studies	92	54	80	77	142	106	118	104	193	122
Total	1,624	1,609	1,320	1,452	1,629	1,604	1,621	1,457	1,775	1,202

Proud FNU Alumna shares her TRIUMPHANT JOURNEY as a Journalist



Working as a journalist is different from other professions, as no day is the same. New things keep happening, and you are required to be on top of your game every day. This is how young television journalist, Sofaila Koroitanoa, describes her work.

The 29-year-old who has worked for Fiji Television and Communications Fiji Limited (CFL), is currently plying her trade in Niue.

The enthusiastic and energetic journalist studied Diploma in Media and Journalism at the Fiji National University (FNU) and began her career in 2010.

“I started as a cadet reporter at CFL where I got hands-on experience on how to conduct interviews, write news articles and news presentation. It was a good experience for me,” recalled Koroitanoa.

She said one of the most rewarding attributes of being a journalist is having the ability to highlight issues that impact and makes a difference in the lives of the people.

“People who do not know about journalism think it is a glamorous job, but it requires a lot of hard work, and you have to develop a thick skin and be responsibly applying your journalism principles and ethics to make sure that you do not end up on the wrong side,” Koroitanoa said.

After her stint as a successful multimedia journalist in Fiji, she decided to move to Niue to take up a managerial position in 2018.

“I strongly believe that personal growth and taking on new challenges is important because I don’t like to be stagnant in one place. I had come to a point where I felt that I needed a new environment, a new challenge, a new experience. I wanted to gather experience in the region in terms of mainstream media work,” she said.

Koroitanoa currently works as a senior multimedia journalist at the Broadcasting Corporation of Niue where she has been entrusted with the role of Head of News

Department. She has five people reporting to her.

“I oversee the daily operation of news in both mediums, radio and television. I feel privileged to have been a journalist in Fiji, where I learnt all the ethics and principles of journalism. I now share those skills and my experience with my team in Niue,” she said.

The senior journalist said her Language teacher at Saint Joseph Secondary School played a significant role in shaping her professional career.

“I had a hunger for writing since secondary school. I volunteered to write reports on behalf of my form for our school magazine, and I also participated in numerous oratory contests. So I developed that passion for writing and speaking from a very young age. This is when my school teacher would encourage to take journalism as a career,” she said.

Reflecting on her time at FNU, Koroitanoa said the knowledge she gained during the two-year course prepared her to enter the journalism industry with confidence.

“My role sees me producing content for radio and television and online platform. It is only because I was able to learn about all of these during my academic life at FNU,” she said.

“I am proud of being an FNU graduate. From budding media professional to industry experts, the course offers something for everyone,” she added.

She encourages aspiring journalists not to be deterred by challenges, insisting that she always was able to use her contacts and determination to land behind the news desk.

She adds, however, that in addition to the thrills of chasing a story, aspiring journalists should expect to work hard.

“They should be willing to do almost any kind of story and willing to start from the bottom if necessary if it is the place they want to be,”

“Grow as a journalist, and then move up as your skill level warrants,” she said.

The financial performance of a business has a direct relation to the quality and strength of the partnership it has with its customers, hence the importance of having staff with professional people skills serving clients.

This is particularly important in the banking sector, where friendly staff with the right skill set can project a positive image of the institution to its current and potential customers.

Having the qualities demanded by this sector, Artika Arpana Deo decided to pursue a Bachelor of Commerce, majoring in Accounting and Management – the programme that would open the doorway to her dream profession.

Originally from Nagigi, Labasa, Deo said it was icing on the cake when she discovered the programme was offered at the Fiji National University (FNU) Labasa Campus.

“I did not have to travel to the other island of Fiji to complete my tertiary education. I feel fortunate to have gotten all the support from my family during my classes and exams,” said the 27-year-old.

According to Deo, this was a great relief for her family as they did not have to bear the expenses of her staying away from home.

“My dad is a sugarcane farmer, and my mother is a tailor, and it would’ve been difficult to cater to all the expenses if I had to travel to the city to pursue my studies. I did not have to spend money on rent, grocery shopping, travelling and other expenses. Rather I had more time to do my studies in the comfort of my home.”

In 2015, the final year of her studies at FNU, Deo was attached at Fiji Development Bank (FDB) for four months, which is a compulsory component of the programme.

She graduated in the same year and started working at the Technical College of Fiji (TCF) in Labasa as a Clerical Officer.

“This employment was a stepping stone to the next level of my career. I got to polish my customer skills and put into practice what I learnt while at the University.”

Deo kept trying for a job in the banking sector with the belief that - ‘Some things take time. Stay patient and stay positive, things will get better.’

She got a breakthrough in 2016 as a Customer Service Officer/ Teller at Home Finance Company (HFC) Bank in 2016.

“Being persistent does not require anything expensive or any hard work, but the reward is certainly fruitful,” said

Deo with a cheerful smile.

To remain competitive in the job market, a year later Deo decided to upgrade her skills and qualifications; hence she enrolled in a Post Graduate Diploma in Accounting, which she also pursued at FNU Labasa Campus and will be graduating at the end of this year.

“I believe upgrading qualifications enables one to learn new skills which can assist you in taking on new tasks at work, as well as increase your capacity to articulate to businesses how you can make a difference in the workforce.”

In April this year, Deo joined FDB as a Relationship and Sales Officer. She said she feels proud of her achievements and enjoys her work environment.

“As a Relationship and Sales Officer, I provide financial advisory services to potential customers intending to apply for loans.”

Deo said significant focus is placed on agricultural, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and corporate loans.

“Before taking applications, it is assessed for compliance with our policy and procedures, and then we appraise the loan, which is then sent to head-quarters in Suva for final decision.”

“After the loan is approved, all the security documents are completed, and loan money is disbursed to the client. We later visit the projects and prepare a development report on the farm or the business respectively.”

“The most interesting aspect of my job is that I get to meet different people from different backgrounds, and I feel honored to assist them with the services that the bank offers. While on field visits, I get a feel of peoples’ problems and hardships.”

“Therefore, my work environment puts me through a reality-check on the problems we are surrounded with in today’s ever-changing and fast-growing world. This motivates me to help people even outside my work sphere.”

Deo acknowledged the endless support and guidance of her parents and husband Romeen Chandra in fulfilling her dreams.

She advises students that being successful requires a strong dedication and desire to achieve your long term goals.

“Choose a subject major which will enhance the best interest you have. It is always important to do a little research on what type of jobs are available in the employment market and then decide your career pathways,” she added.



PERSISTENCE, Key to Deo's SUCCESS

Bilash overcomes barriers to enjoy success



Working full-time for a company that paid him a dollar an hour and stretching earnings to pay for food, bills and family obligations failed to discourage Ritesh Bilash from striving for a better life.

Bilash, from a farming community in Baulevu, Nausori, did not let his challenges get in the way of his dreams.

“Life is tough, but you have to work hard to reach your goal,” said the soft-spoken Bilash.

“My father was a civil servant and worked in the (then) Government Ministry of Co-operatives department. We moved a lot in those days. I attended primary school in Navua and then Tailevu North High School.”

“We had a family house in Baulevu that was unoccupied, so we moved there until I completed Year 12 at Vunimono High School.”

It was during his teenage years that Bilash would quietly observe his uncle, who worked as a technician for Post & Telecommunications (P&T).

“We would have issues with our television and video appliances, and when my uncle came home, we would tell him, and he would bring his tools and open up the appliances and inspect and resolve the issue,” Bilash said.

“It was fascinating watching him at work and to see how things were fixed. When I had the chance, I would open the appliances and study it myself.”

This childhood interest prompted Bilash to enrol at the Fiji Institute of Technology (FIT)

in the Diploma in Electronics Engineering programme.

“I enjoyed the classes because this was a field I was interested in, but I had to endure the long travels from our home in Baulevu,” he shared.

“I would wake up at around 4:30 am daily to get ready and catch the bus an hour later to be at Samabula by 8 am. I spent around four hours in travelling each day. Sometimes, the classes finished late, and I would catch the late bus home. My father used to always wait for me in Nausori so we could travel home together.”

“My parents were very supportive and always encouraged me during my university studies.”

Unfortunately, a year after he started at FIT, Bilash lost his father during the second semester of studies.

“This was a tough time for,” he said softly.

“The travelling had also taken its toll so since we had another family home in Vatuwaqa, my mother, grandmother and two brothers moved there.”

“After I graduated in 2004, I began work at an electronics shop in Raiwaqa, but it closed down.”

“I joined another company as a full-time employee for seven months and was working for \$1 per hour. Times were hard back then.”

Good fortune was on his side, as Bilash learnt that Fiji Television (Fiji TV) were recruiting graduate trainees.

“I was lucky to have been selected, and I worked my way up from trainee to eventually becoming the Manager Broadcasting and IT.”

“I spent ten years at Fiji TV and learnt all that I know about broadcasting. I was also part of outside broadcasting (OB) events, and that meant I got to travel a lot. Televising sports events meant I also got to watch the games live and meet distinguished people.”

“One of my major highlights with Fiji TV was in 2017 when I was in charge of relocating the Fiji TV services from Gorrie Street to its current office at Brown Street. I was able to complete this with the limited resources and human resources that we had.”

“I was recognised for my hard work by being named as the Employee of the Year.”

In November 2017, Bilash joined the Government’s Walesi programme as a technician and is currently in charge of the Network Operations Centre (NOC).

“We also have the VSAT services, which is internet over satellite. From time to time, I assist the IT engineer with day to day tasks such as any issues with the Walesi app,” he said.

“Walesi provides digital TV services to all Fijians across the country through our Walesi app and digital television, and this is important because it gives all Fijians the same access to information and entertainment.”

“During times such as Parliament sittings, our viewers can access the live stream from wherever they are and listen to our leaders discuss issues of national interest and they would be aware and be able to take part in constructive discussions regarding our nation.”

Physio Koong assists elite rugby players to perform their best

The Rugby World Cup is all but here, and every Fijian rugby fan will be rooting for the national 15s side to emulate the successes of the abbreviated code. While getting hands on the coveted Webb Ellis Cup is a dream for every participating nation, the road to success is as challenging.

“There are all sorts that go into winning a Rugby World Cup,” two-time World Cup winner, Richard Hugh McCaw told Stuff News recently. The former All Blacks Captain knows what it means to win as his playing record is one of the finest in the game.

The Fiji Rugby Union (FRU) has unveiled plans to insure the national team players until the World Cup which goes on to highlight the importance of player welfare and wellbeing in winning any tournament.

In all contact sports such as rugby, there are always high chances of injuries, and at the elite level, there are many mechanisms that are implemented to ensure the physical conditions and diets of players are continually looked after so that they can perform to the best of their abilities every time they take the field.

The FRU has adopted many of these mechanisms, and one of Fiji National University’s alumnus has taken a lead role in ensuring that player injuries are avoided and or managed correctly.

Meet William Koong, who graduated with a Diploma in Physiotherapy from the then Fiji School of Medicine (now College of Medicine,

Nursing and Health Sciences) in 2002, and is currently the Manager Sportsmed and Sciences with Fiji Rugby.

Wearing a big smile fused with a friendly nature, Koong is a calming figure among the players and has an important task of preparing the rugby gladiators for their call of duty.

One of the significant achievements for Koong was being part of the management team that won Gold at the 2016 Olympics held in Rio, Brazil.

“Sports Physiotherapy was an area that always intrigued me. I wanted to become a Physiotherapist because it deals with elite players, their injuries, recovery and providing education, and resources to manage injuries,” he said.

According to the Sawani villager from Bua, the Medical College provided him with the knowledge and skills that he needs to do his job and that he could not forget his time as a student.

“Studying with students who later became my colleagues, the networks and friendships developed through the years help me to date.”

The former Yat Sen Secondary School student said he reached out to his professional networks whenever he needed expert advice and assistance in player injury management.

Those hours spent in clinical and practical session as a student is paying off for Koong, who also holds membership to several Advisory Boards for World Rugby such as the Rugby 7s Men’s Advisory Board; Tier two Nation’s

Advisory Board; and Oceania Sportsmed Commission.

As the hardworking alumnus continues his daily ritual of ensuring our top rugby players perform and are looked after both on and off the field, Koong simultaneously realises the importance of upgrading his studies and keeping his skills in check.

He will graduate with a Bachelor of Physiotherapy-Bridging from CMNHS at the end of this year. He encourages more students interested in this line of work to pursue studies in Sports Physiotherapy.

“Sports Physiotherapy is the real deal where you get to work with so many elite athletes and be part of their development while ensuring that they perform to the best of their abilities.”

Koong highlighted that current CMNHS academics, Professor of Surgery Dr Eddie McCaig, and Head of School Health Sciences, Maria Waloki, have been among inspiring figures in his journey.

He also acknowledged, “Cathy Wong, mentor in the sporting arena and Luisa Tikolevu, Senior Physiotherapist, who was responsible for pushing me past the boundaries and challenging me to become the person that I am today”.

While eyeing a successful Rugby World Cup 2019, Koong hopes to see more sports in Fiji using Sportsmen Practitioners to help develop their athletes and manage or prevent injuries from occurring altogether.



Nagaunavou's a shining example of hard work leading to success



Growing up in a family of farmers that toiled the land to earn income for their survival taught Solomonian Nagaunavou many valuable life lessons which he applies as a young man today.

Nagaunavou is proud to quickly point out that he was brought up by a father who had dual employment as a hotel worker and farmer. He said there is no shortcut in life, adding hard work and perseverance were the recipes to success.

"I come from a sugarcane farming background and would help my father prepare the land and plant sugarcane. I would work on the plantation up until harvesting time," Nagaunavou stated.

"My education was funded through the income we earned from farming. So I know what it means to physically work hard to achieve our basic needs such as the right to education."

Nagaunavou is a son of Sila village in Cuvu, Nadroga and was educated at Cuvu District School and Draiba Fijian School towards the end of his primary school learning.

He returned home to Nadroga/Navosa High School for the first four years of high school, and after being scouted for his rugby talent, Nagaunavou finished off his senior year at Queen Victoria School (QVS).

In 2000, Nagaunavou returned home after finishing high school and began to think of tertiary study options.

"I was really inspired by my farming background and how it had brought me this far in life, so that was a major reason why I decided to drop off my application at the Fiji College of Agriculture, which is now known as the Fiji National University's (FNU), College of Agriculture, Fisheries and

Forestry (CAFF)."

"I was fortunate to be chosen and also awarded a Public Service Commission (PSC) scholarship."

Nagaunavou enrolled in the Diploma in Tropical Agriculture programme and said he was one of only two students from QVS to enrol at FCA at that time.

Two years later, on graduation day, Nagaunavou was approached by a director from the Ministry of Agriculture's Land Use section.

"He encouraged me to join the Ministry, and after expressing my interest through an application, I was offered the Senior Technical Assistant post in 2003. I spent over five years in this position at the Lautoka office and in 2008, I was transferred to Suva as acting Agriculture Officer."

A few years later, Nagaunavou was promoted to Agricultural Technical Officer and was based at the Koronivia Research Station.

"By this time, I knew FCA had merged with other institutions to form FNU, and since CAFF was right beside my workplace, I decided to upskill my qualifications," Nagaunavou said.

In 2011, Nagaunavou enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Agriculture programme and was part of the pioneering batch of students, as it was a newly-introduced programme.

"I came in as one of the mature, working students that already had a family while everyone else was fresh out of high school," he shared.

"I must admit that it was quite a challenge, and I had to make a lot of sacrifices during the three-year course. So there I was, a full-time worker and a full-time student."

"I would spend hours in the office and at the library doing work and assignments and study at night after spending quality time with my family."

During lecture sessions that related to his field of work, Nagaunavou would be found at the front of the class helping teach those topics.

After graduating with his degree in 2014, Nagaunavou continued to celebrate his success at work after being confirmed in his position as Agriculture Officer and being promoted to Senior Research Officer the following year.

Nagaunavou currently serves in this position and is based at the Ministry's headquarters in Raiwaqa, Suva. He heads the land use section and is in charge of the three divisional offices in Suva, Lautoka and Labasa.

"So basically, my first job was in this Ministry, and I have been here ever since," he said proudly.

"The work we do here is mostly planning for sustainable land management in agriculture and also to initiate land management for climate change adaptation and mitigation in Fiji."

"Our work is aligned to the Ministry's and to the national policies and strategies, and we directly link to the Sustainable Development Goal 15.3, relating to Life on Land."

Nagaunavou has also travelled extensively to places in Asia, Europe and the Middle East for staff training programs, conferences and working committee meetings.

He is heavily involved in the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) work in Fiji and is the Ministry's representatives at various committees in Fiji and the region.

Growing up as a youngster, Andrew Thapa's curiosity in fixing things fuelled his passion for machines. As he grew older, this fascination developed further and fixated on planes and how they operated.

To pursue his passion, he enrolled in Certificate IV in Aircraft Maintenance Engineering (Avionics) offered by the Fiji Institute of Technology (FIT) in 2006.

Encompassing the perfect blend of theory and practical components the course provided him with the opportunity to learn the basics of how to repair and maintain an aircraft.

"The course delivered was a good balance of theory with practice. On-the-job training allowed me to understand, witness, and adopt a great deal of experience and knowledge, which is the key requirement into keeping the aircraft serviceable," said Thapa.

After completing his studies, the Nadroga lad had a brief stint with the Pacific Sun, before joining Fiji Airways as a trainee and climbing the ranks to become a Licensed Aircraft Maintenance Engineer (Avionics), the position which he currently holds.

As a Licensed Aircraft Maintenance Engineer (Avionics), Thapa's job entails carrying out the inspection, repair, maintenance and modification on Aircraft Avionics Systems by relevant safety, procedures and manufacturer manuals.

"I feel fortunate to be working on these next-generation aircrafts, and every day is different. Since safety is the core of everything we do, I am proud to play a part in maintaining our fleet and enabling a safe and efficient airline operation," the former Jai Narayan College student said.

According to Thapa, even though he had the passion for pursuing Aircraft Maintenance Engineering (Avionics), it was his mother who encouraged him to join Fiji Institute of Technology, now the College of Engineering, Science and Technology (CEST),

"My mum influenced me to attend FIT because of knowledgeable lecturers, and the course was both theoretically and practically suited," he said.

Thapa said the industrial attachment galvanised the learning experience and provided him with a solid foundation for a career in Aircraft Maintenance Engineer (Avionics).

The science fanatic said at the University he met many like-minded individuals who are now his colleagues.

"We enjoyed every moment together and learned so much from the well-experienced lecturers who shared their knowledge with us abundantly," he said.

Thapa said there is never a dull moment in the life of an aircraft engineer.

"The decision I made to choose my career as an aircraft engineer through trusting in God and perseverance is by far the best decision I have made in life, and I return all the glory to God for the wisdom and guidance He has bestowed upon me," he said.

Thapa's advice to students is to have passion if they want to step into the aviation field, as the course will require sacrifice and hard work.

"There is a lot of studying involved, and the systems in aircraft are ever-evolving. Safety is paramount at all times. But the result is an excellent reward as we can repair, check, maintain, and release to service an innovative machine, aircraft."

He expresses his gratitude to Fiji Airways for the training and development opportunities that have carried him through the ranks.

"Working in this 4 Star prestigious company is enjoyable plus working alongside fellow graduates from FNU is a bonus", he adds.

Apart from socialising with friends and families, Thapa's favourite pastime is spending quality time with his one-year son Jethro.



Thapa cherishes dream job as an Aircraft Maintenance Engineer

A diversified environment with students and academics from the region and western countries is something that Assistant Lecturer in Dental Technology, Samantha Kumar appreciates about the College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS).

Growing up in Savusavu, Kumar has a passion for making a difference in the lives of people, and she finds great joy in being a part of a team that can redesign, fabricate and restore somebody's smile.

Her journey in the field of dentistry began in 2007 after she enrolled in the Diploma in Dental Technology programme from the then Fiji School of Medicine (FSM) now, CMNHS under the Fiji National University.

The soft-spoken charismatic academic feels the medical school has made an immense contribution to her life.

"I attained my education here (CMNHS), I graduated and then the College allowed me to become an academic and develop a professional career beginning as a Tutor and now as an Assistant Lecturer," she said.

But not just this, the College, through its holistic development approach, also instilled graduate attributes that shaped Kumar into the person she is today.

"The College shaped a lot of my early adult life as well. Studying at FSM (now CMNHS) required me to leave my parents, my home and move to a whole

new place and learn to live on my own. So at a personal level, it has impacted my life too."

Kumar is also able to pursue her hobby of creating 3-Dimensional Baby Hand & Foot Castings.

As the Director of Lasting Impressions, she helps parents to capture their child's precious moments.

"At Lasting Impressions, I create timeless 3D hand and foot casts for babies, children and even adults. A perfect gift, whether you are proud new parent, grandparent or just looking for a keep safe."

"Each Lasting Impression cast is unique to the child. A timeless memory that lasts forever."

Having completed Post Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Teaching and currently enrolled in Post Graduate Diploma in Health Service Management at the College, the former Savusavu Secondary School student aims to be part of the change and evolution of the Dental Prosthetics in Fiji and the region.

Drawing inspirations from her parents, who taught her to remain humble and kind and her husband, who has shown her that with discipline and dedication, anything can be achieved, Kumar added that the field of dentistry was unique.

"You are not just replacing a smile, but you are also indirectly restoring a person as a whole."

"It gives them their self-confidence

back, boosts their morale, their perception of themselves and their life. So you don't only fix a smile, you end up fixing many other aspects of your patients in the process."

Giving an insight into her current role, Kumar highlighted that it was hugely satisfying.

"As an Assistant Lecturer, I teach two units – Dental Materials and Orthodontics and also co-teach in other undergraduate programmes at the School of Dentistry and Oral Health. I specialise in the area of Dental Prosthetics."

"The best part of my job is that not only do I get to have an academic influence on students, but I also get to serve the people of this nation and the region as a whole. I get to interact with various groups of people, and there is always something new to learn and challenges to address."

While recollecting how she enjoyed her student life at CMNHS by making friends from across many countries, learning about different cultures, participating in fun student association activities and College outreach programs, Kumar had timely advice for aspiring students.

According to the 'smile specialist,' it is essential for students "to find joy in whatever you choose to do in life and make it your life's philosophy to becoming a lifelong learner."



Academic lauds Medical College's contribution

Delaibatiki committed to providing people with better road access

"While some of us have better access, there are others who need better and well-maintained roads. This challenges and motivates me to push myself forward and serve the people in need."



Having good and well-maintained roads is a crucial contributor to economic development as it encourages growth and offers essential social benefits to the people.

In Fiji, the role of ensuring proper roading and maintenance lies with the Fiji Roads Authority (FRA), which regularly engages external specialist companies through tender bids to construct and maintain roads around the country.

Given Fiji's geographical location, climate and landscape, road construction and regular upkeep can be a challenge, and the onus is on FRA to ensure that members of the general public have access to well-maintained roads.

The FRA has a strong team of experts who are tasked to ensure all projects undertaken is delivered as per the respective timelines, and any emergencies are dealt with in a timely and efficient manner.

Vataliai Delaibatiki, who is employed by FRA as the Works Manager, has a key role in overseeing the coordination and construction management of infrastructure projects and all operational site activities.

Forty-year-old Delaibatiki firmly believes that having the right infrastructure, which allows the transportation system to move people and goods swiftly and reliably to its location, is crucial to any country.

"While some of us have better access, there are others who need better and well-maintained roads. This challenges and motivates me to push myself forward and serve the people in need," he shared.

"I ensure all programme and budget requirements are met. Infrastructural projects mainly include maintenance of crossings and bridges."

Originally from Batiki in the Lomaiviti group, Delaibatiki had a passion for drawing which saw him graduating with a Diploma in Architectural Technology from the Fiji Institute of Technology (FIT) in 2000.

He secured a job as Junior Draftsman at an architectural firm, Larsen Holton Maybin Limited soon after. However, due to the political upheaval that same year, Delaibatiki lost his employment as the company folded.

He relocated to his village where he spent the next four years working on his family farm. Delaibatiki, however, maintained his passion to find formal employment and further his studies.

In 2006, he enrolled at FIT to pursue a Diploma in Quantity Surveying which he completed in 2008. The following year Delaibatiki joined the Department of National Roads as a Chainman.

After a brief stint, he joined China Railway First Group as its Business Development Officer and then MWH Global as a Bridge Maintenance Technician in 2014.

After serving nine years, Delaibatiki joined FRA in 2018.

"My skills and experience attained so far have contributed a lot to my role in terms of running a project and within allocated costs," explained Delaibatiki.

"I find my work very challenging as it requires efficiency and accountability to deliver the work within very strict deadlines."

"I have travelled to a lot of places in Fiji and have met a lot of people, and sometimes we hear negative criticisms towards the Authority however, this only motivates me to help deliver my work more efficiently," he added.

The ambitious manager is advising young graduates to push themselves to the limits to deliver work as required to be successful in life.



Good people management practices key to all organisations – Kumar

As businesses become modern riding on the wave of technological advancement, so does the management of human capital. Gone are the days where large amounts of paper forms were required to be filled and submitted for job applications, nowadays organisations prefer soft copies of applications emailed to the Human Resource Divisions.

As a teenager, Akshay Kumar became interested in the role human resource divisions played in organisations, particularly the sections dealing with recruitment and training of employees. He set a goal to become a HR specialist.

“While in Year 13, our careers teacher, Ms Peni organised mock interviews to give the students an idea of what to expect in a job interview and this is where I realised the imperative role that the interview panel plays in choosing the right candidates,” said Kumar.

In 2012, upon completing secondary education at Khalsa College in Ba, the 25-year-old enrolled at the Fiji National University (FNU) in the programme of Bachelor of Commerce, majoring in Human Resources, Industrial Relations and Management.

During his tertiary education journey at FNU, Kumar said he was able to gain valuable knowledge and understanding which set him on the path to developing a career in people management.

“The programme provided a sound understanding of key human resource management, employment and ethical leadership matters,” Kumar said.

“We were equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills required to respond to rapid changes reforming work practices and policies as well as to articulate approaches that will ensure a productive and engaging workforce.”

Originally from Wailailai in Ba, Kumar joined the workforce in 2014 as Human Resources Officer at Kalabo Investment Limited in Suva, and since then he has evolved in this profession.

He was responsible for recruitment and selection, staff appointment and performance management.

A year later, Kumar joined Industrial and Marine Engineering Limited as Human Resources and Payroll Officer.

“This position provided me with a platform to strengthen my understanding of HR Management as well as to diversify my knowledge in preparation of payroll.”

Kumar expanded his knowledge in drafting policies and grievance management.

In 2016 Kumar joined the Fiji Revenue & Customs Service (FRCS) as the Senior Human Resource Business Partner.

“In this role, I coached and trained managers and team leaders with regards to HR matters and laws. I attended mediations and employment grievances in court and looked after employee appraisals,” Kumar said.

After a three year stint, he was appointed as the Team Leader Technical Capability (Training).

According to Kumar, the HR profession has been evolving a lot, and he has to keep updated in terms of the changes in the labour laws. The second eldest among his three siblings, he dedicates his success to his hardworking parents, who are also his role models.

“My dad is self-employed and deals with furniture making and joinery work, while my mother is a housewife. My accomplishments are the fruits of their upbringing and guidance, and I would like to acknowledge them whole-heartedly for being by side in the most difficult situations of my life.”

Kumar is happily married and has a son.



Hard work and Sacrifice is the key to Success says Hill

It is not often that someone acknowledges they acquired sound management skills while folding bedsheets, but for Elizabeth Bale Hill, it was doing housekeeping at a resort in 1993 where she discovered that sacrifice, hard work and discipline are all essential ingredients for success.

Since graduating with a Diploma in Hotel Management in 1992, from the Fiji Institute of Technology (FIT), Lisa, as she likes to be called, has established a noteworthy career in hospitality operations which spans over two decades.

“I was lucky to get immediate exposure soon after graduation as I worked at a five-star resort called The Regent of Fiji, which is now known as the Westin Resort on Denarau Island,” she said.

“I was part of the management program and worked in most sections such as Public Area, Front Office, Telephonist, Reservations, Sales and Marketing, Water Activities, and Housekeeping,” she added.

The Vanua Levu native fondly remembers working with a colleague who instilled in her the value of humility, hard work, the importance of family, and the love of God.

“I appreciated those moments because she was sharing what she was going through, and was in some ways, preparing me to be mindful of my future career,” Lisa said.

After spending seven years at Sheraton Fiji & Regent Fiji, Lisa joined the Berjaya Inn as an Executive Housekeeper.

In 1999, Lisa got an opportunity to strengthen her leadership skills as she joined the Pre-Opening team for Outrigger Fiji Beach Resort as the Guest Services Manager.

Lisa had a passion for sharing her knowledge and joined the Training Productivity Authority of Fiji (TPAF), now the National Training and Productivity Center (NTPC) as a part-time trainer. She commuted from Sigatoka to Nadi to teach her classes. Later she joined TPAF in a fulltime position taking courses in Front Office Management.

In 2003 Lisa was offered another Pre-Opening role as Front Office Manager at the Fiji Marriott Resort.

“I was sent to Sydney Harbor Marriot for training. It was not an easy decision, as I had just given birth to our first child. Despite being homesick, I knew that to progress, I needed to toughen up and learn as much as I could,” Lisa reflected.

After three years, Lisa moved to Hawaii to work at the Waiohai Marriott Beach Club in 2006.

“I thoroughly enjoyed working there. The employees were a joy to work with and made us feel at home,” she said

When she returned in 2010, she joined Radisson Blu Resort and within six months was promoted as the Rooms Division Manager. She was the first local and female to hold that position.

“I was not only shocked but quite humbled that my predecessor Paul Loader had confidence in me to take the role.”

“I was at the height of my career in reaching an executive level, and making decisions for one of the biggest divisions, but it also came with its challenges and you need to swim your way through every wave you met,” she said.

In 2012 Lisa moved to Papua New Guinea to join her husband who worked at Civil Aviation Ministry.

After returning to Fiji in 2015, she volunteered with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a Protocol Officer for eight months before joining Fiji Airways as Manager Customer Care – Corporate Affairs and Customer Experience.

After spending almost 26 years in the hotel industry, Lisa enjoys working for Fiji Airways.

“I never thought at all that I would end up in aviation, but here I am and enjoying, learning and now helping the same guests but from a different compartment,” she said.

She advises those wishing to join the hotel industry is to be respectful and loyal. “We continuously need to step up in our service levels and the empathy we provide, respect and loyalty enables us to become better at what we do so well – sharing the Fijian Hospitality,” she said.

The Cake Maker

“No excuses – Own it! Do not shift the blame; acknowledge your hard work or mistake. Do not repeat it and improve on everything you do. Work Smarter.”

Determined to be a chef at the tender age of six, Bertrand Jang’s success story is one of perseverance, persistence and aspiration to accomplish one’s goals in life. Today, Jang proudly owns a bakery, where he spends most of his day whipping up exquisite cakes and sweet delights that he describes will surely send you to ‘cake heaven’.

“I knew I wanted to be a chef at the age of six, and there was no stopping me. It was probably the easiest decision of my life,” he said.

Jang is from Suva, has six brothers and was raised in an extended family of 14 members.

“I am blessed to come from a family who love to cook. Food has connected us. We bonded while we prepared food,” he said.



Education and Career

After completing Form Six, Jang decided to pursue further education at the Fiji Institute of Technology (FIT) in Nasese. He enrolled in the Trade Certificate in Cookery programme, which was an 18-month course.

Reminiscing his university days, he says, “I loved going to the campus back then, the teachers were awesome, and the curriculum was interesting to learn. The lecturers were very interactive and very open to discussions. I had a part-time job at the time of studies, so I never got to stay back and spend time with the other students but occasionally went to a few “Gunusede”.”

He graduated in 2005 and the following year, he worked at the ROC Café in Suva as a Barista for one year before landing a job in his field in Rarotonga, in the Cook Islands where he spent the next six years working for Rarotongan Beach Resort & Spa as a Commi Chef and later for Pacific Resort Beach & Spa as a Junior Sous Chef.

In 2013, he moved to New Zealand when he was the Senior Chef de Partie at the Wairakei Bayview Resort in Taupo. He then joined the Peppers Bluewater Resort in Lake Tekapo in Timaru as the Sous Chef for the next two years.

An opportunity to teach presented itself and he joined the Cornell Institute of Technology in Auckland as a Cookery Tutor in 2016. But his love for the kitchen saw Jang join Kai Pasifika as the Head Chef in 2017 and worked there until the end of the year.

On January 1st 2018, Jang opened his cake shop, Sweet

and Me which he currently runs in Auckland, New Zealand. He has a team of seven staff.

Talking about the challenges he faced starting a business, Jang says, “One of my biggest challenges was not having a stable income for the longest time, ever since I was a teen I always had a steady income and lived a comfortable life, but since starting up my cake shop, it has been a struggle. Not knowing where your rent will be coming from and not enjoying certain aspects of social activities was difficult. If it weren’t for the support of my partner and best friend, I truly never would have gotten this far. They had the utmost belief in my dream and knew that it would work and gave me strength and hope when I was down.”

Sweet and Me

He describes his business as “For Pacific Lovers who need artistic non-traditional Island cakes, Sweet & Me is a Speciality Cakery that is true to the Pacific spirit. The visual appearance and ingredients used are a reflection of the Islands, as well as New Zealand, and evoke memories for all occasions. They are handcrafted based on your desires and offer great value.”

Jang uses a variety of ingredients such as koko from Samoa, Heilala Vanilla Extract from Tonga, coconut from Fiji or coconut oils from Northern Vanuatu. He uses Manuka honey, wild berries, molasses and sweetener as well as fresh flowers from New Zealand.

Jang says that their cakes are unique and can be adapted to each customer’s taste. For healthier and ‘dietary friendly’

options, Sweet & Me offers customers a choice of healthier varieties, catering to each family’s need.

Words of Wisdom

Jang’s advice to students is to work hard and be responsible.

“Studies are expensive and require a lot of time and effort, so do the hard yards and spend time reading your notes. Do independent studies, the curriculum is just the tip of the iceberg, and it is your responsibility as a student to convict yourselves in your dreams and aspirations,” he said.

He also shared his top three tips to graduates starting in their career.

“Be punctual – I know you hear this all the time, but it is so important! Not only in the classrooms, but also to meetings, projects, promises and life in general. You become a more respected individual when you show that initiative at the first meet,” he said.

“No excuses – Own it! Do not shift the blame; acknowledge your hard work or mistake. Do not repeat it and improve on everything you do. Work Smarter,” he added.

“Balance – Work, sleep, drink, eat, laugh and repeat! Surround yourself with strong independent people and ask for help when you need it,” said Jang.

A successful and upcoming entrepreneur, Jang is keeping a part of the Pacific alive by showcasing it through his cakes and delectable sweet delights.

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