

MIKE McCULLOUGH

Walt Disney Imagineering's Mike McCullough '76 COE talks to Villanova Magazine about his role in creating places around the world where dreams come true.

What exactly does your job at Disney involve?

I am the Environmental Design and Engineering Studio executive for Walt Disney Imagineering. WDI dreams up, designs and builds our theme parks, resort hotels, cruise ships and other amazing places for families to have fun together. I lead a team of architects, engineers, designers and other talented folks who take the concepts of our creative teams and bring them to three-dimensional life.

Do you find the work exciting?

Very. I can be in a meeting with architects discussing the castle at the park we're building in Shanghai, and the next hour I'm talking to structural engineers about how to design a structural system for a mountain range for the backdrop for Cars Land in Disney California Adventure.

How did a Villanova degree prepare you?

Villanova provided an excellent foundation, not only in the fundamentals of engineering, science, business and the humanities, but also in understanding people and how to work in a team environment. As a leader, you realize the importance of collaborative efforts.

What made you choose Villanova?

Both my father and brother had attended Villanova. When it was time to pick a school, I was leaning toward Villanova because it offered a broad range of programs.

What was it like to go from NASA rocket science to Disney parks and resorts?

Like the space program, designing Disney's theme parks and resorts requires lots of innovation, collaboration and teamwork, and pushing the limits of what is possible. We pride ourselves on creating guest experiences that are authentic to the story we are telling. We spend an incredible amount of time researching—whether it's the architecture of a specific time period, rockwork or landscaping found in a unique area of the world, or music to emphasize a particular emotion.

How has the Imagineering business changed?

When I started we had only two theme parks: Disneyland in California and Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World in Florida. Today, WDI is responsible for creating experiences for a global market and a more diverse guest composition, with parks and resorts in Paris, Tokyo, Hong Kong and, soon, Shanghai. Plus, our cruise ships sail to itineraries around the world. This requires us to connect with many cultures to create magical experiences that resonate with our guests, wherever they come from.

How is designing in Shanghai different?

In the US, Europe and Hong Kong, generations have grown up on Disney stories and played in our parks. We don't have that advantage in mainland China, so we are being diligent about how we introduce guests to Disney's beloved stories at Shanghai Disney Resort. ■



SNAPSHOT

A native of Bellmawr, N.J., Mike McCullough earned a bachelor's in Civil Engineering from Villanova and a master's in the field from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Tori, his wife of 30 years, and their daughter, Kelsey, also work for The Walt Disney Co.

EARLY CAREER

Stress analyst, General Electric Space Center;
guidance and controls analyst in flight operations,
NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratories

DISNEY CAREER

Has managed the engineering and architectural designs for many domestic and international projects; currently leads a studio at Walt Disney Imagineering, which is responsible for the design and engineering of the built environments for all Disney parks and resorts worldwide