

## EXPANDING HER HORIZONS

BY AUDREY EDGERTON

**T**he world is not just this country," Maria Ranniger said. She would know. Ranniger, a 1986 UI graduate with a bachelor's in public relations, was raised near Oxford, England.

After graduation she worked as an assistant in the public information department headquarters of NATO in Mons, Belgium. Following that she worked at Mathieu Thomas, a public relations firm in London, before returning to the inland Northwest in 1988.

In October 1994, she founded MTR Communications in Spokane, where she works today.

In the first years of business she said yes to every opportunity. At the beginning you "take whatever job you can get," Ranniger spoke of her early days.

These days she's able to take on pro bono work in addition to her regular client accounts, which she believes allows her to follow her own passions.

"I really think it's the right thing to do," she said.

It's difficult to describe Ranniger's daily routine. "It's so diverse, there isn't such a thing as a typical day," she said. Now and again, she pulls a

24-hour work day in order to provide the level of service she believes sets consultancies such as MTR Communications apart from the bigger agencies. "Sometimes, I'm not really sure when it ends or begins," she explained.

Her day could include a variety of things: from conducting a conference call with clients across the country to directing a photo shoot to editing a column for The Spokesman-Review to performing as on-air talent during local public television on KSPS-TV and radio on KPBX membership drives.

She could be working with a reporter on a news story, checking

in with the creative team, seeing that news releases have been distributed, or putting finishing touches on a marketing plan and double checking to ensure she's followed up on everything.

Ranniger said her favorite part of the job is "the variety, the diversity and of course the client relationship." Owning her own company hasn't made life easier. "I've never worked as hard as I have since starting my own business, nor experienced as much job satisfaction," she explained. "You get all the credit or all the blame."

For recent graduates and current students, Ranniger offered this advice for success in the work place. "Learn to write," she repeated several times. She estimated

that 50 to 60 percent of résumés she sees are poorly constructed. "Do not rely on spell check," she emphatically advised. "Read it aloud. ... Read every word backwards."

"Anything you can do to broaden your mind will help you in this industry," Ranniger said. She suggested taking as many classes as possible in various areas including drama, literature and foreign languages.

"I've always loved Moscow," Ranniger said when reminiscing about her college days. "There's something about the place that seems encapsulated in amber — ever and yet never changing."

Ranniger lives in Spokane with her husband, Greg, and their 13-year-old daughter, Emma Kate.



MARIA RANNIGER

## Grad pulls from journalistic toolbox for bevy of experiences

BY JESSIE M. WADDELL

**J**ulie Pipal wanted a job in public information, but had to use several other jobs as stepping-stones to reach her goal.

Pipal graduated from the UI in 1991 with a journalism degree and a political science minor.

She first worked as a reporter at the Idaho Business Review in Boise, but discovered the job wasn't quite for her. "I found that I wanted to spend more time with the stories and the subjects than I did at that job," Pipal said.

She then worked in marketing for a real estate company, writing engineering proposals and selling office products before meeting the chief of staff for Phil Batt, then an Idaho gubernatorial hopeful.

Batt won, and in January of 1995, Pipal, then 25 years old, began work at the gover-

nor's office.

"It was really an 'Alice in Wonderland' experience. I went from doing sales for an office product company to working with people who are making all the decisions for the state of Idaho," Pipal said.

She said her experience there with an unusually young staff and the first Republican governor in 24 years was "almost indescribable."

She spent two years in the governor's office but said that in politics, "you set your own destiny," and she took a job in public involvement at the Idaho Transportation Department.

It was her job to ensure that all state projects had proper public input by means of hearings, meetings and other opportunities.

Pipal said that during this job she still wanted to move toward a lead public information officer job. "Don't wait for anyone to offer you a job. Go do what you want," Pipal said.

She followed her own advice and soon found another job as an agriculture and food communication officer at

the Idaho State Department of Agriculture, a position the department hadn't filled in over a decade.

Since it was basically a brand new position, she built her own communication plan and enjoyed the influence it gave her with policy makers.

In October of 2003, after about five years with the Department of Agriculture, Pipal accepted her current position as the manager of budget, policy and intergovernmental relations for the Transportation Department.

She now deals with budget development and economic forecasting for the department and works as its legislative liaison.

Pipal said the position was the next logical step for her in her career path.

"I knew when I was doing media relations that I wanted more," she said. "This came as the opportunity to affect the way in which public policy is made in this state."

She now gauges her days as either good or bad public service days.

"On good days I helped somebody, I got a lot of work done and I felt good about the job I was doing. A bad day —

you can't make anybody happy, you feel like you're caught up in the beauracracy and wonder if you're really making a difference."

But there are few bad days, says Pipal.

She and her husband Randy, whom she met at UI, have two children: Bradley, 6, and Ryan, 2. Besides spending time with her family, Pipal is active in the Republican Party.

She advises the Pan Hellenic Council at Albertson College, which requires her to drive from her home in Meridian to Caldwell every other week.

Pipal said her experience at UI most definitely prepared her for her different jobs.

"I think I got a great liberal arts education. I learned how to think through problems, how to work with others and how to interact with others in the business world," she said.

Pipal keeps close ties with the university. As the recruitment adviser for Delta Gamma sorority, she has spent about 10 days on campus every August for the past six years.



JULIE PIPAL