



# Alumni Spotlight

## John Held '02



In completing his term as president of the Millersville University Alumni Association Board of Directors, **John Held '02** reflects on the positive experiences and warm memories from many years of involvement at Millersville University. His decision to attend Millersville University as a student began with a memorable moment on campus. "Like thousands of other alumni, my decision was made at the pond. There's something special about that place, and the campus just felt like home. Nearly 20 years later, it still does," says Held.

Held grew up in Oreland, Pennsylvania, and graduated from Millersville University with a bachelor's degree in communications with a focus in public relations. Following graduation, Held pursued a career in the field of communications and is currently the Director of Communications and Brand Management for the American Board of Internal Medicine and ABIM Foundation. The connections that he made with faculty and staff at Millersville University made a lasting impact on his professional career and his life after graduation. Held states, "There are so many great people that I had a chance to meet as a student, and who gave me guidance and support during my time on campus – many of whom I'm still connected with all these years later. I'll always be especially grateful to one professor in particular – Dr. Tom Boyle from the Communications Department. He had just joined the faculty at the start of my senior year and took me aside and asked if I'd be interested in doing an independent study focused on leadership. I had never considered that before and learned so much from him through that experience. I credit a lot of the success I've had in my career to the opportunity Dr. Boyle provided me. He gave me confidence in myself and taught me skills I needed to be a better leader. I hope he reads this and knows what a difference he made for me!"

Participation and leadership in campus activities was a highlight of Held's student experience at Millersville. "There was really no shortage of opportunities to get involved and meet new people – it seemed like there was always something going on, some event to attend, some new club or student organization to join." He recalls, "I was in the University Activities Board all four years, serving as vice president my junior year and president my senior year. I was in Student Senate, serving on the Executive Committee my senior year. I was involved with the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) and served as president my senior year. I was in the bowling club all four years. I played on MU's first ever club roller hockey team, and also played intramural tennis, street hockey and soccer."

Held and his wife, Laura '04, met at Millersville and were both attending Millersville University as students at the same time. "We got married in 2005 with a lot of our Millersville friends by our side. We have three kids – Owen (5), Nora (9) and Jack (11) – and all three have been coming to campus since they were babies," Held says.

In 2009, Held was elected to the Millersville University Alumni Association (MUAA) Board of Directors. He was selected to receive the MUAA Young Alumni Achievement Award in 2015. Held became president-elect of the Millersville University Alumni Association Board of Directors in 2017, and then served as president from 2019 until 2021. He explains, "One of the neat things about how this role is structured is that it's basically a six year arc – you serve as president-elect for two years to learn the role and get ready for your term; then it's two years as president; and now I move into the final two years of the arc as immediate past president, where I'll get to serve as an advisor to our incoming president, Joyce King, and president-elect, Matt Olphin." The experience of serving as president has made a difference for Held as a leader. "I definitely learned a lot during my term as president about leadership – how to be a better listener and curator of ideas, how to create an environment that fostered creativity, and how to work through challenges in a constructive manner. I'm grateful for this experience, and I'm already applying a lot of what I've learned in my professional life."



During his term as president of the MUAA Board of Directors, Held participated in several uniquely memorable experiences. “Two experiences stand out to me as the most memorable: The pinning ceremony and Homecoming. At the pinning ceremony, I got a chance to welcome new students to Millersville and share with them a bit about my experience as a student. It was such a neat experience to be up on the stage, looking out over a sea of black and gold, and hear the excited voices of the new students as they were about to embark on their journey at Millersville.” At the 2019 Millersville Homecoming Parade, Held and his family rode along the parade route in a convertible. “We attend the parade every year, but had never been a part of it, and seeing it from that perspective was awesome. Riding through the streets of Millersville, seeing friends waving back to us along the route – simply an awesome experience we’ll never forget,” recalls Held.



Held is proud of the many accomplishments of the MUAA Board of Directors during his term as president. “We have so many great alumni serving on the MUAA Board and Committees. One of the most positive experiences was getting to know them better and learn about what drew them to serve the Alumni Association. It was then my job to make sure we were tapping into that talent and creating opportunities for alums to give back in ways that were meaningful to them, and that advanced the goals of the Alumni Association.” These achievements include establishing the Millersville University Alumni Network; supporting students during the pandemic by providing additional scholarship funding from the MUAA; recognizing MUAA Emeriti Board Members; and securing new MUAA revenue streams including Amazon Smile and a partnership with Wanderlust Coffees that created the Biemesderfer Breakfast Blend.

As Held’s term as president of the MUAA Board of Directors comes to a close, his commitment to involvement at Millersville University will continue into the future. “I think I’ll always find a way to stay connected to Millersville, whether it’s on the board or through some other opportunity. Millersville means a lot to me, and I want to find ways to keep it in my life.”

His advice to fellow alumni is to stay connected with the University and get involved with the Millersville University community. “Find some way to stay connected to Millersville in whatever way that works for you, because I promise it will be worth it. There are so many ways to get involved that work for everyone – no matter where you live or what kind of time commitment you can make. Come out to Homecoming this fall. Follow the Alumni Association on social media. Come to an MU After Work networking event. Volunteer as a mentor for a student. Go back and talk to students from your major. Simply buy some MU gear and wear it proudly wherever you go,” he says. “I’ve made so many friends through my involvement with the Alumni Association who have enriched my life. I hope for the same for all alumni, but it starts with taking that first step of getting involved. I encourage all alumni to get involved however they can.”