When business travel takes Harley-Davidson executive Mark Van Genderen ’90 to London, certain sights cause a special meaning—following their wedding, he and his wife rode together from the church on it. He is pictured in front of Harley-Davidson’s headquarters in Milwaukee; he is on his Road King, a bike with meaning for the couple. It was really intrigued with the brand and the culture.

As Van Genderen’s career has progressed, he’s stayed connected to Hope in various ways, most notably as a member of the college’s Alumni Board. Just last month, he began his first term as president, after having served as vice president for two years and a general member for the two years prior. In its advisory role to Hope’s alumni office, the board meets on campus twice a year, and the individuals members organize events in the regions they represent.

“Since my internship was something I really was and having a chance to see how companies somewhere operate,” Van Genderen explained. “To really be in the business and was moving his or her way up,” he continued. “I was viewed as being just like any other clerk who’d already graduated from college and was moving his or her way up,” he explained. “To really be in the business world – in the middle of commerce and industry – even just for a few short months, was absolutely fascinating. It was also great to live alongside other like-minded students from various colleges. Overall, I felt like I had grown up.”

Another key experience Van Genderen had at Hope was a full-time summer position as student director of the college’s New Student Orientation program. His task was to prepare all the activities and materials for the four-day New Student Orientation at the beginning of the academic year. It was the first job he’d ever had with a specific deliverable at the end, and he believes it served as a foundation for much of his career work since then. “Even as I’ve moved through the corporate world, my project-based work always comes back to the same base elements: getting a team of people behind a certain goal, setting out a vision, and then accomplishing it,” he noted.

After graduation, Van Genderen worked for two years as an admissions counselor at Hope. Dr. James Bekker, ’65, who retired in 2006 as vice president for admissions, remembers Van Genderen as an excellent recruiter with the right skill set for his position. Specifically, he felt Van Genderen’s internships and summer work directly influenced his ability to make a smooth transition from college student to professional worker.

“Through his experience in Chicago, Mark saw the real world and saw employees in the work force,” Dr. Bekker explained. “There’s no doubt in my mind that his internship there and his other experiential learning helped him hit the ground running after graduation.”

In 1992, Van Genderen left Hope and spent four years helping his father start and grow an investment firm. He then completed an MBA at Northwestern University in Chicago. During one summer at Northwestern, he worked for the Ford Motor Company – a perfect fit since he’d always enjoyed mechanics and motors. Although Van Genderen had planned to work full-time for Ford once he graduated from Northwestern, his course changed when a recruiter from Harley-Davidson came to campus; it wasn’t long after that he accepted a job with the company.

“I’d been a motorcycle rider and, although I didn’t own a Harley-Davidson, I thought it was a great company,” he said. “At that time, it was still a relatively small company, but I was really intrigued with the brand and the culture.”

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“I’ve never felt uninvolved with Hope, because with my parents living in Holland, I’ve often gone to football and basketball games when I’ve been back in town. And I had to make sure my wife had a chance to see Hope before we got married, because she knew that her getting into Hope was a great company,” he said. “At that time, it was still a relatively small company, but I was really intrigued with the brand and the culture.”

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