

2013 Distinguished Alumni, Jeff Gendell, Visits Wyoming High School

Written By Sallee Ann Ruibal

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On May 20, The Wyoming School Foundation and the Distinguished Alumni Society brought the 2013 Distinguished Alumni, Jeff Gendell, to Wyoming High School to speak to students.

Jeff Gendell graduated from Wyoming in 1977. He is the middle child of seven children, all of whom graduated from Wyoming. Gendell went on to study at Duke University and the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. Gendell founded and is currently the Managing Partner of Tontine Associates LLC, a Connecticut based investment firm. He lives in Greenwich, CT with his wife and three children.

Jeff Gendell spoke to the entire student body in an assembly and talked to smaller groups of classes throughout the day. One of his main points was that students shouldn't have a plan. This caught the attention of students as it goes against traditional thinking. Students are told from a young age to have goals and to work towards them. Gendell is most likely not against goals, but rather an advocate for rolling with life's punches. For example, he went to Duke in hopes of joining the swim team and instead found himself as a sports writer, and later editor, of the school's daily newspaper.

Gendell also tied this in to the fact that companies and business trends change or they die all together. It's difficult to predict if what is a booming business today will still be alive and well five to ten years from now when current high school students become college graduates. Gendell also mentioned that his CEO friends often say that what the current workforce is lacking is not education, but work ethics such as arriving on time and not skipping out on shifts. In a world where work is becoming 24/7, those ethics are what set people apart.

Another point Jeff Gendell made was that "students' backpacks are too heavy." In other words, students are trying to do too much all at once. "You guys aren't having enough fun," Gendell remarked several times with a smile. This also caused some stirring amongst students as they're told to work, work, work. Instead, Gendell recommends students take a gap year to find what they're re passionate about and develop those work ethics. Working in food service, Gendell said, is often more beneficial than an internship because that's where you really learn to understand people and how to work with them.

It was also evident in Gendell's presentations that no matter what students do, take a gap year or immediately major in Engineering, they take Wyoming pride with them. At every speech he gave, Gendell mentioned how his sixth and eighth grade math teacher, Mary Heimert, was at the Distinguished Alumni presentation the day before. He had kept in touch with her and she was thoughtful enough to give him one of her favorite books as a congratulations. That touching gesture so captured the spirit of Wyoming, which is what makes us—current students and alumni alike—proud to be Cowboys.