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Food & Family: a recipe for success

By **Claire Curry**

Among Massimo Grande's most treasured memories of his childhood are the many summers he and his siblings spent in Italy with his grandparents and extended family. Perhaps most vivid of all are his recollections of the brick oven his grandfather built in his backyard and the sumptuous family feasts that made ordinary days seem like holidays in Calabria. "Being with family meant enjoying a great meal," he said.

Food and family traditions have taken center stage throughout Grande's life in Reading, where he was born and raised, and where his parents, Alby and Lina, have been running G.N.A. Ristorante on Penn Avenue since the mid-1970s.

"I would work there in high school and college, on the weekends and whenever I didn't have class," explained the Alvernia alumnus who majored in business and graduated in 2007. In college, Grande said he had a lot of mixed thoughts about his future career, but that working in the family restaurant got him "hooked. I liked the fact that you're talking with different people every day,"





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he said, and giving them memorable dining experiences.

Grande’s family roots, his grandfather’s brick oven and his appreciation for the way a great meal brings people together gave him and his sister Tina the concept for the brand identity of Nonno Alby’s Handcrafted Wood Oven Pizza, the restaurant they launched together in 2014 and nicknamed for their dad, now a “nonno,” Italian for grandfather.

“We wanted to incorporate pizza in a new dining experience so we decided to go artisan style,” said the entrepreneur who runs the restaurant with his wife Trisha, sister Tina and brother-in-law Raffaele Cirandine. “It’s a style of pizza that is popular in the bigger cities, like New York and Los Angeles. We felt West Reading would support the concept.”

So Nonno Alby’s officially became the neighborhood’s first wood-oven Neapolitan restaurant four years ago. It has since become a popular eatery known for its gourmet-style dishes—personal pizzas, burgers and wood-oven-

fired wings—that incorporate high-quality ingredients like fresh mozzarella made on site, prosciutto, sopressata and imported olives and cheeses. Grande said their concept took a little time to catch on because the community was accustomed to typical pizzeria menus—pizza slices, hoagies and cheese steaks.

Nonno Alby's fare has created buzz on social media and around Berks County, and has also earned several awards, including "best pizza" by Best of the Berks and the Reading Eagle and recognition in *Pizza Today*, the industry magazine.

"It's been phenomenal," Grande said about the restaurant's success, noting that a number of regular patrons are Alvernia faculty and students. "I still see my professors," he said. "Dr. Flynn comes in on the weekends and fills me in on things that are happening on campus. It's always a nice treat to see him and many of my professors."

Among these Alvernia patrons is Business Professor Travis Berger, who recruited Grande to the university when he was the men's soccer coach.

"Mass was one of a special group of guys on Alvernia's very successful men's soccer team," said Alvernia President Tom Flynn. "They were among the first student-athletes I met, and I recall traveling to support them in the playoffs. So it is really fun, over a decade later, to be a patron of Nonno Alby's, a successful business owned by an alum, and a Flynn family favorite, bringing the best of Italy to West Reading."

Grande remembers his soccer team as a close-knit group that successfully made it to their first-ever conference championship as seniors. Today, soccer remains an important part of his life as he trains athletes at his alma mater, Wilson High School, where he serves as head coach of men's soccer. He also enjoys spending quality time with his family's youngest generation—his daughters, Guiliana, 4, and Gemma, 11 months, and his sister's children, nieces Sofia and Arianna.

He credits Alvernia for its personal approach to education and warm culture. "That's one thing I always loved," he said. "You weren't just another student. Everyone knows one another and everyone has a name. My whole life has been about family and that's what Alvernia is to me." **A**





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—Conor Delaney
CEO, Good Life Advisors

A journey toward the good life

By Claire Curry

“Conor is one of our most impressive young alumni. He is a creative and savvy entrepreneur who epitomizes the Franciscan call to ‘do well and do good.’”

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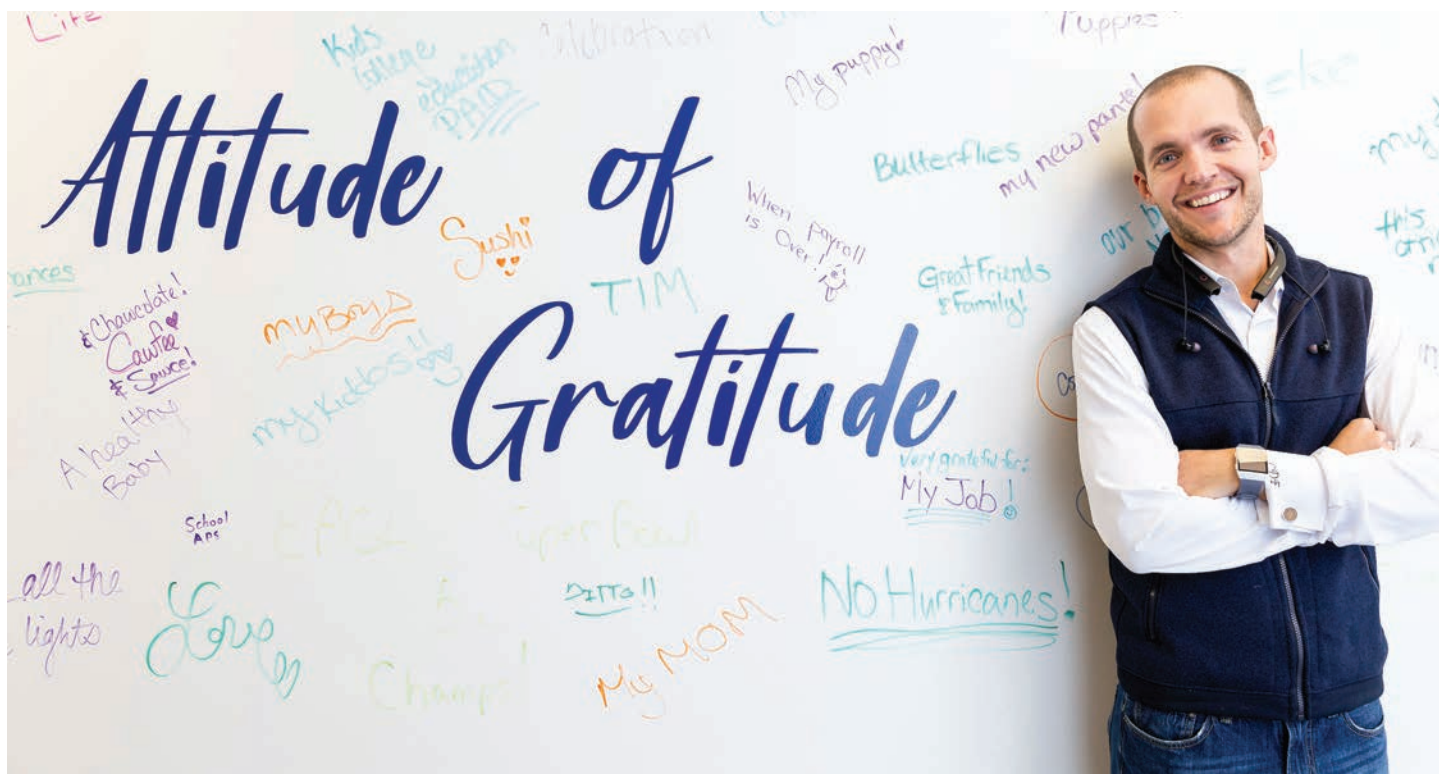
Just a few days after celebrating his high school graduation, Conor Delaney’s life took a sharp and unexpected turn: his father passed away suddenly at age 52, leaving behind a wife and three college-bound children.

At the time, Delaney ’07 couldn’t have foreseen the many ways in which this tragedy would redirect his future—from choosing the college where he met his wife Liz to pursuing a career as a financial advisor to building an organization that today has offices in 42 states and manages \$4 billion in assets.

“You don’t get bigger opportunities than what we’ve been blessed with,” Conor said. “But it’s all come out of a tragedy. It’s not about whether people are going to have adversity, it’s about what you do with that.”

Liz Delaney ’07 remembers meeting Conor during their freshman year at Alvernia when the two were talking on their phones with their moms





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in Clare Hall. They became fast friends, quickly realizing how much they shared in common. Both were born and raised in New Jersey and both are dedicated athletes—she played soccer and lacrosse and he played basketball and ice hockey. They also come from similar backgrounds.

“Our parents were blue-collar workers,” Conor said. “Liz and I worked hard to get through school and through life, and we’ve taken care of each other from the time we were 18.”

Conor’s parents—teachers who were married for 32 years—were loving and hardworking, but always struggled to make ends meet. After losing his dad, Conor had to grow up quickly and handle his family’s financial affairs, one of the reasons his advisor at Alvernia, Associate Professor of Business Scott Ballantyne, suggested that he consider a career in financial services. Conor took his advice and landed a job in the field during the summer after his freshman year. For the next three years, he juggled work, night classes and hockey practice, and obtained his securities registrations and insurance licenses. He also started dating the girl he said “brings sunshine” into his life.

Recruited to Alvernia to play soccer, Liz majored in education and math, and later taught at a local preschool and

charter school. The couple settled down in Reading and has welcomed three children—Blake, 6, Rhys, 4, and Elena, 2.

Since 2012, Conor has served as CEO of Good Life Advisors, a company he formed with his trusted colleague and friend Courtnie Nein. Its mission is to meet the needs of the working class—people like Conor’s parents, who he says could have achieved greater stability with sound financial planning advice.

“We want to be the champions for middle-class American investors and the advisors who serve them,” Conor said. “We created a model that puts service first.”

In fall 2018, Good Life Advisors opened its new headquarters in Reading, near Alvernia’s campus. The renovated 30,000-square-foot building includes office space, a community center, a fitness center and an organic café.

The organization is deeply rooted in its local community, employing several Alvernia alumni and training student interns. Neighborhood nonprofits such as Habitat for Humanity, United Way and local church groups are invited to use the community center for free and, for affordable prices, local residents can work out in the fitness center and enjoy healthy fare at the café.

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President Tom Flynn.

Conor attributes his approach to work, parenting and life in general to what he learned from his first role model. “As a teacher, my dad touched so many lives. He had a community that respected him and he was always there for me.”

Not only do Conor and Liz share the same values and work ethic, they are equally committed to maintaining a healthy and active lifestyle, and have been running marathons together around the world.

“We’re going to finish out the Abbott World Marathon Majors that end in Berlin in October,” said Liz, referring to the series’ six marathons, also held in Tokyo, Boston, London, Chicago and New York.

While Liz manages their household and home-schools the children, Conor spends a good deal of his work weeks traveling around the country to meet with advisors, run training programs and implement new strategies and technologies for the company. He and Liz are also exploring some new side business ventures.

Conor credits his wife—who he may never have met had he not attended Alvernia—for being his inspiration. “God’s got a weird way of setting things up. You suffer a gigantic loss, but then in walks the person you’re going to spend the rest of your life with, and it saves you.” **A**

