



*Alumni of Achievement*

*Renee Ryan*

*B.S.B.A. Finance '83, B.A. Spanish '08*

As a volunteer working internationally, Renée Ryan didn't like being unable to verbally communicate with the people she was assigned to help. The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) alumna traveled abroad with Trinity Baptist Church to do volunteer short-term mission trips. "I realized that I did not like being unable to communicate and really relate to the people in the communities where we traveled and worked.

Ryan previously earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (Magna Cum Laude) degree from UAH in 1983. She returned to UAH in the fall of 2006 to study Spanish after a trip to Brazil. Ryan began her studies with Dr. Linda Maier, now Professor of Spanish in the Department of World Languages and Cultures at UAH.

"I thoroughly enjoyed studying the language and received a great foundation. Dr. Maier strongly encouraged her students to get involved through volunteering in the local Hispanic community in order to improve our Spanish and learn more about the culture. The Alabama Hispanic Association (AHA) was one of the most active Hispanic organizations in the Huntsville area at the time," Ryan said.

She became a member of AHA in fall of 2007, and was immediately placed on the board as Outreach Co-Coordinator and then Treasurer. "In the fall of 2010, AHA received a grant to fund an after school K-1 Hispanic tutoring program at Morris Elementary School. As the director of this program, I was able to fully utilize my Spanish skills working with the Hispanic parents and volunteers. Ryan met her future business partner, Flora Santor, while both worked as volunteers with AHA.

After taking Dr. Leslie Kaiura's Life and Professions class, Ryan "felt led" to enroll in the Samford University Healthcare Interpreter Training Certification program. "The program only accepted 15 students at the time, and I felt extremely honored to be selected to participate, as many of the students were native speakers or near native speakers who had lived abroad."

Ryan completed her UAH internship experience in Guanajuato, Mexico in 2008, under Professor Karl Keller's leadership. "I worked for four weeks as an assistant to the Director of El Centro de Orientación Familiar, Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia or S.N.D.I.F. I learned a great deal about Hispanic culture and improved my language skills working each day alongside my director, traveling by local buses to very rural, remote communities, helping her deliver a twelve part program aimed at improving family relationships. This was an invaluable experience for my future business. Currently, our company, *Language that Works, LLC* (LTW) has the privilege of working with Mr. Keller to provide these same Spanish internships and study abroad, as well, for UAH Spanish majors in Costa Rica."

Born in Atlanta, and raised in Brentwood, TN, Ryan earned her second bachelor's degree (Summa Cum Laude) in 2008. "Without UAH...the professors and the experiences resulting from my studies, I would not have this career," she said. "As you can see, our company, *Language that Works*, is a direct result of the education and experiences I gained from my second degree at UAH."

Ryan said she received the education and opportunity to acquire, utilize, and improve a second language. "I was encouraged to serve, learn, and apply my new language skills. Ongoing and continued encouragement from the faculty and fellow students motivated me to keep on achieving higher levels of language acquisition. I now have the ability to not only speak Spanish, but work at a professional level in Spanish in Costa Rica."

Never expecting to be honored for doing something that she loves, Ryan is appreciative of her UAH professors for believing in her and encouraging her to achieve her many goals. She recognizes too, that the award is something that she didn't achieve solely on her own. Ryan is thankful to her husband Steve, their children Jonathan, Ginger, Chris and Meagan, along with her parents, father-in-law, and business partner, Flora Santor.

"I would like to thank the UAH Alumni Association Board of Directors for this incredible honor. Helping others to acquire a new language and providing them opportunities to improve their language skills through immersion experiences abroad is simply a joy and reward in and of itself."

