

Denise DUTTON

Class of 1990

Look up the word “focused” in the dictionary and you may well see a picture of 1990 Great Graduate Dr. Denise Dutton illustrating it.

Her father, Dave Dutton, recalls shortly after the family moved to Broken Arrow, they purchased some acreage outside of town and, lacking nearby neighbor kids to play with, Denise and her older sister, Deanne, became “farm girls” who were quite comfortable sitting astride tractors. When Dutton built a backyard swimming pool, the attention of the girls shifted to their new aquatic playground and acquiring the skills that would later lead to positions on the Broken Arrow High School swim team.

Showing her focus, Denise took on the demanding role of being the team’s distance swimmer and was good enough to represent her school in state competition.

This same approach was carried into the classroom. An example came when, as secretary of the Student Council, she played a major role in hosting the state conference of student councils. “It was really a big deal and quite an intense time,” her dad said. “But she dug in, did what had to be done while maintaining her position as having the highest grade point average her last two years of high school. She was always a list-maker and wouldn’t quit until every item had been checked off.”



Following graduating with distinction from BAHS, Denise earned a Bachelor of Arts, Magna cum Laude, in English from the University of Tulsa. From there, it was off to the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University where she received a Master of Arts in International Relations with emphasis on Central and Eastern Europe and then to Princeton where in 2003 she earned a PhD in Politics.

After 10 years on the East Coast and six years teaching at Missouri State University, she returned to Oklahoma as Assistant Provost at the University of Tulsa with responsibility for the school’s Honors Program. She is also founding director of the Henneke Center of Academic Fulfillment.

Despite reaching heights many can only marvel at in the academic world, this Great Grad points with equal pride to her years of community service that include being a member of the Intern Minister Advisory Committee for All Souls Unitarian Church, serving on the board of the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence, being a member of the 45th class of Leadership Tulsa and serving on the board of Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Oklahoma.

Now a new mom of twin daughters, her dad says he wouldn’t be surprised to see his daughter begin making lists to help her accomplish her new job – showing her kids the kind of focus it takes to be great swimmers – and accomplished tractor drivers.