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ALUMNI PROFILE

Education and Positive Change Go Hand in Hand for Ce Cole Dillon *By Marya Smith*

If campus diversity happens one student at a time, Ce Cole Dillon was one of the students who helped make it happen at Northwestern when she entered as a freshman nearly 35 years ago, after graduating from Bloom High School in Chicago Heights in 1974.

Today Cole Dillon (BS78) is director of worldwide education services at Bytemobile, a California-based technology company, and is president of the Northwestern University Black Alumni Association (NUBAA). As a globe-trotting business educator, she applies her SESP education on an international scale, and as an active alumna she continues to address the issues of diversity at her alma mater.

"I value my Northwestern degree today more than I ever have," she says. Looking back, Cole Dillon acknowledges that it wasn't always easy being a pioneer for social change.

"As Dickens wrote, it was the best of times and it was the worst of times," she says, reflecting on her undergraduate years in the 1970s. "At that time, there was not a long history at Northwestern of black students on campus. You have to realize I was a 17-year-old sent to cross the color line, and to some extent the gender line, with no tools to manage that.

"It was a burden and an opportunity, but lots of people took good care of me at Northwestern," she adds, recalling in particular the emotional and spiritual support she received from the Department of African American Student Affairs, where she had a work-study job.

"What I most appreciate about my Northwestern degree is that it taught me how to learn," says Cole Dillon. "It became a platform to explore all the possibilities in life, without restrictions, because you realize that if there's anything you want to learn, you can."

This insight has informed her entire career. Not drawn to classroom teaching, Cole Dillon chose to enter the corporate sphere after college. "At that time, companies were making the transition from paper to computers, and I discovered I had a great affinity for computers and a love of technology," she says.

Cole Dillon next enrolled in the technology law program at Santa Clara Law School in California's Silicon Valley, earning a JD degree in 1986. She practiced law for more than 12 years before discovering her true calling: corporate technical education.

In the last decade, Cole Dillon has managed education programs for companies including Informatica, Rearden Commerce (formerly Talaris) and Oracle Corporation. In 2007, she joined Bytemobile, where she manages technical and skill-based learning for customers, employees and corporate partners in countries around the world, including China, England, France, Greece and Japan. "I teach people in business about technology so they can solve problems themselves," she explains. "Every day I'm able to combine my love of technology with my passion for education."

Fast-paced introductions in technology and an indisputable global business community foster ever-increasing opportunities for educators, according to Cole Dillon. "Learning occurs in every work context, in every organization, and people are needed to be responsible for that learning," she says. "I use my Northwestern degree in a way I never imagined when I got it."

Cole Dillon is also an advocate for social progress. She views her involvement in NUBAA as a way to have a positive impact on the university's policy issues. "The overt racism of my childhood and adolescence doesn't happen today, but a lot of America still struggles with the black-white divide," she notes. "Northwestern was in the forefront in making changes in the '60s and '70s, and today the university has an opportunity to reassert its leadership in diversity."

She is optimistic about the future. "Almost all change is rooted in education," she says.

"The gift the university gave to me — my degree in education — has been an integral part of my life," she adds. "Northwestern's commitment to diversity opened the door to someone like me to be a regular American when, for hundreds of years, America had been denying those opportunities to individuals like me."

Ce Cole Dillon (BS78), president of the Northwestern University Black Alumni Association (NUBAA), is shown at a NUBAA event.