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Kara Snyder: Board.

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Kara Snyder: Hello, and welcome to the podcast, a podcast produced by the College of Applied Science and Technology at Illinois State University. I'm. Your host, Kara Snyder, and I serve as the assistant dean of marketing communications and constituent relations for the college.

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Kara Snyder: Each episode we're sitting down with an alumn of the college, and today we have a chance to talk to Yolanta Poniolo Yolanta is an information technology alumni, and currently serves as Vice President of information, information, technology, and exceiv

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: welcome. And thank you so much for being here. Kara. Thank you so much for having me. It's a pleasure.

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Kara Snyder: Well, I am so excited to chat. Let's start at the beginning. Why did you choose. I issue

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: Okay, Well, actually, I didn't choose Isu I my sister. I have a 2 year a sister who's 2 years older than me, and I've always just followed in the in her footsteps, and she chose Isu, and was so pleased with her experience on campus

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: that she she basically you got to go here. You got to come here to to be with me. So that's it. That's actually how I ended up at Illinois at University is my my big sister made that move first, and we we look back on the experience that it's an incredible great memories from our time there.

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Kara Snyder: Oh, I love that. And how fun to have 2 red bird alumni in the same family. That's fantastic.

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: So how did you pick information technology? Yeah. So when I first joined at Illinois State University. I was actually a math as a general student going into math. Major. I wanted to teach mathematics, so I wanted to be a math professor at the college level, and then, as part of that curriculum, I started taking, like calculus calculus, 2, 3, etc., and I was introduced as part of the math curriculum programming classes. So computer science, you know, writing code learning about computers to solve math problems.

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: So really, once I got into coding classes and more of the technical Cs type coursework I was. I was like, oh, maybe math isn't the Major. I want to to pursue. Maybe it's computer science I want to pursue. So I quickly pivoted and switched my major to computer science.

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Kara Snyder: All of that sounds like it was just meant to be

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: So tell me about your time as a computer science student. You know it wasn't what you initially thought, where you initially thought you would be on campus. What was that like to choose something that maybe you weren't expecting to

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: to choose? Did you have friends in the Major? Tell me about that experience? Yeah. Yeah. So fortunately I as you, it's a big school, but it's a very Once you get into your Major. It's a very small, tight knit community. So I always look at my computer science days at Isu. We had a Really, it's a lot of the same students in the classes that you tell up. We had very high touch, smaller classes with, you know, personal attention from professors. So it was a really positive experience. I I I felt like the instructors, were very accessible, and they were there today

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to help you and guide you and answer your questions and share their knowledge.

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: So it was, you know. I look back at at at that time, I would say, probably the only difference was there. Wasn't a lot of females in computer science at the time. This is, you know, over 20 years ago, and and I did feel like I was probably one of the only girls or one of the only few girls in the computer science program, but it never really bothered me. I was always very involved, and and we I was involved in the Computer Science Club and and encoding competition. So it, you know I don't. Really it never bothered me, but it was something that

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: that you know. Hopefully. Now, in in the

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: current age. We have more women in computer science. We're encouraging girls to code that it's a field that is, for anyone, right? Actually, it started with females. If you look back at a history.

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: Oh, that's interesting. I didn't realize that. Oh, yeah, the first computer programmer was was a female, and and

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: women were kind of the human computers back in the days before we even had the machines. So it's it's a it's a great field.

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Kara Snyder: Yes, that reminds me of hidden figures, you know. You watch that and kind of bring some of that human computer thought process To the forefront shines the light on that

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: right?

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Kara Snyder: So tell me. What what did that look like when you got in the field? You are in this entry level position, and I imagine that it was probably very much like the classroom, right? Maybe not a lot of female representation. What did that look like once you got into the workforce.

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: you know. Actually, I right out of Isu. I. I worked for a company called Cardinal Health, and I was very fortunate to be surrounded by a lot of great female leaders and and fellow female mentors in the computer science field. So some of the project managers and project leaders where I was working at or were female, so it never. It didn't look, as you know, as far as in terms of female representation, as as maybe some other companies.

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: But you know once again, that's not something I ever focused on really for me is this is a passion. I love solving problems. I love learning new things. I love how technology is such an enable, or for efficiency, and doing things more better. So I've just always just kind of dug right in, and and you know.

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: try to provide value there using my skill sets, but

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: it's it's it's a wonderful field, and I I also wanted to give a big shout out to Isu for encouraging internship. So when I was a Cs student they encouraged me to do internship. So during the summer I worked at allegiance and Cardinal House I did a couple of internships before I accepted a full time position after graduation. So the internships

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: really gave you a nice view in terms of what to expect when you're going to be working in the real world, applying these computer science, you know, programming skills. Here's what to expect Here's the type of projects you're going to be working on. Here's the kind of business problems you're going to be solving. So yeah, great program.

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Kara Snyder: I love that. And I, I personally think it's so special that I issue encourages that. So it's so wonderful to hear from a successful alum as yourself, and to say, No, it really worked, and it

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: sounds like you interned at the company where you ended up getting your first full time. Position is that I did. Yeah. So it was a wonderful way to get my foot in the door at the company, and also, you know it's. It's it's great. It's it's a great recruiting tool for firms to attract computer science, talent and vice versa. It's a great tool for first time

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: computer graduates to start getting experience in the real world and working for, you know, a reputable company. The other thing to car I want to mention is

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: I've had a lot of amazing leadership. Opportunities at at Isu as a student, and that included, being a resident assistant in the dormitory participating in the preview program. All of these experiences kind of

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: helped shape and mold the type of professional and and how I manage my time and and all the things through those programs that I learned really helped me to be a better leader in the computer science field.

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Kara Snyder: You know I love that because I think on the surface, you know, maybe being a resident assistant, or being a preview guide, might not seem like it directly connects. But i'm sure you learned

how to think on your feet, and, like you mentioned problem solving you have to do all of that in those sorts of positions.

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: Exactly. Exactly. And you're interact with a lot of different individuals, you know, different personalities, different approaches problem solving. So it's you're absolutely right. Those are all very valuable experiences.

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Kara Snyder: Yeah. Lots of transferable skills involved there, that's for sure.

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Kara Snyder: So tell us you started as an enter.

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: And now you are a Vice President, so give us the cliff notes. How did you get from Point a. To? Yeah. So well, many, many. There's many aspects involved, but you know, the cliffs of version would be. You know, I started out in a very technical role as a computer programmer, and I transitioned into project management project leadership and eventually into department management and technology, you know, strategic management.

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So and that really happened just through.

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: you know, never saying in my comfort zone, always trying to learn something new, so pursuing opportunities that help me grow professionally and personally. So I keep learning versus being stale with my skill set. I also will attribute it to being having wonderful mentors and colleagues in my in my life. So just

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: people people who have taught me just you know the fundamentals and best practices in it. And and so, I think, just surrounding yourself with smart, intelligent people, and and also stretching yourself to keep learning and to keep growing versus just settling, for I know everything I need to know, but that's not in the it. Field. You can't know everything, so you have to keep learning so I think it's just keep

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: keep being, you know. Keep straight, taking stretch assignments, pushing myself to learn new things, and eventually it kind of leads to these bigger, bigger opportunities

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Kara Snyder: and tell me a little bit about. You know you mentioned those leadership opportunities on campus. You're in a leadership role. Now, what is your leadership? Philosophy?

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: Hmm. That's a great question. I'm a: i'm a people person, and that my style is very democratic. I love. G Get gathering inputs from my team. When we make a decision we make it together. We all all points of views are considered. So my style is very democratic and and very.

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: you know, collaborative. So I I like I like to have a very strong team bond. I like to build a strong team bond where people are no longer just co-workers, but their their friends and their



colleagues, and they really respect each other, and value each other, and try to empathize with each other for

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: both professionally and personally. So that's that's my style is really just to build a strong team. Have a good relationship with my coworkers and and trust each other and work hard to get stuff done together.

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Kara Snyder: I love that. And I think that outlook is so important because it really creates this level of buy-in, where everybody can get excited about the mission and the vision of the company. So I commend you for that because I think that's really exciting.

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Kara Snyder: Thank you.

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Kara Snyder: So tell me what is your favorite part of your job.

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: So I would say, I love my field, and my job is because I have no 2 days, or ever the same, and I'm constantly learning because it's you. You can't know everything right. You'll you'll be. You'll have a problem that never has come up, and you're like oh, I've never seen this before, and you just you have to research. You have to dig in. You have to, you know. Try to solve this problem. So so for me, the continual intellectual stimulation how you know you're you're You're never at a point where, like I just know it all, and i'm comfortable

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with it. You really have to continue to evolve and change and

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: learn new things. So that's that's probably one of my favorite aspects, and of course, the team I love. I love the people I work with. I've I find the the relationship and the camaraderie and the team work. Just it just fuels me. I'm an extroverts that fuels me, and it kind of makes me happy.

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Kara Snyder: So what would you say to a student that is wrapping up their time at I issue and looking at joining the workforce. You know I love your outlook on constantly learning, and I know you know if those students are starting to get tired of classroom learning, how would you encourage them to kind of reframe that, and make sure that they're willing to learn on the job and keep that energy and interest up

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: what you love right? Because, if, like the there's that phrase they, if you do what you love. You never have to work a day in your life.

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00:11:45.620 --> 00:12:10.950

Jolanta.Pomiotlo: Pick, pick a feel that you're really passionate about, and that you you love what you do, and then to never stop learning. Always continue to be curious. Continue to like, look, and and read on your own. Because if you're passionate about something, you'll just that will come naturally. I think so. I've always loved computers. I always love math and logic. So, so naturally, all all things in that area were very interesting to me, and to this day I continue to kind of.

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: you know, research a little bit more and kind of discover the the new aspects of of information like quantum computing, and some of the more innovative AI and innovative areas in it. But I would say, when you finish is you, your education does not stop there. You have to be a lifelong learner, if you want to be successful, so I would say, continue to grow, continue to evolve.

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00:12:35.710 --> 00:12:38.680

Jolanta.Pomiotlo: Continue to to learn and and never stop learning

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Kara Snyder: for the joy of it. Absolutely. That is fantastic advice. And you talked a lot of a lot to about your team and how you create this collaborative environment, and how you know you really want them to feel like they can come to you, build those relationships.

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Kara Snyder: you know, for our students that are getting ready to begin the job search process, especially at this time of year. You know, I think

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Kara Snyder: graduation is in sight at the end of the spring semester. They're going to start job searching. How can they make sure they find the right fit, You know, when they're in the interview process.

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: how can they find a team that's a good fit for them? Do you have any questions you recommend? They ask, or what sorts of things could they look for

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: to make sure that it's a mutually beneficial arrangement so, and be picky, because I always tell like friends, and and you know, younger colleagues, you're trading your light. Your time, like your time, is your most precious commodity that you have as a person right, and when you work, you're trading your time for a paycheck. So you want to make sure that you are working, and you are enjoying what you do. You are working at a company that values you, that shares the same values as you might have that has a purpose and a mission.

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: So I I always advise, you know, individuals just like be picky like Don't don't just settle for anything that comes your way, really, or just for paycheck. Really, do what you love find the right company that that

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: aligns with your values and your interest. And and so you're going to be happy day when you wake up in the morning. It's Monday 9, am. You're not going to be like oh, I have to work you. You want to avoid that scenario. You just want to wake up you like. I'm excited. We're going to keep going. We're going to work on this new project. You want to have that that that excitement so, and it starts with who you who you work for and and what team members you work with, you know, are you?

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: Do you have a good synergy, the right attitude. All of that comes into play.

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Kara Snyder: Excellent! Thank you so much.

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Kara Snyder: Well, I loved hearing about your favorite part of your job. But now i'm curious what is the most challenging. Think about your job.

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: I don't know that. But let me do some research. I think that's that Sometimes that could be challenging, not having all the answers, but knowing where to look for the answers, or knowing where to turn to to find the answers. I think that's more critical, challenging other aspects of of the I mean. Sometimes I would say.

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: you know

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: the people aspect I mean it's. I love people, and it's it's it's wonderful to work with colleagues, but sometimes people could also be a challenging component as well. So but

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: sure, yeah, yeah, I think you'll find that anywhere right. Of course, of course I mean it's it's all like, I think, if you approach it with a with a sense of understanding and a sense of empathy, and again. Kind of, you know, trying to look at other people's perspective that comes that you know that challenge is easily overcome sometimes so

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Kara Snyder: absolutely, and so tell me when you say you know you say I don't know I'm going to do some research. I'm going to find that answer. Were you always so comfortable telling someone that you didn't know. Or was that something that you've had to learn throughout your career?

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I I would probably say I, I've always been pretty comfortable with that, because i'm a very authentic, honest person. If I don't know the answer, i'm not going to make up an answer and just pull it out of thin air, which some people, you know do that i'm more of the you know. If I know something, i'll answer it correctly. If I don't, I will say.

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: i'm not sure. Let me research that i'll get back to you. Or if there's even just if there's a process that you might not understand you. You just you kind of go follow up. Do the research. See? We see how it works, and then come back to to you know the person who's asking the question. So I think that's a pretty.

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: I I would say it's better to answer it, and and honestly say you know I honestly do not know that, but I will find out for you versus just, you know. Start spitting out answers that might be wrong.

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Kara Snyder: Absolutely. I'm sure that level of transparency is so valuable to your team, and, like you said, just coming at it from a place of authenticity, i'm sure that really resonates with those around you. So that's a wonderful outlook.

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Kara Snyder: so we will go ahead and finish with a speed round. So i'm going to have you just go with your first instinct on these questions, and we'll get to know you just that much better. So we are you a morning person or a night owl?

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: Morning person

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: always has. That always been that way. Would you say that always campus? Oh, always yeah. And my husband's a night owl? So it's like complete opposite. I'm a 60'clock in the morning. Up and right, you know, functioning already, and my husband is like up to like one am so total opposite. But it works it works. How does it say, Isn't, that always the way

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Kara Snyder: favorite day of the week.

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: any day? I honestly don't have a favorite. I love Monday's, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursdays All days are special, so I I like them all.

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00:18:07.480 --> 00:18:09.110

Kara Snyder: Oh, I love that outlook.

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Kara Snyder: salty or sweet, sweet. I have a big, sweet tooth love sugar, so do you bake, or you have a favorite snack. I I hate to cook, but I love to bake because I have a sweet tooth. What's the best trip you've ever taken?

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: Hmm. In 2,011. I I took a year off with my husband to travel the world before we had children. So we followed summer all the way around the world, and it was. It was a year long trip where we visited over 33 countries, and about like 260 cities. So it's pretty fast. Yeah, it was an amazing experience, and I highly encourage all is you students to travel internationally to see the world and see the possibilities.

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Kara Snyder: That's incredible. I bet you learned so much just over the course of 365 days. Oh, My gosh.

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: hmm. I like both. I love books, but I also like to watch a good movie. Can we do both

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: if you have a free Saturday with no obligations. How do you spend it

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Jolanta.Pomiotlo: with my children? Probably time and Nature taking my dog for a walk, taking the kids to the park just relaxing. I I love the outdoors. I'm a huge nature buff and nature fan. So being outdoors

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00:19:34.830 --> 00:19:37.520

Kara Snyder: hard to beat fresh air, that's for sure.

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00:19:37.820 --> 00:19:57.690

Kara Snyder: And then the important one Avanti's gondola or Alvant. He's, of course the bread is it's just. Is it still that sweet, delicious? It is so good with the creamy butter so good you got it.



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00:19:57.880 --> 00:20:10.200

Kara Snyder: and one last question for you. If you could give one piece of advice to a college student, and I know our conversation has been packed full of wonderful advice. But if you have one more, what would you say?

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00:20:10.320 --> 00:20:29.240

Jolanta.Pomiotlo: Oh, I probably repeat what I've said earlier. Just do what you love and never stop learning. Just you at college is not the end. It's just the beginning. I it's it's it's just a spark to open your eyes, and to discover your vocation and your passions. But then, from there you got to keep learning and keep growing

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00:20:29.580 --> 00:20:48.519

Kara Snyder: well. I think that's a great lesson for anybody who is listening to this. So thank you so much for being here. We have had the pleasure of speaking with Yolanda Pamela, Vice President of information technology at exif today. Join us next time on the podcast for more stories from our cast alumni.