

From Pupil to Instructor

Retiring HS Graphics Communications Teacher Replaced by Former Student & Phoenix Challenge Participant

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After 19 years as a graphics communications teacher at Johnson High School in Gainesville, GA and serving as the teacher liaison for his students in numerous Phoenix Challenge High School Competitions, Scott Porter is retiring.

But what makes his particular retirement unique is that Grayson Anthony, who will be taking over the entire graphic arts program for Porter, is a former student and member of the school's Phoenix Challenge team. In fact, Anthony participated in Porter's first Phoenix Challenge as a student in 2013. Back then, Anthony was a senior in Porter's advanced graphic design class.

The replacement seems fitting, as Porter remembers student Anthony as having what the industry refers to as "it."

"He sees the big picture. He came to my program and immediately picked up the craft," the retiree recalls. "Grayson soon became my go-to student."

LIFELONG LEARNING

It wasn't only in class that Anthony learned the trade. During both high school and college—where he studied business administration

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Grayson Anthony

at the University of North Georgia—the newly minted instructor worked at a print shop called Instant Imprints doing screen printing, embroidery, signs and banners (he says he enjoys the job so much that he still occasionally works there). During college, Anthony also found the time to return to his former teacher's classroom to help him train students. "I knew then that I hoped someday he would replace me," says Porter.

To see that wish come true is a great feeling for the retiring teacher. Having put a lot of effort into the program, Porter did not want it to become what he describes as “just another business lab” when he retired. A high school with a flexography program makes the school unique, especially in the state of Georgia. “I wanted the flexo program to grow,” he adds.

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Scott Porter

Participating in the Phoenix Challenge is still a memory Anthony cherishes from his high school career. As a Phoenix Challenge competitor, he was in charge of cutting plates and attaching them to cylinders that were going on press. Anthony recalls his favorite part of the competition was trying to recreate a Pantone color using the different ink parts that it required, and then testing it using a roller.

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Toward the end of college, his career path turned to logistics. After graduating, he worked as a logistics coordinator—a job he loved, but one that left him feeling like he wanted to do something else. That’s when the call about Porter’s job came.

“It is very exciting for me to return to my alma mater,” Anthony says about the opportunity. “It will be a huge change for me and a huge responsibility to live up to the standards that my high school teacher has held in his classroom. There are big shoes to fill and I am very excited. I know I will be learning a lot about myself as well as how to run this program with the caliber that Scott has for the last few decades.”

Echoing his own career path, Anthony says young flexographers should strive to be lifelong learners of all different types of printing, and to make connections with everyone they work with and know.

“I also would recommend to never burn any bridges with employers or friends. You never know when you might need that connection in the future,” he advises. “I have known too many people who will burn a bridge with an employer and not even care. You never know who your next boss may be.”



Grayson Anthony (left) and Scott Porter
Photo courtesy of Grayson Anthony

MAKING AN IMPACT

When it comes to the Phoenix Challenge, Porter says he will always remember how impressed he was with the level of industry involvement. “The Phoenix Challenge staff and industry supporters give their sweat and blood to the youth and industry. It’s truly unique.”

Porter describes the annual high school competition as a life-changer for students. “Students always want to return the next year because they felt the experience was great. I’ve had parents thank me numerous times for taking their child to the Challenge.”

One way it changes lives? By leading to career opportunities. Porter points to Pao Sengkhammee, plant manager of Zebra Technologies, who has hired many of his students. “Pao has been instrumental in supporting our students and was the one who introduced me to [Phoenix Challenge Chairman] Bettylyn Krafft and the Phoenix Challenge,” Porter recalls. “Bettylyn and the industry supporters of the Phoenix Challenge have touched so many lives. Grayson is a prime example of how a life was enriched by their desire to help others.”

PASSING THE BATON

Anthony remembers Porter being more like a coach than a teacher, making sure students knew he cared about them. He praised Porter for helping students get jobs in the industry, and says he admires him for helping students create a future for themselves.

“Scott has made a huge impact in my life and he was an awesome teacher,” Anthony says. “He was one of the few teachers who actually taught real-world information. He would always use real stuff, like showing actual printing plates and statistics about jobs.”

And what advice does Porter have for his former student, as he takes over his role? “Treat students with respect and always be honest with them. Develop a network of friends in the industry who will support you. Strive to be your best and develop a servant attitude.” ■