

## Joseph M. Diorio ('15) remembers Rowan's Influence on his KoffieStraw Entrepreneurship

*Joseph M. Diorio was born in Voorhees, NJ. He grew up in Franklinville, NJ. His mother is a computer programmer and a Glassboro State College graduate. His father is a project manager in residential construction. Joseph has two younger brothers. Both went to Rowan for engineering degrees. One just finished his PhD at Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN, in Biomedical Engineering. He was a Chemical Engineer at Rowan. The other is an Electrical and Computer Engineer working for the Federal Aviation Administration in Atlantic City, NJ.*



*Joseph completed his Rowan Civil and Environmental Engineering degree in 2015. He immediately started a Master's in Patent Law at Notre Dame, South Bend, IN. After graduating from Notre Dame, Joe returned to Rowan and worked at the South Jersey Technology Park as the Patent Portfolio Manager and Interim Director of the Office of Technology Commercialization for one and a half years. His job had him work with several Patent Attorneys who encouraged him to go to Law school. After scoring well on the LSATs, Joe received a scholarship to attend Villanova University, Philadelphia, PA. While at Villanova, Joe completed an externship with Rowan's General Counsel department. Joe completed his Law degree in 2020 and, since then, he has passed the bar and is a practicing Attorney with a specialty in Patent Law.*

*In addition to being a full-time Patent Attorney, Joe is the owner and operator of KoffieStraw LLC. He got the idea for KoffieStraw during his senior year at Rowan. KoffieStraw is a silicone reusable straw specifically designed for hot beverages. The company sells the KoffieStraws to retail shops, including Rowan's Barnes and Noble bookstore. KoffieStraw also provides custom labeled straws for businesses and events.*

*Outside of work, Joe loves to travel, play sports, and enjoy the great outdoors. Recently, Joe moved to Boise, ID where he regularly hikes, snowboards, and rock climbs.*

I chose Rowan Engineering because Rowan offered a great engineering program while also allowing me to stay close to my family in South Jersey. It was the best of both worlds, I could commute to school to save on living costs, stay close to family, all while pursuing my engineering degree. After knowing that I wanted to pursue engineering at Rowan, I decided to focus on Civil and Environmental Engineering because of my childhood. Growing up, I spent a lot of time on my dad's construction sites and even had some experience surveying. This helped me to become familiar with Civil Engineering and helped me decide to pursue it in school.

The Engineering Clinic<sup>1</sup> classes were my best experience at Rowan. In one clinic, I worked with Electrical and Computer Engineering Professor John Schmalzel, and we were able to meet with the client and visit their facility in Vineland, NJ. I still remember that day and it provided such a great real-world experience. In addition to the Clinic classes, I also remember participating in

the Elevator Pitch Competition in the College of Business at Rowan my junior year. I was always entrepreneurial and interested in learning more about inventions and startups. This interest is what led to my development of KoffieStraw during my senior year of undergrad. Coffee cups at that time had an oval opening, and there weren't any existing straws that were designed with that shape in mind. Wanting to find a solution to this problem, I designed some straws in AutoCAD and started playing around with materials. Silicone ended up being the best material due to its thermal properties and its sustainability. The business competitions and my Engineering Clinic experiences helped me to bring my idea to life.

After developing KoffieStraw, I knew the straw needed to be patented. To cut costs, I wanted to file the patent myself. Coincidentally, I checked an email from the Rowan's Engineering Outreach Office<sup>2</sup>, which frequently sent out career opportunities. One opportunity described the Notre Dame patent law program, which was the perfect fit for my interests. I could utilize my engineering degree (since you need a STEM<sup>3</sup> background to pursue patent law) while also combining my interest in entrepreneurship. This led to me filing and obtaining a US patent on the KoffieStraw.

I started KoffieStraw LLC with my mother and cousin around the time I went to Notre Dame. The company came together quickly and was an immediate success. We have had some notable media over the years, such as working with one of the sharks, Daymond John, from the hit TV show Shark Tank, and also appearing on the Today Show to showcase KoffieStraw. Now, 9 years later, KoffieStraw is still up and running and has been recognized by Market Watch as one of the leading businesses in the Reusable Straw industry. As for me, I still split my time between running KoffieStraw and practicing law as a freelance Patent Attorney.

Although from a first glance, a law degree may seem like a big change from engineering, Rowan's Civil and Environmental program prepared me well for law school because I learned the problem-solving mindset and a strong work ethic. The problems may be different, e.g. understanding case law vs. designing a wastewater treatment plant, but the methods were still the same - break down the issues into smaller components and show your work!

The story of my career—like showing my work—wouldn't be complete without the pivotal part Rowan University has played.

[Editor's note: Most engineers end up working in engineering, but an engineering degree prepares you for just about any career. Engineers become doctors, lawyers, accountants, etc. "More top-performing CEOs now have engineering degrees than MBAs" (Washington Post, 2018).]

*Based on an Interview with Jess W. Everett on 2024-3-8*

1. Engineering Clinic is a hallmark of Rowan University. Students take a Clinic class each semester, eight total. Many are interdisciplinary. All are hands-on. First-year Clinics focus on engineering's place in society and fundamental engineering skills. Sophomore Clinics merge communication coursework with an engineering design experience and are team taught by engineering, writing arts, and rhetoric faculty. Junior and Senior Clinics have students work in teams on research or design projects, usually externally funded.

2. The Engineering Outreach Office “is actively engaged in outreach activities leading to partnerships with organizations, corporations and entrepreneurs. These alliances have created synergistic opportunities where students get real-world, hands-on experiences through industry-based projects and exciting summer internships. These collaborations also lead to career placement opportunities upon graduation, contributing to the Henry M. Rowan College of Engineering's success in placing engineering students.”

3. STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.