



**ERIN CERENZIA**

### What is your current position?

Neighbourhood Network Coordinator, Magna International. Neighbourhood Network is a not-for-profit Magna for Community initiative. Founded by Belinda Stronach and funded by Magna International Inc., our organization partners with municipalities in York Region and promotes opportunities to engage volunteers with local charities and community groups. Neighbourhood Network has over 5,000 active volunteers and 200 charities and community groups currently partnered. As Coordinator, my role encompasses many fields, including:

- o Liaison between 200 charities and community groups partnered with Neighbourhood Network
  - o Planning and facilitation of Neighbourhood Network signature programs (including Spring Tree Planting, Fall Food Drive, Holiday Gift Drive, Snow Removal Program, and Give Back Award - scholarship program)
  - o Principle contact point for all individuals looking to get involved in the community
  - o Participant in the Newmarket and Aurora Chamber of Commerce(s), member of the Character Community Foundation of York Region council, member of the York Region Association for Volunteer Administration council
  - Additionally, I work on:
    - o Strategic, operational, and marketing planning
    - o Content for weekly e-newsletters, website, and local community publications
- Wrote, co-produced, and hosted "Step Up, Give Back" - a 6-episode Rogers TV series on volunteering

#### About my current historical work

- Participant in the 2013 Canadian Battlefields Foundation Study Tour
- Guest speaker at the Newmarket branch of the Royal Canadian Legion AGM, 30 September 2013
- Keynote speaker at the Character Community Foundation of York Region's Respect and Remembrance Tea (for veterans) at the Aurora branch of the Royal Canadian Legion, 21 October 2013
- Contributor (articles, local history research) to the Newmarket Historical Society
- Contributor (display, local history articles, and online exhibit) Newmarket Public Library
- Contributor to local newspaper's Remembrance Day issue
- Member of the *Newmarket Remembers the Great War* Centennial Committee
- Member of the Queen's York Rangers Committee

Author of *The Time Traveler's Life: A Modern Day Historian Bringing 20th Century Europe to Life in the Present* blog, <http://timetravelerslife.blogspot.ca/>

### What History program did you take at Western? What year did you graduate?

Master of Arts in History – successfully completed program August 2013 and scheduled to graduate from The University of Western Ontario 1 November 2013  
Honors Specialization in History – graduated from The University of Western Ontario 2012

### How did your History degree prepare you for your current position?

When I began my undergraduate degree, I faced the challenging question that other History students have been asked countless times – “what will you do with a degree in History?” To many people looking in on the world of academia, three logical paths seem to exist for historians after graduation. The first is the most obvious one; “you can become a history teacher,” the many will tell you. And if that isn't your grand plan, the many will either place you in the job category of “something to do with museums” or will suggest that you consider “more school to get your PhD, because what good is an undergraduate degree in History anyway?” And yet, I am a former History student whose career aspirations have led me away from these three logical paths, and outside the world of academia. Instead, I operate in the not-for-profit sector of the business world, and although I am no longer researching resistance to the Nazi Party, I continue to utilize my history degrees on a daily basis.

In business, your communication skills are absolutely essential to your success. Beginning with writing, my degrees have put me leaps and bounds ahead of some of my colleagues. You would be shocked at the number of people who cannot write, a skill that is second nature to us historians. At my job, I have been responsible for writing anything and everything from Strategic Planning reports, to website content, and even things as small – but as necessary in today's business fields – as social media. In addition to writing, I have been tasked with many formal presentations throughout my career. Things as small as presenting in a committee meeting to as large as working as a television host are all a part of my job. The comfort I have when making presentations is a confidence I gained directly from years of seminar participation. I have found that if you actively participate in seminars, discussing and debating with your TA or even your professor, you will be confident in tackling meetings and other audience-based activities in the workplace that come your way.

In conjunction with these communication skills, my research strength, a finely honed tool developed over five years working in Western's archives for many history essays, has been critical. I find I am able to read through documents faster than most, yet with the same level of detail that is necessary when researching for a major paper. Research, no matter what type – whether it is looking in an archive, to learning about the needs of non-profit organizations, stems from the same knowledge and skill base, and that is what my degree helped me to develop. Similarly, my critical thinking and analysis skillset are integral to the business world, but both were enhanced throughout my time studying History.

### What would you tell an incoming History student?

The most important thing I would tell an incoming History student is: do not be afraid to study what you love! If History is your passion, throw yourself into it whole-heartedly. If you study what you love, you will develop critical life skills while also expanding your knowledge on a subject you actually care about, making your education experience that much more meaningful. It is so important to remember that while you may not apply your history degree in the sense that “I did my degree on Nazis so I will have a job related to Nazis” it does not mean that your degree was useless, that you didn't learn anything, or that you are not actually using skills from your degree.

There are countless ways to apply history to your everyday life once you leave Lawson Hall. In my own case, I have reached out to my local community and embraced history in every possible way. I focused a lot of my Master's research on the history of my town during the First World War, and as such, have been asked to contribute pieces for our local Historical Society, to Town Council, and in other veteran-centred events. I have also created a blog where I update community residents and other followers on historical events and information as I experience and research it. Most recently, I was selected to tour the European battlefields of the two World Wars with the Canadian Battlefield Foundation Study Tour, and blogged my way around Europe, sharing the experience with everyone. Lastly, I have found that talking to seniors – whether it is your own relatives, local veterans, or visiting with people in retirement homes – is a fantastic way to learn new bits of history and incorporate history into your daily life.

The last piece of advice I will leave you with is another “do not be afraid,” this time, do not be afraid to take a history course outside your area of interest or with a professor who is rumoured to be a “hard marker.” Do not get me wrong, these choices will definitely challenge you, but you will learn more about history, and yourself, than you thought you ever could! Do not hold yourself back, and always strive to be the best historian and person you can be!

### Any other thoughts or comments?

Lawson Hall is our home; make good use of it and enjoy your time there, you will miss it when you are gone!