

Evans Scholar Alum has full circle moment

Jason Drake (MSU '00) is Plante Moran's next managing partner, where he'll lead one of the nation's largest audit, tax, consulting and wealth management firms — and help drive a commitment to giving back as a corporate partner of the Evans Scholars Program.

Tell us how you began caddying.

I was about 10 years old and wanted to make money. My grandpa was friends with the caddie manager at Pine Lake Country Club. We grew up in Pontiac, Michigan, and my dad worked at General Motors. Caddying was a great way for us to earn money. Every summer since I was 11, I've pretty much lived at the golf course. I could see from that there was a better life out there, and I'd have to work hard, build relationships and go to college to achieve that.

What did you learn from caddying?

It was hard at the beginning. The bags were bigger than me. Once I grew, I got the hang of it. The success I've had today can be in large part attributed to what I learned from caddying, especially in public accounting — it's all about client service. I've been doing that since I was 11, thinking about clients and how I can add value.

Growing up, we didn't know anyone who was a doctor, lawyer or business owner — but being a caddie exposed me to those people. It also instilled confidence in me when it came to working with others. When I'd encounter someone who wasn't the nicest, I'd give them the benefit of the doubt because they could have had a bad day. I also had the opportunity to work with really incredible people — one couple brought me under their wing and would check in with me through different life transitions. They even told me if I didn't get the Evans Scholarship, they would help with college. Caddying introduced me to many people who I feel fortunate to have known.

Tell us about your career.

I started as an intern at Plante Moran in 1999. And in July, I'll take on the role of the firm's managing



partner.

Throughout my career, I've been focused on audit, consulting and helping to build and grow the firm's international practice. When I started, we didn't have any international offices; now, we have offices in China, India, Japan and Mexico. It's been rewarding to help extend Plante Moran's culture to staff 8,000 miles away. Growing up, I never traveled. It wasn't until college that I even got on a plane. The Evans Scholars helped fuel a big part of my passion for travel. Now, I've traveled almost 3 million miles, and I've been to about 50 countries. It's been an incredible journey.

Why is giving back important?

When I take on a new role, whether it's managing partner at Plante Moran or joining the Evans Scholars' executive board, I strive for excellence. In my role at Plante Moran, I look for opportunities to add value, not just for our clients and staff, but for the communities around us. And being a corporate partner of the Evans Scholars Program is just one of the ways we do that. Plante Moran has nine Evans Scholars working either full-time or as interns. We sponsor career services for Scholars, and we've done networking sessions at Ohio State, Michigan State and the University of Michigan. I also mentor a student at Penn State. And one thing is always consistent — the Scholars all have passion, drive and energy.

For me, it's a full circle moment. I'm here today because of people who were willing to invest in me; I want to continue to invest in others. My experience as a caddie and Evans Scholar set me on this path and led me to where I am today. It's been very special to me.

