



GOING places

By Jim Biros, Photo by Jed Carlson

Stephanie Romanoff can't sit still.

It's not really her fault – she's got too much to do.

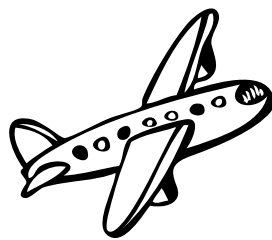
As a child, she hopped across the United States and South America – attending three high schools between Maryland and Ecuador. With a father who works in international agricultural development, relocating was expected for Romanoff and her two siblings. As if growing up isn't a difficult enough process, she had to adjust to not only new teachers and classmates, but to a new country and culture.

All of that moving around instilled in Romanoff a desire to connect with the place and people that she called home – even if it would only be for a short while.

“Being that I've moved around to different parts of the U.S., I still always feel that appreciation of where I am and try to embrace that,” she says.

The wanderlust did not stop in Ecuador. After getting an undergraduate degree in economics, Romanoff worked for human service nonprofits in Philadelphia and Chicago before she landed in Northwestern Wisconsin and instantly felt a connection with the place.

“When I got to Ashland and Washburn, I thought ‘I guess I'll just be there for the summer’ and the place was like Velcro – in a good way – and I just knew I was home,” she says. “I fell in love with it – I just knew that was my home.”



“WITC was supportive along the way,” she says. “They knew about my commitment to volunteering and working with youth. When the youth wanted to explore things like taking CNA classes, WITC was right there, whether it was taking tests to see if they could get in, to helping them secure funding for school, they were really proactive about it. They understood, respected and encouraged that type of involvement.”

counseling courses and is currently in a master’s program for social work in the Duluth area that she calls home – for now.

She is employed as the marketing director for the Integrative Holistic Board, which provides doctors education and board certification in integrative holistic medicine, working to connect doctors and other medical professionals to the organization. At WITC, she became interested in how to help heal effects of trauma on developing brains, which is something she is still passionate about. In her current position, she is learning about a more holistic approach to health and wellness that will affect her own future practice in therapy settings.

“Social relationships are absolutely critical for our physical well-being, she says. “[That’s] why it’s so important to connect with others and be a part of a community. The more I learn about this, the stronger my commitment is to our community and maintaining our community. That’s what’s so special about Ashland and about Washburn and about the WITC campuses – they do have that community and it affects us professionally, emotionally and ultimately it affects us physically.”

While there, Romanoff looked into continuing her education and weighed her options to stay in the Chequamegon Bay area or seeking out a new destination.

“My sister lives in Chicago and I had looked at classes there,” she says “[For] the cost of a course there, you can take a semester at WITC-Ashland and the reputation is solid. You know you’re going to get hired. If you’re interested in health care, WITC’s nursing program is just rock solid.”

The switch from economics to nursing, along with a changing career path, was something she felt confident and excited about pursuing.

“My undergraduate provided a strong skill set, but I wanted to pick up some technical skills as I transitioned my career to be more focused on direct service,” Romanoff says. “WITC, especially the nursing program in Ashland, had really strong reputation. My understanding was that WITC would be a challenging program that carried a lot of weight with employers.”

Romanoff speaks highly of the program.

“It exceeded my expectations,” she says. “At this point, I’ve taken a lot of classes in various settings. I can’t say enough good things about my courses and teachers at WITC. My anatomy and physiology

classes with Jodi Karr were amazing. Yes, they were wicked hard, but I’ve learned so much that affects me personally and professionally. Professionally, doors got opened. Personally, the knowledge from those courses changed my understanding of my own health and wellness.”

As a WITC student, Romanoff was a mentor at the middle school after-school program and became involved with the Ashland Mentoring Program. Connected with the county court system, youth in the program must complete an alcohol and drug prevention course before being assigned with a mentor.

“I found that one of the most rewarding experiences of my life and I learned a lot – about our community and the students,” she says. “It’s a cliché that you get more back than you put into it, but it’s absolutely true. I got to work with an extraordinary student who now has a full life, is in college and is rocking out and it’s incredible to see her make that all happen.”

While there, Romanoff coordinated the middle school after-school summer camp.

“I loved my job so much,” she says. “I got to work with incredible kids from the Ashland community and we lived it up.

Working with parental involvement, Romanoff, along with Len Moore, Bridget Moore and Rose Spieler-Sandberg, helped organize summer camp activities.

Romanoff had the added benefit of being able to work with the youth when questions about education and their future arose. The mentoring experience had a career-changing effect on Romanoff, affirming her interest in working with youth and taking her to a new city and new schools to continue her education. Not that she’s uncomfortable with change. She has since completed