

SDSU alumnus builds a life after graduation

By Esther Dacanay
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Once an Aztec, always a San Diegan.

Writing for "After Hours," a column that used to be featured in *The Daily Aztec*, gave Barry Berndes the inspiration to launch his

annual publication, the *San Diegan*, formerly called *San Diego Guide*, which is now celebrating 30 years in business.

Berndes eats in more than 150 different restaurants a year, pays for his own meals, inspects kitchens and writes about his findings in the *San Diegan*.

As if trying new restaurants isn't enjoyable enough, Berndes also reviews night clubs, sporting events, recreation, local hotels, resorts in Mexico and shopping.

"What I sell is consistency, so I have to eat in restaurants again and again to ensure that

my reviews accurately reflect the quality of the restaurant," Berndes said.

"So when I get a bad meal I go back and eat there again before I decide to leave them out of the book."

Please see ALUMNUS on page 10

ALUMNUS

continued from page 6

Berndes has lived in San Diego since he was 10 years old.

After attending San Diego City College for one year, Berndes transferred to San Diego State University where he earned a bachelor's degree in journalism.

Shortly after Berndes graduated in 1964, he was accepted into the Peace Corps and Officer Candidate School. He entered the U.S. Navy as an ensign during the beginning of the Vietnam War and later became a lieutenant.

"I was a stranger to every place I traveled to while in the Navy," he said. "Once I got out of the Navy, I decided to write a book about San Diego and include everything a best friend would tell you about the city. That's why everything is personally reviewed."

After serving in the military, Berndes had two goals in mind: launching the *San Diegan* and building a wine cellar under his parents' Point Loma home.

And he did both.

Within a half-hour of receiving cursory permission from his father to build the cellar, Berndes rented a jack hammer and started breaking ground.

As for the publication, Berndes invested the \$4,000 he had saved while in the Navy into launching the first *San Diegan* in 1969.

"Building this business was very difficult at first," he said. "No one in their right mind would start a publication like the *San Diegan* with less than \$4 million."

Berndes lost some money on his publication the first year, but with a heartfelt passion for success, he persevered and survived through a myriad of mistakes.

"By now, I know how to do everything wrong," he said. "The fact that we have a successful business today is an absolute miracle."

After losing money on the first edition, Berndes sought advice from his former SDSU marketing professor, Richard Darley. Darley gave Berndes two suggestions: get a master's degree or do some research at the library.

Because of his financial constraints, Berndes chose the latter. He went to the book stacks in Love Library and began

researching topics like distribution, marketing strategy, business ownership and management. He did this five days a week for two months.

"I was just an entrepreneur," he said. "It's hard to be successful when you don't have any money and when you don't have anyone in the marketplace to emulate."

In 1973, Berndes decided to use his G.I. Bill funds to attend SDSU as a part-time student to pursue a master's degree in sociology.

However, he stopped attending school when his business tripled in 1975, the year he decided to change the look of the publication's cover from sunsets and cartoons to a picture of himself as a trademark personality.

Berndes credits this advice to a woman he used to date, a former reporter for *The San Diego Union-Tribune*.

"One night we went out to dinner, and after her third mai tai, she said, 'Barry, if you put your picture on your cover, everyone will see how much fun you're having and will buy your book,'" he said.

Since then, Berndes has appeared as a guest on numerous television and radio talk shows.

Berndes strongly encourages students to take advantage of internships and to network with leaders in the field.

"Part of giving back to the university is giving students an opportunity to work at our company to find out whether or not they want to continue to pursue a career in this field," he said.

"I think the most difficult thing for a college student is determining his worth in the marketplace."

You do not have to own a business to be successful, he said, you just need to have a passion for something — magnify a need in society and fulfill that need.

"Although I wasn't the top person in my class, I had a burning desire to be successful out in the world," Berndes said. "If Barry Berndes, an average student, can be a success, so can others."

After all, he said, success is getting paid for doing what you love and loving what you do.