

Turning a Lifestyle into a Brand

RYAN ORABONE '06 grew up skiing and has always had a passion for it. He loved the close-family atmosphere that he found up on the mountain, how everyone is happy, how nobody fights.

"I see it said in sports all the time," says Orabone, "players saying 'my teammates are my family.' But we have family on the ski mountain that is truly a second family." Orabone ultimately turned his obsession with skiing into a livelihood: he founded a ski apparel company called Till I Die.

After graduating from Marist with a double major in marketing and international business, he became an assistant buyer for Macy's and worked his way up in the company. After three and a half years, he left Macy's and went on the road with friend Paul Vikan to sell his first T-shirt designs.

They were "awful," he says. The effort failed and he spent all his money. He decided to learn all he could about the apparel industry in order to start his own company. "I was dead-set on making this happen."

He went to work for clothing companies Greg Norman, True Religion Jeans, and Ben Sherman, gaining exposure to every side of the business.

In 2010 Orabone started his company, calling it Ski Till I Die. Then, he says, "we realized that people have the same passion for whatever they do that we have for skiing." So he dropped the word "ski." The idea was still "Whatever you do, do it forever. Do it till you die."

As for a logo, he wanted something that could be easily recognized. He chose a shield with two diamonds, reflecting the double-diamond ski trail sign that indicates an expert-only trail.

His goal is to make Till I Die a national iconic brand. He wants people to see the logo and think the brand is active and fun.

Orabone still goes on the road, this time with more success. Each week he drives about 500 miles for buyers' meetings and on-site events, circling from his home in Killington, VT, to New York City and Rhode Island, where

his supplier is located. The apparel is started in Honduras and finished in America. Next year, products will originate in India. Although currently he is the only full-time staffer, he has help from four others including Scott Kaufman '06 who handles marketing and public relations. He plans to hire an associate and two interns this summer.

Currently on-site events such as pop-up shops at ski resorts bring in 50 percent of his business. Events also include fundraisers for Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports and Carve for Cancer.

The Till I Die customer base is split evenly between men and women. They are ages 25-34 and live mainly in the Northeast. Web sales bring in 25 percent, as do sales in 30 stores that carry Till I Die apparel.

This past February, Orabone returned to the Marist campus to speak to students in the College's Fashion Program about starting a fashion brand. He offered some tips.

"It's really important when you start your own company to know what you know and know what you don't know." For example, he let others create the company web site since web design wasn't in his skill set.

"It's OK to make mistakes." His first decals weren't waterproof, he said. He cited a second example: a T-shirt he was determined to sell in an orange hue.

"People just don't like tangerine." The same shirt in mint green sold out four times.

"Pair what you know with what you love." He knew skiing, and he knew how to plan, he says.

The future of Till I Die is looking good. This summer his apparel will be in surf shops for the first time. His products will be in 75 ski shops next season. His items will be in all 50 states by 2020. In 2019 he will start selling in Canada.

He's thinking of branching out into fishing and boating apparel.

"I love doing this. Every single day is awesome." 📸

—Eros Rios-Tinoco '20



Ryan Orabone '06 returned to campus to speak to Fashion Program students about his apparel company, Till I Die.

York's Dutchess County. Drink More Good, based in Beacon, NY, uses locally sourced and organic ingredients to create handcrafted soda syrup concentrates, tea and tisane concentrates, and bitters.

2005

Jessica (Donnelly) Akopyan ('06MA) was married to Emin Akopyan in East Aurora, NY, over Memorial Day Weekend 2017. The bridal party included maid of

honor **Heather DiDiego '05** and bridesmaid **Patricia Mead '06**. Jessica, vice president at Edelman, and Emin reside with their 4-year-old English bulldog. ■ **Kristen Alldredge** ('08MA) and her husband, **Damian Bednarz '04**, welcomed Cora Izabela on June 4, 2017. ■ **William Hayden Bates** has been recognized as one of "America's Top Next-Generation Wealth Advisors" by Forbes. He is senior vice president of investments at Wells Fargo in



William Hayden Bates '05

Westport, CT, and has 12 years of experience in the financial services industry. Over the past five years, he has volunteered his time curating the "Live at the Edmond Town Hall" series, dedicated to restoring a historic theater in Newtown, CT. He also serves on the board of directors of the Ives Concert Park in Danbury, CT. Hayden lives in Newtown, CT, with his girlfriend and their puppy. ■ **Sarah (Emerson) Beauregard** is a photographer and multimedia