

FROM TEENAGE INVESTOR TO HIGH-WEALTH MANAGER

John Keeton credits Cougar Fund with firing him up to succeed

By Wendell Brock

John Keeton thinks he probably made his best investment at age 15 — long before he went on to get his MS in finance at Bauer College ('08), where he worked on the college's highly selective Cougar Investment Fund. As a youngster, he had heard his dad and other family members talk about playing the stock market, and he was intrigued.

"It was a small little computer company in the north Austin area," Keeton recalls. "This was 1995. I put down \$4,000 in this one little startup."

A couple of months later, he sold the stock at a 15 percent profit. Not a bad rate of return by any means. Then again, if he'd held onto the purchase, he would be considerably richer today.

"That company was Dell Computer," Keeton says wistfully, waiting for the inevitable guffaws he gets from listeners every time he relates the tale.

Still, he gained a useful lesson, at a young age, about the fickle nature of the market and the inevitable highs and lows of business — not to mention life itself.

Today, Keeton is a Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) and wealth strategist at Covenant Multifamily Offices, LLC, a boutique wealth-advisory firm in San Antonio. In April, he received an award from Five Star Professional's wealth manager program, the largest and most widely published wealth manager award program in North America.

He believes his time at Bauer College — and his stint on the Cougar Fund, specifically — gave him the foundation he needed to advance his career, which has been a series of challenges as well as victories.

Though Keeton's work now affords him a glimpse into the rarefied world of the super-wealthy, he says he was not born into money. He grew up as the youngest of four in a working-class family in the Garland-Plano suburbs of Dallas. His mother — who was born in Japan and survived the bombing of Hiroshima at age 1 — passed away when he was in fifth grade, and his dad certainly had his challenges raising four kids as a single parent.

A talented baseball player, Keeton had his eye on a career in the big leagues. But

while playing ball in junior college, he realized he'd probably never make it big, so he hung up his cleats and hunkered down to study harder.

Transferring to Texas State University in San Marcos, he paid for college by waiting tables at a Mexican restaurant, even as he held two non-paying internships in the business realm. In 2003, he earned his BBA in Finance, graduating summa cum laude. He was the first member of his family ever to graduate college.

But as luck would have it, he entered the job market just as the aftermath of 9/11 was disrupting the world economy. The Austin area, his home at the time, had been particularly hard hit by the burst of the tech bubble. His first position out of college, he remembers with some disappointment, was as a bank teller.

But Keeton was not to be defeated.

He and his wife moved to Houston, where she pursued her Ph.D. in psychology at the University of Houston, and he took a job on the accounting side of a small gas-marketing firm. But because he still

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wanted to pursue his boyhood dream of working in investments, he decided to pursue his graduate degree at Bauer. The Cougar Fund was a big incentive.

At UH, he found a culture that appealed to his work ethic and background. “There is no feeling of entitlement,” he said. He also formed a network with professors and colleagues that has endured to this day. “I built better relationships with teachers than I ever thought possible,” he says.

In 2008, he was on the legendary Cougar Fund team that placed first in the United States in the Chartered Financial Analyst Institute’s Research Challenge, a national stock-analysis competition. The group went on to a third-place victory in the Global Finals of the CFA Institute’s Research Challenge. Keeton describes that moment as one of the “most memorable experiences of his life. “We were just little old Houston competing against all the

top business schools in the nation,” he recalls proudly. “We worked extremely hard to prove not only that we belonged in the competition, but that we were good enough to win.”

That achievement also lit a fire in his belly and gave him the confidence to make the transition to the investment side of the business. In 2008, he became an equity-research associate at SMH Capital and soon after an investment analyst for Frost Bank’s Wealth Management Services Group. In 2010, he left Frost to help form Covenant, a boutique wealth-advisory firm, with a group of colleagues. He then put in a three-year stint as a high-net-worth banker advising business owners and corporate executives at J.P. Morgan. In 2013, he returned to Covenant.

Though he now lives in San Antonio with his wife, Kathryn, a NASA employee, and their two young children, he maintains

close ties with Bauer College, visiting the Cougar Fund team two or three times a year. “When I go back, I try to meet with everyone just to let them know that I am always there for a phone call, an email, or chat to discuss their school and career challenges.”

For those seeking a career in investments, he has plenty of insight. After all, he’s been on the path since he was 15.