Puttin’ on the RITz celebrates 20 years of RIT Croatia

RIT Croatia students, faculty, staff, alumni, business partners and friends came together for a night of elegant entertainment at the Dubrovnik Hilton Imperial Hotel in April, celebrating RIT Croatia’s 20th anniversary and raising money for the college scholarship fund, to help deserving future students with tuition costs.

Puttin’ on the RITz is an annual student-driven event that promotes and celebrates the hospitality expertise of RIT students in the International Hospitality and Service Management Program. The event has been traditionally organized at RIT’s main campus in Rochester, New York, but this year for the first time it crossed the Atlantic to beautiful Dubrovnik.

A total of 40 students from the campuses in Rochester and Dubrovnik worked together with their mentors and industry professionals to plan, organize and execute every aspect of the event, from the invitations, entertainment, menu, and décor, to fundraising and accounting. Students at the Dubrovnik campus were led by Prof. Domagoj Nikolić, in the Event Management course during the entire spring semester, while Rochester campus students worked with Prof. Rick Lagiewski, a longtime friend of RIT Croatia and former instructor.

"The way we organized the RITz dinner event this year is trailblazing the path of future education," said Prof. Nikolić. “The course was taught in our Global Classroom which includes RIT students from both sides of the Atlantic, Dubrovnik and Rochester. The learning is fully experiential because the students are given real professional tasks and involved in real life situations, and thus are stepping out of the secure classroom environment. Dynamic, high powered and at times stressful, this type of learning is the best professional character building students can get anywhere.”

Faculty, alumni, friends of the college and top administrators from the Rochester campus enjoyed an evening of reunions with old friends, while performances by Dubrovnik’s renowned folk ensemble Lindo, as well as the award-winning Step’n’ Jazz dance group, livened up the evening.

“This was a perfect opportunity to meet and collaborate with Rochester students. We established a great connection between campuses and executed a fantastic event,” said RIT Croatia student Marina Bobelj, who served as Director of Advertising and Sales for the event.

(continues on page 3)
Students at both Dubrovnik and Zagreb campuses volunteered at local senior citizens’ homes during the annual Community Service Day this spring. In addition to physical work of cleaning, painting and gardening, the students enjoyed socializing with residents, getting to know them through music, social games and conversation.

In Dubrovnik, students presented a short musical concert and enjoyed group singing of traditional songs with residents, followed by playing cards, bingo and other social games with them. In Zagreb, students, staff and faculty took part in painting activities, gardening and socializing with residents. Older residents of the homes in both cities delighted students by presenting musical recitations of their own.

“The most beautiful part of this day was the socializing with residents. We really were able to get to know them and feel connected to these people in our community,” said Prof. Rebecca Charry, one of the organizers of the event.

The annual community service day tradition has been a part of RIT Croatia’s educational mission since the college first opened in 1997. “We believe in getting to know the people around us, and give back to the local communities where we live, work and study. This is part of the life education that we offer, which is about much more than just books, tests and grades,” Prof. Charry said.

On both campuses, the idea for this year’s event came from the first-year students, who chose the location and helped organize the event, as part of the Year One orientation course. First year students as a group decided on the choice of working with senior citizens, and students formed an executive committee on each campus to organize and plan the logistics.

Students volunteer at local senior citizens homes

“Students’ enthusiasm, friendliness, talent and hard work were very much appreciated by the residents, directors and staff of both homes.

“It was a pleasure to be a part of the Community Service Day,” said student Matko Piškor. “We did decoupage with a lovely lady at the home, and used the time to talk a bit with her about her youth, her family, and her life at the senior citizens’ home. The way the residents welcomed us and how happy they felt that we were there, showed me that we can still do a lot to help them out and make them feel good simply by doing things that seem small to us, but mean a world to them.”

“We learned a lot, not just about gardening, but also about real teamwork. We connected with the residents and involved them in the work we were doing,” said students Dora Batoš and Tena Vuković.

“We felt happy and fulfilled after this day, but we would also like to go back again and continue building a relationship with them in the future,” added students Jelena Horvat and Dejana Kusić.

Community Service Day brought joy to many people and left lasting improvements at both locations that will be appreciated for a long time. Students at both campuses are looking forward to more opportunities to continue getting to know these wise and valuable members of our communities, through future events and projects.
An RIT Croatia education isn’t only about learning in the classroom, it’s about the chance to meet and learn from current business leaders, hear their advice, and find employment in some of the region’s leading companies. That’s what the college’s annual Career Education Day is all about. This year, students at both Dubrovnik and Zagreb campuses met with representatives of more than 30 leading companies to hear presentations and participate in lively discussions on current trends in international business, hospitality and information technology. Top companies in IT, hospitality, finance, consulting and retail represented this year included Nestle, Procter and Gamble, Erste Bank, Hrvatski Telecom, Oradian, Phobs, Enum and Extension Engine.

Students who took advantage of the opportunity to submit applications in advance were selected for personal interviews at CED. Sophomore Slavica Nenadić had several interviews, and eventually accepted a job as a guest relations agent with ExAlto agency. "I applied for this position because I like to communicate with people and get to know different cultures. I already have some experience in working at guest relation and front office, and I discovered that I really enjoy it," she said. "Even though I was very nervous during the interview, I was offered a job position and welcomed the opportunity to become the part of Ex-Alto team."

New at CED this year was a speed networking event which challenged students to introduce themselves to an industry professional and make a great impression face to face in just three minutes. Student volunteers also played a crucial role in the success of this complex professional event, held at the Libertas Rixos Hotel in Dubrovnik and the Westin Hotel in Zagreb. In Zagreb, students Iva Anić and Tina Količ coordinated more than 30 student volunteers who supported the event.

Every year, some RIT Croatia graduates come back to CED to share their experience with students and look for potential employees on behalf of their employers. This year, Filip Macukić (Class of 2016) participated in CED as both a panelist and an employer looking to hire students for his digital agency, Enfluar. "When I was a student, the CED event was a great opportunity for me to meet future employers; it helped me boost my self-confidence, which later proved to be crucial in interviews," he said. "Now, as an employer, I see an amazing opportunity to find new talent among RIT Croatia students. We have had new employees in Enfluar from both IB and IT programs. My advice to current students is to get out of your comfort zone and start networking. This is a great way to start preparing for your career!"
RIT Croatia partnered with HUB385 and TEDxZagreb to host an exciting salon event in March titled “Visionary or Leader.” This intriguing day of discussion brought together a variety of distinguished guest speakers, including RIT Croatia alumni, to address current students and the general public.

Speakers included RIT Croatia Alumni Ivana Ninčević Lesandrić, Member of Croatian Parliament and founder of the Entrepreneurial Center Solin, and Izet Ždralović, co-founder of MicroBLINK which launched the famous smartphone application PhotoMath.

Other speakers included Goran Čandrlić, co-founder of Kisha, which produces smart umbrellas, and Ivana Matić, founder of the web portal Women and Adria, the brand for women in business.

RIT Croatia’s ongoing cooperation with HUB385 includes participation in a wide variety of innovative workshops, lectures and training sessions designed to promote innovation, leadership and entrepreneurship.

RIT Croatia students attended a series of free, innovative technology workshops this spring as part of the college’s new cooperation with the DURA nonprofit development agency in Dubrovnik. In a series of hands-on Saturday workshops, professional instructors covered in-depth, practical aspects of electronics, robotics, hydroponic gardening, sky and land drones and iOS mobile programming.

Topics included:

- Arduino for beginners – building, connecting and controlling simple electronic devices including lights and sensors for an endless variety of applications.
- IOS application development – an introduction to the tools and required to build applications for iPhone and iPad platforms.
- Programming and flying drones – everything you need to fly a drone safely and effectively, including practice on a simulator and then a real flight.
- Smart irrigation systems – Hydroponics uses sophisticated sensors to grow plants without soil.

Sophomore student Lovro Kolanović attended all four workshops. “I’m really interested in technology, so this was a great opportunity for me to expand my knowledge. These workshops were a great opportunity to learn about the kinds of new trends and opportunities that have applications in almost every industry, like using Arduino to control, water and feed a whole garden by remote control. The drone workshop was also great, but flying one properly and safely is not as easy as it seems! You can program them to do almost anything, from delivering packages to filming video, but they are very fragile and expensive so you really have to know what you are doing.”

Freshman IT student Melda Krvavac also attended several workshops.

“Hydroponics is about growing plants without traditional soil, using just water with nutrients in a specially designed environment using Arduino technology and a pump kit. With this technique, you can easily maintain a small garden that you control over your computer or phone. The sensors detect how much water or nutrients that day plant needs depending on the weather conditions, temperature, and moisture,” she explained.
Graduates gather for alumni weekend

Reunion and networking with old friends

The celebration of RIT Croatia’s 20th anniversary in April continued with a series of activities for our Alumni. Some of our nearly 2000 graduates returned to Dubrovnik for a full weekend of fun and informative events to reconnect with old friends, network and plan for the future.

The weekend included a city tour of Dubrovnik, guided by our Alumna Vesna Ćelebić (Class of 2003), followed by a wine tour of the Pelješac peninsula. Alumni who were more into sports activities gladly got together for a basketball game at the Dubrovnik sports hall, whereas wine lovers who wanted to learn more about the nectar of the gods joined Ksenija Matić (Class of 2007), a certified sommelier, at a wine tasting workshop in Restaurant Amfora.

The evening was reserved for a get together on the Sea Star event cruise boat, and more than 200 alumni from the entire region, professors and other guests from RIT embarked on a wonderful evening ride down memory lane. The weather served us well, and after a short and pleasant boat ride, Sea Star anchored in Old Harbor in Dubrovnik Old Town, and the party continued.

Seeing so many Alumni from various generations all at one place really brought a sense of pride and belonging to RIT Croatia and it was a wonderful way to wrap up the weekend of celebrating 20 years of RIT in Croatia.

“Our RIT Croatia alumni community is very strong and tight in Croatia. Although we have grown to nearly 2000 members now, it still feels like a family affair” said Ana Jarak (Class of 2003), who served as alumni association president from 2012 to 2016. “Whether it’s a reunion, a community event, student mentorships or social gatherings – there is always a great crowd. The main reason for such commitment in my opinion lies in the gratitude that Alumni feel toward the college. Class projects, faculty mentorships, and co-ops, made us appreciate these relationships that made us “ready” for the real world.”

“I often get asked if I would make the same choice if I had a chance,” she continued. “My answer is, I would not change a thing, not one. RIT experience made me into a person and a professional I am today.”

Alumni Career Updates

Tvrtko Novaković started a new position as Director of Sales for Eastern Europe at Prolaz. He was previously employed as Sales Director at Centar Banka d.d.

Mara Vuković started a new position as Eastern Europe Sales & Marketing Assistant at FOREO. She was previously employed as Senior Sales and Marketing Executive at HUP-ZAGREB Inc.

Hana Đapo started a new position as Sales Manager Wella SP at Orbico Bulgaria.

She was previously employed as Senior Brand Manager at Orbico Beauty GmbH.

Mirela Raić was recently promoted to Brand Marketing Manager - Premium & Select Brands, Middle East & Africa at Marriott International hotels.
Parent perspective: Why our family chose RIT Croatia

‘Here, my child is not just a number. She gets individual attention from professors who care.’

Parents play an essential role in the RIT Croatia community, particularly when it comes to choosing the right college for their children and supporting them through their education. To find out more about parents’ perspectives, we spoke with Mrs. Svjetlana Nijemčević-Todorović of Osijek, who shared her family’s experience with us.

We wanted something different

We started thinking carefully about the choice of college for our daughter Petra while she was still in high school. Based on my own university experience at the Faculty of Tourism in Dubrovnik and the Faculty of Economics in Osijek, I knew that I wanted a different type of education for my daughter. I have to say that the approach to education at RIT Croatia is a completely different world from the Croatian style of education. I don’t intend to, nor can I, reduce the value of Croatian programs, but the approach that I noticed at RIT Croatia, starting with the very first phone call I made, to the meetings and discussions we had in Dubrovnik and Zagreb, were the deciding factor for us in choosing this college for our daughter.

Our daughter is delighted with her studies

After we visited the RIT campuses in Zagreb and Dubrovnik, Petra chose the Service Management program in Dubrovnik. She has completed two years of study, and still talks to us with the same delight about her studies, professors and life at RIT Croatia as when she first started.

The way the college communicates openly with parents has delighted me since the very beginning. We are invited to meet the dean, the professors, and the staff of college. RIT Croatia makes a special effort to keep us informed about all the activities and programs that are available to our children.

Throughout Petra’s study at RIT Croatia, we have consistently gotten feedback about her studies and the many opportunities which are available to her. Even more importantly, we know that the professors and staff care about her, and assist her in choosing her courses and specializations, according to her own preferences and talents. In a word, at this college, my child is not seen as just a number, lost in a mass, but as a unique young person, who receives individual care and attention.

Professors give the best of themselves

Petra often talks to us about her professors, who truly give the best of themselves, and bring the best out of their students. We can see that professors are working hard to prepare students for their future lives after college, to survive and thrive in today’s society and meet the challenges that await them, through the crucial practical work and experience that Croatian universities rarely, if ever, provide.

This is what attracted us most to RIT Croatia – the required practical work (co-op) which enables students to use what they have learned in real life. And that is what makes the studying itself so much more interesting and dynamic – along with the many contacts they make with businesses and industries which will be useful in their future employment.

Students become independent and prepared for the future

We decided that, even though there are many colleges in our hometown, it is important for all young people to gain independence by studying away from home. And we can see that we made the right choice to send her to Dubrovnik. She has become a more mature and responsible person, who has a stronger foundation for the independent life which awaits her.

I could write even more about the advantages that RIT Croatia offers – the feeling of belonging and the family atmosphere, the multicultural community of students from around the world – and much more, but I’m afraid other parents will just have to enroll their children at RIT Croatia to fully understand what I am talking about.

Exchange Program Unites Business Students with US Peers

Deepening cooperation between RIT Croatia and the RIT main campus in Rochester, New York, about 20 students from the Saunders College of Business participated in an innovative new exchange program this spring semester, specifically designed for business students, through a combination of live face-to-face and online instruction. Thirteen students from RIT Croatia and seven from the main campus spent a semester together. First, the group spent six weeks studying at the Zagreb campus, followed by a trip to the US. They spent spring break traveling around the country and the continued their classes at the main campus, ending the semester with the RIT Imagine innovation festival.

At the Zagreb campus, students studied Regional Business, Global Marketing and Scientific Inquiries in Environmental Science. At the main campus, the students

Design Thinking and Cross Cultural Management.

Students participated in a strong cross-cultural experience and were able to build lasting friendships. They not only experienced and learned about each other’s cultures, but they also saw firsthand how various businesses function in both countries. In addition to regular classes, the course included field trips and company visits.
Winning team heads to L’Oreal Brandstorm finals in Paris

Our RIT Croatia team of young innovators is heading to Paris in June to compete in the final rounds of the L’Oreal Brandstorm innovation competition in the Tech Challenge category. This is the second year in a row that RIT Croatia students have excelled in this international innovation competition.

RIT Croatia students Jakov Fauković, Domagoj Hruškar and Martin Kajtazi presented a winning proposal for a mobile application called GrooME, that teaches young men how to properly style their beards.

They will be among 30 teams competing in the finals, at L’Oreal’s Innovation Fair, where all the regional finalists will become exhibitors, and have the opportunity to pitch their projects. The juries are composed of brand experts such as L’Oreal executives and specialized journalists.

IT students win Hackathon with Citizen Card mobile app

RIT Croatia IT students Tomislav Kulušić, Petar Čučuk, Antonio Šutalo and Marko Zelenković, won the prize of 5,000 kn at the annual Dubrovnik Hackathon 2017 in April. This event brought together six teams of creative innovators, IT experts and programmers who spent 36 sleepless hours brainstorming, designing and executing their own original tech ideas.

The RIT Croatia team won with mobile application and web site for citizens’ interaction with the local government, called Citizen Card, which encourages positive behavior and ecological awareness. Citizens collect points for activities such as the use of public transportation, walking instead of driving, as well as sharing information about the location and the quality of public services. This app relies on “crowd-sourcing” model of collecting information. Earned points could be used for discounts on city services or private partners.

Honor Society presents “Starting Your Own Business”

RIT Croatia Eta Sigma Delta Honor Society members organized their first event in cooperation with Dubrovnik Regional Development Agency DURA in March. More than 40 students attended “The Practical Side of Starting Your Own Business,” with Ms. Marijana Puljas.

Students heard valuable advice for first-time entrepreneurs and visited DURA’s Idea Factory and Entrepreneurship Corner.

“We learned useful information about potentially starting our own business, from a person with a lot of experience in the process,” said student Josipa Buble, Director of Marketing and Public Relations for the society. “She provided us with useful advice so we are better prepared to meet legal requirements. Most importantly, she pointed out some common mistakes that we can learn to avoid.”

Eta Sigma Delta is an international honor society whose members demonstrate excellence and leadership in the field of hospitality studies. The RIT Croatia chapter was founded this year under the guidance of Prof. Milena Kužnin.

STUDENT HONORS

Outstanding Undergraduate Scholars

Dean’s List receptions at both Zagreb and Dubrovnik were held for those students who obtained a GPA of 3.00 and above in the fall semester of the academic year 2016/2017. There were 89 students who have earned this honor at Zagreb campus and 59 students at Dubrovnik campus. As a part of this special event, Outstanding Undergraduate Scholar awards were presented to senior year students who were chosen based on their academic achievements, community involvement and leadership: Petra Očinić from IB program, and Mia Kun and Ljubica Vasiljević from the IHSM. In addition, Dubrovnik IHSM student Andela Petra Cvićanović received the RIT Excellence in Student Life Award, for her engagement in activities, excellence in scholarship, and the practice of responsible leadership.

Valedictorians

Each year, one outstanding graduating senior from each is selected to represent the RIT Croatia graduating class by speaking during the Commencement ceremony. This year, the honors went to Dubrovnik Campus student Mia Kun, and Zagreb campus student Petra Očinić.

These young ladies will address their peers, professors, and distinguished RIT guests from the podium at commencement. They were selected for their academic achievement and leadership in the community.

Among her many achievements in the International Hospitality and Service Management program, Mia participated in an Erasmus exchange program in Milan, Italy, in the spring of 2016. She has also worked as a tutor for both Financial Accounting and Microeconomics, and served as a peer mentor for first year students. Most recently she was inducted into theEta Sigma Delta Honor Society.

Mia will also have the honor of traveling to Rochester in May to represent RIT Croatia at the main campus convocation ceremony.

Throughout her four years in the International Business program at RIT Croatia, Petra participated in many community outreach projects, and spent a year as a volunteer German tutor for her in-class colleagues. Upon graduation Petra is planning find employment in the finance sector as she thoroughly enjoyed her co-ops in this field.

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RIT Croatia – 20 years of student success

RIT Croatia in numbers: Why students choose to study with us

2 campuses
- Dubrovnik (1997)
- Zagreb (2011)

3 undergraduate programs
1 Master of Science program
2 diplomas
- American
- Croatian

Over 800 students
- from different countries studying on both campuses

More than 1,900 alumni
- 3 undergraduate programs
- 1 Master of Science program

Over 50 faculty members

Over 800 students
- find employment or continue their studies within 6 months after graduation (RIT Croatia data; Class of 2016)

93%
- Scholarship fund: over 350,000 EUR each year

A GLOBAL COMMUNITY
OF OVER 1,900 SUCCESSFUL ALUMNI

They mostly work in...
- Croatia
- but also in countries such as the U.S., Germany, Canada, UK, UAE, Australia, Switzerland

Employers say our students are...
- motivated
- willing to learn
- team work oriented
- innovative
- proactive
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