



## The Ravens' Mark Burdett University of Maryland Distinguished Alumnus

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For 2011, the Office of Undergraduate Studies was honored to name Mark Burdett (1981), Vice President for Corporate Sales and Development for the Baltimore Ravens, as the Undergraduate Studies Distinguished Alumnus. This award was celebrated at the Alumni Association Gala on April 9. In May, I asked Mark for an opportunity to interview him. I wanted to know him better so that I could share with students and alumni more about the journey that has made Mark the person he is today.

Mark's well-earned distinction results from 30 post-college years of hard work toward high goals. As a Ravens Vice President and the development team point person for all non-football related events at M&T Bank Stadium, he proudly refers to the Ravens' 2000 Super Bowl win and the strong success of intervening years. Today the distinction of this noteworthy NFL team lies in its intense fan loyalty and strong revenue production. For the last two years, the Ravens have ranked in the top ten of all NFL franchises in revenue. When factored against their market size and trade area, this success translates to a Number One ranking for this exceptional team. A team effort certainly, but Mark has played a significant role.

Born in New Jersey, Mark grew up in Severna Park, Maryland, in the shadows of the Naval Academy. His father, Lt. Comdr. Paul Fletcher Burdett, graduated

from the Naval Academy in 1945, saw combat with the Navy in the South Pacific during World War II and later pursued a career in the pharmaceutical industry. As the youngest of three children, Mark appreciates the opportunities he had to learn from those who led the way. Mark was also the beneficiary of early Catholic education, followed by enrollment in Severn Preparatory School, where he played on the lacrosse team.

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In 1976, Mark enrolled in the University of Maryland, the school that gave him an opportunity to play lacrosse at the highest level. Mark was central to the Maryland team's success in making three "Final 4's" in the NCAA in four years. Meanwhile, he pledged Phi Delta Theta and pursued his academic interests in business and economics through the University's General Studies program in Undergraduate

Studies. Mark places high value on his team mates, fraternity brothers, and classmates and on the bounty of the lifelong friendships they yielded. Self-described as coming to the University as a "small town boy," Mark remembers the impact of being in such a different place: the University in the late 1970s was a community characterized by a clash of different cultures—cultures of race, religion, and geographic diversity. There was great enthusiasm and excitement, much of it focused on sports and social events. Mark reminisces further: "It was a time when no one felt entitled; no one expected anything to be given to them. There are so many successful people among the Maryland alumni from those days."

Of his early career goals, Mark emphatically states he "wanted to be in sales," and then adds, with his characteristic self-reflection, that he knows that "most run from that moniker." But Mark knew what he wanted; he wanted to be "out and about". He wanted a career in sales where he could "work hard and earn hard." A job at Dalton Broadcasting in Washington, DC, where he sold airtime and created advertising spots for WXTR radio, launched that career. After three years, he moved to Paramount Television and WDCA in Washington DC, where he stayed nine years, working his way up through a series of management positions. On the move in more ways than one, Mark took a job with ABC television, and experienced six heady years of a rapidly growing television industry, both independent



and cable, with multiplying options in alternative programming. Mark describes this time as one of “double digit growth yearly and lots of smart people in the industry.”

Still, change brings change. Eventually the broadcasting business flattened out; the late 1990s boom years of the IPO and the dot com cultures changed the playing field in which Mark had thrived. Forty years old in 1998, Mark wrote down his goals for the coming year: “I need to open myself up for a new opportunity and welcome risk.” Believing he was at a “now or never” crossroads, he worked for one year for the Washington Redskins as Senior Vice President of Broadcasting and Corporate Sales. In short, says Mark, this was “business boot camp:” “I never

worked so hard or learned so much about what I wanted and what I did not want. It was a time of great personal growth for me.”

The big break came in 1998 when his boyhood friend, Steve Bisciotti, now owner of the Baltimore Ravens, bought a minority share in the team and paved the

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way for Mark to join the Ravens in 1999 as Vice President of Corporate Sales. For the Ravens, their 2000 Super Bowl win represented a quick climb to the top and an introduction to coveted championship status. In subsequent years, the Ravens have excelled in earning power and brand power, while enjoying deep community influence. Proud and elated by the Ravens’ relationship to the community, Mark explains that “Football is one of the few entities that can light up a community with positive excitement and pride. The smaller the market the

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Deeply fond of Baltimore, Mark reflects on the city’s traditional identity as a proud working class community where citizens walked to the factory, walked to church, walked to the Elks Lodge, and walked to high school. Understanding these features of Baltimore means that Mark also understands why Baltimoreans still identify their place in the city by the high school they attended. He understands the University of Maryland, Baltimore as belonging to these same traditions—built as it is into the city streets with an array of professional schools that speak to Baltimore’s strong traditions of work. Of course, as a university that today produces a large percentage of Baltimore’s and Maryland’s elite professional work force, UMB also represents Baltimore’s progressive side and promising future.

Mark’s description of Baltimore leads him back to the Ravens. Baltimore’s love affair with the Ravens, he explains, matches the Ravens’ brand and style of play, one cultivated for Baltimore’s traditionally tough ethos. Pressed for more detail, Mark quickly pulls out a purple and white 4 X 6 laminated card that states on one side, “Our mission is to win football games, serve our fans, and be a positive force in the community.” On the opposite side, the first in a list of Ravens guiding principles are these words: “Cool, powerful, edgy, progressive. Team is the theme.” Glossing for my benefit each word of this neatly chiseled principle, Mark pauses longest on the word “team,” and on the importance of taking seriously the notion that one will always put the team or another player ahead of oneself, a concept that is deeply engrained in Baltimore’s self-identity and in Mark’s personal value system.

Close to the end of our conversation, I suggested that students and younger alumni would be among the readers of this article. What might he want to add, I asked, that would be especially important for them? Mark never takes long to come up with a response, and certainly not in the summer of 2011 with the recession still hovering and NFL labor negotiations in full swing: “Know your industry, no matter how successful it may be. What are the factors that could bring it down? An individual can control the micro, but not the macro. Know the macro.” At another moment he urged, “When there is a decision to be made, choose the hard right.”

It was an honor to talk with Mark. He is an exceptional person with a powerful story of success grounded in a commitment to do the right thing. Undergraduate Studies is proud to have had the opportunity to recognize this extraordinary alumnus.