

Staying Active from Afar

John Shoemaker working to connect with, support others who work internationally.

By Angela Lutz

When the pandemic hit, **John Shoemaker, '04**, was looking for a lifeline. Like everyone, his daily routine was profoundly impacted by travel restrictions and stay-at-home orders, and he found himself distanced from friends and colleagues. It was during this time he began to reconnect with faculty and fellow alumni from Washburn University School of Law while attending online happy hours hosted by Dean Carla Pratt. The virtual format was essential for Shoemaker, who has lived and practiced law in Singapore since 2015.

“Washburn did an excellent job at coordinating their online outreach to alumni during the pandemic,” he said. “It reinvigorated my awareness of and my thankfulness for what Washburn had done for me. It reminded me how I got to where I am, and I was looking for a way to recognize how important Washburn has been to me.”

For Shoemaker – who currently works at private firm Butler Snow focusing on taxation, trusts and estate planning and previously served in the trusts, and foundations unit at UBS Wealth Planning in Switzerland – it made sense to donate to Washburn’s International and Comparative Law Center. In an increasingly globalized world, he believes other alumni should consider doing the same.

“We are at a fundamental shifting point in global development,” he said. “There will be a huge need for the study of comparative law over the next few decades. This center is very uniquely positioned to address the political, climate, and economic future that is rushing towards us. We need to start building up the baseline that will empower us to withstand it.”

Shoemaker also recognizes that the internet has made it possible not only to reconnect with old friends from thousands of miles away but for an attorney from Kansas to have an international influence, which he first realized when participating in Washburn’s summer exchange program with King’s College in London. For future students considering studying or working abroad, Shoemaker’s primary piece of advice is simple: Stay curious and don’t be afraid to take chances. In Shoemaker’s case, participating in an improvisational comedy troupe hasn’t hurt, either.

“Improv taught me to think on my feet and be open to learning something new,” he said. “Don’t ever think that anything from



John Shoemaker, '04, and his wife, Kelli, show off their fun lifestyle in Singapore. Photo submitted

your background or your situation is prohibitive of you making a change and doing something you’ve always wanted to do. It may not work out – but it may if you keep plugging away at it.”

Shoemaker’s own academic trajectory was fairly nontraditional, underscoring the value of these suggestions. Due to personal circumstances, he didn’t complete his undergraduate degree before he began law school, but he is grateful Washburn gave him the flexibility he needed to complete his studies. He also received much-needed emotional support from former Washburn Law Professor Peter Cotorceanu, who helped him through a tough year when he lost five close family members.

“The greatest strength Washburn provides is the support and opportunities it gives to students to pursue things outside of the norm,” he said. “My donation is a way to thank Washburn for everything they’ve done and continue to do – and a way to give back to current and future students so they understand this is possible. A small-town kid can have a global impact. If you have thought about going to another country – you can.”