

Summer with the Jets, No kidding - 34 students score internships at the team's practice complex.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 1, 2004, NEWSDAY (MONEY SECTION, PG. 39-40)

You have your people who just dream about their dream jobs. But then you have your people who push to make them happen. A group of 34 "pushers" showed up July 23 at the New York Jets complex at Hofstra University, arriving for their orientation as summer interns with the team's special-events crew.

They had beaten out about 265 other applicants - not by being the best scholars - but by displaying common sense, problem-solving skills and plain old drive. Many had called on friends of friends with ties to the team for referrals. Some had nagged Kenny Zore, special-events manager and intern coordinator - clearly without crossing into the offensive zone. One had submitted her application in a folder with the Jets logo outlined in rhinestones.

And what they were to hear was what it will take for them to succeed on this internship, which could put them in good stead for a job with the Jets or some other to-die-for sports employer.

One of the clearest messages came from Zore's boss, Brian Mulligan, director of game operations and events. No way, no how are they to behave like fans, going ga-ga over players and coaches. No asking for autographs or photos. No loitering in the office hoping to hang out with quarterback Chad Pennington.

"If you do, you're out," said Mulligan, himself an alum of the Jets' first formal intern class in 1997.

Nope, they're there for the next several weeks to staff Generation Jets Fest, a portable theme park of inflatable games and activities for kids, as many parents, coaches and camp counselors watch the team training on the Hofstra field from now until Aug. 25.

That, plus taking care of just about any other detail. Like jump-starting the dead battery of the Jets truck right after orientation. And loading and unloading boxes, tarps, water coolers at the Meadowlands. Yes, you might call it your typical intern grunt work.

But no grumbles, at least so far, as many agree with Zore, who had told how he still fills the fridge with soda when it's empty, cleans the van and picks up trash. "I'm 26 and I'm not told to do this," he said. "It's a privilege to be here."

Further marching orders:

Arrive on time, which means early. "Fifteen minutes early is on time. On time is late," says the intern manual.

Play well with others. A few years back the interns had formed cliques and didn't work well together, Mulligan said. But, "we see team players and we know they're good people." Make sacrifices. Indeed, head coach Herm Edwards told in his pep talk how as a kid he desperately wanted a new bike. His family couldn't afford one, so he would ride his used bike over to an Army base 5 miles away to shine shoes and earn money.

"I really didn't like shining shoes, to be honest," he told them. "But I wanted a new bike. I didn't like riding those 5 miles, but I had enough discipline to keep doing it."

For students that translates to a willingness to forgo parties and stay on call just about all the time. Said Zore, "I missed weddings, parties, road trips with friends - that's how I got here."

This from a guy who said, too, that he had been a "party animal" when he started classes at Nassau Community College. "I had no ambition for college. I had no desire or drive." Not until the day a professor announced the chance to intern with the Jets. Zore got his sister to help write a resume that night and was first to hand it in the next day. After interning for three summers and getting his degree in sports management from St. John's University, he came on board full-time in September 2001.

Still, all this talk of all work and no player autographs did not deter the interns. Ryann Ruzika of Wantagh, a graduate of Rider University in Lawrenceville, N.J., was one of eight to drive to the Meadowlands Monday to clean storage units and transport boxes of giveaways.

He called the internship "a dream opportunity." And it beats selling cars, said Ruzika, who after graduation in 2002 worked in a guitar center and then an automobile dealership.

The press to go that extra mile was what Carinne Marino, about to enter her senior year at Hofstra, had expected. She had applied for the internship last year - just sending in her application and crossing her fingers. "I didn't push that hard," she said. But this year she sought out a Hofstra contact with a friend working for the Jets.

So much for the scut work. What do the interns get besides \$225 a week and the chance to develop impeccable work habits? You'll learn about marketing, Mulligan told them. And the fan base. And how to hang banners.

And then there are all the contacts they'll make. Zore handed out a list of 13 present or former Jets business operations staffers who got their start as interns, plus a list of 28 former interns who have gone on to the likes of NFL Europe, the Orlando Magic, ESPN/ ABC Sports and the New England Patriots.

Says Anthony Missere, director of the sports management program at St. John's, "The few who put in the ungodly number of hours at this young age will work themselves into a networking organization and so open doors for themselves. ... There is no such thing as luck. You make your own luck."

That's been the experience of Christina Papaccioli, an intern last year who was appointed Jets Fest supervisor this year. "If you just do what you're told, you're not going to stand out. If we ask for volunteers, we notice who doesn't volunteer as well as who does. We don't bark out orders. We need people to step up. Those are the ones who get somewhere," she said.

If this internship still sounds dreamy, here's some advice from Zore on how to be considered next year. If you're in college, get to know people in your career center; that's where he posts information. (He draws students from all over the country but looks especially to local schools so he can call on intern veterans for special projects during the school year.)

Look for volunteer opportunities, such as with the Boomer Esiason Foundation in Manhattan and Garden City that raises money for cystic fibrosis (see www.empirechallenge.com).

And get some experience working with kids - as a camp counselor or youth coordinator.

As for Zore and all those hours worked and parties missed - how does he stand at this point in his career? He says, "I'm a kid in a candy shop still."