

At WestConn

Local Father and Son Make Higher Education a Family Affair

DANBURY — Western Connecticut State University senior Matthew LaPak will be ready to follow in his father's footsteps in the information technology field when he graduates this May from the Ansell School of Business.

But it is Matt's father, Dennis, who has followed in his son's footsteps in pursuit of a bachelor's in management information systems (MIS) at WestConn.

Seated at the kitchen table in

his Newtown home, Dennis recalled the long road to a bachelor's degree.

"My life at WestConn started in 1976, but I only went for a year before I took some time off to sort things out," Dennis said. "Then I went to Norwalk State Technical College and got an associate's degree in 1980."

He was married soon after, and with his wife Maureen began a family that includes Matt, 22; Tim, 21; Tucker, 16; and Molly, 8.

For 25 years, he's had a successful IT career, serving since 2000 as IT manager at the Partner Reinsurance Company of the U.S. in Greenwich.

In 2001, Matt enrolled at WestConn to begin his undergraduate studies, and the following year Dennis decided to finish what he began so long ago.

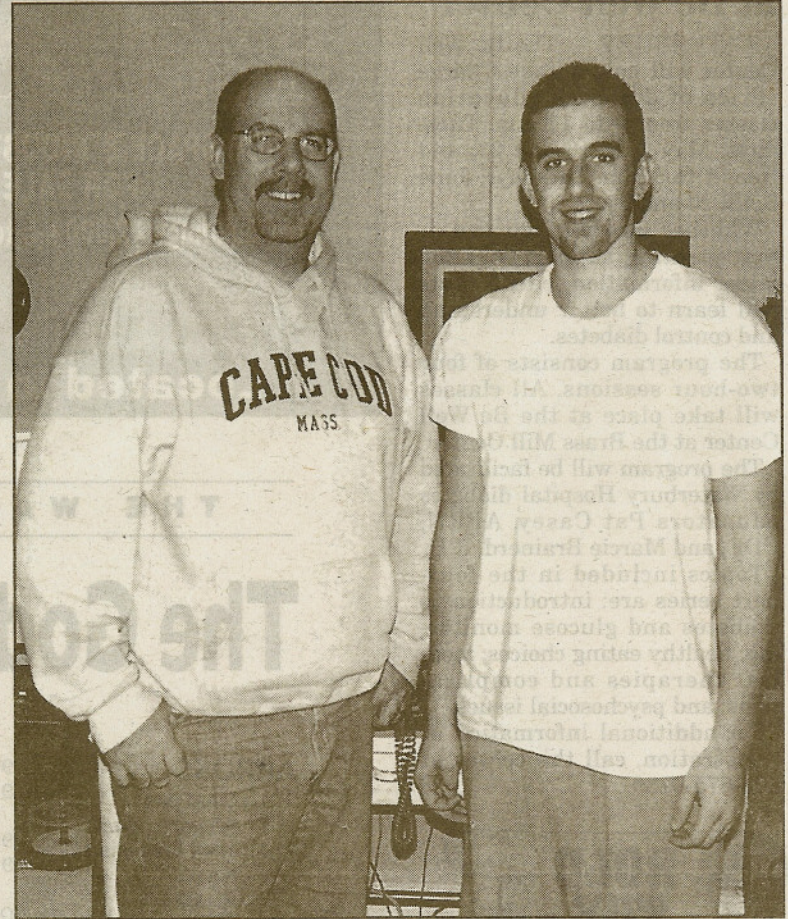
"Three years ago, I finally decided for my own personal fulfillment to finish my bachelor's degree," Dennis said.

"This time around, I'm more mature. I have 20-plus years of work experience, and it definitely makes it mean more than when I was 18 or 19 years old."

Returning to school has posed a formidable challenge for the elder LaPak, who maintains a full-time job that demands long hours and overseas travel.

"I work 50 hours a week and I have to travel to Switzerland periodically, so I have to coordinate everything and get my papers in on time," he said.

While Dennis returned to WestConn with a clear objective of completing a business administration degree with MIS major, Matt took several semesters before he settled on the same degree goal.



Dennis (left) and Matthew LaPak

The younger LaPak said his turning point came when he took assistant professor of management Dr. Richard Bassett's Information Systems Concepts.

"I liked it and just stuck with it," Matt said.

"I felt it was good to know about business and computers, and thought I could apply it to finance, marketing and other

things."

This spring the LaPak family will be preparing to celebrate one WestConn graduation, and looking forward to another several years down the road.

"My son will graduate in the spring," Dennis said.

"I have seven or eight classes left to take, and I hope to graduate before I have grandkids!"