
January Alumni Spotlight: A Conversation with Tom Golden

Tom Golden is the epitome of a true Lowellian. From growing up on Coburn Street to raising his daughters on Monroe Street less than a mile away, this city has always been his home. After graduating from Lowell High in 1989, Tom attended UMass Lowell, where he earned his bachelor's degree in Management and Marketing, and eventually his master's degree in Business Administration. Currently, Tom holds the seat of State Representative of the 16th District, which serves the communities of Chelmsford and Lowell, and serves on the Board of multiple local nonprofits.



Throughout his life, Tom has used his leadership skills, businesses acumen, and all-around community mindset to help make Lowell the city it is today. When he's not pushing for new projects like the Lowell Judicial Center, the UMass Lowell Student Recreation Center, or the Bellegarde BoatHouse/Rourke Boat Ramp, you'll find Tom spending time with the three ladies in his life whom he calls his bosses, his wife Joane, and their two daughters, Abby and Lilly.

Earlier this month, our Alumni and Programs Coordinator, Madelaine had a Zoom call with Tom to discuss his work as a State Representative, how students and Lowell High alums can get involved in the community, and share stories about Lowell High, alumni to alumni.



FUN FACT #1

During the COVID-19 lockdown, Tom & his family adopted a Golden Retriever named Finnegan.

Madelaine: You've had a lot of experience in business, real estate, and politics, so let's start at the beginning-- How did studying business at UMass Lowell lead to where you are now?

Tom: I actually started out originally thinking that I might have wanted to be a police officer. After a year or so, I found out that criminal justice wasn't for me, and that led me to finance. At UMass Lowell, I got my bachelor's degree in Management and Marketing, it was a dual major. When I graduated, I went to work for a local gas company named Colonial Gas. Then, when I ran for office, I decided to return to UMass Lowell to get my master's in Business Administration.



FUN FACT #2

Tom's favorite Lowell restaurants are Athenian Corner, El Potro, and Blue Taleh.

Madelaine: Can you tell me about your journey in American politics? Specifically, about your work as the House Chair of the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities, and Energy.

Tom: I've had a number of Chairmanships and Vice Chairmanships throughout the years on Beacon Hill, Chairperson of House Bills in the Third Reading, Vice Chair of State Administration, and Vice Chair of Bond Authorizations. After those, I ended up as Chairman of Telecommunications, Utility, and Energy, which is very interesting, but I'm now Division Leader in the House of Representatives.

I still work on issues concerning energy, but now I deal with healthcare, finance, almost anything else you can think of. Recently, there have been a lot of new green technologies coming out to change the way we do things, like harnessing the wind offshore to create energy, and I've been able to take part in those conversations. I also help a lot of other Chairs get to where they need to be and figure out ways to support their communities and the Commonwealth as a whole. It's a really cool position, it's unique and different, and it's been a very exciting time for me, both professionally and through the legislature.

Madelaine: An aspect of your political career has been focused on climate activism, or more specifically, policies that encourage environmental and climate protections. Have you always been interested in energy and environmental policy?

Tom: Our goal overall, and I think everyone's goal, is to create a 'greener infrastructure', or a 'greener tomorrow'. At this point, we're all thinking about ways to reuse things, from energy to the cups we drink out of, and how we can be a heck of a lot better to our environment as a whole. I believe that tomorrow's job market is really going to continue to push into that trajectory: the renewable, reusable, materials and protecting our natural resources mindset.

Those ideas are really what drove me to energy and environmental policy. There are a lot of discussions going on because we're a society that wants our heat the way we want, our phones to always be charged, and other things of that nature. Of course, the easiest thing would be to dive fully into creating a society like that, but some of our friends over in Europe have shown us that that's not always the case. A firm, measured, approach is the way to go when you're talking about the environment and trying to make our tomorrow cleaner than it was yesterday.

Madelaine: If a student has an issue that they were concerned about, how would they get in touch with you as their state representative?

Tom: From reaching out on social media, to giving my office or the Statehouse a call, to sending an email, there are so many ways to get connected. I would even be willing to grab a coffee with a student to discuss their concerns or ideas. People come to me with problems all of the time, not just about politics, and my job is to find the solutions. They're part of the 43,000 people that I represent and trying to listen to what they have to say and being aware of their concerns is probably the most important thing I can do as an elected official. We always have to make sure that whatever we're pushing or asking for is something that the entire community wants, and the only way I can know what that is if they tell me.

Overall, I think the best thing to do if a student has a concern or if they're thinking about an area they want to make a change in is to find out who else thinks the same way, make a plan, and take action.

Madelaine: Outside of the office, when you're not a State Representative or working as an auctioneer, what do you like to do?

Tom: I just love to spend time with my girls as a family. I often work on the weekends at the auction house or selling real estate, but I do try and take off some Sundays to spend with them. I'll do anything, as long as we're together. We're big into skiing, biking, hiking, going to the beach, things like that. But, to be honest with you, I just listen to my three bosses. If they want to go to Vermont, we're going to Vermont. If they want to see a movie, that's where we'll be.



Tom with his wife, Joane, daughters, Abby & Lilly, and dog, Finnegan.



Madelaine: Since graduating from Lowell High, you've continued to be involved in the local community and supporting residents here. Do you have any advice for Lowell High Alumni who are also interested in giving back to their community?

Tom: It really sounds silly, but it can start with the corner of your street. It doesn't need to be big or boisterous. If you're into cleaning, clean up your neighborhood, if you're into gardening, start a community garden. If you want to make a difference in your community, the smallest things are always the best things.

You can look at some of the nonprofits that have started throughout the city and are doing a fabulous job as an example. Lowell Litter Krewe doesn't require anything else except showing up and picking up trash, and when people see them picking up trash, hopefully, they get the point and say, "Maybe I shouldn't throw that stuff out the window." There are a lot of ways to make a difference in the school community too. Give your time to a student if you're good at math or English, or even at playing the piano, and help create different opportunities for them.

People are always looking for these big plans, these big ideas, or they are waiting for someone else to do it. While I was in Senegal, I worked with a group of folks who wanted to put flowers around some of the trees in the area. I said to them, "Hey, let's just have at it," and we were finished on the first day. So, if people want to make a difference, they just have to move forward.

Madelaine: Did you have any experiences attending Lowell High School that helped get you to where you are today?

Tom: Lowell High is one heck of a community, I always enjoyed being there. I'm very proud to say that I was the president of my class all four years. It was a lot of fun and a lot of work, but I really enjoyed those days and getting involved.

I was on the track team all four years, indoor, outdoor, and occasionally long-distance when they could pull me out. I always really enjoyed being involved in student government, too. As a class president who was also involved in sports, I tried to make a difference in that community by listening to people, trying to be helpful, and just being a friendly face. If somebody had an issue, I always wanted to see what I could do to help.

So many of my friends were like that too, ready, willing, and able to help, and I notice those same qualities when I talk to Lowell High students today. There are a lot of people over there that are always wanting to make positive changes. The community at the high school has so much to offer, whether you're in any one of the organized clubs, sports, or just meeting friends.

Madelaine: What advice do you have for current Lowell High Students?

Tom: You have to participate in the community to be a part of it. You have to show up ready, willing, and able to play. If not, things will just pass you by. Life requires getting out of your comfort zone and finding a way to do that is one of the major challenges that people face every day.

