

## John Reitmeyer, The College of New Jersey, Class of 1997

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John Reitmeyer, The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) alumnus, class of 1997, is in the spotlight and the Spotlight. As a financial reporter and writer, he prefers to avoid the lowercase spotlight and devotes his intellect and energy to the uppercase *NJ Spotlight*, New Jersey's online news source, renowned for its award-winning, thought-provoking coverage of New Jersey politics and public policy. ([www.njspotlight.com](http://www.njspotlight.com))

By Wall Street standards, writing about finance is far less lucrative than working in finance. By John Reitmeyer standards, however, his compensation brings him great wealth, because it goes beyond dollars and cents.

"I love my job covering budget, tax policy and other state financial issues, because it is "gratifying" to help New Jersey residents be informed *accurately* about the issues playing such a crucial role in the lives of New Jerseyans, he said.

And TCNJ played a crucial role in his life, both inspiring him and then enabling him to succeed as a journalist in an economically precarious time of change and upheaval for the media industry.

"The college was everything to me," he said. It propelled him into a "fulfilling," professional, as well as personal life. It was where he met his wife, Mai, also class of 1997, who is the senior research services librarian at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

When he started college in 1993, the South Jersey native (born and raised in Atlantic County and now a resident of Cranford in Union County) had no grand vision of becoming the next Woodward or Bernstein. He was into playing sports, particularly soccer, but when he more than met his (soccer) match at TCNJ, he had to refocus his priorities into academics instead of athletics. That's when the value of the TCNJ faculty kicked in.

Fascinated by stories about his heritage, John decided to major in history with a focus on classical studies and minor in journalism. His grandmother, who is from Marseille, France, met her husband, John's grandfather, when he was an American soldier fighting in France in World War II. His father's family members trace their Pine Barrens roots as boat-builders back nearly 300 years; the wood-working gene manifests itself in his father, who is an expert duck-decoy maker. His mother's great grandfather Albert Benjamin Johnson was a planning

board chairman in Atlantic County; the name Johnson in Atlantic County was a much-recognized name in local political circles.

His interest in history was heightened by something he was experiencing at his school – a name change from Trenton State College to The College of New Jersey. “I was really into Trenton history and at first was somewhat resentful of the name change, because of Trenton’s fascinating and rich history. But I came to understand the wisdom behind the move – as long as TCNJ never forgets its roots.”

History Professor John Karras, who died in December, 2016, was chair of the history department, taught classical studies, John’s area of specialization. “Professor Karras was tough and demanded a lot from his students. But I liked that .... If you did well, you knew you really accomplished something .... Professor Karras was incredibly engaging, had a lot of life experience, traveled the world, made the subject matter real and mesmerizing,” John said.

The other professor responsible for John’s career path was the “legendary” journalism and English professor Dr. Robert Cole, who died in August, 2015. He connected with Dr. Cole, when he signed up for journalism as an introductory elective. Once in the class, journalism became no longer an ‘elective’ but rather an imperative for John.

“He inspired me, encouraged me, and nudged me without being heavy handed .... He had us working as journalists, not just sitting in a classroom. We covered a famous murder trial. Dr. Cole worked part-time for the *Trenton Times*, so we were learning from his day-to-day experiences. He taught not only the craft of journalism and writing, but also the ethics and responsibilities of the journalism profession .... The journalist’s responsibility was to get the facts right (informed by the best information available) and to tell a story with objectivity.

“Dr. Cole got me to think about journalism more seriously. And he also was influential in getting me a State House internship with my hometown newspaper, *The Press of Atlantic City*, during my senior year,” said John, who worked for the school newspaper *The Signal*, where he covered mostly sports.

Although he personally never abandoned his love of sports (he has evolved from a team sports participant to being a lone runner), professionally he became immersed in New Jersey State House and political issues at the *Burlington County Times*, then the *Bergen Record* and joined *NJ Spotlight* in 2015 as a State House reporter covering finance issues.

His interest in and ability to cover state financial issues can be traced to his love of sports – and his roots. Budgets were never daunting to him, because “as a kid I was into batting averages, basketball scoring, performance projections. I loved the math. My dad, a retired financial advisor for the South Jersey Gas Company, spent 30 years doing budgets and is a great sounding board for me,” said John, who is celebrating his 20<sup>th</sup> year as a full-time member of the New Jersey press corps.

Financial savvy Fred Reitmeyer, John's father, also knew the value of a public-college/university education. All of the four Reitmeyer children attended New Jersey state colleges and universities; and John's nephew just transferred from a Florida college to enroll in one of New Jersey's state universities. Now that deserves the spotlight – in all caps.