



AN AMERICAN

SUCCESS

STORY

only just

under way

BY CASSANDRA PYE

KIMBERLY LEE SAYS SHE DIDN'T FIND THE GROCERY INDUSTRY. **"IT FOUND ME."**



Kimberly Lee was a frequent shopper at her local Food4Less, about 10 minutes from her home, throughout her college years. It was on a typical shopping trip that she saw a sign announcing a hiring event at the Rialto, Calif. location. Days later, she attended, turned in an application and was interviewed on the spot.

"They were really open and seemed to really like me," she recalls. "They talked about all the opportunities I could have. I felt like this is a company I could move up in."

Lee was hired as customer first clerk, then promoted to cashier and has recently been cleared to work as a District Trainer. She'll train both customer service clerks and cashiers throughout her district after just two years with the company.

Lee has been awarded the first-ever \$10,000 "Legends of the Industry Scholarship" from the CGA Educational Foundation. She intends to use the award to complete a master's degree in counseling while continuing to pursue opportunities at Food4Less.

Her story is that of hard work, discipline and determination – so often heard about in America, most especially in California.

"I come from an immigrant family," she shares in a very poignant application statement. "I first arrived in the United States when I was eight-years old, not knowing one word of English or anyone outside my immediate family. I had a difficult time adjusting to the different customs and language while attending school."

She was salutatorian of her high school class and attended Cal Poly Pomona. Lee says receiving Cal Poly's prestigious Kellogg Honors College's scholarship gave her the freedom to focus on her studies.

"I could stop worrying about my tuition and focus on obtaining a quality education," she says. "From that moment, I made it my mission to work even harder in my classes and participate in extracurricular activities that helped develop my life philosophies in education, hard work, and helping others."

She is living that mission daily. When she's not working, Lee is an avid reader, writer and volunteer at the Kids Campus Youth Center, helping youth from preschool-age to 18 with homework and other support.

"I really enjoy my volunteer work," she says. Now married for three years, she adds that starting a family is in her plans but wants to finish school first.

Lee says she also learns a lot from her Food4Less teammates and recalls one colleague, then second-in-command at the Rialto store, being encouraging and highly supportive of her educational pursuits.

"Lili Lara was really helpful," she says. "She's the one who told me about the retail management certificate. I want to be like her – that person who encourages people to stay at Food4Less and pursue opportunities."

Where will she be in, say, five years? "I will have completed my master's in counseling and hopefully working in human resources, probably still doing a lot of training," she shares.

Lee hopes CGAEF will continue doing great work on behalf of industry employees.

"I am very, very thankful for the support from the Educational Foundation because this scholarship will allow me to continue my education," she says. "I hope they continue to help other retail grocery store students because completing your education is not something you can do right off-the-bat – you need help when you're in school. It makes you feel valued." ■

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