

Aleah Wilson

Feature Writing

Profile Story – Dr. James Andre

It was the late '60s and the anti-Vietnam war era. Warm breezes blew through the California air. They called it the Summer of Love—women wore flowers in their hair, acid rock was popular and people peacefully protested across the San Francisco and Berkeley area. Amongst those lucky enough to witness this first hand, James Andre—Semester at Sea's finance professor.

Andre grew up in San Luis Obispo, a small town in Southern California. It wasn't a tough decision as to where Andre would attend college. "I went to college in Santa Clara, I sort of didn't look at any other colleges," Andre said. "My father and my uncle had gone there and I thought, well, that's the place I'll go."

During college Andre and his fellow classmates embraced their surroundings and enjoyed hanging around the areas that were densely populated with free spirited marchers. "We hung out once and a while at Berkeley and San Francisco and that was pretty cool," Andre said while happily reminiscing his early adulthood.

After earning his undergraduate degree in accounting, Andre entered the workforce. His first job out of college was at VISTA, now known as AmeriCorps. VISTA was a national service company that was designed to alleviate poverty. "I worked there for a very short time to avoid getting drafted," Andre said.

At that time, draftees were put into a lottery and if their number was low, there was a higher chance of being sent to Vietnam. "I was lucky enough to get into the National Guard at the same time my lottery number came up," Andre said. This

was Andre's ticket to avoid being drafted into the war considering his lottery number was 11.

After working at VISTA, he pursued a career as a mortgage banker for five years in Los Angeles. Although the job went very well, he decided he didn't want to stay in accounting. "I was doing accounting but it just didn't appeal to me for the long term," Andre said.

Andre decided to return to school at USC in 1976 to receive a master's degree in business administration. That's when Andre helped start Sports Locker – a men's retail business, with some friends. "I was kind of the main CEO and investor," Andre said. The business was good for roughly six years until it collapsed due to the surge in interest rates.

Once the retail business went rogue, Andre's career reached a turning point. He had a friend who worked for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics and became interested in finding a job there. "I sort of wrangled for a job there and was lucky enough to get hired," Andre laughed.

While working for the Olympics, he became the financial control manager of the architecture and construction divisions. Andre and his team were asked to build all of the venues within a tight framework. "The venues were primarily University of Southern California and University of California Los Angeles," Andre said. Limited construction time was a challenge for the team. "The students got out of school around May and June. We had to come in, redo everything, fix up everything and build our venues," Andre said.

The City of Los Angeles planned the Olympics differently by using many existing venues rather than building a brand-new Olympic village. This saved Andre's team from having to spend billions of dollars on a new village.

The team received a few perks from their job. "It was fascinating, I had a pass that got me into all of the venues so I was able to see everything," Andre said. He saw the opening and closing ceremonies along with all of the backstage work it takes to organize such a performance.

After his job at the Olympics, Andre was invited to teach a finance class at Pepperdine University. He enjoyed teaching there and that opened a door to teaching at USC. Andre ended up working at the school from 1984 until 1997.

While working at USC a colleague of Andre's told him about Semester at Sea. "I really thought it'd be great and I applied in the early '90s a number of times," Andre said. It wasn't until reapplying around 2006 that he was hired to teach on the 2008 voyage.

"I was fortunate enough to join both the fall 2010 and the spring 2014 voyages," Andre said. During each voyage, he enjoys watching the sense of community grow and develop. "That's the magic of Semester at sea, we're all kind of in this environment that encourages us to interrelate and work together," Andre said.

Andre teaches multiple finance classes on the Spring 2019 voyage. Many of his students including Natalie Engel enjoy taking his class. "Professor Andre is hilarious and always brings a great energy to each class," Engel said.

Andre looks forward to spending most of his time in California. "No set plans, I mean I hope to survive for a few more years and make the best of it," Andre laughed. He enjoys traveling and looks forward to seeing more of the world.