“Building. Building. Building.” This is 1990 Alumna Kelley Robinson’s mantra. Like a skillful architect designing a skyscraper, a symbol of visible history, an indelible mark of talent and inventiveness, Robinson ’90 is adroitly crafting her business career, building on a foundation constructed from solid business knowledge, exceptional organizational skills, a willingness to be flexible, and a strong thirst for learning.

Currently a vice president at JPMorgan Chase in Wilmington and an adjunct professor in Neumann’s business division, Robinson’s career is full of different work and personal experiences from the banking industry as well as from teaching, mentoring, fundraising and volunteering. “They are all building blocks for my career,” she says.

Robinson began to shape her career when she decided to attend Neumann as an undergrad, an experience she would not have had if it were not for the partial scholarship she received. The first in her family to attend college, she chose Neumann for its similarity to her high school, Padua Academy, with its Franciscan value system, and for its “intimate” environment. “I had the feeling, I could be a big fish in a small pond,” she says.

Robinson also preferred to be a “big fish” in the business world. “I wanted to be a boss,” she chuckles as she explains her reason for pursuing a business degree. “When my sister and I were kids, we built a lemonade stand and started to do little puppet shows around the neighborhood. I always liked to organize things and put things together. I definitely did not like making the lemonade. So, I learned at an early age that I did not want a job in manufacturing. I liked bringing people and products together,” she reflects.

Robinson credits Neumann with helping her lay the first building block. Neumann provided her not only with knowledge, but assigned her a mentor, a local businessman. He imparted real-life, business-world perspectives and gave her guidance with her résumé and interviewing. Neumann also arranged an internship at Barclay’s Bank of Delaware (which eventually became Beneficial National Bank or BNB USA) where she worked 40 hours a week from freshman year until graduation. A month after graduating, she was promoted to department manager—her chance to “be a boss” had arrived.

After a year, she knew there was more to management than just being a boss. She accepted a position in BNB USA’s telecommunications division. “If you think about it, I left to manage machines not people,” she admits. The experience taught her an important lesson. “Things don’t always go as you expect, and it’s ‘ok’ to reinvent yourself along the way.”

Robinson added, “You don’t necessarily learn everything you need to know in the classroom.” She shares this lesson with students in her Principles of Management course and cites textbooks that claim, “statistically, 20% of the knowledge you need for a career you get in college, and the remainder is made up of other experiences.”

After learning all she could about telephone systems — even crawling under floorboards and above ceiling tiles —
Future for Kelley Robinson ’90

Robinson took her people management skills and technical telecom knowledge, and accepted a position at MBNA in 1996. As a technology project manager she created contingency plans for customer call centers, managed business recovery globally for the customer satisfaction area, created a new department which pioneered targeted customer service, and developed a new web site for handling customer service via the internet. Along the way, she also earned her MBA from Widener University in 1999.

After nine years at MBNA, she moved onto her next building block, her current position with JPMorgan Chase. As VP and technology project manager, she is spearheading strategic growth initiatives that include globally expanding call center facilities, executing new product features like Chase Blueprint℠, and helping the company respond to changing regulatory legislation.

Robinson believes her personal and professional success is “deeply rooted in the education and holistic development (intellectual, social, spiritual, character and athletic)” at Neumann. “The fine faculty and staff at Neumann showed me how to lead with compassion and confidence, to learn from my successes and failures, and to continually improve myself and the world around me,” she states.

Besides teaching at Neumann, Robinson continues to be involved at the University as a former business division advisory council member, as a fundraiser for the Brendan P. Kelly endowed scholarship, and as a mentor for business students. She feels “challenged to uphold the traditions of the University,” and sees the importance of “embracing truth, love, charity, fairness and respect in everyday living.” She believes Neumann is unique in that it has “held true to its mission despite all the changes, new buildings and expanded major offerings.” She attributes this constancy to Neumann’s president, Dr. Rosalie Mirenda.

“Dr. Mirenda has unparalleled compassion in her leadership. She makes you want to do things and do them in a very principled way. She’s a fantastic role model.” Based on her skills and adeptness at building her own career, Robinson is well poised to be a role model in her own right.