

# PEOPLE OF ACTION

## James Burnett

Public Relations Director, Kane Communications Group

[james@kanecommgroup.com](mailto:james@kanecommgroup.com)

*(Member since 2019)*

Throughout his career, James Burnett has understood the value and emphasized the importance of storytelling. He is currently the Public Relations Director at Kane Communications Group and has over 20 years of professional communications experience. But from a young age, James has always had the gift of connecting with the people from all walks of life and figuring out what makes them unique. According to him, “Everyone and everything has a story, even those who don’t appear terribly unique or rare at a glance. I just keep digging.”



James was born and raised in Southeastern Virginia during his early childhood. He spent the second half of his childhood in Sicily, where his father, a career U.S. Naval officer was stationed for his final tour of duty and later consultation to an aircraft manufacturer. He describes those years as a great time in life where he was fortunate to experience amazing places and fascinating people across Europe.

After he and his family moved back to the United States, James planned for college by planning to provide for himself, including paying for school. So, he spent most of his college years working “the graveyard shift” as an F-14 jet machinist at the Norfolk Naval Air Station and immersing himself in his coursework at Old Dominion University during the day. A professor’s recommendation that he joined the campus newspaper staff put James on the path to a successful “first” career as a journalist. His second news gig? News reader and reporter at a news/talk radio station during his senior year of college.

After graduation, James went on to a 16-year career as an award-winning reporter, columnist and editor for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, the Miami Herald, and the Boston Globe. At the Globe, James was a writer on the paper’s Pulitzer Prize-winning team that covered the aftermath of the 2013 Boston Marathon Bombings. He has also been a magazine and broadcast contributor to O: The Oprah Magazine, U.S. News & World Report, CNN and NPR.

James Burnett’s own story exemplifies the complexity of people and life, in general. He has seen the world and met many people and has used these experiences to become a great storyteller, a skill he says has proven beneficial to his public relations clients, as he works with them to better identify and relate to their clients, employees, and stakeholders.



In late 2018, he and his wife, Jill ( a special needs teacher for Milwaukee Public Schools), and children, Max and Sophie moved back to Milwaukee to be near family.

As he continues to meet new people from varied backgrounds, James constantly explores new ways to “storify” people, services, products, and causes. When he’s not working, James enjoys time with his family, baking, playing basketball, dodging his literary agent’s phone calls, and taking long hikes with his black lab Leo..

His advice to the next generation of journalists and PR and marketing communicators is to be open, relatable, accepting of all people, and curious. He says these elements will foster trust and build comfort levels with people who need guidance strengthening and spreading their stories.

Although James is a busy man, he still makes time to actively participate in the community. He is a member of the following organizations:

- Friends of Villa Terrace, Board Member
- Rotary Club of Milwaukee, Member
- Penfield Montessori Academy, Board Member
- Three Harbors Council, BSA, Committee Member



**Editor’s Note:** Rotary People of Action is a bi-monthly series written by a group of Rotarians. This feature was written by Kimberly Kane. The next Rotary People of Action will feature longtime Rotarian Paul Meyer, written by James Madlom.