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University of Virginia gamer makes good during TEC summer

By Duane N. Morrison, ERDC-TEC



Arthur

She is a self-proclaimed ‘gamer’, does not like her wide wrap-around shades referred to as ‘Paris Hiltons’, likes all music but prefers rap, (“Juelz Santana has a good beat,” she said). Her turbocharged work ethic has gained enough favor with her chain of command that a CO-OP program with her mother ship – The University of Virginia (UVA) – is in the works. This summer, she has tackled assignments related to all functional areas of the Inland Electronic Navigation Chart (IENC) program and she is ready for more.

Katherine Marie Arthur is a third year civil engineering student at UVA, and came to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Engineer Research and Development Center-Topographic Engineering Center (ERDC-TEC), Alexandria, Va., through a pathway that proves marketing who we are and what we do is worth the effort. A family friend attended a recent Engineering

Day event at Hayfield High School, and passed Dr. Eric Zimmerman, TEC’s Research Division chief’s contact information to Arthur’s mother. Arthur submitted a resume and two letters of recommendation to Zimmerman. An interview followed, and she joined TEC’s Geospatial Applications Branch in May. I was assigned as her mentor.

The most amazing thing one notices while watching Arthur work is the speed with which she operates buttons, windows, menus and toolbars. Her rapid-fire mouse clicks over-speed her desktop’s task bar on a regular basis, making one think of the Guinness World Records. She accurately digitized 30 miles of shoreline in one day. I learned, during her first week to keep her loaded with taskers, staying one step ahead of her automaton-like production speed. She always completes tasks early.

She attributes her speed to gaming. “I’ve gamed with my brother most of my life,” she said. But, there is another element to her success at TEC this summer: she likes this stuff. Arthur was tasked with creating an ESRI shape file so I could also task her with creating Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC)-compliant metadata to go along with it. Before I am accused of cruel and unusual treatment in the assignment of tasks, check this out -- she enjoyed it! Numbers, equations, figures, and most things technical fall in her comfort zone. Add to that a strong desire to be challenged, and a heavy sprinkling of initiative, and you begin to understand how TEC is a nice fit for her.

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I provided her with the latest FGDC metadata standard, she printed it out, and can tell you what a “process step” is and when you need to record it and where it gets recorded.

If you were to ask me what her greatest productive accomplishment was this summer, I would tell you about building an IENC sample for the Navy. In less than a week, she generated data for river features in ArcMap from in-house resources and sent the final data files to an IENC team member for S-57 file creation (IENCs native format is the IHO S-57 data format). This data file was submitted to the Navy for review July 26 to allow for follow-on requirements discussions. Maybe, I directed her and coached her with unfamiliar areas, but she created every point, line, and polygon for a complete IENC cell by herself.

Ask me about her greatest achievement this summer - outside the scope of production, and I would have to say that she has served as one of her generation’s finest ambassadors in a world crowded with old-timers like me that sometimes groan under their breath when told they will be mentoring for the summer. And, if Arthur’s CO-OP program is a success, she could be with us for a long time. I asked her last week what she thought about the potential of a career at TEC, and she said, “Well, after I’ve been here a while I can be a mentor like you and give my summer hire taskers.” Did I mention this was educational?

The ERDC is the premier research and development facility for the Corps of Engineers. It consists of seven laboratories at four geographical sites, with more than 2,000 employees, \$1.2 billion in facilities, and an annual research program approaching \$700 million. It conducts research in both military and civil works mission areas for the Department of Defense and the nation.