

Alumnus Ryan Phifer: Delaware's "Associate of the Year"



Not long after Ryan Phifer graduated from the University of Delaware with a degree in marketing, he realized that the field was not for him. He decided to go back to school to study something that would allow him to work outside, be active and use his mind. He explored the options available at Delaware Tech and came upon Civil Engineering Technology, which seemed to meet his requirements. After taking a surveying class, he zeroed in even further and says he found his future career path – Geomatics.

It was a natural fit, and he excelled at his classes. “I enjoyed the subject matter and was more focused than I had been earlier. The class sizes were small and personal. I knew all of the instructors in the department, and they cared about me and my future.”

Kymerlie Kelly, an instructor in Civil Engineering Technology taught Phifer in several classes. “Ryan's interest and excitement for all of his classes was obvious. He was a great student, inquisitive and dedicated to his school work. Since he graduated, I have used several of his projects as examples for my current students,” Kelly noted.

Another of his instructors, Michael Syzmanski, was active in the professional surveying field, and helped him to make contacts and join the Delaware Association of Surveyors. This contact led to a part-time job while in school, and eventually a full-time job upon graduation. He joined the engineering firm VanDemark & Lynch, Inc., an engineering firm in Wilmington, DE, shortly after graduation, and has been working in his dream field ever since.

“I like that this is a career, not just a job,” Phifer notes. He has completed three of the four Certified Survey Technician (CST) exams, a national measurement exam administered through the National Society of Professional Surveyors, and will finish the fourth soon. He says his coursework at Delaware Tech prepared him well for these tests, some of which he completed while still in school.

Once he completes the tests, Phifer looks towards growing in his company and the field, and eventually becoming professionally licensed as a surveyor, an intensive process that involves testing and internship.

Along with his day job, Phifer is actively involved with the Delaware Association of Surveyors, and volunteers his time with the Trig-Star program, an annual high school mathematics competition sponsored by the National Society of Professional Surveyors based on the practical application of Trigonometry. Through the program he meets regularly with students from Paul M. Hodgson Vocational Technical High School to teach them the basics of surveying. He enjoys the experience so much that he says he may want to teach one day – possibly at Delaware Tech.

Phifer was recently recognized as the 2012 “Associate of the Year” awardee from the Delaware Association of Surveyors, an honor that he attributes to his commitment to the growth of the field of surveying. Looking back at the path that led him to where he is today, Phifer says he is very glad that he decided to come to Delaware Tech to study: “It’s put me exactly where I want to be.”

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