Profiles in Computing

Victor Skowronski
System Engineer
Lincoln, MA, USA

Education:
PhD, Computer Engineering - Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
ME – Stevens Institute of Technology
BE - Stevens Institute of Technology

Advice to students: I often found that I did not recognize the usefulness of a subject until after I had completed a course in it. Even after having worked in a particular discipline, I still found that taking a course was helpful in filling in those areas that my experience did not cover.

Q: Please describe your path to becoming the computing professional you are today.
A: I wrote my first computer programs using FORTRAN and punched cards. I really did not get interested in the field, however, until the microprocessor was developed. This helped me to decide to join a special systems group where I was working.

I liked to call this group the Beyond Help Office. A help office provides assistance with existing software. The group that I was in worked with clients who needed something that could not be found in the standard software. We worked with these clients to identify what they needed, procured what we could, and developed the rest ourselves.

After working in this group for quite a few years, I decided to get my PhD. I did research in Computer Aided Design where our assignment was to help industry work smarter rather than harder.

My post PhD work was in modeling and simulation, where I had the opportunity to help develop systems that would help train our war-fighters. I was also able to use my knowledge and experience to help develop standards.

Q: What is your job and why do you love it?
A: My PhD is in Computer Engineering. It allows me to use my knowledge and skills to solve real problems. Solving these problems has a definite impact on my clients.

Q: Please describe 24 hours in your typical day as a computing professional.
A: I currently work as a technical adviser to the US Air Force. What my day might involve is varied. It may involve listening to presentations or reviewing proposals and identifying possible problems with what is being recommended. I might research questions on the web or other data sources. I also talk with others to make sure that we coordinate our work and do not duplicate effort. After work, I also use my computer skills in several volunteer activities. I have developed several computer scripts to help me process data for my various activities.

Q: Please describe a computing-related work project of which you are most proud.
A: I developed an interactive front end for the US Navy that eliminated the need for punched cards and paper reports in the issuing and reading of radiation dosimetry for shipyard workers. The program reduced the time needed for these functions while increasing the accuracy of the system.

Q: What are your hobbies/ interests/ passions beyond working in computing?
A: I am involved in the folk dance community, particularly English country dancing. I help run a dance series. I also write English country dances.

Videos of my dances can be found at:
http://dancevideos.childgrove.org/ecd/ecd-modern/158-companions and
http://dancevideos.childgrove.org/ecd/ecd-modern/147-rafes-waltz

I have found that many skills that I learned writing computer programs are also relevant to dance choreography.

I also sing in my church choir and assist in the local chapter of the Catholic Alumni Club. Finally, I am a bicyclist, sometimes commuting on my bicycle.