

Fresh Faces Infuse Engineer Development Program with New Perspectives

The gowns, caps and tassels of college commencement have made way for boots and hard hats of the Graduate Engineer Development Program (GEDP) for three young individuals.

The GEDP is a one-year rotational program designed to engage specially selected recent graduate civil engineers into INDOT's culture. During this time, graduate engineers rotate through 18 departments within the districts and Central Office. After the completion of the program, Talent Management works with each participant to find a permanent assignment that is the best fit for them and INDOT.

In late May, INDOT welcomed three GEDP employees: Cristy Gimbel, Marcus Smith and Spenser Vaughn. They will each rotate within Central Office. Additionally, Gimbel will spend time in the Greenfield and Seymour districts, and Smith and Vaughn will work in the Crawfordsville and Greenfield districts.

Cristy Gimbel

The Indiana University Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW) graduate can thank her great-uncle for her career choice. He is an engineer who worked his way up to chief executive officer, and he persuaded Gimbel to give engineering a try instead of her intended discipline of architecture.



New additions to the GEDP are (from left) Spenser Vaughn, Cristy Gimbel and Marcus Smith, who will each rotate through 18 INDOT departments.

Gimbel worked as a Bridge Inspection intern in the Fort Wayne District last summer and was duly impressed.

"After working with INDOT last summer, I knew this is where I wanted to be after graduation," she said. "Everyone at INDOT is goal-oriented and willing to help others get the job done, so that attracted me to work here."

Her experience last summer didn't pass without one humorous incident. She and a co-worker were about to go down a long slope to inspect a

culvert when they heard a rustle in the weeds.

"I looked over, and it was a groundhog," said Gimbel. "After making eye contact, it ran toward me and my co-worker, making us jump. I yelled while backing away, and the groundhog ran in the other direction. I couldn't stop laughing afterward. We let a groundhog get the best of us."

Marcus Smith

Smith is no stranger to INDOT; he previously served as a summer intern in Hydraulics and as a Construction intern, including helping oversee the early construction phases of the U.S. 31 and State Road 20 interchange.

"I have never worked for an organization that had so many employees who truly love what they do," said Smith, a Trine University graduate. "It seems that people at INDOT genuinely enjoy their work, which is a luxury not every company is able to offer."

During college, he gained experience as a traffic circle researcher, studying a roundabout in Angola, Ind., in which he concluded that heavy vehicles have a larger effect on the traffic flow than is currently suggested in the Transportation Research Board's Highway Capacity Manual. He said it will be interesting if other researchers come to the same conclusion.

"My first few weeks at INDOT have been encouraging and inspiring," said Smith. "Talking with other employees excites me for my years ahead and being part of the INDOT team. I have been told several times that my fresh perspective on the daily operations of INDOT are desired and needed for INDOT to continue to improve. That is very invigorating as a new employee."

Spenser Vaughn

Unlike Gimbel and Smith, Vaughn never interned at INDOT. The IPFW graduate spent the past two summers interning in private industry.

"The difference is profound," said Vaughn. "The private industry only was concerned about you getting the job done, and there was not a family-friendly atmosphere like there is here. This will be a nice change working for INDOT. I think the amount of effort and time that people are willing to spend to help the GEDPs get started shows how much we are valued. None of my previous work put half this much effort into training."

Vaughn got his feet wet in the engineering field in 2012 and 2013, when he took the lead role in designing and constructing a concrete canoe during two academic years.

"People forget that steel is three times heavier than concrete," said Vaughn. "Floating or sinking is about weight displaced exceeding the weight of the materials plus cargo."

Once the canoe was built, Vaughn experimented with replacing part of the aggregate with wood.

"It took six weeks to find a way to control the water absorption, but once we figured out that sealing the wood chips wouldn't hurt the strength, we managed to get just enough strength to use the wood aggregate mix for the final canoe," he said.

Curtis Donlan, who started his year-long GEDP assignment in January, continues through the program until next January. He will rotate in and out of Central Office, and the Crawfordsville and Greenfield districts.