

Melissa Redish learned about the laser program at Central Carolina Community College (CCCC) in Sanford, NC, through a one-day Saturday workshop program for middle school students that she attended with her youngest daughter, Bonnie. At the time, Melissa was an assistant teacher in the public school system; however she was so impressed by the laser program that she enrolled the following fall.

Melissa raved about her classes to her older daughter, Michelle, a sophomore studying accounting. The following year Michelle transferred to CCCC to join the laser program herself. She graduated just one year after her mother, and both now work at Northrop Grumman Corp. (NGC) building lasers.



Melissa Redish (left) and Michelle Redish at work.

Attracted to Lasers

Melissa

The many types of lasers and job opportunities all over the country caught my attention. I also saw the need for more women in this growing field. That and a NdYag laser burning a hole through a brick and a really cool laser light show redirected my career goals. [While teaching] I saw a lot of girls that were great in math and science not even considering going into those fields. But, “Do as I say, not as I do” doesn’t work. So, I decided to set the bar higher for my daughters and maybe inspire other young women.

Michelle

I had been switching majors a lot at the college I previously went to. I started out a chemistry major but moved on to psychology and then accounting. I knew I was good at math and science but didn’t know of a lot of options that appealed to me. My mom had shown me some of her coursework and looking at it I just thought to myself, “I can do that.” I went on a tour of her program and was hooked after seeing some of the applications of lasers, in particular the Argon-Krypton laser set up to direct the beam with mirrors around the room and a sample of a hologram. The day of the tour I started the paperwork to transfer to CCCC.

Getting Started

Melissa

The staff at CCCC provided exactly the training and education needed here at NGC Laser Systems. Their example and expectations of professionalism and teamwork were very important in transitioning from school to workforce. Everything we do here relates back to the lab and classroom experiences we received. Now my youngest daughter is considering going to CCCC and studying Lasers and Photonics to receive hands-on experience before going into engineering.

Michelle

CCCC provided me with hands-on experience working with electrical and optical equipment. I was one of those people who started the program not even knowing what a multi-meter was except that it was one of those tools my dad used occasionally, so I could have easily been overwhelmed. The class sizes were small so I was able to receive help if needed. It also allowed me to get used to working in a team-oriented environment, as well as figuring things out logically myself.

Current Work

Melissa

I miss the kids and the many wonderful creative things I learned from them [but] I love doing something different everyday around people who enjoy sharing their knowledge and experience. This is definitely a career field that allows you to think and share ideas. The potential growth for this industry now and in the future is amazing.

I have just been promoted to Laser Tech II. I currently work on the Mark VIII program as well as continue to support the Common Resonator lab. I have the privilege to work with many talented people. On a daily basis I align, troubleshoot, provide engineering support and test the Mark VIII from chassis to finished product. The products we build go directly to our ground forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, and giving them the best is always first priority.

Michelle

At the moment I am an entry-level laser technician, working toward a Laser Technician II hopefully in the next year. I work on the Viper program where my team builds, troubleshoots and repairs reliable lasers to move on the next level of assembly. The quality of our units is critically important since its purpose is to protect our soldiers from the air.

I love learning something different each day at work either from the people I work with or from the unit itself. This is a field where the people you meet today will help you out both now and in the future, especially since this is a growing field with endless possibilities. ■

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