

The Sky's the Limit

WITC graduate completes internship with **NASA**

An optimistic phrase says the only place to go is up. This is advice Casandra Baer definitely took to heart.

After graduating from the Mechanical Design Technology program at WITC-Rice Lake, Baer continued her education at the University of Wisconsin-Stout where she's currently an engineering technology major.

"Many of the classes that I am taking are similar to classes I had at WITC, but more in-depth," Baer says. "The classes at WITC help me understand the more complex information that is being taught at Stout."

To Glenn Sokolowski, Mechanical Design Technology instructor at WITC, it comes as no surprise that Baer chose to follow her educational dreams.

"I remember Casandra as a quiet, but very focused student," Sokolowski says. "After graduating from WITC, it just seemed natural that she would continue her engineering education at the university level. I always share Casandra's story when I visit area high schools because she is a great example of how students can use WITC as a stepping stone to pursue their career dreams."

Last summer, the Dairyland, Wis., native took part in a 10-week internship program conducting research at the NASA Glenn Research Center in Cleveland.

"When I found out that I was accepted, I could hardly sit still," Baer says. "I took a walk around my dorm and was just so bubbly with joy. I had to find somebody to tell as my roommate was not in the room at the time. I was happy for weeks after and told all of my friends."

WITC graduate Casandra Baer on the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Stout, where she is continuing her education.

Photo by Greg Dahl.

During the internship, Baer researched bonding ceramics to metals, which will be used at high temperatures, and investigated ways to reduce stresses in joints. This helps to determine the best fuel tube material and brazing alloy for fuel injector use in the next generation of efficient gas turbines.

"A typical day included making new samples and studying previously made samples by doing microscopy, micro-hardness testing and occasionally using a scanning electron microscope (SEM/EDS), to obtain better images and also to find out the composition of the sample," Baer says. "Some days I just read articles related to my research while I was waiting for various samples that were being processed."

Baer's hard work paid off. Her research appeared in a report for the Subsonic Rotary Wing Project while also helping her to discover what type of work she'd like to do in the future.

"For me, this experience gave me a taste of what NASA's mission is and how I can be part of a bigger project that may change my future," Baer says. "Through this experience, I found out that I would not like to just do research, but would like to design items. Without this experience I would have never known that about myself." ■

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