

FROM TINKERING TO HIGH TECH

BY DEBORAH ANDERSON
PHOTO BY GREG DAHL



Some don't find their calling until later in life. Others, like Tucker McCumber, realize their passion at a young age.

McCumber grew up in Spooner, Wis., as the child of two WITC graduates. His father, Bruce, earned an associate degree in telecommunications. His mother, Gayle, graduated from the EMT program. Career dreams began to take shape when he attended Eighth Grade Career Day at WITC. The annual event allows students to learn about careers from professionals in various fields. That's all it took for McCumber to begin planning his future.

He spent a lot of time as a kid tinkering with computers and knew that his future career would involve designing Web sites, repairing computers or building

and maintaining the networks that link them. McCumber attended Spooner High School and made himself indispensable by helping staff set up audio/visual and other technical equipment while gaining experience.

After graduating from high school in 2009, McCumber enrolled in the two-year information technology-network specialist program at the WITC-Rice Lake campus. He felt the curriculum was customized for the real world, hands-on and directly pertained to the job he wanted to do.

Greg Brodt, one of WITC's IT instructors, describes McCumber as "an energetic young man whose previous experience served him well in his studies." McCumber continued to work at Spooner High School as an intern while at WITC

and incorporated his internship into one of his college case studies.

"It was great to have feedback from Tucker in class discussions, which he willingly shared with other students," says Brodt.

This spring, McCumber joined hundreds of other WITC graduates in walking across the stage to receive his degree while his family watched. He applied for five IT positions, was called to interview for all of them, and wound up with three job offers. In a twist of fate, one of the positions he applied for – and the one he accepted – was for an opening at Spooner High School as a network district technician.

McCumber attributes his confidence in his abilities and the speed at which he got a job to the training and skill set he developed at WITC. With these skills, he passed the CompTIA A+ and Network+ certifications, which employers expect applicants to have.

"As a network specialist, I will need to keep those certifications current,"

McCumber says. "Technology is always changing, so I have to be prepared to continue my education."

"We were pleased to hire Tucker when the position came up. He fit right in," says Hugh Miller, Spooner School District technology coordinator.

McCumber considers himself fortunate to have the opportunity to work full-time at the new Spooner High School, which opened fall 2009. There is pride in his voice as he says, "It is an example of a state-of-the-art school with the latest technology."

His typical day involves setting up computers and other technical equipment and fielding calls to the help desk — sometimes more than a hundred in a week.

"Communication skills are important, and you need to be a detective," he says, "You need to ask a lot of questions to troubleshoot where the problem is and fix it."

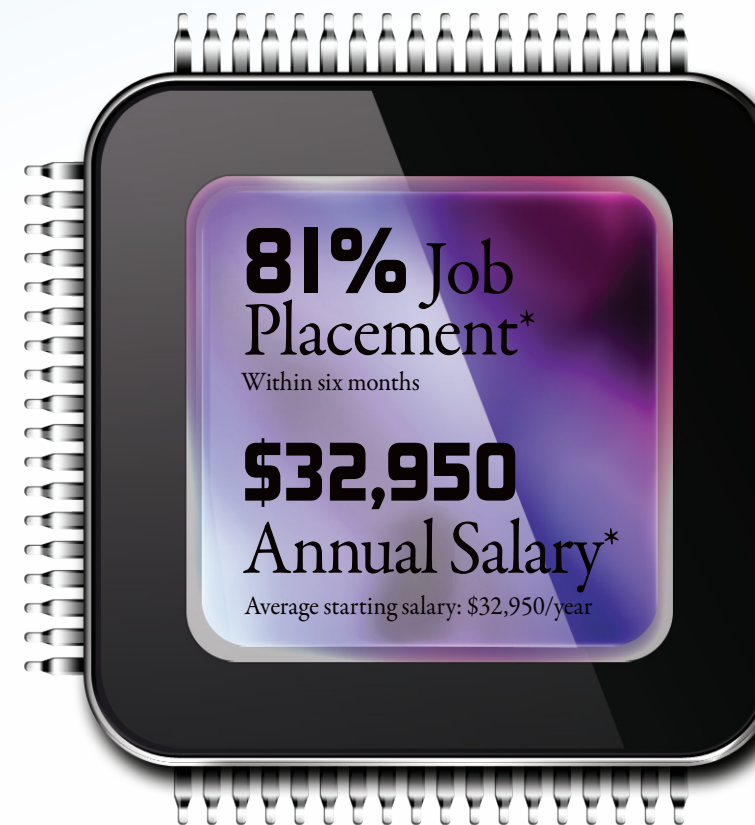
The three-person department is responsible for maintaining all of the technical equipment, from the wireless network to the weather bug on the roof.

"We say, 'as long as everything's working, we are anonymous' and we like it that way," jokes McCumber.

The job allows McCumber to stay near his family and friends in Northwestern Wisconsin while pursuing his hobbies of photography and storm chasing. Even though his work day revolves around computers and technology, he now teaches continuing education computer courses.

McCumber advises anyone who has an interest in a program area to call WITC and set up a class shadow. It's a chance to speak to instructors and current students and learn more about the curriculum, job prospects and if it is the right career.

"Go for it," McCumber says. "WITC will definitely help you develop the skills you need to succeed." ■



IT – NETWORK SPECIALIST (Two-year Associate Degree)

This degree prepares students with the skills to perform network design, installation, administration, security and support for information systems for business, government, educational and health-care institutions.

**according to survey of 2009-2010 WITC graduates*