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SAFEGUARDING OUR SHORES

STEM PROFESSIONALS WORKING TO PROTECT OUR SHORES IN AEROSPACE AND DEFENSE FIND JOB FULFILLMENT AND HOT PROSPECTS.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) says the median income for aerospace engineers in May 2017 was $113,030, and employment was projected to grow 6% through 2026.

BLS further notes that because aircraft are being redesigned to cause less noise pollution and have better fuel efficiency, demand for research and development will sustain. Plus, adds BLS, as international governments refocus their space exploration efforts, new companies are emerging to provide access to space beyond the access afforded by standard governmental space agencies.

Added to that, according to the Aerospace Industries Association (AIA), the aerospace and defense (A&D) industry supports 2.4 million U.S. jobs, as well as 13% of the nation's manufacturing workforce.

Thus, employment opportunities are excellent, and companies are looking to increase STEM talent.

Read on to meet five thriving STEM professionals who happily work in A&D. They discuss how their careers have grown as they dispense advice to fellow STEM pros seeking to join them in this industry.

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BY SANDRA H. SHICHTMAN

can transition from a technical role to a managerial role," points out Willett, who also earned her MBA, which Textron Systems supported and for which the company provided tuition reimbursement.

"All of my previous positions, as well as my current position, require a government clearance," she explains. "Once it's been established that you'll be working on a contract that requires a clearance, Textron Systems' security department provides you with the necessary information and training to complete the process."

Willett is a member of two employee resource groups at Textron Systems, the Women's Network and the Activities Committee. "The Women's Network provides networking activities and resources for women across the business, while the Activities Committee helps coordinate events and activities for all employees."

Outside of the company, she's a member of the Society of Women Engineers (SWE).

"I would advise STEM professionals seeking a career within the aerospace and defense industry to seek internship and co-op opportunities within the industry, including Textron Systems," Willett recommends.

"Opportunities such as these have the potential to develop into full-time positions. Take advantage of rotational programs that corporations offer to broaden your experiences and expand your network. Leverage existing relationships within your network, and reach out when you see something that interests you."

For additional information about Textron Systems and its job postings, go to textronsystems.com and textronsystems.com/careers. Connect on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

CACI International's Briceño Helps Ensure Against Emerging Security Threats

Alejandro "Alex" Briceño is a veteran who earned a bachelor's degree in political science before serving four and a half years of active duty as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps.

Briceño decided to make his civilian career in information security in the defense industry. "As a military officer, the defense industry is a good fit for me and helps to fill my desire to continue to serve my country," he explains.

He'd known about CACI International from his military deployment days when he had the opportunity to work with CACI employees who served as contractors, and gained great respect for the company, which, he says, has a "fantastic" reputation in the defense industry.

Added to that, a friend who worked at CACI recommended him for a position with the company.

CACI is a global company headquartered in Arlington, VA that provides professional and information technology services to intelligence, defense and federal civilian customers.

Briceño was hired in November 2015 as a principal information security professional and, about a year later, was promoted to a senior principal with management responsibilities. The only change from his initial position was the addition of managerial duties.

Today Briceño is a senior principal in the assurance and program management section of CACI's corporate information security division.

"My primary responsibilities include ensuring that we maintain our compliance with security-related regulations and evaluating our security posture against emerging threats," he details.

"In this capacity I'm always looking at risks, and our technical and non-technical defensive measures that we put in place to reduce or mitigate risks."

The security clearance he's had since he joined the Marines and that he continues to have it as a Reservist helps him in his current role. "Many CACI positions require that you have a specific clearance level before you start, but I have seen a number of employees get their first clearance while working for CACI," says Briceño.

"CACI regularly sponsors employees to gain and maintain a clearance."

Briceño further points out that he's consistently been offered training to ensure he stays current in his field and gains new technical skills. "Training has included project management training, as well as vendor-specific training for security applications that we manage."

While Briceño could move into a management track, "moving into a management position in a technical field often requires that you maintain at least some of your technical skills."

> "MY PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES INCLUDE ENSURING THAT WE MAINTAIN OUR COMPLIANCE WITH SECURITY-RELATED REGULATIONS AND EVALUATING OUR SECURITY POSTURE AGAINST EMERGING THREATS."

He adds that CACI makes it easy to "advertise your resume within the corporation," and concludes that "the opportunity to be mobile and try new positions is probably one of the reasons why CACI does such a good job retaining talented personnel."

Briceño is active within CACI, where he's a member of the steering committee for its Veterans Employee Resource Group, and has attended meetings of CACI's African-American Resource Group.

In the field of information security, the International System Security Association (ISSA) International "facilitates opportunities to meet people in the information security industry and gain industry knowledge through professional presentations," he says. Periodically, he also attends conferences of the Hispanic IT Executive Counsel (HITEC).

Briceño feels that anyone wanting to begin a career in information systems should have a degree and/or courses in the discipline, information systems certifications that demonstrate baseline knowledge of the subject, and hands-on job experience, even if it's only on a volunteer basis.

"Anyone working on a U.S. defense industry information system is required to maintain an approved certification as defined by Department of Defense regulations," he adds.

Go to caci.com for information about the company, and careers.caci.com to see its open positions. Connect on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube.