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A unique summer school for teachers
High-tech jobs keep educators busy through 'Industry Initiatives' program

by Alexa Tondreau

At Mountain View-based Synopsys, Inc., you'll find more than the normal crowd of engineers and IT personnel this summer: Some veteran teachers have showed up to lend a hand as well.

Assigned to a variety of departments and positions, including work in networking and voiceover IP, 12 teachers in all have come to the company as part of a program called the Industry Initiatives for Science and Math Education (IISME).

The organization is a consortium of companies, research laboratories and government groups in the Bay Area that offers eight-week paid positions to kindergarten through 12th grade teachers.

Terri Oropeza, a Synopsys employee who is a mentor to six teachers this summer, said the participants do valuable work, contributing significantly to Synopsys projects.

"We don't have them do just something boring, like stuffing envelopes. It has to be interesting," Oropeza said. "They really give us extra staff."

Teachers currently working at Synopsys are contributing to research and prototyping, a variety of documentation projects including the creation of a "tier-1" document, and Windows and networking projects, Oropeza said.

The company began planning in February which projects it would assign to teachers this summer, Oropeza said, and looked for projects with a duration time of eight weeks, so teachers could participate from start to finish.

IISME, which has been in existence for 23 years, aims to help teachers in several ways. A major goal of the program is to enhance the type of curriculum each teacher brings back to the classroom. The program hopes to instill teachers with a better sense of the corporate world, so they can impart what they know to their pupils.

"We want them to have something to bring back from the corporate life into the classrooms, so they can inform their students about real-world jobs and opportunities," said Tisha Bacigalupi, sponsor relations manager of IISME.

Additionally, a majority of the teachers who participate teach science and math, Bacigalupi said, and can easily transfer what they learn in a research lab or project into their curriculum.

Another goal of IISME is more practical: to keep teachers teaching. The program pays its participants about \$7,400 over the course of eight weeks, an important supplement to a teacher's income — particularly in Mountain View, where some teachers find it difficult to keep up with the cost of living.

Oropeza, who has a teaching background herself, said Synopsys hopes to "motivate them to continue teaching. It's hard for teachers to afford to live around here, and the value of teachers to our community is so huge."

Synopsys is participating in its seventh year with IISME, and another Mountain View company has joined for the first time this year, Bacigalupi said. Google took on one teacher for the summer, she said.

Mountain View resident Karen Giehler, who teaches second grade in Sunnyvale, is in her fourth consecutive year in the program. This summer she is working in production monitoring at Lockheed Martin, where she assists in monitoring the supply chain of a new building for flight hardware, she said.

Giehler thinks that, beyond the normal scope of the program's aims, the experience has enhanced her abilities overall. For instance, she said, it has greatly improved her ability to use computer software technology, including Excel and PowerPoint.

"What's really been helpful for me is that I'm more organized, more businesslike with planning in my classroom and helping out the school," she said. "I'll be able to do PowerPoint presentations if the school needs it."

Bacigalupi said the program has maintained its popularity over the years.

"Teachers do come back, year after year after year," she said.

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