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Three Almaden teachers trade classroom for summer work

By Carol Rosen

Editor

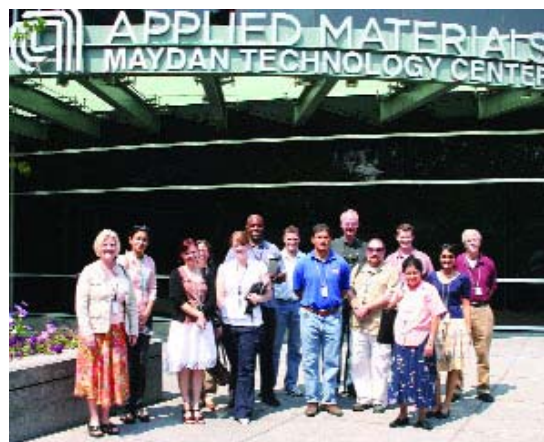
It's always a mystery to students what teachers do on their summer vacations. Three of them from Almaden spent their summer working for big-name Silicon Valley companies like Intel, Applied Materials and IBM.

Fifty-five teachers are serving in the Industry Initiatives for Science and Math Education. Three of them work in Almaden. These local teachers work for various Bay Area companies and research labs to gain valuable hands-on experience in the subjects they teach to bring back relevant curriculum to their classrooms.

All of the teachers put together an Education Transfer Plan as part of their fellowship with the program. Teachers are asked to create a relevant curriculum or bring back a new technology to their classroom based on their summer fellowship experience.

Rhonda Mirabeau

Rhonda Mirabeau spends nine months of the year teaching at Williams Elementary School. She's been there for nine years, and she's taught students from the San Jose Unified School District for 11 years. The fifth grade teacher spent this summer with IBM in the software development services department.



The group of 14 Industry Initiatives for Science and Math Education fellows pose outside of their summer job at Applied Materials.

"The department is working on a program that will save energy when using and building computer systems," she said. "My main function was to test the projects' user functions and work on establishing an automated test process."

She decided to do the summer stint because, "All across the nation organizations are developing, studying and implementing efficient technologies to help save energy and resources. I hoped to gain insight on what a company like IBM was doing to help save energy and resources at their company."



Williams Elementary teacher Rhoda Mirabeau and her IBM mentor Carl Chamberlain pose for a photo outside their lab.

Mirabeau worked on an Education Transfer Plan project called Saving Earth's Water Supply. Her focus is to allow her students to explore the issues of protecting the environment as well as the earth's water sources. "Students will examine the important role that water has on humans and determine ways to help conserve our limited water source. My project has increased my knowledge on how to relate the importance of saving water and energy and by conserving water we can save money, reduce waste and protect our environment."

She plans to incorporate and align her Education Transfer Plan project to her fifth grade science standard. "Students know that the amount of fresh water located in rivers, lakes, underground sources and glaciers is limited and that its availability can be extended by recycling and decreasing the use of water," she said.

Carl Chamberlin, who is serving as Mirabeau's IBM mentor this summer notes that her work is progressing well. He said that she and her fellow IISME teacher consistently exceed the department's high expectations.

"They are intelligent, great learners with excellent concentration, dedicated and motivated. Their assignments perfectly utilize their skills and fill a critical need here. In addition, their work is providing a foundation that will be transitioned at their departure to other members of their team for enhancement in the future. They [recently] provided a combined Power Point presentation to their team, which detailed their specific

responsibilities, actions, status, deliverables and schedules. Their presentation was one of the best ones that I have seen in years. In fact, as the word spread, they were asked to repeat the presentation to management both at the Silicon Valley Lab and by phone to managers at selected remote U.S. sites. They presented yesterday, and they perfectly fielded a lot of questions. It was great!"

Betty Chen

Betty Chen is a fourth grade teacher at Graystone Elementary. She has taught there for seven years.

She spent the summer at Intel Corporation as a marketing and advertising specialist updating Web pages for the company's XML Software group. She wanted to re-familiarize herself with Web design and html codes. She hopes to help Graystone's technologist with the design and implementation of a better application for the school's Web page.

She called the experience definitely valuable and inspiring. "It is invaluable because it certainly helps me as a teacher to keep in touch with the corporate world. Plus, after every summer I'm inspired to go back to the classroom and share with my students all that I have learned," she said.

Applied Materials

A teacher from Leland High School, who asked not to be named, got to work as a solar industry analyst in the Solar Business Group. Energy and Environmental Solutions Division researching overseas markets for Applied Material's solar panel manufacturing equipment.

This teacher "hoped to gain and understanding of the latest business practices and procedures; all about solar energy and solutions for climate change. I also wanted to see how technology was being used in marketing, for example as video conferencing."

In addition, the high school teacher plans to use the new PowerPoint skills learned to teach visual thinking strategies using an LCD projector and the Internet. "I will use the renewable energy information, especially solar content to teach math concepts like unit conversion and ratios."

The teacher called the project, "a really rich, serious experience, very stimulating every day. Formerly, I was a sales engineer in high tech and it's fascinating to see firsthand how business has evolved over the last 20 years. For example, all 18 of us fellows were issued laptop computers in the first hour! In addition, the solar industry is so exciting; there's an invigorating atmosphere in the building that's very motivating. This is a relatively new industry with great potential to make the world healthier and more livable. It's so needed and important. The nobleness of everyone's efforts at Applied Materials is very inspiring."