

David M. Batsche



On returning to school: "I was very intimidated by going back to school. Managing my time between being the sole provider for a family of six, spending time with them, and attending college full-time seemed impossible. I was most proud of finishing a two-year degree on somebody else's time table and graduating with honors. I got a lot of confidence through that. I can do whatever I want and be successful!"

—David M. Batsche, July 9, 2009

David M. Batsche wanted a new career. He felt stuck in restaurant management, unable to advance or make enough money to support his family. "I tried getting other jobs, even retail," he recalls. "But I'd be starting from scratch, all the way at the bottom, and that really wasn't a good option."

So David made the decision to return to school, despite uncertainties about completing his degree on time and managing school and work. "At first I actually thought it would be easy," David laughs. "I'd been to a four-year college, so I was familiar with the expectations. I thought this was going to be keyed down from that. But I had to study. The work load was intense. It wasn't just busy work. It was necessary in order to get a good understanding of things. The classes were very thorough and I studied hard."

Luckily, David got help from local scholarships and a teacher's assistantship position at his school, Central Carolina Community College (CCCC). For working in the school's photonics department, he received a small paycheck and tuition payment. Overcoming his fear of school was aided by his children. "I wanted a better life for my family. That was my sole purpose," he says. "Doing well wasn't a choice for me. It was something I had to do. In addition to that, I was really enjoying myself! I really loved studying the things I was studying."

David didn't even have to wait for graduation for his photonics education to begin paying off. He started his job in January 2008 before graduating in May and now works as a semiconductor process technician for Cree, Inc., which manufactures LED lights. "I get to work in the research and development

group, so I don't just work on one process," he says. "I get to work on all the processes and steps from beginning to end. My job is really interesting. Almost every night is different."

For David, the future looks bright, not only for Cree's LED lights, but for his advancement and the prospect of even more jobs in technical and scientific fields. "Science is where it's going to be," he says. "For one thing, people with technical or scientific jobs will have a very secure financial future." Classmates of David's who, unlike him, completed photonics degrees just after high school, are now making more than \$45,000 per year at the average age of 21. And even though David found his way to photonics a little later in life, he feels he has lots of options to discover. "There are opportunities out there I haven't explored, so my imagination wanders over what I might be doing five years from now. I really enjoy the choices I have."

Perhaps the greatest change has been David's ability to spend time with his family. "There was my life before school and now there's this life. They're completely different," he says. "My kids remember my working in the restaurant business. I wasn't around very much. I worked six days a week and when I had time off, I was too tired to do anything. Now I spend a lot of time with my kids. I really love that."

David M. Batsche lives in Bear Creek, North Carolina, with his wife, Andrea, and four children, Elliot, Kailie, Forest, and Emerson. After receiving his bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Houston in 1992, he returned to school and earned an associate in applied science degree in laser and photonics technology from Central Carolina Community College in 2008. David enjoys gardening, Frisbee golf, and helping his son on tree house construction.