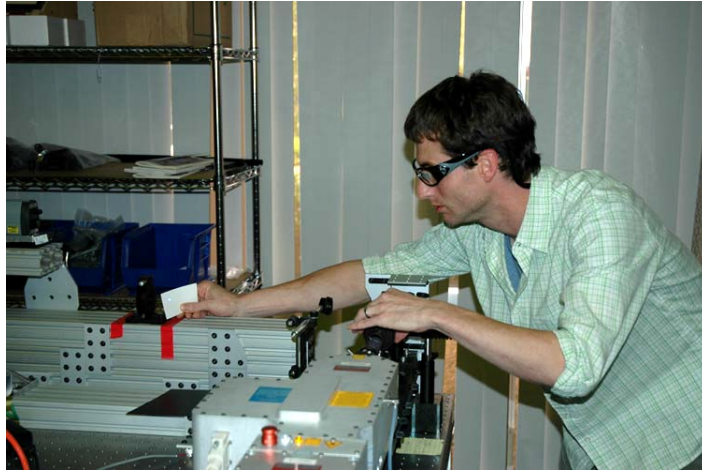


Reese A. Jernigan



On making the best of obstacles: “I was in a car accident that put me out of work because of a back injury. But during the time I was out of work, I decided to use this opportunity to continue my education.”

—Reese A. Jernigan, July 27, 2009

Reese A. Jernigan didn't choose to pursue a laser technology degree at first. He had a job in route sales. But a car accident that left him with a back injury forced him to reconsider his career path. "One of my route sales accounts was AT&T," he recalls. "That's how I first heard about the laser and photonics program at Central Carolina Community College (CCCC). They told me if I wanted to get into fiber optics, I could go to CCCC and take their laser and photonics curriculum. During the time I was on worker's compensation, I decided to continue my education."

And Reese's decision has turned out to be one of his best. Despite the pain and tedium of a long recovery from his injury, Reese is glad that it gave him the chance to get a college degree and put him on a road to job advancement and a secure future. While in school, he struggled with some of the concepts, but he worked through it. "It's all relative to how much effort you put into it," he says. "I don't think anything was *too* difficult about the program because I really applied myself." Along with an associate degree in laser and photonics technology, Reese earned a certificate in electronics engineering technology.

Upon his graduation, Reese knew that his real interest lay in lasers. "I had a couple of job offers in electronics positions," he says, "but I wouldn't have had a chance to exercise the laser and photonics portion of my degree. At first, I was hoping to get into fiber optics, but at the time interest in fiber optics was slumping. I'm glad about that now because it steered me to being a laser technician at Northrop Grumman."

Now Reese works as a laser technician for Bright View Technologies. He describes his work this way: "My job is to assist other technicians and engineers in the custom design of any of the equipment

we need to process specialized optical films for lighting and displays. There are several departments that use lasers, but I usually work in the aperture creation department.” Much of Reese’s job is hands-on research and development. “Since it’s a small, start-up company, I get to wear many hats,” he says. “If I have a good suggestion, it’s really taken into consideration. I had an idea to improve one of our processes. I proposed it to upper management, they liked it, and my idea went from a prototype into a full-scale manufacturing machine that we have now sold to a manufacturing partner in Japan.”

Reese’s favorite part of his job is designing new processes. “As the needs of the company change, my duties change,” he explains. “As the company grows, there’s always something new to do.” In looking to the future, Reese’s path is pretty clear to him, and it is one with lots of options. “I’d really be happy maintaining a career in a small company like Bright View where I can wear a lot of hats and learn a lot. But if I didn’t go that route, I would like to get a government contract position where I could do Department of Defense work. There’s a level of pride that comes along with knowing you’re doing something to help our nation’s defense and homeland security.”

Even though his journey to photonics was a difficult and sometimes painful one, Reese is glad to be where he is now. “Every day, more and more applications are being discovered in manufacturing and other processes that use lasers,” he says. “As lasers change and become more advanced, they open more doors. Opportunities are fresh and new. This field has only just begun.”

Reese A. Jernigan earned an associate in applied science degree in laser and photonics technology and a certificate in electronics engineering technology from Central Carolina Community College in 2004. He lives in Cary, North Carolina, and loves to read in his spare time.