

Ryan Renfrew



On following your instincts: “If more people just did what they enjoyed, they’d be more successful at it. I feel confident in saying there’s something of interest for many people in photonics. Anyone can succeed in whatever career field they feel confident in.”

—Ryan Renfrew, July 15, 2009

Some people struggle to figure out what career they want to pursue. Ryan Renfrew is not one of those people. At the age of 13, as he began to work with his father on classic cars, he discovered what would become an intense fascination with electronics and optics.

Thanks to that early discovery, Ryan was able to get a jumpstart on his photonics education. “My high school had a collaborative program that I was able to complete during my senior year,” he recalls. “The accreditation program allowed me to complete my first term of college while still in high school. The day I graduated, I started my second term of college at Indian Hills Community College (IHCC).” Ryan was 19 when he graduated from IHCC, at the time the youngest ever to graduate from the college. Even before he graduated, he had been offered thirteen very different jobs from companies throughout the United States, with annual starting salaries ranging from \$32,500 to \$58,000. Ryan could choose from fields as diverse as semiconductor manufacturing, laser applications for the automotive industry, and medical laser installation and maintenance. Whatever he chose, Ryan would earn enough money to make him financially independent—as a teenager!

Ryan now works for Cymer, Inc., at the site where the majority of research and development for the computer company Intel is conducted. And he’s 28 years old. “At Cymer, we are in charge of all specifications, all installations, and all upkeep on the lasers used by Intel,” he explains. “It is an exceptionally high-pressure group because all the development is done here.” While Ryan obviously thrives in high-pressure environments, he sees the pressure as both the most fun and the most challenging part of his career. “Once you’re responsible for a particular project or a particular individual, it’s very hard to walk away. I’m on call 24 hours a day most days. That is probably the least favorite part of my job, but it’s also what keeps me here.”

From Ryan's perspective, photonics is an extremely competitive field. "Everybody is advancing and trying new and different things to try to stay in front of the other guy," he says. "It's all a bit of a competition. I believe if you go back and look at people like us in sixth or eighth grade, we were all like that even then. I think it requires a particular personality, whether good or bad!" If there is some particular personality trait that causes people to thrive in photonics, it's safe to say that Ryan Renfrew has it.

Ryan Renfrew received an associate in applied science degree in laser electro-optics technology from Indian Hills Community College in Ottumwa, Iowa, in 2000. He now lives in Hillsboro, Oregon, with his wife, Rachael, and son, Clayton. Clayton likes to do whatever Dad likes to do, which includes bowling, softball, fishing, hiking, and working on cars.