On working with a team: “I have always strived to make my team better by sharing experiences with others and, in turn, learning from them.”

Larry Padavich, Jr., has a heart for mentoring. Larry considers his greatest achievement to have come while he was working as a manager at Northrop Grumman. “I was able to mentor fifteen individuals,” he recalls, “resulting in their personal and professional growth. Five of my former team members are less than six months away from attaining a BS degree. In my eyes, this is the most rewarding part of my job.” Working in the photonics industry has given Larry the opportunity to do what he loves: help others succeed.

Larry began his career working in various technology sectors on projects ranging from electronic systems for US Air Force jets to high-speed digital imaging. When he lost his position after 9/11, Larry decided that it was time for a new start. “I picked up an Indian Hills Community College brochure,” he explains, “looked through the courses, and decided lasers sounded interesting. I went for it.” Larry would be going back to school for the first time in more than fifteen years.

At first, Larry was worried about the age difference between himself and his classmates. “I knew I was academically capable, but I did have some apprehension,” he remembers. “At my age, some of my classmates were young enough to be my children.” However, the age difference proved to be a blessing for Larry and his fellow students. Larry discovered something about himself: he loved teaching. “Many times, I found myself relaying information to my younger classmates. They, in turn, taught me as well.”

Larry’s ability to work as a member of a team is apparent in his personal life as well as in his professional life. While Larry worked full time toward his associate of applied science degree in laser electro-optical technology at Indian Hills Community College, his wife, Chris, supported their family. Chris worked work six to seven days a week while Larry took extra courses each semester so that he would be able to graduate early. Chris’s support allowed Larry to succeed.

Larry advises photonics students to continue their education so that they can grow in the photonics industry, and he has followed his own advice. While working full time, he completed a bachelor’s degree in management and a master of business administration degree at the University of Phoenix.

Currently, Larry works as a senior manufacturing engineer at L3 Communications. He has moved through various positions within the photonics industry, from technical lead II to manufacturing engineer to his current position as senior manufacturing engineer. Larry says, “My career has been rewarding, both personally and professionally.”

Larry lives in Orlando, Florida, with Chris—his wife of twenty-five years—and their two sons. Larry enjoys designing and building high-powered rockets with his sons. He also enjoys building gaming computers, fishing, kayaking, and playing the violin. He is currently restoring a Camaro with his sons.