Tanner Rupe  

On his enthusiasm for his work:  

"Who doesn't want to be part of cutting-edge technology?"

After high school, Tanner Rupe began building motorcycles for a living. Though he enjoyed riding motorcycles, he found himself unsatisfied with building them as a career. Instead, he wanted a job that would allow him to support a family. He had friends who had attended Indian Hills Community College (IHCC), earned degrees in laser/electro-optics technology, and proceeded to develop stable careers. Inspired by their outcomes, Tanner decided to follow their example. He found a “stable growing technical field that I knew I would constantly be challenged in.” Tanner saw that the young technology was not going to dwindle away any time soon, and he knew that the field offered what he was looking for.

At IHCC, Tanner served as secretary of the Laser/Electro-Optics Club and worked as a design engineer at Fat Baggers, Inc., where he focused on advancing techniques for reverse engineering. For example, he “reverse-engineered motorcycle parts for reference points to design new and improved parts for manufacturing.” Tanner recalls that the most difficult part of completing his degree was having the discipline to stay focused. However, he found that his interest in the technology gave him the discipline he needed. He was in a research-and-development environment, so he was able to work with various cutting-edge lasers right off the bat. Tanner finds laser technology “unreal,” and as he says, “Who doesn’t want to be part of cutting-edge technology?”

After completing the IHCC program in 2011, Tanner worked as a laser technician for General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc., in San Diego. He was excited to have found a career path that would “provide never-ending learning.” As a laser technician, Tanner reviewed engineering ideas and drawings, fabricated pieces to complete experiments, and trained employees in various fabrication projects. His varying work assignments allowed him to develop a “strong background in managing and planning projects simultaneously.”

Today, Tanner works as a manufacturing engineering associate for Exotic Electro-Optics, where he designs and creates test setups and procedures, does SolidWorks modeling, and troubleshoots electronics. Tanner’s work has helped to save “thousands of dollars in touch time” by means of new process design and implementation. Tanner is most proud of helping develop a cutting-edge rubidium-vapor laser system that will eventually be used in high-energy laser weapon systems.

Even though Tanner began his career in a field that was very different from photonics, he has managed to advance quickly. “I came in this field as a laser/electro-optics technician, and in just over a year, I moved myself in to more of an engineering role.” Tanner believes that his broad background helps him advise new technicians on how to advance toward their career goals. He is thankful for the friends who motivated him to pursue such a promising career path, and would like to serve as a similar role model to others.

Tanner lives in Temecula, California. In his spare time, he visits the beach and plays outside with his children. He likes to spend time with his wife and friends, ride his motorcycle, and enjoy the outdoors.