"I'd Like to Work for You!"

AN RIT CO-OP STORY

Submitted by Dr. Manny Contomanolis, Associate Vice President and Director Co-op & Career Services, Rochester Institute of Technology

With more than 3,500 student participants and nearly 1,900 employer partners each year, the Rochester Institute of Technology ranks as one of the largest cooperative education programs in the world. Since the program's inception in 1912 with 16 engineering students and 8 employer partners, RIT has been supporting the learning needs of students and the talent needs of the employer community through this distinctive educational model. RIT co-op students work in nearly every kind of business and industry throughout the United States and in more than 40 foreign countries.

Each co-op student at RIT has a unique story…enjoy Jeremy Swerdlow's!

As Dean Kamen rolled his trademark Segway Human Transporter around the RIT campus in October 2003, Jeremy Swerdlow caught up with the famed inventor and pressed a resume into his hands.

In a bold move, Jeremy Swerdlow landed an interview, and ultimately a co-op job, with Segway inventor Dean Kamen's company, simply by asking.

His bold approach paid off big time. Swerdlow got invited for a seven-hour interview and captured a co-op job at Kamen's DEKA Research & Development Corp. in Manchester, N.H., where he worked for a total of 12 months. This past May, Kamen was back on campus delivering the 2006 Convocation address and accepting an honorary doctoral degree. Because of his DEKA connection, Swerdlow and his family were invited to a VIP reception with the inventor.

"What are your plans after graduation?" Kamen asked.

"I'd like to work for you," Swerdlow replied. Kamen made a phone call that ultimately resulted in a job offer—and then told the audience of 8,000 that he hoped Swerdlow would accept. He did. Swerdlow '06 (mechanical engineering technology) reported for work at DEKA's Manchester, N.H., facility in September.

"I loved working there," Swerdlow says of his co-op experiences. "There are about 200 engineers, all involved in R&D, mostly on medical devices and some other projects. In my co-ops, I worked on an experimental external combustion engine and a prosthetic arm. The goal is to build things that are important to humanity. It's just a great culture, a great place to work."

It seems that Swerdlow has been preparing for such a career his entire life. "He's been an inventor since he was 3 years old," says his mom, Valli Spingarn Swerdlow '79 (retail management and commercial interior design), director of construction, real estate development and engineering for Management Recruiters International of McLean, Va. "Jeremy has put 130 percent of himself into everything he does."

Valli and her husband, Richard, live in Vienna, Va. They have another son, Daniel, 22, a student at George Mason University

in Fairfax, Va. She was pleased that Jeremy chose RIT, and not just because it's her alma mater. RIT proved a particularly good fit for her oldest child, she believes.

"RIT has been incredibly supportive," she adds. "He has just blossomed."

Swerdlow selected RIT primarily because of the co-op program. "I wanted to make sure I had a chance to work in interesting places," he says. Besides the work experience at DEKA, he completed a six-month co-op at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) in Gaithersburg, Md., working in robotics. Prior to starting at RIT, he worked for a year building 3-D laser positioning equipment at an R&D firm.

"It never ceases to amaze me what our students can do! It's our goal to empower them to dare to be creative problem solvers," says RIT Professor Carl Lundgren.

"I like to make things work," says Swerdlow. "Actually, I like working more than I like school."

The mechanical engineering technology department suited his approach; he took on numerous independent-study projects and made extensive use of the lab facilities.

"Jeremy is a very hard worker, and in his own special way, he's absolutely brilliant," says Carl Lundgren, professor. "He has an innate ability to visualize and solve problems. For example, as a freshman, he did a very complex gear-train design for a 'battlebot,' long before he would have covered the concepts in his courses.

"Earlier this summer, a precision flow pump we had purchased as a component of laboratory equipment Jeremy was building for the department wasn't performing precisely enough," Lundgren continues. "Jeremy designed and built a pump over a weekend that has performed perfectly."

In between co-ops, classes and projects, Swerdlow found time to invent, manufacture and market a line of radio communications equipment for open-cockpit aircraft and hang glider pilots, brand name SkyTrigger™. He tests the products on his own flights.

"It never ceases to amaze me what our students can do. It's our goal to empower them to dare to be creative problem solvers," says Lundgren.

"I really believe Jeremy will become an alumnus that RIT will be very proud to have as its own," he adds. "I can't wait to see what he creates."

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