

Intern engineers practical experience on Broad St. project

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Karl Leitner likes living and working in the Hazleton area.

The Sugarloaf resident has just begun his third year in civil engineering and project management at Penn State University's main campus at University Park.

He spent his summer as an intern for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) working on the Broad Street Corridor Project.

And when he graduates in two years, he'll be coming back to Hazleton for a few years at least - because he got a scholarship that requires him to come back.

"I'm an inspector," said Leitner, son of George and Paula Leitner. "I'm actually out in the field doing work, talking to contractors. I do things like making sure when pipe is installed, the hole is backfilled and compacted correctly. I'm picking up so much information. I've learned more this summer than a semester at Penn State. There's nothing like practical experience. I love it."

Pat Fritsky, construction manager for the Broad Street Corridor Project for the state Department of Transportation (PennDOT) - said civil engineering students get the chance for some hands-on learning through PennDOT's Engineering Scientific Technical Intern (ESTI) program.

"Every year, the Department hires individuals with at least two years of college," Fritsky said. "It gives them experience in civil engineering on a first-hand basis. They get experience in actual construction procedures, decision making, and working with blueprints and contracts. The department benefits by utilizing the skills they have gained through their education, and they assist with inspection. In the six counties in the (PennDOT) district, we hired 25 interns."

Fritsky said Leitner was an asset to the Broad Street project.

"This was Karl's first year, but he did tremendously well," Fritsky said. "He learned our specifications, policies and procedures, and became a very valuable employee very quickly."

Ted Ritsick, regional training and recruiting coordinator for PennDOT, outlines what kind of training students get in the program, which pays them \$11.43 an hour.

"Engineering, science, and technology students may apply for internships in our seasonal construction, STAMPP (Systematic Technique to Analyze and Manage Pennsylvania Pavement), or roadside development," Ritsick said.

"Construction internships give students experience in inspection, materials testing, and documentation related to highway and bridge construction projects. STAMPP survey crews collect data on roadway conditions. A limited number of positions in the roadside development program provide experience in vegetation and soils management."

Ritsick said the agency uses the interns, with an eye toward hiring them when they graduate.

"The overall goal is to hire only students who can be reached for permanent employment upon graduation, resulting in a career progression within the Department," Ritsick said.

"First consideration must be given to applicants who are enrolled in civil engineering, followed by,

closely related engineering or engineering support majors."

Ritsick said students must be full-time, in good academic standing, and must be enrolled in a major in the engineering or engineering technology field to be considered for internship positions.

Leitner, who ended his internship for this year Aug. 13, completed the first two years of his education with the help of two scholarships - one from Hayden Electric, where he once worked, and the other from the Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership, which requires a recipient to stay and work in the Hazleton area for at least three years after graduation. The Hayden scholarship is given to engineering students at Penn State Hazleton."

Leitner has no problem with that.

"I grew up in the Hazleton area," Leitner said. "I really like the area. It's got everything I like - open areas, I like to hike and hunt. A lot of people knock it. I think it's a fun place to be."

Bob Skulsky, executive director of the Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership, said Leitner is the kind of person the group wants to keep in the Hazleton area with its scholarship program.

"One thing an applicant has to do is submit an essay on why they like living in the Hazleton area," Skulsky said. "It carries quite a bit of weight. I remember his essay. It was very positive about the Hazleton area. And he was in one of those degree programs the scholarship was designed for. He was a good candidate because that essay made him stand out. And what he is doing right now proves the scholarship program is working. He has a lot of virtues, and ended up getting a good internship. He is an example of what we're working for with the scholarship program."

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