2019 high school graduate and former McKim & Creed / Durham YouthWork intern Ivy Jones (center) won the SECU People Helping People award and a $10,000 college scholarship. This fall Ivy will enter N.C. State University to study engineering. She is pictured here with McKim & Creed engineering interns Catie Dunning and Wes Hutchins. Wes works closely with the interns from the Durham YouthWork Internship Program.

INTERNS TURN SUMMER TASKS INTO FUTURE CAREERS

In a Post-Millennial generation that is often mocked for being indecisive about the future, Mya Reid, Victor Chi and Ivy Jones have their futures in razor focus. Mya plans to be a design, systems or propulsion engineer at a defense contractor like Boeing or Lockheed Martin. Victor sees himself in a communications or sales role within the STEM industry, and Ivy envisions herself managing environmental or mechanical engineering projects.

Mya, Victor and Ivy all honed their interest in engineering through internships at McKim & Creed. They arrived at those internships through the Durham (N.C.) YouthWork Internship Program (DYIP).

DYIP is a partnership of the City of Durham, Durham Public Schools, Durham Workforce Development, Durham Technical Community College and other organizations. Each summer, the program places approximately 200 Durham youth, ages 14-24, in paid internships with local businesses, non-profits and city and county governments. "The Durham YouthWork Internship Program prepares our youth for careers of tomorrow," says James Dickens, senior employment program coordinator with the City of Durham.

McKim & Creed became involved with DYIP in 2016, and has hired a DYIP intern every summer since. "Organizations like Durham YouthWork give us an opportunity to embody our vision of 'people helping people' and to support causes that are near and dear to the hearts and minds of our clients. That's a win-win for everyone!" comments Phyllis Elikai, chief people officer with McKim & Creed.

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FROM RECEPTIONIST TO AEROSPACE ENGINEERING

Mya Reid began with the DYIP program when she was 15. “My first internship was as a receptionist and it was boring,” she recalls. When she had the opportunity to use her math and science skills in an engineering environment, she jumped at the chance.

During her internship with McKim & Creed, Mya worked with all four of the company’s business units: Water; Geomatics; Planning, Development and Natural Resources (PDNR); and Buildings, Energy and Infrastructure (BEI). “I learned to use AutoCAD, WaterCAD and other things. I got to plot a bunch of different water main lines. That was cool,” she recalls.

Mya also surveyed with one of our geomatics crews, learned about working with clients on their land development needs, and helped design an HVAC system for a university. Her favorite task, though, was working with AutoCAD. “I realized that AutoCAD was going to be my basis for any kind of engineering, because for design engineers, it all comes down to the design tools and systems.”

Today, Mya is a rising junior at N.C. A&T University, majoring in physics and aerospace engineering. Post-internship, she says “it’s fun to see people’s faces light up when they find out I’ve been in the real world and been to project management meetings. McKim & Creed taught me how to work with all different types of people. They put me to work every day; they didn’t have me getting coffee for them.”

ENGINEERING COULD USE GOOD COMMUNICATORS

In the summer of 2017, Victor Chi became McKim & Creed’s second DYIP intern. He had graduated from Riverside High School in Durham and had participated in the school’s engineering program. The internship with McKim & Creed was a perfect match.

He spent two weeks working with each of the company’s business units. “They really tried to give me a taste of everything the office had to offer. I annotated drawings that were actually being worked on by other engineers at the same time, I created a topographic map of Durham County using GIS, and I even did my own takeoff for a project that had just finished a month before!” he says.

“It felt like I was an actual employee there. Everyone treated me with the same respect they showed their other coworkers and I felt that the work that they gave me was a perfect match for my skillset. They had me doing busy work to an extent, but it was busy work that actually mattered to the project. Like annotating drawings. Sure, they'll revise it and look for mistakes and add things I missed, but for the most part that will be some of my work that they show their contractor. There was never any work that I felt didn't matter.

“In the time I was there,” he continued, “I saw the workers lay down about 80 ft. of ductile iron pipe and install a fire hydrant assembly, which might be one of the coolest things I've ever seen in my life.”

After a year studying construction management at UNC Charlotte, Victor changed to a double major of communications and geography. “STEM fields like engineering could use good communicators for data and working with contractors,” he says.

THE BUSINESS SIDE OF ENGINEERING

High school student Ivy Jones learned about DYIP through a newspaper clipping. “It sounds ancient, but my mom had a newspaper clipping and I kept asking her about it,” she laughs. At 16 she earned her first DYIP internship with the Durham County sheriff department. “I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do. It was really informative and very cool!” Ivy recalls.

Last summer, as a rising senior, Ivy applied for an internship with McKim & Creed. She says she wasn’t really interested in engineering until Wes Hutchins, an engineer intern with McKim & Creed, interviewed her. “As he talked about it, I became more interested in it.”

Her favorite part of the internship was visiting project worksites. “I had looked at the plans but it was hard to visualize, and it’s just ink.” Seeing pipes and manholes going into the ground, however, made the plans, and her career goals, crystal clear.

In June, Ivy was awarded the State Employees Credit Union People Helping People Award and a $10,000 college scholarship. This fall she will enter N.C. State University’s College of Engineering and will study civil engineering. Or mechanical engineering. Or both. She’s researched various engineering career paths and sees herself helping solve communities’ infrastructure problems. She also enjoyed learning the business side of engineering. “I didn’t realize there would be SO MANY client meetings,” she laughs.

A MODEL TO GROW DYIP

“McKim & Creed has been an absolutely superb partner” with DYIP, says James. The company “interviews the students, makes a selection based on those interviews and hires the interns directly. This is the model we need to grow Durham YouthWork.”

From McKim & Creed’s perspective, DYIP is a sterling example of a successful internship program. “We have had the opportunity to work with three very talented young people through this program, and we are especially proud that all three have decided to pursue careers associated with engineering,” adds Ben Latino, PE, regional manager with McKim & Creed.

Today’s summer interns are tomorrow’s infrastructure leaders, and if Mya, Victor and Ivy are any indication, our future looks bright.

Mya Reid was the first intern McKim & Creed hired through the Durham YouthWork Internship Program. She is a rising junior at N.C. A&T University and is studying physics and aerospace engineering.

Durham YouthWork intern Victor Chi worked with McKim & Creed in the summer of 2018. He is studying communications and geography because “engineering could use good communicators.”

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