

Opportunities for Growth

Keep work interesting for Esri employees



Many Esri employees stay with the company for many years because they have opportunities to grow and experience new challenges. Denise King, a development technical lead in the Esri support center in Charlotte, North Carolina, talks about her career growth in this interview with Esri writer Leslie Roundy.

Roundy: What brought you to Esri?

King: My youngest child had just started kindergarten, and I was ready to return to the workforce. I contacted a temporary agency and remember not even knowing what company I was testing for. It ended up being Esri, and I was hired as the receptionist in Support Services. That was in 1997.

Roundy: Now, 14 years later, you're still here.

King: After being the receptionist for about three years, I had already decided I wanted to do more. I clearly didn't understand the terms being used, such as UNIX and C shell ("What do seashells have to do with anything?" I wondered). So I decided to go back to school and got my associate degree in arts and science in 2002.

After that, I applied for and was awarded an Esri scholarship to the University of Redlands and received my bachelor's degree in information systems in 2004. I then went through the formal application and interview process to become a support analyst. I decided to continue my education and entered the master's program in geography at Cal State Fullerton with an emphasis in GIS.

I started to really get interested in mobile technologies. I have to admit I was lured by the devices. After another analyst left, I became the most senior person in Support Services with knowledge of mobile technology. When ArcGIS Mobile came out, it was a logical decision for me to ramp up to support that product as well. Same thing with the new smartphone applications.

I became a senior support analyst in 2005 and started training other analysts. Then, when I learned that Esri was opening a support center in the Charlotte office, I applied and was selected to be one of the first four employees to establish the unit. That was in August of 2006. Today, we have more than 40 employees here.

Roundy: You're now a development technical lead. What does that entail?

King: As a development technical lead [DTL], I'm part of the User Advocacy Group. My role is to help our customers get what they want from our software, whether it is enhancements or correcting issues they're having. I interact with many different development teams, but more closely with the mobile team. One of my responsibilities is helping identify user workflows in the field. When users are designing a mobile project, there are all sorts of factors that have to be considered. So it's doing a lot of what I call best practice recommendations, looking at other resources and other companies' websites to help me make an informed decision.

Roundy: Talk a little about your interaction with the development teams in Redlands.

King: Because a DTL is the conduit between Support Services and Product Development, it's important to keep information going both ways. We tell the developers what we're seeing, trends identified through support incidents, and what users are asking to be added to the software. Conversely, Development is telling me what's coming in the software—where the product development is going to be next. I also monitor the user forums for postings on the products I support, so if there's something critical that's stumping a user, I'll pass it on to the development team if it's something I'm not as familiar with.

I also participate in the product supportability process. Any new product—for example, the Android API—goes through a process in which Support works with product engineers in Development to identify the item, see what support will be needed, identify resources, and make sure there are resources on Esri.com. All this is driven by the User Advocacy Group in collaboration with other Esri teams.

Roundy: You didn't have a GIS background. In those early days, what intrigued you and made you want to keep going with the technology?

King: A lot of it was I wanted to learn more so I'd have a better understanding of what users were calling in about. As I learned, it was like "Wow, this is amazing!" It was that interest that excited me about what our software does and how it helps people make a difference. It's that same excitement I still get when talking with customers or working with colleagues who share the same feelings about GIS, our software, and the changes we help put into place.

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