← Esri solution engineer Tom Murray

Evolving Job Keeps Motivation High

Instead of joining Esri straight out of college, some employees take a more circuitous route. Solution engineer Tom Murray, based in Esri's Denver, Colorado, regional office, belongs to the latter group.

Murray was introduced to GIS during an internship with The Nature Conservancy undertaken when he was a student at the University of Colorado, Boulder, where he majored in environmental studies and economics. He was asked to create a catalog of GIS resources on the web. "At the time I really didn't know anything about GIS, so I just started searching to figure out what it was and what resources were available," Murray said.

A couple of years later, when working as a field manager with an environmental consulting firm, he would take data he'd collected in the field, process it, and create maps. Sometimes, he just drew on paper copies of topographic maps. Recalling his introduction to GIS, Murray knew there was a better way. He enrolled in GIS classes at the local community college. After he began using GIS in his work, he became the "default GIS guy" at the firm.

However, it was his second internship that led Murray to Esri. While pursuing his master's degree from the University of Denver, he was selected as an intern for the Esri Denver office. His assignment to the technical marketing team also introduced him to the solution engineer role. Murray joined Esri full-time in 2004. He eventually became manager of the technical sales team in the region and held that position for five years.

In the last few years, Murray's role as a solution engineer has changed significantly. The position has evolved from giving presentations and demos to customers to spending time really understanding customers' businesses. "My role has gotten a lot more interesting because I enjoy the direct interaction with customers— asking what they are doing, assessing what their challenges are, and figuring out how Esri can help them," he said. He presents solutions that include Esri technology and shows customers how to use these solutions. Instead of working with GIS groups in organizations, he now works with whole agencies or departments in state and local governments.

Recently, Murray began working with Esri's Patterns and Practices team. He is focusing on customers who are interested in the new ArcGIS Online system. He uses skills learned while working with larger, traditional customers and applies them to early adopters of this new technology.

"It's a new product for us, and in some cases, I'm working with a new user, but the basic pattern of understanding their business needs and how to apply our technology appropriately to support those needs is consistent," he said. "It's been exciting to work with customers on a solution that represents a brand-new way of using GIS technology, including a new business model for deploying it."

"Esri has been a great place for me. I think the solution engineer role has been perfect. I like technology, but I didn't begin with a traditional computer science background. I found this great hybrid position that is both technical and solution-oriented." Murray gets to travel and meet customers, but he is also deeply involved with the technology. "It keeps me challenged and motivated," he said.