TAKING FLIGHT FIVE ALUMNI SOAR AS AERIAL VEHICLE STARTUP IS BOUGHT BY GOOGLE

After graduation, five McCormick engineers (Stephen Benson ’13, Dan Corn new ’11, Kyle Liske ’10, Matthew Nubbe ’11, and Nick Renold ’11) took the skills they learned during their time on McCormick’s Formula SAE and solar car teams and went to work for Titan Aerospace, a start-up that designs and builds solar-powered, unmanned aerial vehicles. In April, the company was purchased by Google. The group took time to tell us about that transition, their favorite memories of McCormick, and how they keep in touch.

How did you get involved with Titan Aerospace? Dan was visiting some friends in San Francisco, and he showed us a video of the work that Titan was doing. I was fascinated by the concept of an aircraft that could fly indefinitely, and the challenge to do something new with this technology. I asked if I could come help, and I moved out to start work the next month. Nick Renold

What is the coolest part about your job? We get paid to build something new! The Titan technology is pushing new boundaries, and it’s exhilarating to see the aircraft come together. Dan Corn new

What is your favorite memory from your time at McCormick? The 2011 Design Competition. In a competition where the objective was to move target cakes to one side of the field, we had the only robot that propelled them across instead of carrying them. Between the other teams’ surprise and the audience’s reaction, it was great to see it working mostly as intended. Matthew Nubbe

How did your work with the car teams at McCormick help you in your current role? Experience with the car teams has helped in many ways. The intensity of the work required as a senior member of a car team really conditioned me for an exciting, evolving job. It provided experiences that no other students at Northwestern had. It caused me to think outside the box. The limits of “What can we get?” were replaced with “What can we design and make?” During my time with the Formula SAE team, we did things that pushed boundaries constantly. We were always pushing materials and designs to the limit to be as lightweight as possible. Nothing has changed making the jump to Titan. We’re just playing in a different league now. Stephen Benson

How do you stay in touch with McCormick? I stay in touch by visiting the Northwestern vehicle teams when I am in Chicago. It is fun to come back down to the machine shop in Ford, see what they are working on, and talk to them about the projects. Nick Renold

Keeping It Green in the Peace Corps

After graduation, Natalie Lake (’12) sought hands-on experience applying the green technologies she studied at McCormick. Armed with a passion for sustainability and an enthusiasm to help others, she joined the Peace Corps, and is helping educate communities in Peru about renewable energy through interactive environmental projects.

How would you describe your experience as a Peace Corps volunteer? My experience in the Peace Corps has been the weirdest, most challenging, and most rewarding of my life. For the past two years, I’ve been working as an environmental volunteer in Peru focusing on resource management, waste management, and environmental education.

I’ve helped build and install two biodigesters, a photovoltaic solar panel system, and a wind turbine. I’ve also implemented microturbines and pico solar units in five schools to use in climate change education, built a small native tree nursery in my town, and helped my community start a recycling program.

Please share your favorite memory from your time at McCormick. I actually really miss the crazy all-nighters I used to pull in Tech—getting a room with fellow engineers, using three different types of caffeine to try to stay up, eating a million different snacks, and taking power naps underneath tables. It all brings back great memories.

What lessons from McCormick have helped you most in your Peace Corps work? Problem solving. I find that I approach problems in a different way than my community partners do, and this has proven to be an incredibly useful skill in the Peace Corps where Murphy’s law—anything that can go wrong, will go wrong! ALEX GERAGE