

## ***Coming Full Circle: Rockets, Airplanes, Space and Such***

*by Dexter Johnson*

The intent of BEAM (Buffalo Engineering Awareness for Minorities) was to introduce the profession of engineering to high school students. I was one of twenty selected for the inaugural program in my junior year at City Honors, the summer of 1981. I was not thinking about engineering as a profession but BEAM was pivotal in my decision to try it.

I was leaning toward business administration, but that summer I took two classes at the University through BEAM: Introduction to Computers in Engineering and Intro. to Engineering. Several different professors taught the Intro. to Engineering course although Dean Lee was the primary instructor. A key part of the experience was being introduced to all of these professors.

One of the required projects for the class was to build a bridge out of balsa wood, giving students an opportunity to work together and apply engineering concepts. In the computer class we learned Fortran which was quite difficult since I had little exposure to computers. That certainly gave me a head start, though. I had always been interested in science, particularly in astronomy, but hadn't considered it as a profession. After hearing about all the different fields of engineering I realized I was interested in aerospace: rockets, airplanes, space and such.

Today, I'm working as an aerospace research engineer for NASA at the Lewis Research Center – recently renamed as the NASA Glenn Research Center – in Cleveland since 1990. Most people are familiar with the launch centers, but Glenn is one of NASA's three major research centers.

Currently I am participating in a program within NASA called the NASA Administrator's Fellowship Program. Six people are selected each year (this is the second year) who are all from different centers. It is a two-year program and a primary component involves going to a minority-serving higher education institution to do teaching and research.

So I am at Florida A&M and Florida State University College of Engineering. Both schools share the engineering program. I enjoy the teaching, but it is a challenge!

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