ANOTHER STEM INTERVIEW!

Meet Leslie Moynihan

PUD Energy Efficiency Program Manager for Solar Programs

We recently interviewed Leslie to find out more about her job at the PUD.

What sparked you towards a STEM career field?

I went to Tufts University thinking that I might pursue a career in writing, but a few informative things changed for me during those four years. First, I was getting more active in the outdoors. I was my happiest self when I was on an outdoor adventure, and I made academic and social choices (like studying abroad in Australia) that allowed me to pursue this passion. Second, Tufts has a really deep ethos for fostering global citizenship. I participated in tons of community service and learned from internationally respected diplomats and scientists. These two factors didn't necessarily switch my interest from liberal arts to STEM fields, but they helped me realize that what I was passionate about was environmental science and advocacy. Finally, my junior year I read the just-published *The Heat is On* by Ross Gelbspan. From then on, it wasn't just about the environment for me, but it was specifically about being a part of the solution to climate change.

What type of training do you have?

I have degrees in Environmental Studies and Anthropology. This really just qualified me to be an environmental educator. I did that for a year but felt like I was talking more about the problems than being a part of the solutions. I took a risk and quit that job, and got INCREDIBLY lucky landing my first job in renewable energy. I really consider my training to be my time at the Massachusetts Energy Consumers Alliance (a non-profit organization in Boston) when the green power market was just emerging and solar energy was being revived.

What STEM skills are important in your job?

As a Program Manager for the PUD's solar programs, I am not an engineer or electrician, but I'm often the liaison between the technical trades and our customers. I have enough electrical knowledge to explain solar energy to homeowners, as well as understanding the requirements for proper system design and safe interconnection of solar panels to the electric grid. In addition, I use tools that help predict how much energy can be produced by solar panels at a certain site; satellite mapping is very helpful, but also solar site assessment tools such as the *Solmetric Suneye.* Once in a while, I even use some basic trigonometry when it comes to assessing roof space for solar panels. Another aspect of what I do is tracking energy produced over time. For that I have to be proficient in metering and be able to identify and organize the pertinent data from our huge utility database. There are also plenty of STEM skills important to the business/program management side of my job: budgeting, program evaluation, reporting and graphing results, etc.

Why is your career unique?

Renewable energy is such an exciting field! Not only is it growing rapidly, but it is becoming more and more accessible to everyday people. My first career had an emphasis on promoting renewable energy through consumer education and advocacy for policies that would support renewable energy choices. Now there's emphasis on helping the utility adapt to serving a new type of customer, one who is both buying electricity and also generating electricity of his/her own.

What do you like about your job?

What's not to like? I have a career that stays interesting and challenging, and I feel I've done well when projects I work on go well. Both the colleagues and the customers I work with care about the planet, and want to do something positive about their own impact. I get to help make that happen every day!

Any advice for students who want to go into a similar career?

- There are a growing number of careers relating to renewable energy out there. Find a college that has a focus on environmental studies or renewable energy type degrees.
- Keep your mind open. It is okay to change your career path as you learn more about yourself and what your interests are.
- Look for opportunities to get engaged in the industry that you are interested in. Look for internships or find a mentor in a similar area.
- At the beginning of your career, be willing to do any type of job with the right organization, so you have opportunities to learn. You can take those skills and apply them to your dream job in the future.
- STEM careers are always changing in our fast-paced world, so be willing to always learn more and change with the times.