

The Current News

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Engineers Week Profile: Whitney Whitfield

When the National Society of Professional Engineers (NSPE) launched Engineers Week (EWeek) over 50 years ago, they hoped to raise public awareness of engineers' positive contributions to quality of life. While she has officially been with AEP just under a year, Engineer Associate Whitney Whitfield has been improving life in her community since childhood.

Inclined toward Engineering

A memory in which other engineers may identify, Whitfield remembers her mom telling her that "she was always the one who played with Legos and building blocks, not dolls." While she loved being creative and thinking outside the box, it was also Whitfield's mother who urged her to do something more structured with that creativity from a young age.

"I loved art so much. It just gave me peace, and gave me a chance to be creative," said Whitfield. "Most of my family are educators, including my mother, so she provided a lot of great advice from a young age. She told me that if I wanted to do art, why don't I use it to build things, or something related to engineering."

Naturally drawn to scientific ideas, and armed with support, creativity and direction, Whitfield was quickly enrolled in STEM programs. She loved every minute of them, and was placed in the STEM magnet program in high school where she worked primarily in robotics and programming.

As her education in these areas developed, her evident drive towards success in a STEM field was clear to her peers and teachers. Of these peers and teachers, however, very few looked like Whitfield.

Whitfield, a Black woman with an educational background through high school at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI schools), was used to being in a male, white-dominated atmosphere.

Once she decided a STEM future was for her, she looked into finding a school where other Black individuals, like herself, were working towards the same goals.

Connecting to STEM through TSU

"My family is mostly educators, but they did mostly attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)," said Whitfield. "Tennessee State University (TSU) and North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (A&T) were my top choices, so I started with those schools and their offerings. I was able to get into a program with robotics and STEM topics through TSU, then decided to major in Architectural Engineering."

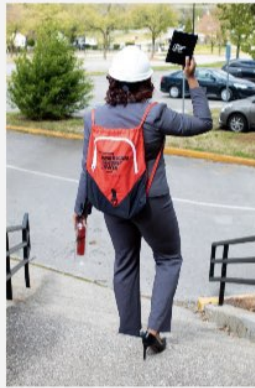
Whitfield shared how impactful the programs she took through her STEM magnet program were for her at a young age. While she was in the TSU summer program in 2017, her counselor told her about the National Society for Black Engineers (NSBE).

Whitfield very humbly explained how she "joined NSBE in 2017, became the chapter programs co-chair, programs chair, then the VP, then President of the chapter and then Region 3 Programs Chairperson" by 2020.

"It just happened naturally," Whitfield said of her quick rise to NSBE leadership. "The program (NSBE) needed help as people would move on, or graduate, which is just what happens with college programs. Since I got involved early in my college career, I had a clear vision for what was needed, and was also able to fill those gaps in as they came up so that NSBE could keep offering resources to people."

Advice From Whitney:

"Don't let anyone treat you like regular glue, you are glitter glue!"



Whitney Whitfield, Engineer Associate (Tulsa, ERCOT).

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Joining the AEP Family

During her time leading NSBE and taking STEM programming at TSU, Whitfield became a part of the AEP family through the Co-Op and Internship program. AEP Co-Op and Internship Manager Barbara Dunlap had recruited Whitfield through her previous involvement with NSBE, and seeing her promise in the field.

"Whitney is absolutely awesome," said Dunlap. "If you're looking for the type of person AEP wants to hire, she is definitely it. She's great to work with, extremely intelligent, diligent, and she is always thinking of the team. We are very lucky she chose AEP, and hope it is just the beginning of a long relationship."

Whitfield was officially hired into the AEP Tulsa office as a Station Engineer Associate (ERCOT) in June 2022. Since then, she's already made a name for herself around the office posting "Quotes of the Week" on her dry erase board, hoping to engage her peers while reminding everyone to look out for one another (pictured right).

"Everything Whitney has done in the past is inspiring, and she is a great addition to my team as well," said current direct supervisor, Lucas Stanberry, Planning & Engineering Supervisor.

Giving Back

It's been made clear that one of Whitfield's strongest skills is bringing people together to inspire an attitude of lifelong learning. While she did help plan national events, meetings, and plan high-level administrative projects for NSBE in her time there, Whitfield says her favorite memories were with students.

"It felt full-circle to me. Being able to give back to the incoming TSU freshmen in the same program I started in was great," said Whitfield. "While I was their counselor, I used the time to teach them Autodesk so that they came into college with a leg-up. This was something extra I could offer. I remembered my counselor telling me about NSBE, which led me to AEP, and my current role helping as an engineer, and wanted to offer resources to the incoming students in the same way."

Open Communication & Working Together Toward Diversity

As her time and involvement within STEM has progressed, Whitfield said she has been glad to see more diversity in the field, though it is still pretty imbalanced.

"I'm happy more women are entering STEM and think we should all stick together! I'm always here to talk to other women or men about how to help make everyone's work environments best for the team," Whitfield said. When it comes to discussing diversity, Whitfield said she is a huge proponent of open-communication.

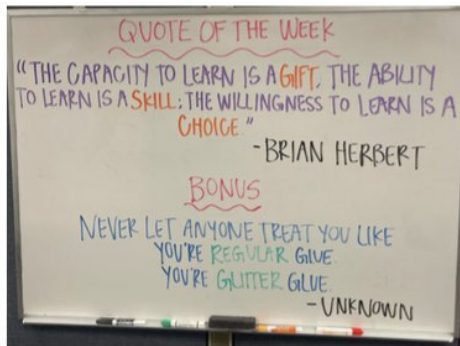
"Some of the conversations people are nervous to have, if done with respect, are definitely conversations we 'should' be having," said Whitfield. "It doesn't need to be offensive to just discuss what's going on around us. I guess I'm just an open book. I want those who work with me to be able to break the bridge of being offensive, and come to me with questions about race or gender. If we walk away with a better understanding of one another, that is an important and valid conversation to have."

Whitfield's advice to those who want to get involved in engineering is simple: "Don't let opinions effect how you really feel, and do what your passion desires. Yes, we do come from a male-dominated field, but how will that change if women don't get involved?"

Talking to Ms. Whitfield was a breath of fresh air, and if you see her around your office or field project, don't be a stranger. It seems we could all learn a thing or two from Whitney.

This was a special feature for NSPE Engineers Week (EWeek). The NSPE organization continues to strive to bring diversity to the engineering field by using EWeek to increase interest in engineering and technology careers.

Past EWeek stories this week: [Engineering at Cook Nuclear Plant \(Video\)](#), [Engineers Week Info \(blog\)](#)



Whitfield's artsy dry erase board one week in Tulsa.



Whitfield pictured (third from left) with teammates at a Corpus Christi Station (69kV > 138 kV > 345 kV).

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