

STEM Career Interviews

School Leadership in Urban Runoff Reduction Project

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-Katrina Jones



Introducing...

Katrina Jones

Outreach Coordinator, Port of Baltimore

Meet Katrina Jones. Katrina is the outreach coordinator for the Port of Baltimore's dredging program. She works for the Maryland Department of Transportation Maryland Port Administration in the Office of Harbor Development, which categorizes her as an employee for the state.

Katrina lives in Baltimore City, but was born in Albany, GA. She decided to move from her city in southwest Georgia because she had a cousin who invited her to work for a temporary hiring agency in Baltimore. This hiring agency had a contract with the State Government and Katrina was hired to work as a typist clerk for three months before they offered her the job permanently.

Although Katrina knew nothing about the Port when she started, her supervisor knew she was willing to learn by her actions. Her supervisor expressed that the reason he wanted her to stay was because she "knew how to answer the telephone and greet people properly, showed up everyday on time for work, and showed that I was willing to learn and do more than just what I was assigned to do." She goes on to explain, "They used to call these soft skills - - now they're called critical skills."

Katrina grew up with her and her two brothers. "I always looked forward to play time with the neighborhood kids and meeting friends at school. In fact, because I loved being around people, including some of my teachers, I had 12 years of perfect attendance in school."

Katrina likes that in the south there were not usually very cold winters or snow. She remembers only once when she was growing up did her city have snow. Katrina recalls after homework and chores always playing outside, riding bikes, making up games, and staying outside until the street lights came on. This was also something she enjoyed doing on the weekends and whenever she found the time. In high school, she joined band, chorus, and drama club - where she says she found her liking for acting. Even today, she remains active in community theater and singing in her church choir. Because Katrina liked acting in high school, she decided to study communications in college.

Katrina attended Valdosta State University in South Georgia and earned a degree in Fine Arts. Having a degree in communications became useful to Katrina when she began outreach in communities to get support for the Port's dredging projects.

"Working for the Port, we have to make sure the channels are deep enough. Channels are like under water highways for the big cargo ships. This means we have to remove sediment or material from the bottom of the Chesapeake Bay and the Patapsco River and when we remove the sediment, we have to have somewhere to place it. The Port has to build sites, called dredged material containment facilities to hold the material. There is one right next to Masonville Cove. The engineers built a dike in the river, and the material is pumped inside the diked area we call cells. Besides working with communities, I created an environmental education program so that students could have field trips to the sites and learn how the Port can use the dredged material to restore habitat that attracts birds and wildlife. I love what I do because it gives us a chance to work with communities and teach people about the importance of the Port of Baltimore. If we don't keep our channels dredged, the ships can't bring in the cargo, and if the cargo doesn't get here safely, people can't get their automobiles, clothes, shoes, sugar, electronics and other things." Katrina omits any "real challenges" when she was growing up, but describes as an adult, working in an industry of mostly all white men.

"Over the years, I have seen women start to rise to positions of leadership and become decision makers. However, being an African American woman, I still feel as if my voice is not often heard or taken seriously. I have gained respect and recognition from my peers in the industry, but I find that sometimes I have to push to get my ideas, thoughts and professional opinion heard the first time. And unfortunately, I have found that it is true that there is racial inequality when it comes to salaries and getting promotions for African American women."

Despite the challenges she has endured as a minority in her field, Katrina finds her work to be rewarding "What's rewarding about my work is knowing that I've been a part of seeing the Port become a trusted partner in working with communities and students, providing opportunities for them to have input in how we do our projects, giving access to our sites through tours, and creating and supporting an environmental education program that has reached over 35,000 students over the last ten years. I came from three generations of teachers and never wanted to be one! Yet, I found that I have become an informal educator with the opportunity to teach people about the Port and the maritime industry."

One of Katrina's career goals before she retires is "to find a way to encourage more minority students and citizens to learn to appreciate nature and being outdoors" like she did when she was growing up.

One of Katrina's favorite sayings come from the wise words of an author/ poet: "People will forget what you said; people will forget what you did; but people will never forget how you made them feel" - Maya Angelou. She continues Angelou's wisdom by adding some of her own, "Try to do something good for someone everyday and expect nothing in return."

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