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ELJ DESIGN

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Trip to MITRE Influences College Freshman's Choice of Major

This September, freshman Erica Johnson starts college as a computer science major. She owes her choice of major, in no small part, to a visit to MITRE four years ago for Take Our Daughters To Work Day.

Erica came to MITRE as a guest of her best friend, Melissa, and Cheryl Lathrop of G021, Melissa's mom. Prior to her visit, Erica had wanted to be a schoolteacher. Then she saw the computer lab CIIS had set up for the occasion. "They had computers set up for us for the visit," said Erica, "so we could surf the Internet. This was four years ago, so it was a newer thing then. And we each had our own Web pages to play with, all ready set up. They taught us about search engines, and then they opened up a computer so we could see inside the box. That's what really interested me--I wanted to know how it worked."

That day at MITRE, when she learned the internal components of the computer, took the RAM out and reinserted it, shot digital photographs, and surfed the Internet for the first time on a state-of-the-art workstation, the focus of Erica's future changed. On her own, she studied computers and how they worked. In the high school's mandatory computer science class, she taught herself C++. Then, Erica took what she thought was the next logical step--she started her own Web design business.

Erica had already been working part-time at a Web design company, so the experience was there. "After a while, I knew I could do just as well on my own," she said. "And my dream has always been to start my own business, so I did." Starting with one client, a pizza shop in her hometown of Walpole, Massachusetts, Erica has been steadily building her client list for ELJDesign. Clients now include an association of hand surgeons, a fire-protection engineering company, and a site for a hip and knee surgeon. Erica expects to continue ELJDesign even while she attends Bowdoin College in Maine.

"Melissa Lathrop, the person I came to MITRE with for Take Our Daughters To Work Day, is now working with me," she said. "She does the accounting and helps with some of the coding. And while she's going to a different college, we'll keep in touch by the Internet and telephone. The same way in which I'll keep my business going."

Erica's future looks bright. Last spring, she graduated from Walpole High School, where she was class valedictorian. Today, influenced in part by her visit to MITRE, she runs her own Web design business and is pursuing a degree in computer science. Perhaps, in four more years, Erica might come back.

Note: This story was suggested by Cheryl Lathrop, a former MITRE employee in G021, and written by Bob Stoberge. If you would like to suggest a story idea for The MITRE Messenger, please email us.

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[Take Our Daughters To Work Day 1999](#)

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