Eva Nieminski UWRL Outstanding Alumni Spotlight

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Each month the UWRL takes a moment to highlight a UWRL student, alumni, or staff, that has gone above and beyond in their research field and achievements. This month we are highlighting Eva Nieminski, a UWRL alumni known for her water quality research and extended service to the state of Utah.

Eva received her Master’s degrees in environmental engineering from Warsaw Technical University and the University of Notre Dame, before coming to Utah State University to get her PhD. also in environmental engineering.

Eva studied at the UWRL under Dr. Dean Adams. Her research and PhD dissertation focused on “Ultraviolet Disinfection of Wastewater: Photoreactivation and Protection of Water-Borne Bacteria by Suspended Material as Factors Limiting Treatment Efficiency.” After graduating in 1985, Eva worked at a consulting engineering firm in Phoenix and then accepted a position as an Environmental Engineer for the Utah Department of Environmental Quality, specifically in Division of Drinking Water, where she has worked for the last 30 years. Eva also serves as an Adjunct Associate Professor at USU and is a member of the USU Engineering Advisory Board.

We recently sat down with Eva to learn more about her experience at the UWRL and her career:

How/why did you choose to study at the Utah Water Research Laboratory?

I wanted to get my PhD in America, and after graduating from Notre Dame I was advised to look at Utah State University and the UWRL. I was interested in the projects available and the research they were doing. I’m a skier, have been all my life, so I was also excited by the possibility of all of the snow and skiing that would be available. So, I moved to Utah, with no intention to stay, and that was thirty-something years ago. When the position with the State of Utah came up, and I decided to take it. This is my thirtieth year with the department and living in Salt Lake. I love living here, because I love my job and I love the snow.

When did you realize you were passionate about environmental Engineering?

There wasn’t one single point that I knew I was passionate about environmental engineering. I was not one of those students who knew exactly what I wanted to do. I knew when I graduated from high school I wanted to do something in engineering, but I didn’t know what it was. However, once I started working, drinking water became my passion.

What’s your favorite memory or thing you did while at the UWRL?

My favorite thing was my own project working with UV, which was relatively new and exciting. I had two technicians working for me, and we had to observe the
bacterial cultures very frequently. I remember doing whatever I had to do on the weekends quickly, so that I could go skiing. It was a fun time of combining two passions, skiing and my research, much like I do now.

I remember the feeling that the lab was mine to use it whenever I needed to. I remember spending nights there, then getting outside and sleeping in the sun because I was so tired. It was like a second home to me.

I still love going back to the UWRL and looking at it, just remembering that I was there. It broadened my interest and made me realize that I could do anything that I wanted to.

What is the most challenging part of your work?

Over-commitment. I am my own boss; I decide what projects I want to work on. I don't know how to say no, so there is a continuing pressure to be and do multiple things at the same time. And yet, I don't know how to cut it down because it's all so exciting. The most rewarding part of my job is the feeling that I am contributing to something very important to public health protection. I have a feeling that what I do has a direct application to something that counts, something that matters, and where I can be proud of what I am doing. I learned something from the water treatment plant operators, which is that drinking water professionals have more impact on public health than medical doctors and nurses.

What is the most rewarding part of your work?

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What would you tell a current student interested in your career? Any advice?

I would say there are so many people that take a job because they have to, to make money and provide for their family. They look at their jobs as something that is an 8 to 5 commitment only. Don’t go there. Find something that you will be passionate about, and keep looking until you find it. For example, drinking water is always evolving, it’s so full of changes. There is always a new contaminant, or new technology, or something else that we didn’t know about. Drinking water offers this whole big batch of opportunities that one can get excited about.

So I would say, there are very few lucky people that love their job, like really love their job, where the hours of the day don’t matter, and the days of the week don’t matter. These people go to work because they love what they are doing. I am one of the few lucky people that really love their job, and I’m grateful for that.