John Junek, left, the Model Development & Data Management Branch head, demonstrates a customized software tool his team developed to Scott Watson as part of the annual Disability Mentoring Day Oct. 24. Watson, who has a bachelor’s degree in computer science, was one of 14 college students and recent graduates who shadowed mentors and toured Naval Air Station Patuxent River to learn more about the skills and jobs here. (U.S. Navy photo)

NAVAL AIR WARFARE CENTER AIRCRAFT DIVISION, PATUXENT RIVER, Md. — Fourteen college students and recent graduates from Southern Maryland discovered future career opportunities and expanded their networks at a Disability Mentoring Day here Oct. 24.

This event helped the students learn about the command's day-to-day operations and the qualifications needed to be considered for future employment. Each participant was paired with a mentor from various areas of the command to network and meet other members of the organization. The day also included a bus tour of Naval Air Station Patuxent River.

William Buchanan, the deputy program executive officer for strike weapons, thanked the students for participating and encouraged them to explore everything NAVAIR has to offer. He said when he first started in 1984, “I wanted a paycheck, a job, but what I found was opportunity. There are lots of opportunities to grow, change and evolve,” he said. “The reason I stay here is to be part of something bigger, and the nation’s defense is a pretty noble cause.”
For Edward Cheah, the event brought him full circle. Cheah attended a Disability Mentoring Day in 2007 and was hired in April 2008 as a financial management analyst for the comptroller’s office.

Two students from Gallaudet University – Christopher Jappah and Olalekan Ajifowoken – shadowed Cheah and another financial management analyst, Karen Sepielli. Cheah touted the command’s reasonable accommodation, in particular its in-house interpreters and videophone, as being superior to other federal agencies.

Leslie Taylor, executive director, NAWCAD, and deputy assistant commander for test and evaluation, NAVAIR, spoke to the students before a luncheon at the River’s Edge Catering and Conference Center and explained reasonable accommodation is key.

“It’s not enough to hire diverse folks if you’re not going to include them,” she said. “This means a sense of belonging and purpose-driven work. We want you to engage and contribute to the mission.”

Model Development & Data Management Branch Head John Junek helped show Scott Watson, a recent graduate from the University of Maryland, University College, who shadowed Junek for the morning, how Watson’s skills might be able to contribute to his team’s mission.

Junek introduced Watson, who has a bachelor’s degree in computer science, to several coders and software developers, who had casual conversations with him about the different types of software they use to create customized tools for their customers. Then, Junek showed Watson several on-screen examples of decision support tools his team has created.

“The ability to show someone their data in a visual way is so powerful,” Junek explained. “It’s almost a superpower.”

Watson said he enjoyed learning about the team’s work.

“I haven’t 100 percent decided what career to follow, but when I got here, it fascinated me,” he said.

Taylor explained that’s what the day was all about — being mentored and learning about the command and all the skill sets needed to work there.

“The fields are unlimited for the types of people we hire,” she explained. “Maybe something will intrigue you enough for your education or future career.”

Buchanan agreed: “We want to know what you can do, not what you can’t,” he said.
Students, college graduates job shadow at annual Disability Mentoring Day

The day was co-sponsored by the NAWCAD Special Recruitment Branch and the NAWCAD Individuals with Disabilities Action Team, which was established in 2006 to help recruit and retain individuals with disabilities. There are more than 1,110 individuals with disabilities in the NAWCAD Patuxent River civilian workforce.

NAWCAD hosts a Disability Mentoring Day each October as part of National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

"This is how we measure our success: the contributions of all those people who deliver products to the men and women in our armed forces," said William Buchanan, the deputy program executive officer for Strike Weapons. "I continue to be impressed, even after 34 years, of what we accomplish with our very talented workforce." Buchanan gave opening remarks at the annual Patuxent River, Md., Disability Mentoring Day Oct. 24. (U.S. Navy photo)
“The fields are unlimited for the type of people we hire,” said Leslie Taylor, Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division executive director and deputy assistant commander for Test and Evaluation at Naval Air Systems Command, as she addressed the mentors and mentees at Disability Mentoring Day Oct. 24. This annual event, held in Patuxent River, Md., helps students and recent graduates learn about the command’s day-to-day operations and the qualifications needed to be considered for future employment. (U.S. Navy photo)