

News Savannah River Nuclear Solutions

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Primary Media Contact: Jonathan Larry
Savannah River Nuclear Solutions:
(803) 952-8179
jonathan.larry@srs.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SRNS Engineers Share Expertise with Educators and Students in Augusta University's WORCshop@AU Program

AIKEN, S.C. – (Oct. 8, 2021) – Savannah River Nuclear Solutions (SRNS) engineers are volunteers in Augusta University's WORCshop@AU program, an effort to recruit new students into nuclear science programs and eventually into the nuclear workforce. The program is funded through the Workforce Opportunities in Regional Careers (WORC) II grant from the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) and provides opportunities for SRNS employees to engage high school educators and students.

Engineers working on the Savannah River Plutonium Processing Facility (SRPPF) Project developed a real-world problem statement that educators from five schools in the region surrounding the Savannah River Site (SRS) are using to teach students engineering problem solving skills. SRPPF is part of NNSA's two-site approach to revitalize the nation's plutonium pit production capabilities in support of the nuclear deterrent. Twenty-four SRNS volunteers are lending their expertise to help educators and students develop their solutions to the problem.

"The problem statement we developed was how to most cost effectively transport approximately 3,000 construction workers to and from the construction work site at SRS," said Rick Connolly, former SRNS NNSA Capital Projects Engineering Deputy Director. "This is a real issue that we could face in a few years, so we're looking forward to the solutions students and their teachers present."

Evans High School, Hephzibah High School, Augusta Preparatory Day School and Edmund Burke Academy each have one educator in the WORCshop@AU program. Richmond County Technical Career Magnet School has two educators in the program.

James Mason, an Augusta Preparatory Day School teacher, was excited to learn about WORCshop@AU and the opportunities it would provide for his students. "I really like engaging my students in projects and activities that help them see how the concepts covered in class are applied in real-life," said Mason. "The opportunity to have my students interact with industry professionals from SRNS is going to open their eyes to careers that they might not otherwise have considered."

Mason, four other teachers and representatives from Augusta University toured SRS at the end of July to gain a better understanding of the problem statement and see firsthand areas of SRS it impacts.

Dr. Ashley Gess, Augusta University Assistant Professor of STEM/STEAM Education and Program Coordinator of WORCshop@AU, said, "Augusta University is a public university, and we are here to serve our people. It is essential for us to listen to what individuals and businesses need and work with them to create solutions. WORCshop@AU is one example of this partnership. Building a local workforce is key to SRNS' continued success and part of that process is to meaningfully engage local high school teachers with SRNS through mentorship."



Caption: (From left to right) Courtney Bernal, Dr. Joseph Newton, Kim Tsakonas, Tyler Gray, James Mason, Shanna Aten and Dr. Ashley Gess get ready to go on a driving tour of SRS. Photography was taken prior to the latest COVID-19 guidelines reinstating mask requirements for vaccinated individuals.

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The university expects to understand how to build teacher-business partnerships more effectively through WORCshop@AU. Their goal is to encourage more students to stay in science, technology, engineering and mathematics disciplines and choose pathways into local workforce opportunities like those at SRNS.

“Students are the workforce of the future, so we appreciate the employees who are donating their time to this important effort,” said Taylor Rice, SRNS Education Outreach Programs Specialist. “We want to ensure educators are equipped with knowledge and information about future workforce needs, particularly those at SRS, that will help them as they influence student career pathways.”

NNSA announced funding for the WORC II grant program in 2020. The \$5 million investment supports the development of the future workforce to carry out vital missions at SRS. Augusta University used a small portion of those funds to develop a summer teacher workshop called WORCshop@AU, which began in May, and a learning experience for students from August to December. Growing NNSA missions at the Site in support of the nation's nuclear deterrent prompted NNSA to enhance its efforts to develop an enduring workforce that will carry out these long-term missions.

Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, a Fluor-led company with Newport News Nuclear and Honeywell, is responsible for the management and operations of the Department of Energy's Savannah River Site located near Aiken, South Carolina.

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