

# Local teens relish their time at engineering camps this summer

By Paul Bello  
Staff writer

For three area teenagers, this past summer will be remembered like no other.

Students from Prince William and Fairfax counties received free airfare to a designated engineering and construction camp within the U.S, courtesy of the Northern Virginia Post of the Society of American Military Engineers, an association that connects architects, engineers and builders in the public and private sectors.

For one week, these students embarked on various group projects, such as building sprinkler systems, concrete beams, and visiting architectural/engineering firms.

Shawnn Conway, who is entering his senior year at Forest Park High School in Woodbridge, attended the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo. It's the longest running of all the camps and has been in operation for 10 years. It provides numerous hands-on challenges, including a lesson on basic concrete construction and



Matthew Croghan

Courtesy photos



Shawnn Conway

safety.

According to Conway, his time at camp was not only educational, but personally rewarding because he got to work alongside other students who share similar interests in engineering as him.

"The camp was good preparation. You get to do a lot," Conway said at a recent luncheon at Fort Belvoir's Officers' Club. "As a group, we worked on water fil-

tration devices, tested catapults and even built a shed. You go over problem solving techniques and discuss why something works or doesn't work. The whole week was a great experience."

Matthew Croghan, who recently graduated from Forest Park, visited the Navy Seabees Camp in Port Hueneme, Calif. in late July.

He quickly learned that activities and instruction are centered on four major themes: construction methods, construction materials, hydraulics and environmental engineering.

"What we did was really interesting. We built a boat out of saran wrap and duct tape, constructed a popsicle stick bridge and learned about armor plating," Croghan said. "This was an amazing opportunity and I'm grateful that I was selected to go. I made some friends and learned a lot. This definitely opened my eyes to other opportunities in the field of engineering."

Representing Burke's Lake Braddock Secondary School, junior Stephen Romans attended the U.S. Army Camp in Vicksburg, Miss. Considered a wide-ranging engineering community, the camp provided Romans a taste of just about everything.

"Our instructors taught us about leadership and how to design something that's cost-effective. They had us build concrete cylinders and we learned all about the differences between asphalt and concrete,"

Romans said. "We also saw a working concrete plant and toured labs on software development soil classification. Without a doubt, the week was a lot of fun and I got a lot out of this experience."

William Kilpatrick, SAME's director of education and training, said the three students were selected out of more than a dozen applications from the northern Virginia region.

Every year, he added the camps are co-sponsored by SAME and the services so students receive exposure to a broad range of engineering disciplines.

"These camps can be a great steppingstone into a much larger world," Kilpatrick said. "Not only do they have camaraderie with others their age, but they also get to learn something about themselves."

Information on the Northern Virginia Post of the Society of American Military Engineers is available from [post.same.org/belvoir](http://post.same.org/belvoir).

*(Editor's note: A photo of Stephen Romans was not available at press time.)*