



Two Students Prove Age Is No Barrier to Gaining IT Skills

Edgar Spikes, 88, from the United States, and Irtaza Haider, 13, from Pakistan, share a passion for learning and working with networking technology.



When Edgar Spikes enrolled in the Cisco[®] Networking Academy[®] IT Essentials course at Purdue University Calumet in Hammond, Indiana, the 88-year-old retiree had been out of school for 69 years. The course helped Spikes discover a fascination for computers, which led him to enroll in Cisco CCNA[®] courses and a class focusing on AutoCAD design software.

Irtaza Haider was 12 years old when he successfully completed the CCNA curriculum at the Ahad IT Services academy in Faisalabad, Pakistan. In July 2008, at the age of 13, Haider became the youngest recipient of the CCNA certification for network associates.

These two Networking Academy students share a thirst for knowledge, a strong work ethic, and a conviction that age is no barrier to learning, especially when you have an affinity for the subject.

Edgar Spikes

Spikes, who retired from the Lake County Sheriff's Department in 1983, doesn't recall ever using a computer during his career. "I had a PC at home, but didn't really know how to operate it," he says. "Then last year I attended a free computer course. The instructor told me about the IT Essentials class at Purdue. I told him I couldn't get anybody to repair my computer, so I thought I'd take the class and learn how to do it myself." The course is offered by the Department of Engineering Technology at the Purdue University Calumet campus.

Spikes enjoyed the IT Essential class so much that he went on to enroll in a CCNA course in the same department. "I was fortunate in having William Robinson as an instructor," he says. "He encouraged me and took the extra time to help me out. The reading was sometimes difficult, but the hands-on aspect made it much easier."

A highlight for Spikes was using Packet Tracer, a simulation tool that enables Networking Academy

students to perform a variety of tasks as if they were working with a real network. “I really like it,” he says. “I’ve got it on my home computer and when I have some time I play around with it and have a good time figuring things out.”

Robinson, an instructor in the Electrical and Computer Engineering Technology program at Purdue Calumet and a nine-year Networking Academy veteran, is impressed with Spikes’ dedication. “He comes in and repeats an exercise until he gets it,” Robinson says. “I think he’s an inspiration to the other students and everyone here.”

Spikes has no immediate plans for a new career. He simply wants to learn more about digital technology. “I intend to go to school as long as I’m able,” he says. “While you’re alive you should always be doing something, shouldn’t you?”

Irtaza Haider

When Haider began his CCNA studies, he had already taken courses in JavaScript, Visual Basic, and HTML at Ahad IT Services. He first became interested in the Networking Academy curriculum when he attended an Academy Awareness Day in Islamabad in June 2007. “I was very much encouraged by the representatives at the event,” he says.

Haider believes his instructor played an important role in his success. “Syed Rizwan Dastgir motivated me to take the course,” he says. “Initially I heard that the CCNA course is rather difficult and a bit dry, but I found the curriculum very interesting.” Haider also studied the course materials for several hours each day during his summer break to expand his knowledge.

Haider plans to earn his Cisco CCNP® certification next and eventually work in the IT industry, where he hopes to “explore the world of networking.”



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