An Interview with William LaBelle, Jr.
Computer Engineering
Old Dominion University Alumni

William “Bill” M. LaBelle, Jr. is a former Navy cryptologic technician that enrolled in the newly created computer engineering program at ODU in 1984, leading to a 20-plus-year career as a computer engineer with the U.S. Navy Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center. LaBelle volunteers with many service organizations, including the Future City Hampton Roads steering committee, U.S. First Robotics, MathCounts Peninsula and the Virginia State Science and Engineering Fair. In 2007, he established the Labelle Endowed Scholarship in Engineering to assist a full time, rising sophomore or junior, majoring in Electrical and Computer Engineering. In May 2011, Bill received the Batten College Service Award.

Degree(s) earned (Minor or concentration) / Year(s) / University:
- Associates in Applied Science in Data Processing, 1984, City Colleges of Chicago European Campus
- Bachelor of Science in Computer Engineering, 1989, Old Dominion University
- Masters of Engineering in Computer Engineering, 2000, Old Dominion University

Brief employment history, current employer and job title:
Prior to and while attending ODU Engineering, Bill worked as an electronic technician for 14 years (10 years in the U.S. Navy) and over 25 years as an engineer. Currently, he is employed with SPAWASYSCEN Atlantic, assigned to the Navigation and Geospatial Information & Services branch. His duties include project management, systems engineering, overseeing the development of a navigation suite (systems-of-systems) modeling and simulation system, and development of software tools to assist technicians during their navigation certification functions.

Summary of professional experience and/or hobbies:
Since graduating from ODU in 1989, Bill has worked in design, development, in-service engineering, and life-cycle maintenance of assemblies and software for radar simulation systems, radar acquisition systems, over the horizon (OTH) radar systems, and built-in testing. In 2001, he was hired by the U.S. Navy Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center (SPAWAR) Atlantic to continue work on the OTHR system. In 2009, his assignment shifted from radar to shipboard (surface and submarine) navigation in-service engineering, system engineering and project management.

In 2010, Bill became a co-coordinator of SPAWAR’s STEM Outreach Program Hampton Roads with focus on robotics (a collateral duty assignment). He also mentors several high school and elementary school students in their quest to build and program competition robots.

Earlier this month, Bill took time from his busy schedule to give insight on his Old Dominion University educational experience and beyond…

What attracted you to get a degree from Old Dominion University?
At the time, ODU was the local college to my residence and the engineering programs within the college were well known in the Hampton Roads area.

How has your education helped you since graduation?
The education gained in the studies of computer science, engineering, science, and math allowed me to be effective in many engineering assignments. The skills I honed as an electronic technician and my background in data processing has allowed me to be flexible and adaptable in taking a variety of roles and assignments. Being able to design and develop hardware, software and embedded code assemblies while conversing with those who specialize in such disciplines has been very beneficial to my career.

How have you supported the ECE Department at ODU since graduation?
I continue to support ODU Engineering in a variety of ways. I assist with the College of Engineering & Technology Annual Open House. I work with high school student recruiting during Engineer Day held annually in Richmond and I volunteer in Engineering Summer Camps.

What advice would you give to current students and recent alumni?
Keep learning and expand your knowledge by traditional or non-conventional methods. Become and stay a member of at least one professional organization to keep current in your field of study.