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Do you know...

Muneer Shetab, the South District’s lead electrical engineer and a native of Kabul, Afghanistan, immigrated to the U.S. with his family in 1990 and returned to Afghanistan as an American working for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in October 2010?



Shetab was in the fourth grade when his parents left Afghanistan in 1987 for Pakistan. After a three-year stay, they made their way to the United States and settled in Baltimore, Md.

“In Pakistan, they put me in the second grade,” said Shetab. “When I got to Maryland, they put me in eighth grade. Middle school was very challenging for me, but I managed to finish it as an honor roll student.”

As a young boy, Shetab developed an interest in electricity. “I had my first experiment with electricity when I was eight years old. My brother had purchased me a toy gun which operated on three “D” size batteries. For some reason, it stopped working. I opened it up and removed the motor from it. I took the two leads of the small DC [direct current] motor and stuck it to a 220V AC [alternating current] outlet. The next thing I saw was big sparks and the power went out in our entire house. I guess it was the little spark from that little motor that sparked my interest in electricity and engineering.”

Shetab’s family moved twice more, to California and Ohio, before he graduated high school and enrolled in California State University, Sacramento in 1998. “I received my bachelor of science degree in electrical engineering in 2002.”

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Shetab is one of eleven siblings. His eldest brother served as a mentor and was instrumental in Shetab’s success as an engineer. “My brother Razeq, that is, Dr. Razeq Shetab—he is a physician—encouraged me and every other member of my family to never settle for less than our best. He emphasized the importance of education and made sure every member of our family received a college degree.”

Choosing a major was not easy. “One day while coming down an elevator at CSUS, I told one of my professors, Dr. Baker ‘I’m doing my best in your computer programming class, but don’t seem to enjoy the binary numbers.’ He looked at me and said, ‘well if you don’t like the programming class, then maybe electronics is not the right major for you.’”

The next semester, Shetab enrolled in a power engineering program instead. He credits Baker with helping move past the binary system. “If it weren’t for Dr. Baker, I don’t know how I would have dealt with all those zeros and ones.

“My advice to any aspiring engineer to make sure they have a solid foundation in their field of study,” he said. “In addition to having the technical skills, they need to be comfortable with their

communication skills. Be a good listener, ask questions, and be ready to take on challenging tasks.”

In the 22 months that he has served in Afghanistan, Shetab has worked on many projects: “The two most important projects that I have worked on are the SEPS-Helmand and SEPS-Kandahar. These projects will improve the electrical infrastructure of Southern Afghanistan and provide power to thousands of new customers who never had electricity.”

“Muneer is an exemplary engineer and an invaluable asset to the Engineering Branch and the district,” said Harrison Sutcliffe, South district chief of engineering. “He has been the lead electrical engineer for many of the district’s highest profile projects and a key player in solving electrical issues at our project sites.”

Along with his professional accomplishments, Shetab has served as the president of the Kandahar Airfield Chess Club, and hosted a base-wide tournament just before his redeployment in August.

“Chess was first introduced to our family in the mid 1980s when my brother brought a chess set with him from the former Soviet Union,” Shetab said. “Over the years I learned the moves and basic strategy. I joined the varsity chess team as a senior at Beaver Creek High School. Our team competed in state and national tournaments and we won a number of prestigious tournaments.”

Shetab has an on-line rating of 1850, which is one step below expert. He said his official rating is lower because he has little time to play in professional and rated tournaments.

“While playing, my mind was locked up on the 20”x20” chess board and that was all I cared about.” Shetab said. “Our monthly chess tournaments drew big crowds including players from U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force. Military and civilian personnel from NATO nations also took part. Chess was an amazing hobby that took me through my long 22-month tour.”

The time away from home has entailed significant sacrifices for Shetab. “The biggest challenge for me is being away from my family. My lovely wife, Shahla, and my beautiful son, Nadeem, live in Vancouver, Canada with my in-laws. My son was 22 months old when I came to Afghanistan. He will be four years old in December. While deployed, I have missed my son’s birthdays and our wedding anniversaries. I plan to make it up to them when I return home in August.”

Shetab sees USACE as a positive force in Afghanistan. “Making a difference means having a positive impact and improving the well being of those who are less fortunate,” he said. “Over the years USACE has built ANA and ANP facilities, hospitals, schools, libraries, water wells, irrigation channels, power plants, and other facilities in Afghanistan. These projects lay the foundation and pave the road to a successful Afghanistan.”

“I believe success is a product of a team rather than that of an individual. As a team we have successfully executed hundreds of ANA, ANP, MILCON, and CERP projects that have a direct impact on the well being and future of Afghanistan.”

“So tomorrow if an Afghan boy picks up a pen instead of a gun, a girl goes to school, and a woman works and walks freely in a street – they will owe it to us, because we made a difference that changed their lives.”

“Muneer Shetab has been a great member of the district family and is a superb example to us all of selfless service,” said district commander, Col. Vincent Quarles. “He has served within the South district for almost two years—away from home and family—for the benefit of both of his nations: Afghanistan, where he was born, and his adopted nation of the United States. I thank him for his service, and wish him all the best as he redeploys.”