

Engineer Achieves Dreams

By Gwen Pawlikowski

Emilio Cabrera had two simple dreams for his work in Canada: he wanted to be able to cycle to work.

And he wanted to work in his field.

The Dominican Republic computer engineer, with an MBA from a Montreal university, felt very positive about moving his family of five to Canada. He knew the country. He felt safe and comfortable here.

He was profoundly positive, so much so that he didn't seem to worry much about finding work in his field at first. Upon arrival in June of 2012, he focused on settling his family, especially his three soccer-loving sons.

And he focused on riding his bike.

So when his first job lead turned out to be an on-call job as a night shift bakery manager, he pursued it. He'd operated a bakery way back in his pre-engineering days in his home country, so this seemed to fit. Cabrera had learned of the work from a friend's wife who was able to connect him to the company. Two weeks after arrival in Canada, the Santiago engineer was earning his daily bread from work at night.

"Definitely, it was not an engineering job but I used to have my own bakery, so in that sense it was OK for me. Even they liked the idea of it because I already had experience working with dough and baking," he recalled during an interview.

He continued in this position for two months. This allowed him time to search for an engineering position during the days as well as help with settling his children. "When you come from another country with a whole family, there are so many things in your mind,

so at the beginning, I wanted to do something very simple."

It was during the summer that Cabrera was also able to accomplish his dream of cycling to work. The bakery was close enough for him to reach by bike. "It was a good exercise," he said,

Dream 1? Check.



In the course of job searching, he found an ISS of BC job search program and realized it would help him. He registered promptly and soon found a position as an engineer in a manufacturing company. Only a couple of months after arriving in Canada, Cabrera was somehow, amazingly, already working in engineering. Despite the common, well-documented struggles that most foreign engineers face in finding jobs, Cabrera seemed to have escaped.

Well, sort of. Although he was doing engineering, it wasn't process automation. Instead, he was in customer support.

"They required me in the customer service area. I was talking with the customers and helping them to solve technical problems...I was working with installation of machines."

Unfortunately, this work didn't last for long. Within six months, financial difficulty struck the company. Other countries were selling similar products at deeply discounted prices and the Canadian company lost customers. That loss meant the company was forced to lay off several workers. One of those was the newcomer from the Dominican Republic. By March of 2013, Cabrera was out of work and receiving Employment Insurance.

Dream 2? Not yet.

I love this peaceful country.

Back he went to ISS, to the people he was starting to identify as a new-found family. He needed their help and he got it through MAPLE 2.0. By early July, Cabrera was back working, using his skills in an internship.

He had received special permission from EI that allowed him to gain experience in Canada. This new position with an automation company was exactly what he'd been doing in his home country, only this time, he was traveling to a copper mine site an hour from Kamloops. The engineer, who'd arrived just a year earlier, was now gaining valuable experience documenting the commissioning, a 30-day project that gave him new contacts and another Canadian experience paragraph on his resume.

"I was going to the mine site ten days, then four days back home," he remembers. "They gave me a truck and I was traveling to Kamloops and then everyday I was traveling to the mine site—one hour from Kamloops."

"It was a very interesting experience," he reflected. "It was exactly in my field."

Just as his Kamloops-area project was ending, Cabrera received an interesting phone call. In mid-August, the bakery equipment company called him again. Their market position had improved and they could afford to hire him again. But this time, he would be working in process automation, which was more related to his career goals than the previous position he'd held. He finished his Kamloops internship on August 15 and started back at the bakery equipment manufacturer on August 19.

Dream 2? Check!

Although his first year in Canada offered a few bumps, Cabrera has had relatively steady employment compared to many engineers.

"It's been a great experience. Living in Canada for me has been so good," he says, even noting that it is "more than I expected, people, education, organization, infrastructure; every time I assess my decision of coming to Canada the balance is always positive: I love this peaceful country."

Without ISS of BC and MAPLE 2.0, those bumps would have been more severe crises. The intervention made his, and his family's, integration experience, smoother.

"It [the internship] has been very important, it would not be the same without it. My mentors of ISS ... really amazed me from the beginning. They dramatically changed in a positive [way] our adjustment experience."

With those two dreams under his belt, Cabrera now helps his three teen sons with their dreams, some of which include soccer. When he's not working in his engineering field, he is normally driving to/from soccer, or watching one of his sons' soccer games, or you might even see him kicking a ball around in his back yard.

His own dreams accomplished, he is helping his children achieve theirs.