

Man on a Mission

Alumnus L. Bryan Keeps Global Business Humming from 22,236 Miles Up

When Leonard Bryan drives past rows of houses with satellite dishes, he feels a touch of pride. He's directly involved in beaming TV channels and high-speed broadband into homes.

Bryan '03 is mission director for Palo Alto-based Space Systems/Loral (SS/L), the world's leading provider of commercial satellites and spacecraft systems with cell phone companies, wireless Internet providers and TV networks as major clients.

"There are parts of the world where there are no landlines, but because of what we do, they have telephones, Internet and satellite TV," Bryan says. "We also provide communications for ships at sea and for weather forecasting. I feel privileged and honored to be contributing to the betterment of humankind."

Bryan oversees mission operations from the moment a satellite contract is awarded until it's built, launched, separated from its rocket, raised to geosynchronous orbit, and subsystems tested before it is turned over to the customer some three or four years later. "My team and I are responsible for the entire program, its success or failure," says Bryan. "It is an interesting, fascinating and rewarding job."

Bryan's journey began when he was growing up in Jamaica. "By the age of 10 I knew I wanted to become an engineer," he says.

Bryan's parents separated when he was young. He moved to Washington, D.C., when he was a teenager to live with his father, an auto body shop owner. Growing up in the inner city, one of seven children, Bryan overcame many challenges. Joining the U.S. Air Force took him to a world far beyond the streets of Washington. He worked in logistics, shipping and receiving, and rose through the ranks to become a traffic management supervisor. "The military gave me focus and the opportunity to simultaneously serve my country and advance academically," he says.

While at his first duty station, Mather Air Force Base in Sacramento, he began taking community college courses. Later at Travis Air Force Base, about 30 miles southwest of Davis, he juggled his Air Force duties with full-time engineering studies at UC Davis. He decided to end his nine-year military career to focus on dual degrees, receiving bachelors' in electrical engineering and computer engineering in 1997.

Upon graduation, Bryan joined SS/L as an operations engineer. After about a year he was promoted to an in-orbit test engineer, which meant hopping to tracking stations worldwide, including the U.S., Canada, Mexico, China, Thailand, India, Singapore, Australia, Japan, Italy, Spain and Australia. He went on to gain experience company-wide, from customer training to payload systems to testing phases.

With tuition assistance from SS/L, Bryan returned to UC Davis in 1999 to pursue an MBA and a master's in electrical engineering. While continuing to work full-time, he completed his course work in about four years, but his lab research work dragged on, largely because of the travelling his job required. By 2008 he earned both degrees.

Bryan says the MBA re-launched his career. "Once I completed it I got a 25 percent pay increase and a double grade

promotion. It positioned me to jump into management."

Today, he often calls on lessons learned in business school, and continues to give back, hosting UC Davis MBA students at SS/L to learn about the company and, most recently, by naming a seat in the large lecture classroom in Gallagher Hall.

And his eyes are set far up the corporate ladder. He is working on a doctorate in Applied Management and Decision Sciences at online Walden University. He hopes someday to become a top-level executive, either at SS/L or another global firm. "I am always looking for the next challenge." 🚀

