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From HCC to a Maunakea telescope
By Eric Dela Rosa

My name is Eric Dela Rosa, and I am currently working for the Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope as a system administrator. I'm writing this article in hope that it will give more exposure to our community in terms of locals being successful in a place where they wouldn't normally think they'd be able to reach. Well, at least that's what I thought when I was growing up.

With this article, I want to bring you an understanding of the opportunities astronomy/STEM in Hawaii Island will bring to us as a community, especially for our youth who don't often see astronomy or STEM as viable opportunities here.

Growing up, like many youths nowadays, I never knew what I wanted to be after high school. One thing I knew is that I love technology and science. I played a lot of video games and always had the newest tech gadgets. Most importantly, I liked to tinker with technology to learn the ins and outs of every gadget I owned.

Even with my love for technology, I still had no idea of what I wanted to do. Upon graduating high school, I enrolled and attended Hawaii Community College as a Liberal Arts major. This tenure was short-lived, as shortly after I had my first blessing, my daughter.

During this time, I had to cut my college career short so that I could provide for my family, so I obtained a job at Ace Hardware in Waimea. While working there, I had the opportunity to attend an event open to the public at W.M. Keck Observatories. It was there that my passion to work in technology was ignited. It was amazing to see the science that comes out of the observatories, and I thought that to be a part of that world would be the best feeling in the world. I set my goal to work at one of the observatories on Maunakea.

When my wife and I decided that it was time for us to go back to college so that we would be able to provide a better future for our family, I enrolled back into Hawaii Community College, but this time in the information technology program. It was an uphill challenge, as my wife and I had to balance our time between family, school and work.

While attending this round of college, I had the opportunity to be a part of an amazing internship called the Akamai Internship Program. Through this program, I was able to get my foot in the door working at one of the observatories.

Coincidentally, I interned at the Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope, the very same one I'm currently employed at right now. I believe that this internship paved my way.

After completing my internship and college, I felt very accomplished and was confident that I was heading toward the right path in my future.

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I ended up working at various companies where I obtained positions such as information technology manager and director of technology. All this hard work allowed me finally to reach my goal to work at an observatory on Maunakea.

The one thing that I want to point out about my story is what made it possible for me to be where I'm at in this point in life: astronomy, STEM and my family. If it weren't for these influences in my life, I'm not sure what I'd be doing right now.

This column was prepared by Community First, a nonprofit organization led by KTA's Barry Taniguchi and supported by a volunteer board of community leaders.