

Mayson "Keith" Crowe, Operations Project Manager, Richard B. Russell Project, Savannah District

Mayson "Keith" Crowe started his career as a Park Technician GS-04 in the Nashville District and worked in that district throughout the 1980's at 4 different lakes as he progressed to a full performance GS-09 Park Ranger. "The Nashville District was a great place to start my career. I worked at 4 different projects and had many great supervisors, observing and learning from each." After 10 years in the Nashville District, Keith began to expand his horizons looking for career advancement opportunities which took him to the Savannah District in the early 1990's. He knew that a GS-11 staff position in the district office would not only advance his career beyond the full performance ranger, but valuable district office insights and district program execution particularly in budget formulation would be valuable for his career. While he continued to observe and learn from various supervisors in the district office, he also began seeking self development training opportunities. The first such program was the Savannah District's Bridge To Leadership (SAS BLT) Program which was started in the early 1990's. "Back then you had to complete the 125 hours of course study on your own time by reading books and watching video programs. Now, the new program is more structured with some travel and government time devoted to completing the program which encourages many more to participate" said Mr. Crowe.

After another promotion and several years of experience as a Park Manager at the J. Strom Thurmond Project in the Savannah District, Keith began to look for additional self development opportunities. In the early 2000's, he was selected to participate in the inaugural year of the South Atlantic Division Leadership Development (SAD LDP) Program. This division wide program lasted for a full year where individuals from different program areas throughout the Division met 6-7 times over the course of one year to participate in leadership and communications training. "This was top notch training. There were great presenters with great messages and insights that really made you think about who you were and how you related to others as an employee, a peer, and as a supervisor", said Crowe. He also stated that due to the high cost of this type of leadership training, it was extra important that the training really had significant and immediate impacts on the participants which he felt it did for him. "I really took some of those lessons and became a better supervisor and leader right there in my current job, which had an immediate positive benefit to my staff and the project. That is where the payback has to be made to the agency for this training to be justified in my opinion."

After completing the SAD LDP Program, Mr. Crowe continued as a Park Manager at Thurmond Lake for 5 more years when a new program was initiated by the OPM CoP, the Operations Project Manager Career Assignment Program (OPM CAP). The program was designed to place aspiring OPMs into an actual OPM vacant position for up to 120 day assignments while the actual vacancy was advertised and officially recruited. Keith was one of 4 nominees selected nationally to participate in the first year of the program in 2007. The program takes highly motivated participants who are willing to work outside their current district and division at a yet to be determined location. "Throwing your name in the hat not knowing where you may go is not for everyone, but this is the top official leadership training opportunity in the Corps for folks aspiring to become an Operations Project Manager", said Crowe. "It was a great experience for me and put me in a situation that I had to perform as a full performance

OPM at a new project with new people and new issues to resolve. I actually went to the Western Kentucky Area Office in Nashville District and they provided me a wonderful support group to help me be successful." At that location, he was responsible for the facilities at Kentucky Lock and Lake Barkley which included recreation areas, a hydropower plant, and a navigation lock. The program provides selectees with a local district mentor in the form of another experienced OPM for them to use as a resource. It was during his OPM CAP assignment that Keith applied, interviewed, and was selected for a permanent OPM position back in his home Savannah District at the Richard B. Russell Project.

Keith took advantage of many levels of leadership training throughout his career as he developed and advanced. He stated that his focus was to get leadership training to help him improve in each one of his current jobs at the time and that doing it exceptionally well is what helps with the next job opportunity when it presents itself. He also believes that employees should not rely only on the agency to prepare them for their next step. He promotes Toastmasters as a program that actually strengthens communications skills and leadership skills through actual experiences on a recurring basis. "I attended Toastmasters for 7 years going once a week to a 1 1/2 hour meeting on my own time. While it was a serious commitment, the skills you learn and develop not only improve your job potential; they improve you as a person in your everyday life." The Toastmasters program encouraged him to volunteering his time to serve as the president of his local alumni association, president of his home owners association, and president (and many other officer positions) of his Toastmasters Club. Performing these activities helped him to advance through the Leadership Career Track of Toastmasters. "Career development is about constant improvement using your on the job experiences, agency training and leadership training, and self development outside of work that also improves you as an employee. I am fortunate to have been able to experience all those things and for my career to take me to my goal of being an Operations Project Manager."

Two years after becoming an OPM, Keith began to give back to the agency by serving on the Operations Project Managers Community of Practice (OPM CoP) National Advisory Board. Two of the three years of service were as the Chair of the Advisory Board working to provide support to the Chief of Operations, HQUSACE and serving the OPM Community of Practice. His most meaningful work accomplishment on the Board was a successful National OPM Conference that occurred in Nashville in 2010. "Being asked to be on the OPM CoP Advisory Board was a real honor and another opportunity to grow and learn by serving others. That is what your job and life in general should probably be about" he concluded. From a GS-4 Park Technician to an OPM and Chair of the OPM CoP National Advisory Board, he continues to try to grow and learn.