

Prentice shows INL to the world

From high performance computing and visualization to nanotechnology for nuclear fuel recycling; from creation of tools to mitigate cyber threats to materials science research that enables more efficient energy options and protects our military, the innovation and technology industry in eastern Idaho is as diverse as the people who call it home.

It's this diversity — in innovation and thinking — that defines the booming tech space, which is home to Idaho National Laboratory and other innovative corporations. Behind the globally recognized science and research are the leaders and game changers with the vision and talent to solve our world's most complex problems.

This month, I am featuring Sara Prentice, Idaho National Laboratory's lead for hosting and protocol. Sara's team is responsible for conducting INL tours and running the laboratory's public meeting center in Idaho Falls. In 2016, Prentice's team provided 287 tours to 3,384 visitors. Sara received a degree in broadcast journalism from Eastern New Mexico University and a master's in communications from Texas Tech University. She has worked at INL since 2006.



Amy Lientz
INL



Sara Prentice, Idaho National Laboratory's lead for hosting and protocol, is responsible for hosting VIP visitors to the site and ensuring they are comfortable. (Submitted photo)

Q: What is your day job?

A: I am responsible for hosting our VIP visitors. I lead a team of employees who work tirelessly to ensure that each guest feels like the most important visitor of the year.

Q: Who are some of these VIP visitors?

A: We hosted Bill Gates, Department of Energy secretaries, generals, admirals, numerous senators and representatives, and dignitaries from foreign countries.

Q: Explain to the average person, "Why is your job important?"

A: Each guest should feel comfortable throughout their visit, allowing them to focus on learning about INL. I also ensure we don't offend anyone in our interactions. For example, if visitors from Israel who abide by Jewish dietary law know we are going to serve them a Kosher meal, they can rest a little easier and focus on the research.

Q: What is the most challenging thing about arranging visits to a national laboratory?

A: Trying to figure out what won't make it onto an agenda. Our lab does so many interesting things that I want us to show our visitors everything, but that just isn't possible. And then you add in the chal-

lenge of being on a site 890 square miles large and I have to account for a lot of driving time!

Q: How would you describe preparations for the recent visit to INL by Energy Secretary Rick Perry?

A: It was very exciting. INL was the first national lab he visited as energy secretary, which was a great honor. Working closely with his staff and the advance team allowed us to learn more about the secretary before he arrived. In the end, the visit was a success and employees really enjoyed meeting the secretary.

Q: When folks come from other countries to tour INL, where do you suggest they visit outside the laboratory?

A: Most want to do the obvious tourist attractions (Yellowstone, Tetons, Sun Valley) but we also encourage them to explore Idaho Falls' downtown (Carr Gallery, local restaurants, the Museum of Idaho, the benches along the river walk). And of course we recommend EBR-1!

Q: What do you enjoy most about your career?

A: The people. I work with a stellar tours and hosting team. On top

of that, I get to interact with people across INL, doing amazing things. Everyone from the bus driver to the reactor operator to the researcher is working to make Idaho and the nation a better place.

Q: What advice would you give a school student interested in pursuing a career in this field?

A: Learn everything you can about other cultures, and have an open mind when you are doing it. Be a consumer of all types of news. The world moves so fast now, it is important to know about cultural and political changes.

Q: Did you always want to do what you are doing? If not, what did you want to be growing up?

A: I didn't even know being a protocol officer was a thing you could do, but I think I was always headed this direction. My father was a general, so I had a lot respect for military protocol. And while pursuing my graduate degree, I took a course on intercultural communication and it made me hyper aware of how our communication differs across cultures and ways we can work to be more inter-culturally literate.

Q: What surprised you most when you moved to eastern Idaho?

A: How much I liked it. I was

IDAHO GAME CHANGERS

from New Mexico and had been in Texas for two years. The first winter was a shock, but I learned you just bundle up and get outside. And I love the surrounding community. Early on, I became a board member for the Tautphaus Park Zoo. It opened my eyes to the many things to do. If you are bored, you really are not trying.

Q: Tell me what you like to do when you aren't working?

A: I have a preschooler, so that takes up a lot of my time. We like to camp, go to the farmers market, Alive after 5, the library, and we love the zoo and the ARTitorium!

Q: When and where were you happiest?

A: I am happiest when camping with family and friends. There is something about it that forces you to slow down and take a deep breath. In my job, things can be crazy. You are constantly bobbing and weaving, so it is nice to leave it all behind for a weekend.

Q: What do you most value in your friends?

A: Honesty. Oh, and I like people who know how to cook. I am a terrible cook, so it pays to have friends who can invite you over for delicious meals! One of my favorite people in Idaho Falls tells it like it is while feeding you amazing food! It's why I love her so much.

Q: Your favorite book you read last year?

A: Dinner with Churchill: Policy-Making at the Dinner Table.

Q: Interesting comments you hear from first-time visitors to eastern Idaho?

A: I hear stories about people wandering around looking for the taxi stand at the airport, or telling us how friendly everyone is. I also get asked about the cost of living. People are shocked at how much house you can buy in eastern Idaho. And then there are questions about those odd-shaped triangular buildings (aka potato cellars).

Q: What are few protocol tips?

A: Flag protocol matters. Flags represent a living country. Treat them like they are living things. Give them the respect and honor they deserve. And know how to display multiple flags together properly. I am surprised how often I see hotels, airports, etc. with their flags improperly displayed.

Also, personal diplomacy matters. Being respectful, poised and polished gives us the ability to build stronger relationships.