

# INL's CIO talks information management, horses, family and friends

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 Na-

tional 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 Denise Stephens, Director of Information Management and Chief Information Officer at Idaho National Laboratory. Denise is responsible for INL's information management organization, employing 185 specialists and numerous service contractors, while

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operating a \$50 million budget. She is responsible for the lab's information technology, cyber security, scientific computing and knowledge management. Denise is a graduate of University of Missouri – St. Louis. She has worked at Boeing, the U.S. Postal Service, Savannah River Site and INL.

**Q: What is your day job?**

**A:** Leading the organization that enables our lab research mission through the delivery of information using information technology/computing and other means.

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

**A:** Almost everyone depends on relevant information and IT systems in their personal and professional lives. Having reliable and secure networks, systems and computing capability to deliver information is crucial to all functions and organizations in any modern institution.

**Q: What is the biggest challenge you face today?**

**A:** Keeping up to date with rap-



Amy Lientz  
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Denise Stephens is the Director of Information Management and Chief Information Officer at Idaho National Laboratory. (INL photo)

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rapidly changing technology in a complex environment while keeping information safe and secure is a challenge for any CIO.

**Q: What is next on the horizon in your line of work?**

**A:** Increasing the application of big data, data analytics, and visualization to our research missions and decision making is a fascinating and growing use of information and technology. The uses for these capabilities are endless.

**Q: Where do you see technology going in your field in the next five years?**

**A:** Just like eastern Idaho's weather, the one certainty is technology will rapidly change. Mobile computing is here and will continue to be a focus for many years to come. Cyber security will play a significant role in shaping information technology capabilities.

**Q: What do you believe is the most useful invention in the last decade?**

**A:** The iPhone. I cannot imagine life without the powerful and intuitive mobile devices now available to us because of Steve Jobs' vision.

**Q: What would be a useful invention to make your job/life better?**

**A:** Push-button/easy cyber security tools. The complexity associated with maintaining good security of information at home and in the

workplace can be overwhelming and expensive, and results in individuals and organizations ignoring this important aspect of using technology.

**Q: What do you enjoy most about your career?**

**A:** I have been an IT professional for almost 40 years and have experienced rapid and amazing changes to the technology I use and implement for organizations. I love the change and ability to be a part of innovating and using information and IT capabilities.

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

**A:** The stereotype of being a computer geek or that you must excel at math is a myth. There are jobs for many different skills but the one common denominator is you must be comfortable with change to be successful in IT, cyber security, scientific computing or knowledge management.

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

**A:** I initially wanted to be a journalist, but found I could apply my creativity and ability to structure thoughts into writing computer programs. I've had amazing opportunities and have never looked back on my career decisions.

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

**A:** The breathtaking beauty of

this area. I absolutely love being outdoors and experiencing the raw beauty of eastern Idaho. Having moved from highly humid climates, I also love eastern Idaho's arid climate.

**Q: What is missing in eastern Idaho that you wish was here?**

**A:** More diversity in our community, industry, in our restaurants and shopping options would be nice. But I really like this area and think it would be regretful to make vast changes.

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

**A:** I have been horse crazy my entire life. My passion is riding, showing and caring for horses. I spend as much time as possible with my horses and "horsey friends." My husband and I recently acquired trail horses and look forward to exploring the countryside on horseback.

**Q: When and where were you happiest?**

**A:** I am happiest anytime I am with family, friends and/or my beloved horses and dogs. While I love spending time hiking in the mountains, fishing the rivers, watching ocean waves — being with those I love brings the most happiness.

**Q: Which talent would you most like to have?**

**A:** I have always wished for mu-

sical ability: singing or playing an instrument, but alas, I was skipped over when musical capability was passed out.

**Q: What do you most value in your friends?**

**A:** Honesty, dependability and the ability to laugh.

**Q: Who is your favorite writer?**

**A:** Pat Conroy — an extremely talented southern writer (The Lords of Discipline, The Prince of Tides, The Great Santini, to name a few) who we lost in 2016.

**Q: Your favorite book you read last year?**

**A:** "The Eighty-Dollar Champion: Snowman, the Horse that Inspired a Nation" by Elizabeth Letts. This is a wonderful, true story about perseverance, focus, dedication, and triumph from adversity.

*Lientz is director of Partnerships, Engagement and Technology Deployment for Idaho National Laboratory. Her organization is responsible for governmental affairs, technology transfer, economic and workforce development, university programs, STEM and public affairs, and community giving. A favorite part of her job is to interact with engineers and scientists, who innovate and solve big problems, and then share their success stories with others to help inspire more discovery. For more information and success stories, go to [inl.gov](http://inl.gov).*

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