

## Profiles in Power

# Conowingo's Reta White—making the connection

*Story and photo by  
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Engineers see things a little differently than non-engineers. They look at buildings and power plants and dams and don't just see the final product, they see inside of them—how they're built, how they're working, how it all fits together.



On some levels, Reta White, Senior Civil Dam Safety Engineer at Exelon Power's

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Conowingo Dam in the Mid-Atlantic Region, is a typical engineer. In her work at the 572-megawatt hydro facility on the Susquehanna River, Reta is responsible for engineering work - ensuring the circa 1928 dam and power generating facility is meeting its design criteria, and helping coordinate the work that's needed when it doesn't. She's also responsible for the plant's Emergency Action Plan, working with local and state officials to ensure public safety is protected.

But there's also a significant portion of the bright and energetic Civil Engineer that takes engineering concepts and brings them into her non-work life. Reta likes to see and experience how things fit together, but it's not always related to safely producing electricity.

“I’ve always struggled with the concept of separating things out - people and culture and ethnicity,” Reta notes. “I’m much more interested in experiencing and linking things together. I like that we’re all connected.”

To make that connection, Reta the engineer is also a world traveler, taking annual journeys to faraway places to experience other countries and cultures and find out more about how people are built the same; how it all fits together.

In the past several years, Reta has significantly broadened her horizons. The Kentucky native, who grew up in Bell County in the eastern Kentucky coalfields, has spent time in Peru, Istanbul Turkey, and Mexico. This year she's booked a three-week trip to South Africa where she's planning to do some camping and check Victoria Falls off her bucket list.

So how does a civil engineer working at a hydro plant in a rural area of Maryland get such a wide perspective? Genes, mainly, she says.

“My father worked in engineering and my mother was an accomplished artist,” she explains. “So I got both the engineering and artistic sides. I like to think it’s a good combination.”

Reta began with Exelon in August 2015 after working for LGE and as a consultant. Her background is in the environmental aspect of water, but true to her nature, she’s broadened that with her current work in the hydro industry.

“Civil engineering looks at different kinds of things—transportation, structures, roads, bridges, and obviously dams,” she noted. “But the theories behind any of those areas are the same. What I like about this job at Conowingo is that I have the water background but not in hydro, so there’s a learning curve. I like to continue to learn.

“I’m not a typical engineer,’ she added. “I know that. But that’s partly what attracted me to engineering.”

“My father worked in the business and I wanted to do the same, but do it with a broader perspective. Travelling helps that. It’s always an adventure and it helps me with my work. I see more of how things work and how they work together. That always makes it worth the trip.”

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