Hartt student works at the Olympics

“Incredible” is how Joe Dziok ’14 describes working with NBC Olympics’ engineering crew at the 2012 games in London, England, this past summer.

“I was there for a little more than two months,” says The Hartt School music production and technology major. “I arrived about five weeks before the Olympics. There was a lot of prep work. People don’t realize all that goes on behind the scenes.”

Dziok was an intern among more than 1,500 crew members and freelancers ensuring that NBC’s 200 million viewers received the network’s thousands of hours of coverage of 302 sporting events.

“Mainly I was helping engineers keep track of sound and video equipment,” Dziok explains. “In addition to putting equipment together, I would scan bar codes to make sure all the equipment was accounted for at the field shop. I also put together the mobile camera kits, and I helped when pieces of gear needed to be repaired.

“The most exciting thing about working the Olympics was how much I learned about the broadcasting aspect of video and audio—and taking a lot of what I learned in the classroom and applying it to a real-world situation,” Dziok says.

“Part of the program at Hartt trains us to be musicians first,” says Dziok, who plays jazz piano. “We learn about entertaining. That’s what courses like ear training are about. Another part is how to be flexible. The Olympics took that aspect of entertainment to another level. It takes so many people to put on a show like the Olympics that you learn just how flexible you have to be as a professional.”

The native of Chicopee, Mass., says he cannot overstate the extent of Hartt’s role in his Olympics experience. “I don’t think I would have had the opportunity if it weren’t for The Hartt School’s program,” he says. “I got the job through Chip Adams. He’s vice president of Olympics Venue Engineering at NBC Universal. He must have heard good things about the Hartt program because he has hired Hartt students before.”

“It is already clear to me what a positive impact Joe’s work at the Olympics has had on him,” says Justin Kurtz, chair of Hartt’s Department of Music Production and Technology. “Not only has his experience in London helped confirm his commitment to studying music production at Hartt, it has also inspired his fellow classmates.”

Dziok’s summer wasn’t all work. In addition to taking in some of the history of London and visiting friends and University of Hartford alumni, he was able to watch from the press box as his cousin, Abby Johnston of Duke University, won a silver medal in the women’s three-meter, synchronized diving competition.

After the games, Dziok worked an additional week, making sure all the equipment was sent back to the States or off to the next Olympics venue, Sochi, Russia.

“NBC starts gearing up for the Olympics about a year and a half before,” says Dziok, who has hopes for another Olympics experience. “I think London went well. Chip said they would like me to come back to work in 2014.”
Just a few weeks after graduating in May, Alyssa Nett '12 found a paid internship that allowed her to use the art skills she had developed in the Hartford Art School. She spent the summer creating art projects with 17-year-old Steven Carrasquillo, who has muscular dystrophy, a neuromuscular disease.

Nett was one of five current or recent University of Hartford students who interned as therapists with Masonicare Partners Home Health and Hospice. Some of them spent time with elderly patients, while others worked with children, like Steven, who are in Masonicare's Pediatric Palliative Care Program for kids under the age of 18 with life-threatening illnesses.

Nett and Steven spent eight hours a week together over the course of the summer, concentrating on decorating Steven’s bedroom in his East Hartford home. A movie buff, Steven likes to color pictures of superheroes as well as fish and birds. Nett helped him create a collage out of his artwork and a few quotes from which they could draw inspiration, such as “Never give up” and “Wash your sadness away with a smile.”

Nett quickly developed a friendship with Steven. “I love kids,” she said. “I think everyone has a kid inside that they’re too shy to let out. This is my excuse. It’s not really work, it’s a lot of fun.”

Steven’s mother, Julie Echevarría, says the experience has been fun for her son as well, and she wishes the program could continue past the summer.

“He has taken art in school,” Echevarría says. “But now he works on projects on his own, even before Alyssa gets here.”

The internship allowed Nett to delve further into her other interest, psychology. As a painting major in college, she declared a minor in psychology at the beginning of her senior year.

“I took a couple of psychology classes and became really interested in it,” Nett says. “I love art and painting—but there’s something really solitary about that—and I love people.”

The internship was Nett’s second time working as an art therapist. She had previously taken an Arts in Healthcare course with Assistant Professor Cat Balco, who was also her internship advisor. Nett and her classmates worked with patients at the Wintonbury Care Center, a rehabilitation and skilled-nursing facility in Bloomfield, Conn. These two experiences have inspired Nett to look for a permanent job in the art therapy field.

The internship was part of The Ellipses Project, an artistic collaboration designed by Balco as a response to our culture’s avoidance of death. The project will conclude with an exhibition at Real Art Ways in Hartford, featuring paintings, sculptures, and drawings that the interns and their patients created over the summer. It will also include “legacy” projects such as videos, handprints, and poems that patients created so their families can have a reminder of them after they are gone. The exhibition is scheduled to open in April 2013.
University of Hartford basketball player Ruthanne Doherty is hardly the stereotypical engineer. That is precisely why she was approached about helping at the University’s Mad About Science program this past summer.

Doherty, a senior forward for the Hawks, is a biomedical engineering major in the College of Engineering, Technology, and Architecture. For two weeks she worked with 16 middle-school girls, helping them to realize that future careers in the male-dominated fields of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) are well within reach.

“You have to get them interested during middle school in order to get into the advanced math and science programs,” says Mary Arico, coordinator of Mad About Science and assistant professor in the College of Engineering, Technology, and Architecture. Arico herself attended a similar science camp in her youth at a community college.

“What better way to prove that point than to have a standout student-athlete and engineer-in-training, like Doherty, front and center each day.”

“I think Ruthanne is such an excellent role model for girls,” Arico explains. “I knew they would look up to her and think, ‘If she can do it, why can’t I?’”

For two weeks Dana Hall on campus was the place to be for plenty of curiosity, scientific inquiry, and fun. Girls from towns across Greater Hartford enjoyed a variety of activities and experiments.

On one July afternoon the girls were split into teams to create miniature vehicles powered by mousetraps. An impressive collection of building materials littered the tables—everything from LEGO bricks to old CDs, wood and plastic scraps, tape, scissors, and glue. The girls modified and repaired their creations as needed. Final products revealed each group’s own concept of “car”: one is shaped like a Formula-1 racer; another has oversized wheels like a monster truck.

“It was interesting, they have a lot of energy,” Doherty says. “I thought it was a great experience, not only for them but for me. You can learn a lot interacting with younger girls. It just made me think about the past and how I did a similar program at a university in Virginia that exposed me to engineering. That is how my interest grew.”

When asked about their future career aspirations, participants had answers ranging from “not sure” to “an engineer at Pratt & Whitney” to “a forensic scientist.”

One thing is for sure. This winter, when these girls see Doherty in uniform soaring for an offensive rebound and scoring another basket for the Hartford Hawks, the reaction will be instantaneous: “I know her. She’s a woman engineer. And she’s cool.”
When Staci Bechard ’13 reminisces about Haiti, the image that she says she will always remember isn’t what you might expect.

It isn’t the 680-mile flight from Florida on a 15-passenger cargo plane or the seven-hour trip on a “tap tap” bus over the winding mountain roads from Port-au-Prince to Jacmel. It isn’t even the devastation lingering two years after the earthquake of 2010.

What she says she will never forget is how friendly the Haitian people were. “It’s rude not to say bon jour [good day] to everyone you walk by in Haiti. Once we asked a woman for directions, and she took 15 minutes out of her day to show us the way.”

Bechard, who is majoring in integrated elementary and special education in the College of Education, Nursing and Health Professions, has volunteered the past two summers with the Haiti Family Initiative (www.haitifamilyinitiative.org). The Delaware-based organization sends teachers, social workers, and medical personnel to help Haitians whose lives were shattered by the earthquake.

A native of Newark, Del., Bechard says she has always been drawn to community service. “I guess it started with Girl Scouts. I’m pretty blessed and privileged to have what I have, and I feel that I should help others.”

She admits that when she arrived in Haiti, she was not prepared for the devastation. “I had been to Gulfport [Mississippi] and New Orleans with church youth groups to help after Katrina,” she says. “But Haiti was in complete devastation; no organization. Some homes stood as they were just after the earthquake.”

At a wellness and recreation camp in a Salvation Army building, Bechard “taught English to children who lived in tent cities. It’s really hard in a population like that because we were only there for 10 weeks. After that, the kids just roam around. They don’t have resources—no books, no Internet. Education drives everything. You can’t improve anything without it.”

Bechard is using her experience to create a manual to help teachers from industrialized countries adapt to teaching in Third World countries. The manual will be published through a grant from the Women’s Education and Leadership Fund at the University of Hartford.

Bechard’s enthusiasm for education is also evident at the University, where she is a tutor; a member of the education honor society, Kappa Delta Pi; and a founder of the University chapter of Students for Education Reform. She is a regular on the dean’s list.

Two summers in Haiti have clearly colored Bechard’s sense of responsibility. “Imagine if the U.S. hired 200 engineers to put water in every town in Haiti,” she says. “Imagine if we did something as simple as that, how much of a difference we could make in someone’s life.”