

# Finding new solutions

By Andrew Stamer

Most architectural engineers spend their days poring over building designs, but when Raouf Girgis is in the office, he spends most of his time working on computer and network problems.

Girgis, who works for the Egypt Area Office, graduated from Cairo University's architectural section 31 years ago as an architectural engineer.

In January, Girgis agreed to come to the Transatlantic Programs Center's headquarters to backfill for an information technology specialist who had deployed to Iraq, said Carroll McDonald, director of Information Management.

How does a highly trained and experienced architectural engineer end up working with computers and network problems? By becoming a highly experienced computer guru.

As the PC evolved, so did Girgis' experiences.

Almost all of what he does in his information management support role has been self-taught, he said. In 1991, computers were a hobby and something to learn about.

"I saw an old PC lying on the floor and decided to mess around with it. I read books on it and started learning all I could," he said.



Photo by Andrew Stamer

Raouf Girgis writes down part numbers while fixing a computer at TAC headquarters.

There was no information technology support in Egypt before 1996, he said, and when his teammates learned how much he knew about computer technology, he became the go-to guy for computer-related issues.

"Over the past 10 years as an Egypt Area Office employee, Raouf has been an extension of TAC's IM office in Winchester," said McDonald. "He has provided invaluable IT support to the area office, and his efforts have involved such things as installing satellite terminals, local area networks, running the e-mail system, and maintaining and upgrading the office telephone system."

As technology progressed, things began moving quickly for Girgis in the arena of technical support. He was moved to Cairo's technical support office where he became responsible for the LAN, a server, and about six or seven personal computers, Girgis said.

This duty "started growing and growing and began eating up" his engineering duties as the number of PCs he became responsible for grew to 120.

His small interest in new technology became a huge part of his job, and all of this with no formal training until 2000 when he received his "first and only" training on the Oracle database system, Girgis said.

"This was very basic. It was how to deal with a database," Girgis said.

In an ever-changing world, he has kept up with the speed of technology.

"Throughout this, my concern was to get the office up and running as smooth as could be," he said. Learning about computers was something Girgis saw as an opportunity for the office to work better.

"I like to learn from problems. Failure to me means success because I will mess with the computers until I find out why the failures exist," Girgis said. And when he finds what's

wrong, he can then fix the problem and chalk up another successful solution.

Though this additional duty has erupted into an involved specialty, about 80 percent of his time is devoted to solving local computer issues. Girgis still regularly completes projects related to his architectural engineering discipline, taking up the remaining 20 percent of his time, completing modifications and changes to computer-aided design and drafting drawings, Girgis said.

"I have to keep it up-to-date (engineering) because I want to keep my original career," he said.

After a three-week stint in Kuwait last year, Girgis was nominated and later received the award for Employee of the Year.

According to his nomination, Girgis traveled to Kuwait to resolve complex issues and train the staff on the resident management system (RMS), which is software used by area and resident engineers to manage construction contracts. His support helped update the offices and increased system use soon followed.

While there, he also taught the Quality Control System, which is the contractor module of RMS. Girgis is TAC's alternate RMS administrator.

Girgis also traveled to Oman to repair a computer and communications package. He made sure the staff was outfitted with back-ups in the event of a main system failure.

"Since Raouf's arrival here in Winchester, he has been a tremendous asset to not only the IM team but all of TAC, the Gulf Region Division and the Afghanistan Engineer District, which have all benefited from his dedication, energy and great work ethic," McDonald said.

This temporary assignment has allowed Girgis the opportunity to work with the IM team he interacts with regularly when he is in Egypt.