



# **Leah Kimura**

**Chemical Engineer  
Class of 2003**

**By Mary Kimura**

Leah Kiyoko Kimura graduated with a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from Oregon State University. She currently works as a

process engineer at the Georgia-Pacific mill in Camas, WA which produces paper products. Papermaking involves a series of processes to convert wood chips to pulp, pulp into paper and paper into finished products.

Process engineers work to optimize processes by reducing costs, improving product yield and reduce variation in the process while ensuring the product quality meets or exceeds the customer's expectations. This can be done by running trials (experiments), working on projects to improve the reliability and ultimately the uptime of equipment, and by monitoring the process to identify opportunities for improvement. Leah works in operations and enjoys collaborating with the operators. She gets to spend a lot of time on the operating floor which she prefers over being at a computer all day long.

Leah enjoyed math and problem solving from a young age. In high school, she discovered that she liked chemistry as well. She enjoyed taking chemistry and physics from Mr. Olive. Chemical engineering is a versatile field, many different types of industries hire chemical engineers. She was able to obtain work as soon as she graduated from college.

When asked what high school students should do if they are planning to study chemical engineering, she said to take as many AP classes as possible, especially AP calculus and AP chemistry. Taking AP classes in high school will give you a leg up in college. Also, passing the AP tests count as college credit at many universities.

She also said to do as many internships as you can. "College is great for theoretical knowledge, but internships give you more practical experience." Leah did internships at Boeing (commercial airplanes) and FEI (scanning electron microscopes, transmission electron microscopes, focused ion beam tools). Some of her classmates work for oil companies, breweries, wineries, and energy consulting firms. Chemical engineers can work for any company that takes chemicals and materials and turns them into some type of product.

Leah graduated with Waiakea's class of 2003. She was involved in a variety of school activities, including science club, robotics, KIWIN's, and math league. She was also a competitive gymnast with Pantheon School of Gymnastics. Her favorite memories of high school include dancing in Variety Show, going to Seattle for a FIRST Robotics competition, math league competitions, and just hanging out with her friends in Mr. Olive's classroom.

Leah currently resides in Vancouver, WA. She believes Vancouver is an excellent place to live because Portland, OR is about 30 minutes away. This means she does not pay state income tax and for big purchases makes the 30 minute drive south where there is no sales tax.

Although Leah enjoys her job, she believes in maintaining a balance between work and life. In her free time, she likes going to the gym, trying new restaurants, and spending time with her friends. Leah also tries to take advantage of what the Northwest has to offer. She enjoys trying new hikes, exploring the city and taking trips to the coast. Leah does her best to visit Hilo at least once a year and keeps in touch with her family through phone calls and video calls.

