



Nicholas Strange, left, and Noah Swerdloff, of Crypto Talent, stand for a portrait along the Astoria Riverwalk.

LYDIA ELY/THE ASTORIAN

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'You're not really as isolated as the word 'remote' indicates'

Though remote work is often digital, its impact isn't limited to computer screens.

Matt Roberts is a mechanical engineer for GE Power's plant in South Carolina. For the past three years, he's been waking up early to design gas turbine components and make calculations from his attic in Seaview.

His work helps power homes and businesses across the globe.

The scope of his job feels bigger than his neatly organized office space that also serves as a bedroom and a home gym. It has a rowing machine in one corner and a standing desk in another.

He said the biggest advantage of working from home has been the ability to focus without distraction, aside from the occasional attention-seeking woof from his dog, a Portuguese water dog named "Jet."

"I liken it to back when I was studying in my bachelor's of engineering days. We would often study alone, and it was so that you could really focus to understand what was complicated physics, and sometimes that just takes individual thought," he said.

After working on the East Coast for two decades, his wife wanted to move to the Washington coast. Since GE already employed people who collaborate from around the world, he was able to make a smooth transition to remote work.

Working three hours ahead of the West Coast allows him to enjoy his afternoons.

"I think it's an excellent place to be from an end of the day perspective, because it's so easy to relax," he said. "For me, in particular, because I do love the ocean and it is a way to step away both mentally and physically from a work environment."

Engineering is a very interactive job, but video conferences and new software allow him to do it all from home. When he's really plugged in, he wears an over-ear headset with a microphone in front of his face.

"You can always speak up on a call. You can always contact somebody and say, 'Can you send me a picture, or FaceTime call me and let me talk you through this,'" Roberts said.

Working remotely, he said he feels connected to both his work on the East Coast and the coastal community where he lives.

"You're not really as isolated as the word 'remote' indicates," he said.