An insatiable curiosity drives Damian Kurum in both work and life

By SALLY PARKER

Damian Kurum has the knack. Like Dilbert in the comic strip, he has an instinctive understanding of how things go together. “You understand the basic principles of why things are done the way they are,” he says. So perhaps it is no surprise that Kurum is a software engineer for Xerox Corp. He troubleshoots technical issues with office printers as a subject matter expert on the company’s ERP. He pauses to recall what the acronym stands for—“Xerox has a lot of those,” he says—and after a moment he comes up with “extensible interface platform.”

Kurum’s curiosity drives his work. He is a modern-day tinkerer, answering questions posed by Xerox partner companies. Twice he has joined Xerox developers as a trouble-shooter in the company’s developer days in England. At the workshops, developers from partner companies can learn from their counterparts at Xerox.

A native of Akron, Ohio, Kurum lives in a house he purchased in Webster within walking distance of work. He enjoys being outside—his office is windowless and “as dark as it gets”—and he escapes for hourlong walks during lunch.

Kurum is a 2008 graduate of the software engineering program at Rochester Institute of Technology. He speaks highly of the program. “The people in that department are just the best. I still talk to my advisor,” he says. In 2010, he earned an MBA from Medaille College at the Rochester campus to broaden his grasp of business. Kurum says it supports his software knowledge and helps him understand what’s happening in the office.

The curiosity he applies to his job and studies also defines Kurum’s personal pursuits. He has played ultimate in the Greater Rochester Area Disc Association for several years and loves to travel. A vacation with his fiancee is no lazy week by the lake with a couple of good books; he is out the door by 5 a.m. for a day of sightseeing, primarily on foot, not returning until 10 p.m. He says his own fiancée won’t travel with him.

“I’m a hard person to vacation with,” he says, laughing. “I vacation hard.” He has taken solo trips along the Eastern Seaboard, England, Ireland and Japan, whose professional baseball games—with cheerleaders, a fifth-inning dance routine and lively crowd antics—more closely resemble high school football games in the U.S., he says. He’ll soon bike the Erie Canal from Buffalo to Syracuse with friends.

“There’s a weekend lost,” he says. Kurum also makes sauerkraut, jam, wine and cheese. He tends a garden of tomatoes, peppers and collard greens, and every Saturday morning, he says, “You’ll see me at the public market,” picking up cabbage and goat cheese.

Instead of mainstream TV, Kurum watches college lecture videos on topics ranging from ape communication to the Roman Catholic Church to number theory. And in the fall he’ll start a Japanese language class at Monroe Community College.

He knows his interests tend to the eclectic and prolific, but Kurum is soaking up life just the way he wants. “I’m always looking for the next interesting thing,” he says. “If it’s out there, I want to know about it.”