

## WHAT CAN PHYSICISTS DO?

An interview series that profiles scientists who opted for careers outside of academia.

### Steluta Dinca puts solar shingles to the test

By **Toni Feder**

#### Photovoltaic reliability engineer, GAF Energy

BS, physics, University of Bucharest, 1997  
PhD, physics, Syracuse University, 2010

#### What was your research focus?

Charge transport and modeling in solar cells. While at Syracuse University as a postdoc and other research positions for more than a decade, I developed an *in situ* solid-state polymerization method that creates ordered, extended polyacetylene chains with unique electrical properties.

(Photo by Thierry Nguyen.)



#### What were you looking for in a job?

I wanted to explore a topic related to solar cells and renewable energy. When, as a postdoc, I got an NSF grant, I was very happy. But I asked myself, Do I want to do this all my life? I decided I would try industry.

#### How did you make the transition into industry?

I looked at companies that seemed in line with my interests and reached out via LinkedIn to people to learn about their career paths and why they left academia. I asked a few to mentor me. I applied to 15 jobs that matched 80% to 90% of my skills, got 4 interviews, and joined GAF Energy in 2024.

#### How do you spend your time?

GAF Energy makes solar energy shingles that combine solar cells with traditional asphalt shingles. I conduct reliability and stress testing to assess product performance.

#### What new skills did you need?

I have learned new characterization techniques and gained experience in programming. I am also learning about being a part of a team, not only as a leader but also as a collaborator.

#### What do you like about your job?

I am working on many projects and learning about every aspect of the business. I like the team I work with and the fact that we are working toward the same goal. My job allows me to stay true to my values while helping make clean energy more accessible.

#### Is there anything you'd like to add?

My advice is to become a well-rounded scientist: Specialize, but also keep the broader picture in mind and consider how your skills can be transferred. Step out of your adviser's shadow. And don't underestimate the value of networking for your future. **PT**

Read more interviews in the series at <https://physicstoday.org/wcpd>.