

## John Luebke & Sheree Hurt

Operations Manager & IMT Journey Worker

Deltrol



John Luebke is passionate about working on the production floor, interacting with workers, and ensuring that products go out on time. As the Operations Manager at Deltrol, an electromechanical controls and hydraulic systems manufacturer in Milwaukee, he takes pride in giving the customers what they need from right here in the U.S.

“I’ve seen a lot of different parts come and go out of here, and sometimes overseas,” said Luebke. “We have a sister company over in Vietnam, and some of the reasons why they left is because we just couldn’t afford to do it here anymore. So I take pride in making sure the product that we currently have here stays here so that we can be competitive.”

If he speaks glowingly about manufacturing in the Milwaukee region it is because it gave him the ability to raise and support his family, just like his parents before him. Born in a family of six siblings, Luebke joined the army at the age of 18 and was stationed in Germany, but got to see much of the world. When he left the army, he got all of his education covered by the GI Bill, and saw Milwaukee as the best place for him to settle.

“Within a 100-mile radius is like 98 percent of the jobs in Wisconsin. I’ve been here since and I love it. I’m married with two daughters at home.”

Luebke approaches his job with a hands-on mindset, preferring to get involved in every piece that leaves Deltrol. He sees it as a way to keep people employed — including himself. When Luebke found out that a new cohort of apprentices would be working on a new valve

coming into the company, he had no idea that cohort was going to be all female.

“I got people here, that for two years, are probably going to be here because they want to get through this apprenticeship,” he said. “Now, I might lose them after that, because now they got a journeyperson’s card, they can go anywhere. From a company standpoint, we’ll teach them, they might leave us, but to a certain extent, we use their abilities to our advantage and keep jobs in Milwaukee.”

One of the women who Luebke depends on is Sheree Hurt. For eight years, Hurt has loved the camaraderie with her all-female team of coworkers. She is one of five female IMT Journeyworkers at Deltrol, which has been exciting for her.

“We have this new valve coming into the company, and the females will get a chance to work on it,” she explained. “We can do good work too, not just the men.”

Her family has been behind her every step in her journey, and admires the tenacity of her and the rest of the



women she works with. From her two college-educated children to her own mother, all of them pushed her to not give up. When Hurt goes to work everyday, she knows that her nieces, nephews, and cousins look up to her. They think it is impressive that she works in a factory.

Just as the women have been trained through the WRTP apprenticeship program, they now teach other women the same skills. Putting the all-female team of journeymen on new projects is a great motivator for getting more women into manufacturing.

Hurt realized things needed to change in the industry, when she signed up for the apprenticeship. Some of her male colleagues were discouraging and thought that it was not for women. “That pushed us all to get it done,” she said. “We were told that it was gonna be hard for us, and that we was gonna drop out. So we had to prove them wrong. It was hard, but we stayed in there.”

Now Hurt is part of the changing face of manufacturing by broadening its appeal to women and younger generations.

As a smaller company, Deltrol barely had the resources to train the women on-site, but Luebke believed that it was an opportunity they could not miss. He had to convince the executive management that this was in the best interest of the company, to help more people become journeymen. He believed the more the company got involved in training the next generation of laborers, the better it would be for the Milwaukee manufacturing scene as a whole.

The pandemic has meant that Deltrol cannot show off the work that these women are doing like they wanted to. With so much interest statewide in the all-female apprenticeship, showcasing their work to the rest of the industry and to girls in schools is something that will have to wait. For now, Luebke hopes that the women can continue to be examples for other women to follow, and hopes that other companies see the benefit to what Deltrol is doing.