Karen Buerkle Testimonial

Current Title:  
Project Manager for Drivetrain Component Machining

Tenure with John Deere:  
13 Years

Alma Mater:  
Undergraduate:  South Dakota School of Mines and Technology  
Graduate: Kettering University

What are the best things about working at John Deere?  
John Deere has the best of both worlds from my perspective in terms of a large company with a small family-business culture.

It is a large company that is well respected which makes me proud to tell people I work for John Deere. In my opinion, for a large company to stay in business, they have to be competitive in pay, benefits, and provide employee engagement opportunities. All of these aspects originally led me to work for John Deere. A big factor in continuing my career with John Deere is the company’s commitment to our community through volunteer opportunities and financial support. There are also a lot of options in terms of organizations and groups that pique my interest and help me grow.

On the other hand, each facility has its own culture, and the location I am at feels like a small family-business. I come to work every day and feel like I personally can make an impact. My coworkers, managers, and the people on the shop floor feel like family to me; we share laughs, frustrations, family stories, and successes together. With this environment, I know that I have a voice in making decisions and when I execute, I go home feeling a sense of personal accomplishment.

What did you expect to learn in your internship and what did you learn?  
Do you know what you want to be when you grow up? I didn’t. I knew I wanted to be a Mechanical Engineer because I liked to build things. Beyond that, I didn’t know what I was going to do after I graduated college. I held three summer internships and through these experiences I learned the technical aspects of the job which helped me go back to school and understand the application in what I was learning in school. Most importantly, my internship showed me what I wanted to grow up to be after graduation. With the networking experiences I had, I met a lot of different people and saw the many roles that were available for a career. Some of these people I met in my internship are still mentoring me today, and since I enjoy coming to work every day, it is a testament to the impact my internship had on my experience!
What is the best piece of career advice you can offer to someone looking for a career at John Deere?

I wish I can take credit for this as this advice has stayed with me through my 13 years and has been a huge impact on how I got to where I am.

1 – Treat people the way you want to be treated, and always with respect
When I first started, I was ready to put my head down, get down to business, and get the job done. I had a mentor and was told to take time to get to know my co-workers. That meant learning about their families, asking what they did on the weekends, and building relationships. Initially, I thought it was going to waste valuable company time, but I followed the advice, and looking back, it was what helped build my reputation. The people you work with are the most important part of making a company great. When you feel like a family you act like a family. The people I worked with helped me get projects done on time and helped me make sure I did it right the first time. Everyone helped each other out. This made it so I loved coming to work every day to see the people I work with and it also helped me be successful in my career because most of the best ideas came from the people I worked with, but we had to be a team in order to execute.

2 Build a foundation
For some reason, there is a lot of pressure in society to climb the corporate ladder and have power. What someone told me is that it is also good to be part of the foundation. The foundation is the supporting layer of a structure, and without it the structure cannot be held up. When you are put in a position, work hard, with integrity, and get the job done the best you can. Don’t look for the next “greatest job” when you are in your current job- look for what new opportunities you can learn in your existing job and impact you can make from where you are. People will notice if you put your heart and soul into the job you have. In addition to this, lateral jobs are a good thing. It helps develop your foundation to make it wider and with wider foundations can come much higher structures. No matter if you want to climb the ladder over time or stay a part of the foundation, the foundation is the most important part of a structure.

How has your perception of this location changed since you moved here?
Have you heard those jokes that have a neighboring state as your punch line? Well that alone made me skeptical to move to Iowa. It is hard to explain how wrong those jokes were! This community, which is around 80,000 people, is completely different than I expected. With the college in town, there are a lot of activities including musical concerts, basketball and football games, and opportunities to take local classes for development. There are many different restaurants in town, with the best steaks I’ve ever had. Last year, I went to a traveling Broadway musical and many different plays at three different theaters. There are also many small-town festivals that will hold anything from Combine Derby’s, Figure-Eight racing, and Irish Festivals. There is always something to do. It is a beautiful area, and the city has put a lot of money and effort into revamping areas of town that have degraded. It looks great. There is an amazing sense of community here with a large United Way organization and a lot of other non-profit organizations. If we want a piece of big city life, we will travel to Minneapolis, Chicago, St. Louis, Omaha, or Kansas City for the weekend because we are centrally located. Don’t believe things you hear. You need to come and live the experience to make a judgment on a location. Most importantly, make the most of where you are!