American Airlines Newsroom

NEWS RELEASE

Getting a STEP ahead

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The Manufacturing Institute recently recognized Debbie Hamilton, Senior Manager of Component Repair at Tech Ops – Tulsa in Oklahoma, as a recipient of the sixth annual Women in Manufacturing STEP (Science, Technology, Engineering and Production) Ahead Awards in Washington, D.C. The STEP Ahead Awards honored Debbie and 129 other women at all manufacturing levels who have demonstrated leadership and excellence in their careers.

The STEP Ahead Awards are part of the larger STEP Ahead program, which is led by The Manufacturing Institute and was launched to promote the role of women in manufacturing through recognition and research. The goal is to inspire the next generation of female leaders in manufacturing and to support current female talent within the industry by sharing the stories of these women and their leadership traits.

A 31-year-veteran of American Airlines, Debbie started her career as a mechanic in the Composite Shop at Tech Ops — Tulsa, where she was one of the first female mechanics to work in that area. She said her start in maintenance at the airline was very different from her original goal of becoming a coach. In the need of a job and by chance, she began tooling for Boeing on the 757 aircraft at Rockwell International in Tulsa and got bit by the manufacturing and aviation bug. Debbie then turned her attention to American's maintenance base down the street.

2019 STEP Ahead Award winner Debbie Hamilton

After working in American's Composite Shop, she spent time in Production Control and Quality Assurance and became a supervisor for Production before working her way to Senior Manager of Component Repair.

Director of Component Repair Stacey Brown, who won the STEP Ahead Award in 2016, nominated Debbie. Stacey and Debbie are two of the first female production supervisors at Tech Ops – Tulsa.

“Debbie’s biggest strength as a leader is her compassion and empathy for people,” said Sarah Kassebaum, Production Supervisor at American’s Tulsa base. “She takes time to get to know people and invests in not only what’s going on within their work life, but gets to know each person on an individual basis. As a leader, people know she is about more than just the job, and that has gained her respect by many.”

The STEP Ahead program supports and encourages women to become leaders in manufacturing and inspires others to pursue the great career opportunities available in the industry. In the past five years, STEP Ahead Award winners have impacted more than 300,000 individuals — from school-aged children to peers in the industry.

The manufacturing industry is currently experiencing a shortage of women in the workforce, representing only 29 percent of the manufacturing labor force. Women represent manufacturing’s largest pool of untapped talent, which makes them a critical factor in closing the skills gap.

Debbie was supported at the event by, from left, Production Supervisor Rose Hardwick, sister-in-law Jackie Hamilton, Production Supervisor Sarah Kassebaum, mom Roylene Pennington, Planning Supervisor Gidget Harris, Debbie Hamilton, wife Carla Trouche, Component Repair Director Stacey Brown, Production Supervisor Elizabeth Weldon and Planning Supervisor Carol Petrucci.

Debbie hopes to inspire women to consider a role in manufacturing and encourages those on her team in Tulsa to grow to their fullest potential. “It’s my hope that being a manager for people — especially for other women — helps them grow and go places, and gives them opportunities that I had,” Debbie said.

Debbie attended the ceremony with her wife, mom and several fellow team members who came to help celebrate Debbie and what she has contributed to the industry.

“It makes me feel good to represent American and receive this award,” Debbie said. “This would not have been possible without the support of everyone around me, including the women I work with. I’m overwhelmed with gratitude. I feel like there’s nothing I can’t accomplish. I hope others strive to do something like this.”