

Medtronic Making a Difference Every Day

By Tom Schuman

All companies provide a product or service that is needed in some form; otherwise, the business would not be viable. While the corporate mission of Medtronic is to alleviate pain, restore health and extend lives, the Warsaw facility manufactures products that often help people return to a normal, active existence.

Mishi Weikart, a machinist with nearly 12 years of experience with the company, terms it “just a blessing” that her uncle is able to walk and function due to parts the company produces. Robyn Coble, with more than 13 years with Medtronic in quality control, says the personal visits from patients and the before/after photos show that “we make quite a difference, especially for the kids.”

That impact is just one of the reasons nearly 600 employees (ranging from high school grads to those with Ph.Ds) on four shifts treat their work as more than just a job. While they enjoy the benefits of a large global organization (more than 26,000 associates in six different business units with spinal and biologics the second largest of those divisions in generating more than 20% of the company’s revenue), “family atmosphere” and “small company feel” are common expressions from both management and employees.

“That (combination) is why we’re a best place to work,” offers finance manager Andy Airgood, one of several people on a second tour of duty with the company. Paul Elliott, senior director of quality, says the Warsaw facility is somewhat unique for Medtronic. “Most of the others are assembly; they get in components from suppliers and assemble them. We are one of a handful that manufacture from scratch. We start with raw materials and end up with a finished device.”

Elliott, director of manufacturing and planning Roy Wiley and IT manager Cord Julian are among those with experience at more than one of the industry giants in Warsaw – the long-designated orthopedic capital of the world. Asked if that depth of companies, big and small, and talent make it easier or more difficult to recruit employees, the unanimous answer was “yes and yes.”

“Our retention rate is pretty high,” Wiley declares. “We’ve got a handful of others who have left and came back here. I run into people in town who say, ‘If you ever need somebody in so and so, let me know.’”

Why do employees choose Medtronic, whether it’s the first or second time in their careers:

- A Policy Deployment System that truly accepts and values worker suggestions, leading to strong employee engagement. When there are challenges, Elliott notes, “It’s not just engineers or managers sitting in a conference room trying to figure out how to solve a manufacturing problem. We get employees involved, have them help design the work instructions and the training materials.”
- Giving back to the community – and each other. Examples: a donation luncheon for an employee battling cancer that raised over \$2,000 and a fundraising effort to send four high school

Raising money and helping others are common activities at Medtronic, including Day of Caring and United Way events.



females in the community to an engineering camp at Purdue University. These efforts and extensive United Way, Habitat for Humanity and other community programs are driven by an employee-based group.

- A comprehensive job shadowing program. Karen Bozarth, training and development specialist: "People working on qualifications get some experience (in other areas) and learn whether or not that's where they want to go." Julian, who has a machinist who regularly helps out in IT, terms it a win-win and "making sure there is not a wall" between management and staff.
- A variety of recognition and incentive programs, including employees honoring fellow team members. Wiley: "Everybody has a lot of fun here. While it's a 'work hard' atmosphere, there's a lot of fun in what we do as well." Adds Randy Ours, senior manager of strategic sourcing, "It's such an intense industry, it's important to know how to have fun doing it."



Paul Elliott (right), senior director of quality, is among many at Medtronic who also have experience at other Warsaw orthopedic companies.

Wiley and others speak proudly of being one of seven operations to receive a 2011 award from the Association of Manufacturing Excellence. Team members marvel at the transformation from a local spinal company started in the late 1980s through several mergers and purchases to Medtronic obtaining the spinal division in 1999 and moving into the current facility a year later.

Anita Snipes, a nearly 20-year veteran who has taken Ivy Tech Community College classes and moved into different areas of responsibility, says, "We have a very clean environment, a good management team and we know we're helping somebody. The company is good to us. A lot of places don't have all that."

Weikart, commenting on the change over the years, notes that "it's always good to evolve. It makes things better for everyone. For me, I enjoy it."

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