

## **Paving the Way to Lockheed Martin**

*By Gabrielle Pata*

While senior Victoria Leppold may be following the footsteps of her family of engineers, she has been creating her own opportunities and resources since she started attending the University of South Florida. From being president of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) to getting hired by Lockheed Martin, Leppold consistently stands out for her enthusiasm toward electrical engineering.

Leppold's family and school experiences shaped her passion for engineering. She attended a high school that focused heavily on academics. The culture surrounding her convinced her that engineering was something she wanted to pursue.

"I didn't figure out 100% why I wanted to do it until I came to USF and started playing around with electronics in labs," Leppold explains.

The history of engineering in the Leppold family pulled her closer to the field. She says her father's side of the family were all engineers "of some sort." Her father and uncle were both electrical engineers who attended USF in the 1980s. Professors that are still working at USF decades later remember her family.

"My family and I have many bonding sessions over many professors and how much we loved their classes."

It was not long after starting at USF before Leppold immersed herself into the engineering world. About two years later, she went to her first IEEE officers meeting, where she learned of a conference they had coming up. Being the eager and interested student she is, Leppold attended the trip to the conference in spring of 2016 and says it made her realize how IEEE wasn't just a USF thing, but that it is an international organization. She took note of how USF could make things better at their branch, because she noticed a lack of events and comradery.

"I wanted to change that. I put my name down for president and ended up getting it, and it has been a godsend ever since because I've made so many wonderful friends who are now like family."

During the ride to that first conference in 2016, a faculty member suggested taking the bid to host the conference in the future. Leppold agreed it was a fun idea and delved into making happen. Fast forward to now, two years later, she is busy preparing to host the SoutheastCon 2018 conference in six weeks, on April 19-22. The student branch is in charge of providing support for the student competitions and student activities.

But, that is not all for Leppold. After she graduates on May 5, she is heading to Lockheed Martin to start her new job as a test engineer working on missile systems. She sees it as her first foot-in-the-door step toward her dreams of working in space systems or aerospace.

“I applied to a lot of different places, such as power and utility companies, and Lockheed Martin was just another check on the list for me,” Leppold says. “I got an interesting email out of nowhere telling me that Lockheed Martin has a site in Ocala and to send my resume if I was interested.”

She sent her resume, received a call a week later, and was hired. As a test engineer, she will work on embedded systems for the front half of the missile where the brain activity goes on. The site itself is responsible for sensors for aircraft fire control systems, missile and vehicle electronic and cabling assemblies, and missile seeker and guidance sections. She says it is fascinating to walk through all the different labs and see the pieces being put together.

Last year, the Florida West Coast Section of IEEE nominated and honored Leppold with IEEE Student of the Year. At the time, IEEE was experiencing a renaissance of new ideas, projects and people as well as a new appreciation for student to professional interaction, which Leppold facilitated. She did not expect to win the award, but suspects it was due to her part in making these positive changes happen.

“The student branch also recognized me for the same award,” she says. “The awards came from two different levels in IEEE, so I received professional and student recognition.”

Unlike other students, she does not attribute her success to the main labs at USF. She says the Mini Circuit Design for X Lab intimidated her because she came to USF as a transfer student. Leppold recounts she was

shy and did not know how everything worked. She decided to make her own resources because she wanted her own space to grow and fit her needs. She worked to set up a more private lab for herself and a few other students.

“Turns out other students wanted a space to chill and work on projects without getting in the way of the big DFX lab, which is a great makers’ space, however, there is always stuff going on and no privacy there.”

When she is not consumed by the business of being an electrical engineering student or preparing to host the upcoming conference, which she refers to as her “baby”, Leppold loves going to the gym and sticking to a plant-based lifestyle. She says that working out is a great stress reliever and makes her feel better about herself.

“Sometimes, when you’re an engineer, things are out of your control. But picking up heavy things and throwing them back down; that is in your control,” Leppold says.

In the future, Leppold would love to get her hands on a space systems project and follow in the footsteps of her father, who worked on one of the control boxes on the boosters for the Shuttle Program. While at Lockheed Martin, she hopes to work on the Orion capsule, which is potentially travelling to Mars and back. She is not certain that she will get that opportunity due to Orion being in the late stages of development.

“It sounds like they might still need test engineers, but I don’t know where they are in those plans. But something along those lines would be the cherry on top, however at this time, to say that I qualify as an engineer in this kind of industry is huge.”