

*These college grads are 25 and under and already climbing the career ladder*

# YOUNG GUNS

It's commonly thought that young college grads entering the workforce must take their time and work their way up—pay their dues, earn their stripes, go through the school of hard knocks. And while there's no substitute for racking up on-the-job experience, the right mix of education and training can cut years off the learning (and advancement) curve.

Meet four young professionals who have landed themselves solidly on their career tracks. Armed with enthusiasm, confidence and a passion for learning, these young guns are ready to make their mark in the workplace.

## **Erik Schweisthal, 25**

**Project Manager**

**Orion Energy Systems**

Sheboygan North High School 2004  
Lakeshore Technical College 2011

In less than five months on the job, Erik Schweisthal has gone from trade show presenter to plant management team member. A project manager at Orion Energy Systems, Schweisthal works on the top-level facilities team at Orion's Manitowoc headquarters.

"We're a renewable energy company working to help people cut their energy costs," he explains. "At Orion, I do a bit of everything—from R&D initiatives to implementing Lean in our manufacturing facility."

Back in May, Schweisthal launched his career in Orion's marketing and public relations area. But it didn't take long for his other strengths to show through.

"I have manufacturing experience from my work right out of high school, so I really asserted myself and my ideas and played to my strengths," he says.

Schweisthal graduated from Sheboygan North High School in 2004 and went right to work in a manufacturing plant. While he took some online classes while he was working full time, Schweisthal didn't give college a serious try until he got laid off in 2009. As a student in LTC's Marketing program, Schweisthal first connected with Orion through a college event; eventually interning at the company. After graduating from LTC in May 2011, he joined Orion on a full-time basis.

Schweisthal says Orion CEO Neil Verfuert brought everything to life for him. Now Schweisthal meets with the company's CEO on a daily basis and recognizes the rare learning opportunity he has each and every day.

"I get feedback and learn lots of lessons in those short meetings," says Schweisthal. "I'm really happy with where I'm at and look forward to growing in this organization."

**Kyle Guthrie, 23**  
**Controls Designer/Technician**  
**Bassett Mechanical**  
 Brillion High School 2006  
 Lakeshore Technical College 2011

Kyle Guthrie knew early on the value of a technical education. With both parents working in the Wisconsin Technical College System, Guthrie set his sights on attending Fox Valley Technical College after graduating from Brillion High School. But once he earned his associate degree in mechanical design, he realized that a job heavy in CAD drawing just wasn't right for him.

"I was still sold on the hands-on experience a technical college offered," Guthrie says. "I enrolled in Lakeshore Technical College's Wind Energy Technology program—and its sister program, Electro Mechanical Technology—and found the perfect combination of theory and putting theory to work."

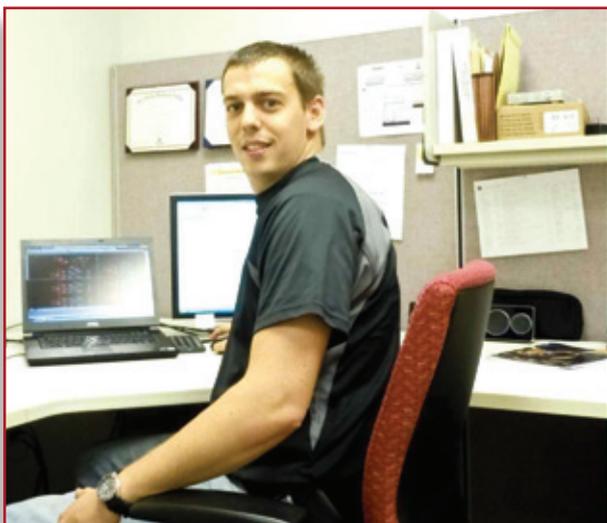
When he graduated from LTC in May 2011, Guthrie had three associate degrees in his pocket and, pretty quickly, two job offers on the table.

"I had to decide if I wanted to leave the state and climb wind turbines or stay closer to home and work for a growing industrial engineering and construction company," he says.

Now a controls designer/technician at Bassett Mechanical in Kaukauna, Guthrie says he made the right choice. One of the youngest at the company, Guthrie works among employees with 40 plus years of experience. He designs electronic controls for ammonia refrigeration systems installed in big industrial refrigeration facilities like cheese factories.

"I like how well-rounded my position is," he says. "And it's a good mix of all three of my degrees; I pull knowledge from all my college classes."

While Guthrie sometimes struggles with his lack of industrial experience, he says being young also has its advantages. He says he brings a willingness to learn and



is soaking up as much knowledge as possible. And his technology literacy is a big bonus.

Guthrie says he sees a strong future with Bassett and looks forward to gaining more knowledge and responsibility.



**Lacie Koch, 19**  
**Dental Assistant**  
**Denmark Family Dentistry**  
 Mishicot High School 2010  
 Lakeshore Technical College 2010

After being out of high school for only a little over a year, Lacie Koch says she has already found her career calling. The 19-year-old dental assistant spends her days assisting dentists at Denmark Family Dentistry.

"I really enjoy helping the patients, especially on follow up appointments when I get to see how happy they are with our work," she says. "I see about 12 patients each day and assist on procedures like fillings and crown preps."

Before she even graduated from LTC's Dental Assistant program, Koch had secured her full-time position with the dental office. Koch says she completed the clinical portion of her college program in Denmark and joined the office the same month she graduated.

"When I was little we'd play dentist in the recliner," Koch recalls. "Ever since I was young I always wanted to work in a dental office."

As the youngest assistant in the office, Koch takes advantage of every opportunity to learn from her coworkers.

"The experience of the people I work with adds up to a lot of good advice. I work in a great office where everyone is pleasant," she says.

The opportunity to attend seminars and continuing education classes means Koch will be able to grow in her

knowledge of dental procedures and bring new skills to her job.

Koch says she is proud of herself for making her own money—she just bought a brand new car—and feels like she's way ahead of most young people her age. Most importantly, she says, she's working at a job she loves and expects to be doing for a long time.

**Brent Vreeke, 24**  
**Police Officer**  
**Sheboygan Police Department**  
 Sheboygan South High School 2005  
 Lakeshore Technical College 2008

When Brent Vreeke goes to work every day he doesn't know what he'll encounter. But he does know he's found the career he set out to find six years ago.

"After high school I attended UW-Sheboygan for a year and then started thinking about what kind of job I wanted," he says. "My grandpa is a retired Sheboygan police officer so I knew the rewards of that career. I too wanted a well-respected job that was exciting and rewarding and where I knew I could make a difference."

After graduating from LTC's Criminal Justice—Law Enforcement program in 2008, Vreeke began stints as a DNR officer and in security at a nuclear facility. He was then chosen from over 200 applicants and joined the Sheboygan force in January 2010. At 24, Vreeke is the youngest in the department.

Before starting his 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. shift, Vreeke works out in the department fitness room and then gets suited up for roll call.

"You never know what you'll be doing at work each day," says Vreeke. "I answer lots of general disturbance calls where I don't know what I'll find but I have to be prepared. Although I encounter a lot of negative activity, I also have really positive contact with people. I enjoy the opportunity to speak with and meet a wide variety of individuals."

