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## **A real V.I.P. in all he does**

*Martin Herrera's career in national security made him a beloved leader and a nuclear deterrence champion*

Martin Herrera, a deputy division leader at Los Alamos National Laboratory, is well-loved by everyone who meets him. His coworkers refer to him as a "V.I.P.," and know him for his kindness, positivity and wisdom. Martin is a leader in the Laboratory's Prototype Fabrication division, which is home to machine shops that manufacture components for programs across the Lab and the nation.

## **A first-generation college grad with strong roots**

Martin was born in Albuquerque but mostly raised in Abiquiú, where he still lives today on a property along the Chama River. He might be found there any given weekend preparing his RV for a trip with his wife, fishing in the river, tending to his alfalfa fields or lounging with his best furry friends: two German shepherds (Chloe and Koda) and a cat (Gato). He also has a shop at home where he's often tinkering on projects. Family is important to Martin, and he says he gladly helps his kids and spoils his grandkids.

Martin's father was a welder who retired from General Electric in Albuquerque when Martin was a kid, later moving them to the wide-open spaces of Northern New Mexico. Martin spent his high school years at Española Valley High.

"Growing up in Abiquiú was wonderful," Martin says. "It was a small community where everyone knew each other, and everyone helped each other. Living there taught me many traditions that are slowly going away but remain important to me."

That sense of supporting others was instilled in Martin from that rural community upbringing and the support of his family. His dad always wanted him to go to a university and find new ways to move his life forward.

He also had some older high school friends who inspired him to attend college; inspiration that they received from their siblings. Martin wanted to follow suit and become the first college graduate in his family.

Fast forward four years, and he was graduating from New Mexico State University with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering. His career took off — and fast.



Martin (right) checks in on Brandon Burries, a machinist at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

## **Instilled with pride**

After finishing his degree, Martin's career started at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in Carlsbad, where he managed waste handling systems for three years before heading back north to join Los Alamos Technical Associates as a quality assurance engineer. Then it was off to Pantex to work on a variety of national security programs. It was an impressive job to land as a young engineer.

"Working at Pantex really inspired me," Martin says. "There was such allegiance there, such dedication to the mission. It really sunk in, and to this day I have such profound pride to support national security in my work."

Martin then joined the Lab in 2002 and knew he was here to stay, while his Lab career took him across nearly every major organization over the next two decades. Martin's various roles at the Lab built on the foundation of his time at WIPP and Pantex and taught him the importance of the mission from every angle.



Alex Galindo-Lepic checks on a machine while Martin makes visits around Prototype Fabrication's shops.

## **A path connected to his father**

Martin joined the Prototype Fabrication division in 2015 as an R&D engineer, transitioned into the chief engineer role and soon after became a group leader. He's now a well-loved deputy division leader and helping to guide the organization into the future. PF is responsible for fabrication and

inspection of components in support of national and global security programs.

Martin fit right in at PF not only because of his seasoned career, but because of growing up spending time in his dad's shop working on fabrication and mechanical projects.

"When I walked into [the machine shops] for the first time, the sound of the machines and the smell of the shop made me feel like I was coming home," Martin says.

Little did he know that his father's career had even more overlap with his own. Before Martin was born, his father had held a Q clearance to serve as a welder for nuclear weapons manufacturing programs while working at American Car & Foundry. When Martin learned this recently, it gave him an even greater sense of gratitude for those who have supported national security in ways big and small.



As Martin visits machinists around Prototype Fabrication, Mark Smith observes work happening inside a lathe.

## **Rebuilding a rare capability**

Martin has spent the past eight years in his division building the organization not only with new staff but also new skill sets. From supporting a unique new manufacturing center to expanding the Machinists Apprentice Pipeline Program to founding the Shell Academy (a hands-on knowledge transfer program), Martin is ardently working to ensure PF's work and mission remain steady.

Bob Qualick is a shop supervisor. He noted that Martin's role is foundational to the division and the Lab, and that Martin's character — who he is at his core — is what makes it all work.

"When I think about the Lab's values such as integrity, excellence, service, teamwork ... trustworthiness and commitment, Martin is the first person that comes to mind," Bob says. "Those in management are always juggling a wide range of priorities that compete and in some cases conflict with each other, but Martin can bring all these values and competing priorities together in harmony. He is a great mentor and leader."

## **The true meaning of deterrence**

For Martin, the foundations of his successful career at the Lab lie in two things: the people and the mission of nuclear deterrence.

"I am fascinated by the skill of our machinists to take material and transform it into complex geometry with very tight tolerances. Being a part of that has been truly rewarding, and knowing the role it plays in our nation's stockpile is inspiring," he says. "I want all employees to understand that even though my career has been dedicated to making weapons, my goal is that we never have to use one of those weapons. That's what deterrence means, and why I'm proud to be a part of it."