

  
**LA ROCHE UNIVERSITY**  
2024 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI CIRCLE AWARD RECIPIENT



**John Luitgaarden, M.S. HRM '01**

*Captain, Check Pilot*  
American Airlines

*President*  
Wexford Ace Hardware

John Luitgaarden is a seasoned airline captain and check pilot with over 25 years of experience in aviation. In his work for American Airlines, he ensures the safety of passengers, crew and cargo, oversees flight crew competency standards, and evaluates and certifies other pilots' skills.

Alongside his aviation career, Mr. Luitgaarden serves as president of Wexford Ace Hardware. As president he implements company goals, policies and procedures, manages the budget and financial activities, and provides leadership to ensure the team effectively executes daily operations.

His idea for Wexford Ace Hardware developed during a research class when he was a graduate student in La Roche University's Master of Science in Human Resources Management program. "The program, along with the Strategic Management and Leadership track, provided the skill sets that I needed to successfully plan and develop a business outside of the airlines," he said.

His coursework helped him to create a strategic management plan to obtain financing and develop the property for the business. "The information gathered in class created the foundation that Wexford Ace Hardware still runs on today," he added.

Beyond his professional achievements, Mr. Luitgaarden is invested in his community. Wexford Ace Hardware launched Operation Brown Bear to support the Children's Miracle Network, raising funds through the sale of teddy bears. The company delivers the bears by flying them in a Piper Cherokee aircraft and invites families to visit the airport and tour the airplane.

"We exist to serve others and are in the business to be helpful," he said. "It is foundational to give back to the community that has helped to support us."

Mr. Luitgaarden earned a Master of Science in human resources management from La Roche in 2000. Previously he completed an Associate of Science in aeronautical technology and a Master of Science in technical careers from Southern Illinois University.

