



Training for a bright future



HAVING completed his Certificate III in Electrotechnology Systems at the University of Ballarat and having completed his apprenticeship through Laser Electrical Ballarat, Ben Dean is now a fully qualified electrician at Laser Electrical Ballarat, ably performing tasks from wiring houses to doing maintenance on large factories, such as Mars.

If his name sounds familiar, it's because you may have already read of his resounding success in the WorldSkills National competitions.

Just over two years ago, Ben won the Ballarat regional competition and last year represented Australia in Canada receiving a medallion of excellence after winning the industrial-based electrical gold medal at the National World Skills competition held in Sydney.

Competing in WorldSkills was one way of gaining extra training while completing his apprenticeship.

Ben said the training he had undergone through the university and through WorldSkills had been invaluable, but with the rapid rate at which technology changes, it was important to keep it up.

"The training I have undergone during my apprenticeship and through World Skills has given me the skills to become a good electrician and to be in a good position to develop my skills even further," he said.

"More training will lead me to having a broad

range of skills within the electrical trade, which I hope will leave me in a good position in the future.

"With the rapid changes in technology, we really need to stay with a foot in the door."

Ben Dean said that the changes taking place in the electrical trade were massive and were forever being improved and that it was vital to continue training.

He said that the extra training he got through WorldSkills advanced his skills and helped him become the electrician he is today.

"For the International WorldSkills competition I had to spend many hours training and a lot of it was stuff you would not generally get to do at work," he said.

"The main thing I had to learn was programming PLCs (Programmable Logic Controller) and touch screens, which control the automation of electrical installations, mainly in factories. Now that I have learned how to use this equipment, I'm now able to complete jobs at work in this area, which not all electricians can do."

And now Ben is in a position where he can pass on his skills and knowledge to others.

"Now I'm qualified to work alone, manage jobs and projects and to assist and train apprentices on the job," he said.

"It's really good to pass on the skills that I have learned during my time in the trade."



Growing your own employees

KEN McCulloch is a firm believer in "growing your own employees" – and providing training to make them the best fit possible.

His family company, a leading hydraulic and pneumatic engineering service, which started in 1945, naturally has a long-term focus so employees are not seen as short-term fixes.

They generally start as work experience students from local secondary colleges, with those keen then offered apprenticeships in a range of fields from machinists to hydraulic fitters to steel fabricators.

And with the company behind them 100 per cent, they usually decide to stay on as qualified tradespeople when they have finished their apprenticeships.

"We have a high retention rate here," Ken said. "And it means that as we have slowly expanded we have not had to poach people from the labour market.

"You could say we are growing our own at home." Ken, who is the Goldfield's region's Skills Ambassador, said McCullochs had, over recent years, taken on performance appraisals.

"We are always looking for ways to make the most of their skills and these appraisals give our staff the opportunity to tell us what training would allow them to do their work better."

It's proving successful.

McCullochs' apprentices have taken out a myriad of awards including the Australian WorldSkills in Fitting and Turning. Another has won the Bendigo Business Excellence Apprentice of the Year while

many have picked up gongs from the Bendigo Institute of TAFE.

There is also the succession planning: one former apprentice, Brad, now three years into his trade has decided to leave the machine shop and train in technical drawing in readiness for a Diploma of Engineering.

"The advantage is that if engineers have come through hands-on apprenticeships they have a real understanding, rather than just learning from what they have read in books," Ken says.

"And our staff appreciate the time we have put into their training and show it with their loyalty and work ethic.

"The success McCullochs has achieved over the past 10 years is largely to do with the way the staff handle themselves.

"We may be a family company but we only have five family members, so we couldn't do a tenth of the work needed to be successful.

"And over the past 12 months our staff numbers have risen by 15 – not bad seeing it was the during the global financial crisis."

Ken says McCullochs was making staff even happier through an expansion over the past three years into manufacturing drilling rigs which were selling across Australia.

The rigs, which are used for exploratory work at depths down to 1100 metres, are receiving rave reviews, which provide great feedback for staff.

"Everyone is really pleased with the quality and the guys are really proud of their work. It's a win-win for us."





BACK: From left, Matthew Hall, Zachary Wells, Ryan Van Egmond and Tim Taylor.
CENTRE: From left, Vanessa Stephenson, Amy Hateley, Ben Dean, Heather MacLeod, Karla Preston, Jo Reid, Tom Ryan and Samantha Barras.
FRONT: From left, Romain Marteau, Alexander Plucke, Brendan McPhan, William Thurlbeck, Joseph Mark, Mark Doherty, David McPherson (Absent: Bryce Flitcroft, Nathan Jehu and Michael Kent.)

CEREMONY

WHAT: World Skills Australia's 2010 National Competition Jacket and Flag Conferral ceremony

WHERE: University of Ballarat SMB campus

WHEN: April 27