

# WULGURU

June 2016 · Edition 9



# 40



YEAR

## ANNIVERSARY







# Welcome

Wulguru Group is proud to celebrate our 40th anniversary.

**W**elcome to the 40 year anniversary edition newsletter for the Wulguru Group. From humble beginnings in 1976 we are proud of the multi-faceted business we have grown to today.

A key to the success of Wulguru over the years is the close relationship with both clients and staff. It is with a sense of pride that I note the client that the founders of the business undertook that very first job for in 1976, remains a client of Wulguru today.

As we have mentioned in previous editions of our newsletter the length of service of some of our employees now stretches past 30 years. In this edition we have highlighted how many fathers we have working alongside their sons in the Wulguru Group. As an owner of the business I feel there is no bigger endorsement of our company and its values.

This company culture must have been evident to others as we were recently nominated and announced as a finalist in the Townsville Chamber of Commerce Employees Choice Awards.

The business has successfully traded through both tough times and periods of prosperity. We have selectively added only quality brands to the group over the years and we will continue with our strategy of carefully considered acquisitions that not only fit within our company culture but also add to the customer experience.

Wayne Landrigan  
General Manager  
*(pictured with co-founder Vince Nielsen)*



# Wulguru Group



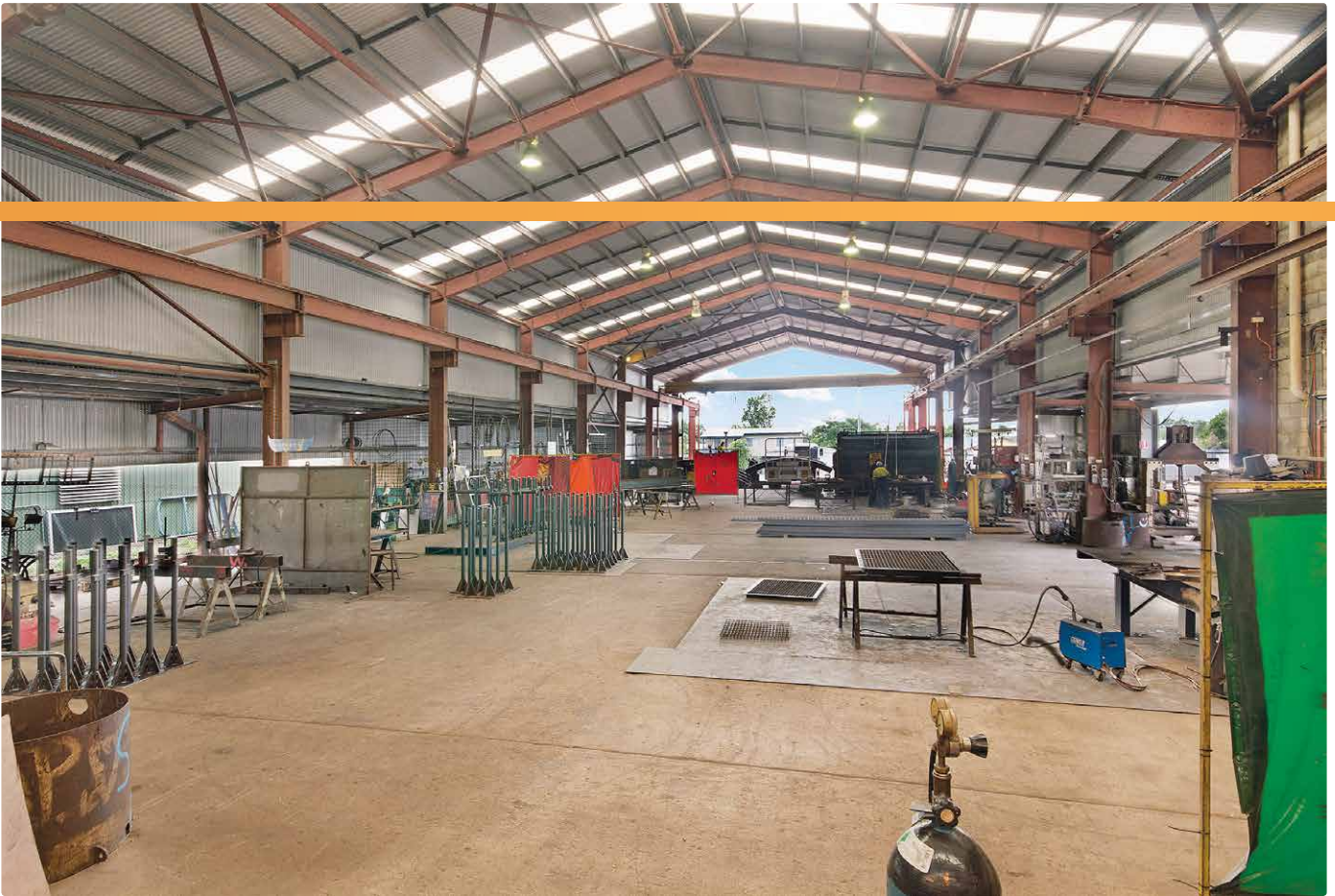
# Years of Excellence

The Wulguru way: Celebrating 40 years of delivering high quality work on-time.

**T**he Pretenders couldn't have said it better: "Some things change. Some stay the same." While the 1976 home-based two-man-band of Wulguru Steel is seemingly eons away from the group that employs around 150 staff and services heavyweights in the mining, fuel and energy, meat processing and sugar industries; you only have to look around the Townsville headquarters to spot the evidence of what's remained constant.

"There are guys who are still here, or only recently retired, who have been with us since the 1970s," says general manager Wayne Landrigan who runs the multi-faceted company with commercial director Bob McKay, and is flanked by framed photos of Wulguru's key people and jobs. "Then we have staff who have been here for 20, 25, or 30 years and now their sons are involved – we have seven father and son combinations that we are employing at the moment, which is quite remarkable." (See page 5)

Just as incredibly, the Wulguru Group continues to service some of the very first clients it secured in the seventies and eighties in the meat industry and mining, the companies growing together over the 40 years as Wulguru increased its capacity and leveraged its diversity. Here's the story of how one of Northern Australia's largest privately owned engineering and manufacturing companies has evolved.



## Two mates, a vacant block and a stainless plaque

Wulguru Steel Fabricators was registered in 1976 by Vince Nielsen and John Nash – two qualified tradie mates in their thirties who wanted to venture out into the fabrication world on their own. The first job was made under John’s house in Wulguru, and needed to be moved out with a crane and welded “somewhere else”. That “somewhere else” was a vacant block in a suburb called Wulguru on the outskirts of Townsville – and that same vacant block is where the company moved in 1978 and still sits today.

The workshop was initially extremely modest – the small team worked out of what is now the lunchroom. Interestingly, the main building itself grew not out of prosperity, but out of adversity. In leaner times, when faced with just a trickle of work, rather than culling the staff that had become like family, employees mutually agreed to work four days a week and – in return – the company had them



Project work in the original workshop



In 1977 we helped to build the Ross River meatworks as one of our first jobs and now Wulguru would have equipment in most meatworks in Australia.

crafting the new offices.

“We were like a big family right from the start,” explains Vince, who – now 75 – retired in 2002. His staff gave him the nickname ‘Kurly’ and, having been bald for some decades, he admits he rather liked it. “One of my favourite sayings was ‘experience is expensive,’” Vince continues. “It just meant that we needed to try different things to improve and move forward, even though they may not have always worked and ended up costing. But I’ve always felt that the best way to learn is to try something for yourself: As long as you learn something, it’s been a valuable experience.”

Fittingly, when Vince made the decision to retire, one of the “young blokes” he put on in 1979 called Stewart Caven – who’s still at the company today – fabricated his beloved boss a plaque emblazoned with his signature phrase, which is still displayed at the office.

## Making it the Wulguru way

Through the history of the company the owners and directors have been selected based on the unique skills they could bring to the business. The current combination of Wayne Landrigan and Bob McKay is ideal as Wayne draws on his fabrication background in the industry and Bob brings commercial experience after years in the commercial finance and business management sector.

Reflecting on some of the key milestones through the 40 years, Wayne lists many projects that have defined the business. One of the signature jobs was Townsville City Council’s \$10 million 41-megalitre water reservoir at Douglas, which was extremely technical and highlighted the capacity to deliver on complex larger scale jobs.

Another challenging job, but this time in a logistical sense, was the boiler stack that the company made for Macknade Mill in Ingham. Built in the Townsville workshop, the stainless steel pieces were then transported 110km ‘up the road’



## Extended Capabilities

We are able to take on a large range of work, more technical jobs that others shy away from, and deliver on tighter timeframes because we manage it all in-house.

# 40th Anniversary



and welded and installed on site.

The Wulguru Group was also behind the fabrication and construction of Townsville's new railway station in 2003 and has designed, constructed and commissioned abattoirs in several countries all over the world, including Japan, Indonesia and Malaysia.

"The abattoir industry has always been one of our largest customers. Back in 1977 we helped to build the Ross River meatworks as one of our first jobs and now Wulguru would have equipment in most meatworks in Australia," says Wayne.

Another important milestone in the company's evolution has been its strategic acquisitions. Notably there was MS Welding & Fabrication in Charters Towers in 2006, which allowed the group to spread its reach west and further service the mining industries.

The purchase of Archimedes Engineering in 2010 has served the company well. The product handling business is a specialist manufacturer and supplier of screw conveyors, bucket elevators and material handling equipment and systems, giving the parent company a greater service offering, including a skilled hire labour force and the increased opportunity to provide scheduled ongoing maintenance for all equipment.

The purchase of fuel industry specialist Abrahams Steel & Pipe



**Erection of the first workshop**



**Successfully marrying the Abrahams name and expertise in fuel with the scale and professionalism of Wulguru has provided the ability to undertake larger projects within the industry.**



**Workshop with extensions in the late 1980's**

Fabrications in 2015 gave Wulguru exposure to clients in the petroleum industry. Successfully marrying the Abrahams name and expertise in fuel with the scale and professionalism of Wulguru has provided the Group the ability to undertake larger projects within the industry.

"Acquiring these businesses has been all about growth and control," explains Bob. "We have broadened our customer base and are able to undertake larger projects while controlling most of the processes in-house, which means we can precisely manage the quality of our work and also the timeframes. We are well known in the industry for supplying high quality products safely while meeting tight timeframes.

"A lot of this has to do with the approach we take with staff – we have a highly skilled stable workforce. We like to retain the skills of our people and – because of their expertise – we are able to take on a large range of work, more technical jobs that others shy away from, and deliver on tighter timeframes because we manage it all in-house."

### Onwards and upwards

Just ask Vince or any of the staff who have been at the

Wulguru Group for 20-plus years – this company is used to riding the tough times and is here to stay. Moving forward to the next 40 years, the focus is on further diversifying the service offering to customers in the mining, sugar, meat and fuel and energy industries to ensure their needs are being met in the most efficient way possible.

Giving Wulguru's co-founder Vince Nielsen the last word, he sums it up well: "You don't get too many companies these days that have people with 35 years of service and we have quite a few. I'm extremely proud of the place and would say the main reason it has made it to its 40th year is due to the good, solid people here from the top down.

"If I could give my parting advice to others in the industry, it would be to treat others as you'd like to be treated, remember that every job is just as important no matter how big or small, and always look outside the square – never get yourself locked in because there is always an opportunity out there."

And that's an attitude that will stay the same at the Wulguru Group.





Matt, Bill & Gary Abraham



# Family Ties

## Keeping it in the Family

**T**hey say the apple doesn't fall far from the tree and this adage runs true at Wulguru Group, which is currently employing seven father and son teams.

Senior Project Manager Richard Toigo and his son Lathan are one of these sets, with Richard starting at the company nine years ago after a career in the sugar and mining industries. Lathan, 17, joined him at the end of last year as an apprentice boilermaker after doing work experience with Wulguru for two years.

While Richard works in a different area to his son and is keen not to show any bias, he says he's extremely proud of Lathan, who has enjoyed coming out to work sites with his dad since he was a small child.

"As is the case with a lot of 15-year-olds, he was a bit lost there for a while and didn't know exactly what he wanted to do, but started tinkering in the shed with me and did the work experience here, and then the spark was ignited," Richard says.

"He's a hands-on kid so this work is right up his alley and I hope he can learn a few things from me; not just the technical skills, but the business skills too, like the importance of timelines and how to meet client expectations."

Richard says the fact that he's been at Wulguru for nine years and has encouraged his son to get involved – and this has happened with six other guys – shows the standard of the company he works for.

"It's quite extraordinary that some guys did their apprenticeships here and now their sons are doing the same thing," Richard says. "I don't think you'd see that in too many places."

"Not only do we enjoy our jobs, which are full of variety due to the breadth of industries we service, but there's also a fantastic atmosphere here – just like a big family. The fact that we've been here for 40 years and have this stability says we'll be here for the long term."



Top down: David & Jordan Knight, Wayne & Cody Landrigan, Stewart & Marshall "Dougie" Caven, Linton & Kevin Cox, Lathan & Richard Toigo





# Skills Training

**Focus on Growth**  
With unrivalled technology, capacity and infrastructure Wulguru Steel has become one of the largest steel fabrication companies in Northern Australia.

## Security for the Future via Investment in Training

The Wulguru Group is one of the largest employers of apprentices in Northern Australia and – despite the leaner economic times – has not stopped investing in the future of the industry.

**W**hile many of the newly-qualified apprentices have remained within the company – including those who have risen to management levels – others are highly sought-after further afield due to the quality of their training.

Tristan Marrinan (*pictured*) started with Wulguru in 2005 as an 18-year-old first year apprentice. In 2006 he won Sheetmetal Apprentice of the Year and stayed on with his employer as a qualified tradesman. A year later he was approached by a manager who identified his potential as an estimator. He did this site-based role for six years until he was offered a job as manager of the Wulguru Group’s newly-purchased Abraham Steel & Pipe

Fabrications in South Townsville.

“When I was estimating, I was project managing on-site, but now I do that as well as running a workshop of 20 guys,” Tristan says, who will soon turn 30.

“I got a huge amount of support when I did my apprenticeship and the standard of the tradespeople we learnt from was second-to-none. The sheer variety of jobs the company takes on means there’s a huge opportunity for apprentices to learn, and the skills developed from these jobs has allowed Wulguru to adapt and diversify as demand has changed.”

The calibre of apprentices produced is also evidenced from the sheer volume of industry awards secured – a quick flick through press clippings from the past 10 years gives a nod to the

” I got a huge amount of support when I did my apprenticeship and the standard of the tradespeople we learnt from was second-to-none.



range of promising talent.

“Wulguru apprentices across the board have always been a step ahead and would be finishing their training blocks earlier than everyone else,” Tristan says. “We all had good mentors to learn from and realised the importance of working hard.”

Tristan continues to embrace this philosophy in his new role, still constantly learning from senior staff, but hoping to be a good leader for his own crew:

“We have a lot of talent in the Wulguru Group and it blows me away how long some of the guys have been here for... until I realise that I’ve been here for 11 years (laughs). The constant learning, challenges and being surrounded by a great team are what keep me going.”



Townsville Chamber of Commerce Employees Choice Award Finalist