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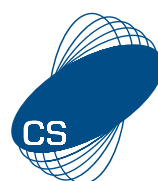
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From the Editor



The October Federal Budget did not come up with many major surprises. It is framed around a less than positive economic outlook, with declining growth, higher inflation, rising interest rates, stagnant productivity and lower than CPI wages growth.

Even though budget initiatives were curtailed by the large Government debt arising from the Covid

pandemic, it was somewhat limited in attacking these challenges, at least in the short term.

There were some welcome announcements regarding labour and skills shortages, including those from the Jobs and Skills Summit such as an increase in migration, 180,000 fee-free TAFE places and encouraging pensioners to engage in additional working hours.

The widening of paid parental leave and affordable childcare will also help with participation rates.

With further large price hikes expected for energy, the focus on energy transition is also welcome.

Locally, we were pleased to see that major projects such as the next upgrade for Newcastle Airport, the Muswellbrook bypass and the Port of Newcastle clean energy precinct all received funding. Further funding towards faster trains was also included, although we will wait and see how long it will take to see major improvements in trip times.

There are always other local infrastructure projects that could have been included, but this was probably as good an outcome as could be expected given the circumstances.

The forecast budget deficit for 2022-23 is \$36.9 billion. Although this is a major improvement from the earlier forecasted deficit of \$78 billion, it is still a slight increase from the previous year in terms of percentage of GDP and there is no real outlook for the government debt to be reduced in the foreseeable future, especially with higher interest rates increasing the servicing cost.

Any substantial reduction in the government debt will likely require increases in productivity and significant tax reform. The latter has been obvious for many years but the question remains whether and government is brave enough tackle this head on.

Garry Hardie
Publisher and Editor

ON THIS MONTH'S COVER

A scene from MITS Alloy, winner of the Manufacturer of the Year - 50 Employees or More at the recent 2022 Hunter Manufacturing Awards. For further information on these major industry awards see coverage from page 27.



Planning a business FUNCTION? WORK PARTY, CONFERENCE, MEETING, WORKSHOP, EXPO OR OTHER BUSINESS EVENT



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www.hbrmag.com.au/2022-hunter-business-function-guide

Port of Newcastle boosts global GRESB sustainability rating for fourth consecutive year

Port of Newcastle's sustainability efforts have received top marks in the 2022 Global Real Estate Sustainability Benchmark (GRESB), with the Port receiving its highest score to date of 95 out of a possible 100 points. GRESB is a world-leading environmental, social and governance (ESG) benchmarking tool, which provides insight into an organisation's ESG performance over time and compared to its industry peers.

The 2022 assessment saw Port of Newcastle achieve its second-straight 5-star GRESB rating, which is reserved for the top 20% of surveyed companies and formally recognises them as industry leaders in sustainability. The Port also ranked first out of 26 participating global ports for its Management Score and fourth for its overall GRESB score.

Port of Newcastle CEO Craig Carmody said the result is a reflection of the Port's sustainability journey over the past four years.

"To go from an overall GRESB score of 40 in our first assessment in 2019 to 95 in 2022 is a wonderful achievement and recognition of the dedication, collaboration and commitment of the many teams across the Port who have been working to make ESG a core part of our business and our culture," Mr Carmody said.

"In the last 12 months we have extended the scope of our 100% renewable power purchase agreement, completed a port-wide energy efficient lighting upgrade, renewed our EcoPorts certification, entered into two sustainability linked loans and transitioned the entire port fleet to electric vehicles.

"As the world's largest coal port, we have been actively working to diversify for the future and are well on the path to achieving our goal of reducing coal trade to half of total revenue by 2030.



GRESB Chief of Standards and Innovation Rick Walters and Port of Newcastle Senior Manager Investor Relations and ESG Matthew Stephenson

"Our deepwater global gateway now handles 25 different types of cargoes and last year we saw records across a number of export commodities including wheat (+900%), aluminium (+87.5%), meals and grains (+2836%).

"Along with securing federal government funding towards hydrogen readiness, the arrival of the Port's two new mobile harbour cranes to boost container handling capabilities has been an important step forward in our vision to create a sustainable and resilient port for the future that continues to support local jobs and a prosperous Hunter economy.

"We understand the important of ESG to our customers, shareholders and our staff and are committed to delivering strong ESG outcomes, embracing new opportunities and new ways to grow."

Port of Newcastle has committed to undertaking GRESB benchmarking annually. The Port's target-driven ESG Strategy sets out its commitment to Net Zero by 2040.

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Newcastle enticing entrepreneurs

Newcastle is inviting entrepreneurs and professionals to join its thriving innovators' hub, as part of its on-going transformation to a diverse, sophisticated economy.

The City of Newcastle is offering domestic and international innovators a three-month free membership to the Landing Pad within the University of Newcastle's I2N hub. The Landing Pad is a hot house for entrepreneurs seeking access to smart city infrastructure, an investor network, and collaboration with academic experts.

Deputy Lord Mayor Declan Clausen says Newcastle is 'start-up heaven'. The region has long been a popular testing centre for many innovative new releases, from the polymer bank note to e-bikes.

"City of Newcastle's Economic Development Strategy is built around people, and the Landing Pad initiative provides the extra encouragement for entrepreneurs to build their base from our city and help create new jobs or support emerging industries," Cr Clausen said.

"Local governments often spend a lot of time and money trying to attract big businesses. We've flipped that narrative and are attracting highly-skilled entrepreneurs who'll bring their networks, their expertise, and their innovative businesses to create local opportunities.

"People relocating from the big cities will experience the best of modern Newcastle, a place brimming with innovators, a vibrant night-life, and business confidence, with more than \$100 million in DAs approved by Council each month."

University of Newcastle Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alex Zelinsky said that innovation and entrepreneurship is a big priority for the University.

"We are delighted to partner with the City of Newcastle on this exciting initiative," Professor Zelinsky said.



Senior Manager of I2N and Innovation at the University of Newcastle Siobhan Curran said the Landing Pad supported a community of innovators to leverage technology to scale their businesses globally.

"A Landing Pad candidate might be looking to mitigate climate change or deliver better health or business outcomes. We're industry, sector and stage-agnostic, as long as they're developing a positive product or solution that's scalable," Ms Curran said.

"The Landing Pad offers professional office facilities, mentoring opportunities and a network of like-minded people in an enviable location.

"You might strike up a conversation in the cafe or kitchen that could spark your next collaboration, or connect you to customers and clients. You need to increase your surface area for luck to strike, and it's harder to do that at home on your laptop."

According to the Regional Australia Institute, recent banking data shows Newcastle is one of five local government areas welcoming the lion's share of migration away from capital cities. Leading the charge are people in their 30s, looking for economic opportunities with a balanced lifestyle, close to nature.

Gallagher acquires McCluskey Insurance Brokers

On 10 October Gallagher announced the acquisition of Newcastle based McCluskey Insurance Brokers. In joining Gallagher, the business will use the Gallagher brand and be able to offer its clients access to a range of services and specialisms such as industry expertise, claims advocacy, placement capabilities and access to global markets.

Founded in 1999 by Steve McCluskey, McCluskey Insurance Brokers operates in Newcastle, Lake Macquarie and the Central Coast. McCluskey Insurance Brokers has a diverse range of clients, including earthmoving, manufacturing and commercial cleaning. The brokerage has expertise in liability, professional indemnity, industrial special risk and pleasure craft. All five members of the business will commence working from the Gallagher Newcastle branch.

This acquisition is in keeping with Gallagher's ongoing strategy of expansion and is the fourth acquisition announced in the previous five months.

Sarah Lyons, Gallagher Australia Chief Executive said: "Fantastic to welcome McCluskey Insurance Brokers officially into the Gallagher family. Steve McCluskey, Tracey McCluskey and the whole team have built a well-regarded business in the local market and I'm excited to see our combined experience strengthen our position in the Central Coast and Lake Macquarie region."



Michael Lewin, Gallagher Australia Head of Mergers & Acquisitions; Mark Bramley, Gallagher Newcastle Branch Manager; Steve McCluskey; Tracey McCluskey; and, Gallagher Australia Chief Executive Sarah Lyons.



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\$110 million to unlock investment in Regional NSW

The NSW Government will invest \$110 million to activate new and emerging industries, drive high value jobs and help the regions reach their economic potential.

Deputy Premier and Minister for Regional NSW Paul Toole said the Regional Investment Activation Fund was aimed at making regional NSW the location of choice for private sector investment.

"Our Government has a big, bold vision for regional NSW – and this fund is about helping bring that vision to life," Mr Toole said.

"We're putting more than \$100 million on the table to co-invest in game-changing projects that turbocharge priority industries or locations in the regions.

"It will be open to expressions of interest from investors across Australia and around the world interested in expanding or setting up in regional NSW."

Mr Toole said the fund would help activate the economic potential of the State's Special Activation Precincts, Regional Job Precincts and other priority locations.

"The NSW Government's unprecedented investment is making regional NSW the location of choice for investors both here and around the world," Mr Toole said.

"This fund will help support new and emerging industries where regional NSW has a competitive edge and put our communities in the box seat for the future."

The Regional Investment Activation Fund will co-invest with eligible businesses in projects that aim to deliver, significant economic, social and/or environmental benefits for a priority industry or location.

Projects must be based in regional NSW, support sustainable employment opportunities and be completed by 30 May 2025.

Applications are now open. **For more information visit www.nsw.gov.au/RIAF.**

Cessnock Job Shuttle to bring employment opportunities

The Cessnock to Wine Country Pilot Job Shuttle Program is expected to commence in June 2023 following a resolution at the September Cessnock City Council meeting.

The program promises to connect Cessnock workers with jobs in the vineyards by providing low-cost transport between the two destinations seven days per week.

Cessnock Council has worked with employment agencies, businesses and job seekers to identify the best times and locations for the shuttle service to operate. Following the resolution at the September council meeting, Council staff will continue planning the shuttle launch.

Cessnock City Mayor Jay Suvaal said the job shuttle would provide Cessnock residents with easy access to hospitality jobs.

"Lack of access to driver training or a reliable vehicle is a widespread barrier to employment in the Cessnock Local Government Area," Mayor Jay Suvaal said.

"The program will boost the available workforce and have far reaching benefits that will flow to the entire community."

The shuttle program contributes to Council's workforce management strategy, which aims to increase the amount of young people in the local workforce and increase employment opportunities for those with disabilities.

Cessnock Council has applied for a grant through the NSW Government's Resources for Regions program to fund the service. If the grant application is successful the shuttle will run between June 2023 and June 2024.

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Sport back in action at No.1 Sportsground following \$8 million upgrade

Newcastle cricketers took to the pitch for the first round of their district cricket season in October to celebrate the reopening of Newcastle's No.1 Sportsground following its \$8 million upgrade.

The players will benefit from the ground's extensive refurbishment, which included the construction of seven turf cricket wickets, new sight screens and oval perimeter fencing.

The playing surface has also been completely rebuilt, with a new sub-soil irrigation and drainage system providing a high quality, consistent playing surface, while the increased field size achieves the minimum standard for high level AFL and cricket fixtures.

Lord Mayor Nuatali Nemes said No.1 Sportsground's redevelopment will allow Newcastle to attract first class cricket and pre-season AFL fixtures while also benefitting those locals who utilise it regularly for grassroots and regional level sport.

"No. 1 Sportsground was designed and constructed in 1921 and was officially opened 100 years ago last month," Cr Nemes said.

"In that time the venue has hosted a variety of sporting and non-sporting events, including the 1931 Mayor's Relief Fund and Newcastle Ambulance Round, in which cricket legend Don Bradman captained a female cricket team at No.1 Sportsground.

"The redevelopment delivers significantly upgraded facilities for regular users of the ground while also providing our city with a potential economic boost through the attraction of major sporting events.

"Novocastrians love their sport and the completed work at No.1 Sportsground will put us in the running to host pre-season AFL fixtures and regional Big Bash League matches right here in Newcastle.

"We're also continuing to investigate government funding opportunities to complete the second stage of the project, which will increase the footprint of the existing grandstand with a two-storey addition at the rear of the building to provide upgraded amenities for players, officials and spectators."

Other features of the stage one works that have been completed include a lighting upgrade to enable evening fixtures, new player dug out benches, and additional bleacher seating to almost double the seated capacity from 400 to 790.

Newcastle District Cricket Association Secretary Aaron Gray said he is excited to see cricket once again being played at the premier facility.

No. 1 Sportsground is located on the corner of Parry and Union Streets in the iconic National Park, one of Newcastle's largest and oldest sportsgrounds and open space reserves. It boasts facilities for a range of sports including netball, AFL, cricket, rugby, football, athletics, and croquet, and caters for casual sport and play through basketball courts and parklands.

Other work recently completed within National Park includes the construction of four additional basketball courts on the former tennis court site near the corner of National Park and Parry Streets, along with playing field upgrades at No. 5 and No. 6 Sportsgrounds, which have improved the playing surface of both grounds and allowed for effective management of the flood storage capacity of National Park.



New vision for future of transport in Hunter

On 1 October the Australian Government has released plans to create 15 minute neighbourhoods in the Hunter region by better connecting local transport networks.

Minister for Regional Transport and Roads Sam Faraway said the Draft Hunter Regional Transport Plan is now out for public consultation and outlines the Government's strategy to bust congestion, improve freight connections and make the M1 a Smart Motorway.

"The Hunter is one of the fastest-growing areas in NSW and we want to ensure we are building what matters to make daily life easier for these communities," Mr Faraway said.

"This draft plan is our vision for what Transport for NSW should look at to secure a brighter future for people living in the Hunter, by providing support for the businesses and industries that are the lifeblood of this booming area.

"Some of these initiatives we're already delivering – like the transformative New England Highway upgrade between Belford and the Golden Highway – and some are about to get underway, including the Muswellbrook and Singleton bypasses.

"We're also planning for the future by investigating a range of initiatives such as further upgrades to the New England Highway to improve safety and travel times at Rocky Cut, Belford to Singleton, Singleton to Muswellbrook and Muswellbrook to Scone."

Minister for Metropolitan Roads Natalie Ward said Newcastle is the second largest city in the state and with its population expected to increase 15%, it's important that residents and stakeholders contribute to the Draft Hunter Regional Transport Plan.

"We are putting the foundations in place that will make sure the rapidly growing population across the Hunter has a safe, efficient and accessible road network to use," Mrs Ward said.

"We've already set in motion major projects that will deliver great travel time savings for the city and its commuter hubs, like the final piece of the Newcastle Inner City Bypass from Rankin Park to Jesmond and widening the Hexham Straight.

"We're also investigating a range of measures to reach our government's target of zero fatalities and serious injuries on our roads by 2056 by creating a safer road network.

"It's now time for residents, businesses and visitors to have their say on the draft plan to help us enhance our transport network now and into the future."

The plan is available to view at Future Transport and covers 10 local government areas comprising Cessnock, Dungog, Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Mid Coast, Muswellbrook, Newcastle, Port Stephens, Singleton and Upper Hunter.

\$3 million project to help link Farley with Maitland

Maitland City Council will soon break ground on a suite of works that will provide much needed improvements to accessibility to and from the fast-growing suburb of Farley.

Worth nearly \$3 million and funded by a combination of Council's Capital Works Program and developer contributions, the works will rehabilitate and widen the road surface of the busy Wollombi Road from Green Street, Telarah to Own Pen Lane, Farley.

In great news for cyclists and pedestrians, a brand new shared path along the eastern side of Wollombi Road will also provide a much safer alternative to driving for residents. This will include a 2.5 m wide foot/cycle bridge across Stony Creek.

Farley is one of Maitland many fast growing suburbs, and Mayor Philip Penfold said these works are important to an expanding community.

Currently approaching the end of the Design phase in this project, Council expects to begin construction on these projects in late 2022 and conditions permitting, completed by June 2023.

Over \$26,000 raised for Hunter Breast Care Nurses

PKF Sydney and Newcastle, The Newcastle Herald and NEX at Wests City held the annual Hunter Breast Care Breakfast on 27 October 2022 as over 360 guests filled the ballroom of Wests City for a morning of raffles, prizes, speeches, and reflection. \$26,419.10 was raised for the Hunter Nurse Education Group – the highest amount raised to date.

The event was hosted by NBN Television's Natasha Beyersdorf, who generously donates her time to MC the event year after year. Guest speaker Dr. Janine Lombard, Medical Oncologist specialising in Breast and Gynaecological Cancers, gave in-sights to the incredible progress that has been made in the treatment of Breast Cancer.

Dr. Lombard is actively involved in clinical Breast Cancer research and has been a member of the Breast Cancer Trials Group, the largest Breast Cancer research group in Australia and New Zealand, for 13 years.

"With survival rates now reaching 92%, the hope that this gives those diagnosed has never been stronger," said Dr. Lombard.

With the most recent Breast Care Breakfast contribution, the event has raised more than \$280,000 over the past 14 years, missing two years due to COVID. Every dollar raised stays in the Hunter to fund training and professional development for specialist breast care nurses. The nurses are dedicated to caring for Hunter people facing the battle to overcome Breast Cancer.

Hunter Nurses Helen and Rebecca with Bob Bell of PKF



Maitland breaks ground on recycling revolution

Maitland City Council has turned the first sod on the Maitland Resource Recovery Facility, a long-awaited project set to dramatically improve Maitland's recycling and circular economy capabilities. The four stage project will enhance the recycling process and improve community access to the Mount Vincent Waste Management Centre, with Stage 1 of the works kicking off in October.

Initial works at the site include the construction of sealed roads and drop off areas that will improve the customer experience and expand the range of recycling materials accepted onsite.

Speaking at the sod turning, Mayor Philip Penfold said these works will help the community recycle more and they will benefit from the internal road improvements.

"Residents are going to love this work because it'll mean they can do more free recycling, the internal roads in the Waste Centre will be better to use, and the site will close less due to wet weather," Mayor Penfold said.

"The new recycling centre will help us reduce the amount of waste we send to landfill and move towards our goal of being more sustainable."

The next stages of work include:

Stage 1: Enclosure of the current Community Recycling Centre and a new open building for problem waste management

Stage 2: A new weighbridge and upgraded access to Mount Vincent Road Waste Management Centre

Stage 3: A new sealed resource recovery and transfer building, and a building to process bulky and general waste from kerbside collection

Stage 4: Upgraded amenities, staff facilities, a community education centre, and a circular economy and reuse centre.



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Grand plan to power Walka Water Works

The heritage listed Walka Water Works site near Maitland would be revitalised under a \$25 million plan to transform it into a Hunter and NSW tourism icon.

Parliamentary Secretary for the Hunter Taylor Martin said the NSW Government, Maitland City Council and Reflections Holiday Parks are partnering on a joint funding bid for the 64-hectare Crown reserve to be submitted to the Regional Tourism Activation Fund.

"Walka Water Works is one of the state's most unique public sites serving the Hunter since 1887 as a source of water, then power and now recreation and heritage," Mr Martin said.

"This plan aims to restore Walka Water Works to its former glory and invest in additional improvements that can make it a tourism magnet for the Hunter Valley."

Under the plan, the Department of Planning and Environment – Crown Lands and Maitland City Council will remediate, restore and upgrade the site.

Reflections Holiday Parks, which operates Crown land holiday parks, would establish caravan and camping accommodation to support tourism including for weddings and other events at the reserve.

Proposed site improvements would include:

- Restoring the 1885 pumphouse building and chimney back to their original condition to preserve their heritage and allow tourism and hospitality businesses to flourish, such as an interpretive centre, cafés, restaurants, craft brewery or distillery, and event functions.
- Establishing overnight visitor accommodation starting with 10 eco-cabins, 12 glamping tents and 40 powered caravan sites, as well as a camp kitchen and barbecue area.
- Upgrading the Eastern Lawn with landscaping and infrastructure for weddings and other events.
- Redeveloping the miniature train railway station as an improved visitor experience.
- Upgrading walking trails to improve accessibility and include interpretive information.
- Developing a centralised amenities building, upgrading car parking to meet accessibility standards, and other infrastructure improvements.

Maitland Mayor Philip Penfold said other upgrades could later be pursued for the Power Station lawn area for picnics, events and a water play space, remediating Walka Beach, and an education centre.

New shareholder for Monica Clare Recruitment

Monica Clare Recruitment has announced Krystle Parker as a shareholder and partner in the business. In her new appointment alongside founder Clare Ferguson and Business Director Simon Rutten, Krystle will play an integral role in MCR's expansion along the eastern seaboard of Australia. This is MCR's second shareholder appointment in two years and one that finalises the directorship of the business.

Krystle made an immediate impact when she joined MCR in 2020. With 14 years of industry experience, she's solidified the team in its continuous growth and expansion and diversifying MCR's recruitment offering.

Co-founder, Clare Ferguson, believes Krystle's unique approach to management has helped to attract new highly skilled talent to the business.

"The staff who have joined MCR since Krystle started as our Consultant Team Leader in 2020 are testament to the pull she has. Many have left tier-one recruitment firms, enticed by the prospect of working with an inspiring leader who values their contributions and motivates them to achieve milestones and then surpass them again."

Clare credits Krystle as being integral in transforming the culture of the business over the last two years, seeing the business through the pandemic.

"We are known as a business that leads in elevating our industry standards and services. Krystle has been a driving force in this. She isn't scared to take a risk and challenge how the industry can change, grow, and evolve."

"With Krystle, she challenges the status quo, thinks outside of the square, and continuously assesses how we can improve our service offering, diversify or differentiate. She does this so well; we won't ever run the risk of being stagnant or reactive."

With the leadership team solidified, Clare feels the team are on firm ground to make huge strides in the future.



Nominations open for Lake Mac Awards

The hunt is on to unearth this year's crop of unsung artistic, sporting, environmental and community champions with nominations now open for the 2023 Lake Mac Awards. A celebration of creativity, activity and inclusivity, the awards aim to shine a spotlight on quiet achievers making Lake Mac an even better place to live.

Incumbent Lake Mac Ambassador Dr David Durrheim said winning the top award, for guiding the community through the COVID-19 quagmire, was an honour that transcended the trophy. "My award reflected on the wonderful job done by all members of the Lake Mac community in responding to the pandemic," he said.

"As Ambassador, I have been incredibly fortunate to meet some of the many inspiring long-term Lake Mac residents, including Awabakal elders and leaders. It was also a delight to meet brand new Australian citizens who have chosen to call Lake Macquarie home.

"To have the opportunity to engage positively with the leaders of our future-focused Council has been a particular privilege."

Lake Macquarie Mayor Kay Fraser said the Lake Mac Awards represented the highest honour Council could bestow on local residents.

"These awards reflect the very best aspects of our community. They celebrate those who inspire us, enrich our lives and embody the spirit of Lake Mac," she said.

The 2023 awards feature a new category - 'Community Event of the Year' - to acknowledge small and grassroots groups making a big social and cultural difference to Lake Mac.

Nominations can be lodged online at lakemac.awardsplatform.com before the closing date of 12 December, with many categories now accepting team and individual entries.

Finalists and category winners will be recognised at a gala ceremony on 11 March, 2023.

For more information on the categories, criteria and nomination process, visit lakemac.com.au/Lake-Mac-Awards

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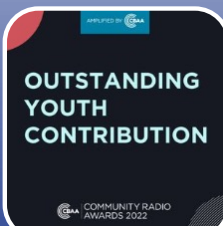
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University of Newcastle moves up in World University Rankings

The University of Newcastle has continued to excel as a global leader for the region, moving up a band in the latest Times Higher Education World University rankings, to rank in the top 200-250 universities in the world out of almost 1,800 institutions.

The rankings, which were released 12 October, evaluate universities across the world according to indicators like research, teaching, citations and international collaboration to form a standardised benchmark for universities to measure themselves against.

Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alex Zelinsky AO explained these rankings demonstrate the University's continued focus on excellence.

"This year we have shown continued improvement in our rankings, moving up five places in the QS World University rankings - ranking in the top 200 in the world, improving across all five areas of the broad subject areas in the QS World University Rankings by Subject, and now moving up a band in these latest rankings to place us in the top 250 universities in the world.

"These rankings strengthen our reputation as a world-leading university for our regions, it reinforces that we are facilitating leading research, high-quality teaching, and that we are engaging on the world stage.

"The World University Ranking in particular reflects our research performance, which is an area where I am proud to say we have some of the best staff who continue to be pioneers in their field.

"The University of Newcastle is committed to research



informed teaching and these results are a demonstration of the outstanding experience we provide to students.

"Students at our University have the opportunity to receive a world class education and be taught by leading scholars in our beautiful region, which is a tremendous opportunity."

The University of Newcastle ranks in the top 200 in the world in the QS World University Rankings and ranked in the top 5 in the world for Partnering for a Sustainable Future (Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 2022).

PwC Australia has recently appointed Prem Chand as Managing Director in our PwC Private team based in Newcastle.

Amy Etherton, Partner, PwC Private said "We are excited to have Prem in our team. Prem brings extensive business and commercial experience that will provide opportunities to assist our clients in delivering their objectives. Since moving to Newcastle four years ago, Prem has been actively involved in the local business community and understands the challenges and opportunities in the Hunter region."

We caught up with Prem for a brief chat to learn more about his appointment.

Q: Could you share your thoughts on joining PwC Australia?

I am delighted to be joining Australia's largest professional services organisation. PwC Australia's values and culture surrounding its people, responsibility towards community and programs on Social Impact were critical in my decision to join PwC.

Q: What do you see as your role in this appointment?

The Hunter region has tremendous potential for private businesses. It is an economy in transition. It contributes almost 30% towards the NSW economy and is an integral part of our State. This is evident from the focus, and support that we are receiving in the region from both State and Federal governments. Renewables, Hydrogen, Defence, Agtech, Medtech and manufacturing are some of the areas that provide significant opportunities. There are established private businesses here that have potential to expand and grow. Established family businesses



that have been successful in the region also need to consider succession planning. These are the key areas myself and the team can help clients with including business strategy advice, tax structuring, growing a business to maximise value when it's time to exit.

Q : What do you feel are the important aspects of a successful business?

Having a unique product or service is important. This gives a foundation to a business. You need to continually ask yourself "why would anyone buy from me?" However, a product on its own does not make a successful business. It needs more than that. It requires purposeful leadership to establish and maintain a clear and compelling vision for where the organisation is heading and why it's going in that direction. Relating to the market and with your customers to understand

their changing environment and having insights as well as taking an ecosystem approach are also essential. And finally, the importance of a high performing team makes a significant impact on organisations. Employee engagement and having the right culture are as critical.

Hunter law firm's free ebook on women's health

Leading health law firm, Catherine Henry Lawyers, has produced a free e book to help women to better understand their legal rights in relation to women's health issues.

Your Body Your Health: A legal guide to women's health was launched at a forum at Fort Scratchley in September in Newcastle during Women's Health Week.

The community resource was written by the Newcastle based firm's Principal and its other women's health lawyers.

More than 70 people gathered at the forum to discuss how the law can support women's health. A panel of Hunter women discussed the challenges facing women in the area of health and what can be done to advance women's interests, rights and outcomes.

The panellists were Member for Wallsend Sonia Hornery MP, Maroba Aged Care CEO Viv Allanson, Victims of Crime Assistance League Newcastle CEO Kerrie Thompson, GP Specialist in Reproductive and Sexual Health Dr Phoebe Walsh and Oasis Solutions Principal, former nurse and academic Dr Shirley Shulz-Robinson.

Ms Henry said for three decades she has litigated cases for women experiencing poor or avoidable health outcomes. She has advocated for women whose health concerns have neither been taken seriously or ignored, lobbied for reform to health care rights such as informed birth choices and access to abortion and supported women who've had primary responsibility for aged parents bringing focus to unacceptable aged care practices.

"Our health law team see the whole gamut of health issues that women face," Ms Henry said.

"We wanted to write a comprehensive guide – from before the cradle to grave – to help women know their legal rights in relation to health issues," she said.



Catherine Henry, Kerrie Thompson, Dr Phoebe Walsh, Dr Shirley Shulz-Robinson, Sonia Hornery MP and Viv Allanson

Topics covered in the book include abortion, contraception, pregnancy, childbirth, surgery, healthy ageing, chronic pain, sexual and other violence, mental health, making complaints, through to aged care.

The panel agreed that access to health and aged care is a major issue for women, particularly for women in regional and rural areas. Panellists said some of the current issues included: access to abortion, especially early medical abortion; mental health support, including for survivors of sexual or domestic violence; and a lack of health care workers and capacity of services in regional areas.

On the question of what the audience and other members of the community can do to help improve women's health, the panel was unanimous. They agreed governments needed to invest more in services and pay attention to what front line services and staff say are the problems and solutions. There needs to be more studies into adverse events and more public reporting of data on those events and other aspects of health care.

The e-book is available for free from www.chlawyers.com.au



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Decline and regeneration occurs in life and real estate

Steven Dick
Movable

With the passing of my brother-in-law Phil Crockett, I'm reminded of the great circle of life. From his era, Phil was a stalwart to many around the city of Newcastle.

Meanwhile, my heavily pregnant daughter-in-law has moved in for the days before the birth of grandchild number four, reminding me that the cycle of life of decline and regeneration continues.

The regeneration of Newcastle

In recent weeks, a few people have commented on the city's regeneration, each stating their reason, like some old comedy skit.

You know, the one where a couple of old blokes lament their childhood and how challenging it was, and the memories get tougher as the chat continues. Each person had a theory about the regeneration of Newcastle and a saviour.

There was also some divergence about whether it was the council, the state government or even a saintly rescuer. However, none seem to understand it was just the great circle of life taking hold.

The regeneration of Newcastle can't even be traced to the building of the tramway or the Honeysuckle Development Corporation. Despite these improvements, Newcastle had degenerated to such a point, and values had dropped so low that the opportunity to develop became too hard to ignore.

Baby Boomer demand for retirement lifestyles

Another reason for the regeneration can be traced to the return of the Baby Boomers to the city.

Many boomers moved to the suburbs to raise their families. However, the cycle of life is catching up, and the boomers are older and have less energy to maintain their lawns and houses. This ageing demographic bubble coincided with the declining city.

Then VOILÀ, we had the perfect storm of ageing people needing newer residences. These housing needs provided the impetus to regenerate an old town.

So, despite all who claim to be the saintly saviours that changed the city, they didn't. It was inevitably happening anyway.

Future regeneration provides pockets of opportunity

Over my time in real estate, there were pockets of opportunity and probably still are pockets that provide opportunity. You must look beyond what most people are doing or saying and at the fundamentals surrounding the real estate you are considering.

It's easy for me to talk about what could have been when buying property. I always sought advice from trusted people around me before purchasing. First, my dad talked me out of 6 Berner St Merewether. "The salt son will rust everything out. Buy something away from the beach."

I spent the same \$60,000 buying in New Lambton. Why did I look to the beachside? I loved the beach and the surf and couldn't understand why those suburbs were overlooked.

The second was an old warehouse in Newcastle East where my brother-in-law Phil talked me out of buying what has become the View Factory for \$80,000.

At the time, Newcastle East had an untapped potential for the derelict and drug addict-infested shells of property littering the area. The degradation was astounding, yet it had the city heart to the west, the harbour to the north and beaches to the east, all within a few hundred metres.

A recent pocket of opportunity called just before COVID. I sold a property at West Wallsend. I hadn't been there for years, and this old coalmining village that still boasted pubs and clubs, schools, and IGA had beautiful old houses on big blocks that were cheaper

(at the time) than anything else around.

Wallsend looked like a lovely place with a mountain backdrop. Also, it was just off the Hunter Expressway and M1 Motorway. To my way of thinking, Wallsend is a perfect spot for a commuter family. After that, the property prices skyrocketed, others thought the same, no doubt, but then prices took off everywhere.

I'm not sure whether it's age or whether I'm not really looking for those pockets of opportunity anymore, but they are out there, I'm sure. If you're on the lookout for a pocket with plenty of potential, look for the following:

1. Where in the great circle of life do they exist. Look for the older aging towns and suburbs.
2. Look at what they offer to younger people and families—services, such as schools' parks, shops transport.
3. Look at future infrastructure or current infrastructure that services the area. Road networks, rail stations.
4. Trust your gut instinct if you are thinking without the persuasion of others.

Rest in Peace, Phillip Arthur Crockett. You helped so many people in this town – as one of your friends said to me, another good man succumbs to the great circle of life.

For further information contact MOVABLE on (02) 4915 3000



Steve Dick is a director of Newcastle's leading residential and commercial real estate firm, Movable.

\$11.5 million to get local housing moving

The NSW Government is backing councils with funding and resources to move a backlog of planning proposals and development applications (DAs) and deliver more local housing.

NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet said the \$11.5 million Unblocking Homes Program will provide targeted support, to help fast-track the delivery of tens of thousands of homes currently stuck in the system.

"We're building on our \$2.8 billion 2022 Housing Package announced in this year's Budget, with targeted help for councils to drive more local housing delivery," Mr Perrottet said.

"It's timely support which will provide more opportunity and certainty for first home buyers, under-resourced councils and for the construction industry."

Deputy Premier and Minister for Regional NSW Paul Toole said the support includes a new Regional Housing Flying Squad which would help regional councils clear development applications faster and speed up the delivery of new homes.

"We know there's a shortage of qualified planners in some parts of the State. This is about overcoming that with a flying squad of experts who can help councils review development applications faster and move projects into construction," Mr Toole said.

"We trialled this approach earlier in the year so we know it works. We're now expanding it to ensure we are making an impact in the communities that need it most."

Minister for Planning and Minister for Homes Anthony Roberts said the Regional Housing Flying Squad is on track to assess more than 2,400 new homes, saving hundreds of hours of council planners' time.

"Councils have done it tough in recent years with skills shortages, bushfires, COVID-19 and floods all contributing to a local planning backlog, and an increase in average assessment times for local DAs from 69 to 85 days between July 2021 and July 2022," Mr Roberts said.

"We're here to help with support for complex applications and assessments, freeing up council time and speeding up approvals to get more shovels in the ground sooner."

Minister for Local Government Wendy Tuckerman said, as at 15 September 2022, there were 107 housing rezoning proposals currently under assessment with potential for 87,583 rezoning lots.

"There were also nearly 10,000 residential development applications under assessment with the potential to deliver some 82,842 homes," Ms Tuckerman said.

"The Unblocking Homes program will see the NSW Government partner with councils to resolve issues in complex assessments. This will help tackle the backlog and fast-track approvals to deliver more housing more quickly for our growing and diverse population – including social and affordable housing for people in need, Aboriginal communities and seniors."

The \$11.5 million Unblocking Homes Program includes 7 new and ongoing initiatives:

- Regional Housing Flying Squad (expansion following successful pilot);
- Planning proposal support and expert assessment for prioritised housing projects (new project);
- Planning Delivery Unit Regional Case Management and Planning Concierge;
- Regionally Significant DA capacity building and faster assessments;
- Local Housing Strategy Implementation;
- Regional Housing Strategic Planning Fund; and
- Faster Local Assessment Grant.



Property Council welcomes Budget commitments

The Property Council of Australia has welcomed the Federal Government's budget commitment to create one million new 'well-located' homes under a new National Housing Accord.

The new National Housing Accord aims to bring together Federal, state and territory governments, as well as the property industry and institutional investors, to boost housing supply and create more affordable and social housing.

Property Council of Australia Chief Executive Ken Morrison said the agreement demonstrates bold ambition and a welcome collaborative approach, but will require further action to deliver.

"We commend the Government for making housing supply and affordability a centrepiece of this budget and for striking an agreement with the states and territories," Mr Morrison said.

"Australia is facing a housing affordability crisis and as the Productivity Commission found last month, greater housing supply needs to be a key solution.

"The National Housing Accord is a very welcome commitment and we thank the Government for engaging with the Property Council on this initiative.

"Achieving the Government's target will require more tangible actions than have been announced tonight, and we look forward to working with the Government on practical steps to boost supply," he said.

Mr Morrison also commended the Government for its commitment to review the barriers to institutional investment in housing, including Build-To-Rent housing, to be conducted by the soon-to-be-established Housing Supply and Affordability Council.

"If we are serious about providing greater housing choice and affordable options, it is important we have fair tax settings that encourage investment in all types of housing," Mr Morrison said.

"Right now, current tax settings around Build-To-Rent housing are a barrier to investment, and a levelling of the playing field will bring more rental stock online, as noted by the Productivity Commission.

"Build-To-Rent housing offers renters greater security in their tenancy, superior facilities and services, and an additional form of housing which Australia sorely needs," he said.

The Property Council also welcomed the Government's commitment to build 10,000 affordable homes and 20,000 social homes through the establishment of the Housing Australia Future Fund, as well as the additional 10,000 new affordable dwellings at the energy efficiency rating of 7 stars or greater (or a state's minimum standard).

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2/23 Ayrshire Crescent, Sandgate 352sqm*
High clearance warehouse with air-conditioned office.
\$36,000pa + OGs + GST JOSH BARNES 0425 302 773

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*Approximate



NEWCASTLE AIRPORT

David Armstrong is an accomplished commercial leader with a passion for developing and implementing solutions that drive efficiency and enhanced business outcomes which makes him perfect for the role of Business Manager - Car Park and Ground Operations at Newcastle Airport. With a strong background in parking and ground transport with both Cairns and Mackay Airports, David will oversee the ground transport transformation as Newcastle Airport's international aspirations take flight.



DELANEY ROBERTS SPECIALIST FAMILY LAWYERS

Tanya Chapman has been appointed as Senior Associate at Delaney Roberts Specialist Family Lawyers. Tanya specialises in assisting high net worth individuals and individuals with complex property and business interests with Wills, Family Estate Planning and Elder Law Issues. It is Tanya's mission to ensure that every client has the information they need to make informed decisions and plan for the future.



ADVITECH

Craig Wellings has joined Advitech as its new Manager - Environment. Craig is a scientist majoring in chemistry and physical geography and has fulfilled a number of leadership and management roles in over 35 years of consultancy. Craig's experience includes geotechnical and earthworks testing while at Douglas Partners and RCA Australia and environmental project management and direction at a number of consulting companies, including ERM, URS and Arcadis. Craig has also run his own consultancy EnviroFocus.



NEWCASTLE AIRPORT

Joining Newcastle Airport as Property Development Manager with a background in retail and commercial property development and leasing, **Robert Green** has worked with some of world's largest brands including Westfield, 7-Eleven, OPSM, Burger King, Colliers and Lidl. Rob is also a Sessional Lecturer with the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) in the School of Built Environment. Now working in the close-knit Property team at Newcastle Airport.



EMERGENT GROUP

Emergent Group has welcomed **Simon Bull** as Principal Engineer - Ideation. A specialist in systems engineering, Simon will develop new services in emerging areas such as clean technology, defence and agriculture. Simon came from New Zealand to work for Goninan & Co. (now UGL) and has since worked for Sandvik, Orica, Hunter Water, Transport for NSW, Healthshare, Thales Australia and 3ME technology. Simon aims to identify novel approaches to the challenges presented by clients, offering solutions they will not find elsewhere.



ADVITECH

Advitech's new Manager - Sustainability is **Abby Yates** who brings extensive experience to her new role. Although a Newcastle local, Abby has spent the past 13½ years working in London in engineering and scientific service delivery projects for the energy sector at Mitsubishi Power Europe. Her work took her to Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Abby has specialised in quality, environment, and energy management. At Advitech, Abby will help businesses navigate the complexities of ESG through integrated and risk-focused practices.



NEWCASTLE AIRPORT

Amie McMullan has commenced as Property Development Coordinator at Newcastle Airport. She previously worked for Canberra Airport and was responsible for bringing a brand-new precinct online in the Canberra CBD. Amie looks forward to lending her expertise and growing her knowledge around the construction of innovative buildings and creative spaces. Her work with the Property Development Managers will play a key role in the delivery of Astra Aerolab.



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More than a customer with The Mutual Bank

Small business is the lifeblood of the Hunter economy, and The Mutual Bank's local Business Banking Managers are here to help with all your banking needs.

With modern, competitive products to assist business members it is the Hunter-based bank's personalised service that sets The Mutual Bank apart.

"As a member-owned bank, no one delivers personal service quite like us," said The Mutual Bank's CEO Geoff Seccombe.

"Members who join The Mutual Bank for its great products and competitive interest rates stay for the exceptional member service.

"Our Business Banking Managers are experienced, highly-trained locals who have a passion for helping other locals."

It's a passion that has seen The Mutual Bank helping Hunter people with saving, buying property and their business banking for more than 130 years.

The Mutual Bank is customer-owned, which means it does not have shareholders so reinvests its profits back into developing better products and services for members and to support local communities.

"With The Mutual Bank, you choose how you want to bank," said Mr Seccombe.

"We provide digital banking services as well as a local call centre based right here at our East Maitland Head Office and our seven branches open six days a week," he said.

From payroll services, merchant facilities, MYOB BankLink,



Xero to batch processing and rental disbursement, The Mutual Bank's Business Banking Managers can help you.

Your Mutual Bank Business Banking Manager will provide you with guidance and support and have real authority to provide quick loan decisions.

Let The Mutual Bank tailor your business banking to your actual business needs.



Know Your Local Banker

The Mutual Bank has been helping Hunter people with saving, buying property and business banking for more than 130 years. Our specialist team of local Banking Managers can support you with all of your business needs from accounts and payment systems to flexible loans with real authority to make faster loan decisions.

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Funding your business needs

Decisions around the funding of their business are among the most important decisions that a business owner can make.

There is an increasing array of options available and it can make the decision quite difficult. It is wise to seek independent advice where possible to make sure that your decision helps to grow your business and not impact negatively.

In general funding can be from debt financing or equity financing.

Debt financing

Debt financing is borrowing money which will need to be repaid with interest. The business premise is that these funds will produce significantly greater returns than their associated costs.

There is an increasing number of options available in the market, but most fall into one of the following categories:

- **Loans from financial institutions** – these are available from traditional sources but there is a large number of “low-doc” type offering also available. Along with interest there is likely to also be fees which should be also included in any financial modelling. It is usually a case of risk vs interest rates. Secured loans, usually real estate, will be significantly cheaper but not everyone will have a suitable asset or may prefer not to use it as security. Be aware of the conditions of any loan. Whether the interest rate is fixed or variable can also have a major impact. “Low doc” type offerings are easier to obtain and require less paperwork, but will have a higher interest rate than banks.
- **Overdrafts** – Again these can be secured or non-secured. The interest rate will usually be higher than a traditional financial institution loan but may be a better option, particularly where revenue is variable. Although the interest rate is higher, the actual interest cost may be less as you only pay for the amount outstanding. You can also later change to a loan if you discover that it would be more suitable.
- **Credit Cards** – These are higher interest than financial institution loans but offer great flexibility for purchases. They also offer interest-free periods if you can pay back quickly.
- **Equipment finance** – This can be a specific loan but can also be a lease or hire purchase arrangement depending upon circumstances. The equipment purchased is normally also used as security and the interest rate will reflect this.

Equity financing

This is where your own or someone else's money is invested in your business. If an outside investor, they become a part owner of the business.

Many small businesspeople are reluctant to lose part of the equity of their business but it can result in being a part owner of a successful business rather than a full owner of a struggling business. The investor may also bring additional expertise to the business that can result in significant benefits.

Sources of equity financing can include:

- **Family and friends** – but beware of the strains on relationships that this can bring
- **Venture capitalists and angel investors** – they can offer many benefits apart from funds but will want results
- **Crowd funding** – a source of funding that has grown in popularity online
- **A public float** – issuing shares. This is usually for a larger business that has been successful and is looking at financing the next stage of its growth. A strong business case is required and it entails a substantial administrative load

Conclusion

This is just a short summary of some of the finance options available for businesses. There are a wide range of options for



financing your business and the decision to seek finance and then decide on the type of finance requires careful consideration.

Independent advice from an accountant, business adviser or similar is always recommended as these are vital decisions that will have a significant affect in your business.

The Mutual Bank's CEO makes plans to retire after almost three decades at the helm

The Mutual Bank's long-serving CEO Geoff Seccombe has announced his plans to retire after more than 30 years with the Hunter-based bank.

Chair of The Mutual Bank's Board Steve Meyn said Geoff's shoes would be difficult to fill but the planned retirement would allow a seamless transition once the right candidate for the role is found.

"We have employed the specialist banking executive recruitment firm Amrop Carmichael Fisher to help us find the best candidate that aligns with our culture and our vision," Mr Meyn said.

"What won't change is the focus on our members who have always come first."

Mr Meyn praised Geoff's leadership over a period of extraordinary growth for The Mutual Bank.

"Geoff is only our seventh CEO in our rich 134-year history and under his steady leadership we have achieved consistent, sustainable growth."

Mr Seccombe started his banking career with the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney (now NAB) in 1974. In 1989 he joined the team of nine people at the Maitland Mutual Building Society which then managed assets of \$20 million.

He was appointed CEO of Maitland Mutual Building Society (now The Mutual Bank) in 1994. The Mutual Bank now employs 100 people and manages assets of more than \$1 billion.

Mr Seccombe said it has been a privilege to be the CEO of the member-owned bank, working with some incredible Board Directors and team members over the years to assist members achieve their goals.

He said as a member-owned bank the profits go back into better banking products for members and assisting the community through sponsorships.

This aligned well with Mr Seccombe's own dedication to community service. He has held various company director positions and has been involved in many local charitable and community organisations over the years. Recently he was awarded both a Paul Harris Fellowship and a Paul Harris Sapphire Pin in recognition of his contribution to Rotary.



Mr Seccombe said he had seen remarkable changes in the banking industry and the Maitland and Hunter Region over his career. He said some of his career highlights at the Mutual Bank included:

- Always putting people above profit
- Introduction of digital solutions for members' banking
- Obtaining Authorised Trustee Investment Status
- Implementing both an external and an internal Securitisation program
- Opening six additional branches
- Moving the bank's Head Office into a landmark building at Green Hills
- Achieving \$1 billion in assets under management
- Achieving a financial grade investment rating of BBB- with a Positive Outlook
- Successfully steering the organisation through the Global Financial Crisis and Global Pandemic

Nova Alliance Bank increases community grants

As long-standing supporters of not-for-profit organisations and community programs, Nova Alliance Bank has increased their 2022/23 grant round to the value of \$60,000.

In a bid to ease the pressures that resulted post COVID-19 in the community, this decision was agreed to unanimously by the team at Nova Alliance Bank to help give back to those who kept on giving despite the added obstacles.

For the 2022/23 grants round, Nova Alliance Bank also increased the range of community groups that were applicable.

By re-evaluating their grants program, they were able to open space to support and address mental health, education, sport, and youth as well as charities in the region.

This year, eight local groups and charities each received a personalised grant to help support a program that directly benefits the community. The groups and charities who received grants includes:

- **Got Your Back Sister** – Helping address and support those experiencing domestic violence – providing funds for their Feast with Friends Cooking Program.
- **Hunter Melanoma Foundation** – Spreading awareness and helping to defeat melanoma in the Hunter - providing funds in support of their Spot Check Program.
- **Newcastle Men's Shed** – Advocating for mental and physical health with regular workshop activities and community bonding – providing funds to purchase a forklift that will enable easy loading and unloading of heavy items.
- **Hunter Life Education** – Providing health education programs for children – helping with sponsorship of their Water 4 Life Challenge involving a range of local schools.

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We are currently seeking support for the 2023 edition of the Hunter Business Investment Prospectus, the annual hard copy and online publication that promotes the Hunter Region as a smart business, investment and lifestyle choice.

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The 2022 edition can be read online at <http://www.hunterinvest.com.au>

- **Ronald McDonald House Charities** – Supporting sick kids and their parents in our local hospital. Continuing sponsorship of the Quiet Room and increasing support to the NICU Family Room.
- **Reach Homeless Services** – Supporting the homeless and the less fortunate of our community – Providing funds to sponsor their Breakfast Champion Program.
- **Newcastle Police Boys Club** - Providing funds to sponsor Nation of Origin multifaceted sport, cultural, education and leadership programs and off field uniforms.
- **Under Construction Choir** - Supporting Mental Health in the community through the power of song – this grant will help with ongoing rent and instrument assistance.

Nova Alliance Bank CEO, David Franklin said that the grants awarded for 2022/23 reflected their ongoing commitment to giving back and ensuring those who help others receive the support too.



Community First Credit Union transitions to member-owned bank

After 62 years as a credit union, Community First is rebranding to become Community First Bank. The credit union has been offering banking services to customers since 1959 and as an Authorised Deposit-Taking Institution regulated by the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA), the “bank” brand will remove any confusion to potential customers seeking a banking alternative.

The process will commence immediately, with the rollout expected to be fully complete by March 2023.

The transition has been made possible by a lengthy trademark dispute in 2021 that saw Community First win the right for all mutual banks to call themselves ‘community banks’. Also, record loan inflows in the last two years highlighted that customers wanted more viable large bank alternatives that were also safe and secure.

This announcement follows news that Community First Bank has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Australian Mutual Bank to explore a merger. The merger is subject to prudential and member approval and is not expected to proceed until 2024.

The transition to Community First Bank is a natural evolution which will result in a subtle change in name only. Research indicates that among younger generations of Australians, the term ‘credit union’ is not widely understood. Rebranding to Community First Bank will help consumers understand the services and support Community First offers, helping to grow its member base.

The decision to rebrand was tested via member surveys, which indicated extensive member support for the Credit Union to become Community First Bank as long as our continued focus on helping members achieve their financial goals remained as an absolute focus.

Mr John Tancevski, CEO of Community First Credit Union, said, “Since 1959 we have operated as a credit union. However, the next phase of our evolution has arrived, and it is time for us to change our name to Community First Bank.

“It is a subtle yet natural evolution, and our transition to Community First Bank is testament to our growth and success over the years. Today, Community First Bank has member deposits of \$1.1 billion, we have over \$1 billion in outstanding loans, and our Members’ Equity at 30 June 2022 stood at \$104.5 million, marking the first time Members’ Equity has risen above \$100 million.

Newcastle Permanent and Greater Bank merger to proceed

Greater Bank and Newcastle Permanent are moving to merge and create one of Australia’s leading customer-owned banks, after the results of Special General Meetings in early November.

With strongly favourable member votes, both organisations achieved well above the required 75% “Yes” threshold for both brands. Newcastle Permanent members also carried resolutions related to the merged entity’s name and constitutional amendments.

The merged organisation will have more than \$20 billion in total assets and 600,000 customers, and benefit from almost 200 years of combined operating history.

The new merged entity, Newcastle Greater Mutual Group Ltd, will be led by a Board comprising four Directors from each of the current Greater Bank and Newcastle Permanent Boards. Wayne Russell, Chair of Greater Bank, will assume the role of Chair and Bernadette Inglis, CEO of Newcastle Permanent, will be Group CEO.

Wayne Russell, Chair of Greater Bank said the member vote was endorsement of the vision of both Boards to bring the two organisations together.

“This is a landmark outcome for our respective organisations, customers and employees that will enable us to create a financial powerhouse based here in the Hunter,” Wayne said.

“Both Boards shared a vision for a merged entity that would make us a more resilient force in the market, better positioned to continue to compete with the major banks and deliver high value, competitive banking for our customers.

“We are incredibly proud and humbled that our members have shared our vision by voting yes. Thank you to everyone who voted on the proposal.”

Mr Russell said bringing together the two brands under the one merged entity secures the future of mutual banking in regional NSW.

“While we have big plans to grow and develop our business, we remain committed to keeping skills and expertise, jobs and investment here in regional NSW. Starting with our commitment that our headquarters and customer contact centres will continue to be based in the Hunter, as they always have,” he said.

Bernadette Inglis, CEO of Newcastle Permanent said focus was now on bringing the organisations together.

“This is a momentous day for both our organisations and I could not be more delighted with the result,” Bernadette said.

“We’re looking forward to bringing everyone together and to affirming our position as a significant regional employer of choice. Working for the merged entity will create opportunities for our people, enabling them to forge rewarding and diverse careers possible in a larger organisation.

“We know our brands, Greater Bank and Newcastle Permanent, are important to our people and our customers, and we’re keeping both.

“Maintaining both brands is, and will remain, critical to our ongoing strategy with Newcastle Greater Mutual Group Ltd having the resources to see them grow and evolve,” she said.

Newcastle Permanent and Greater Bank confirmed there will be no change to customers’ bank account details on merging, although customers will be able to use their Greater Bank or Newcastle Permanent card to access both brands’ ATM network for free.

The merger is planned to come into effect 1 March 2023, following final regulatory approvals.

AUTOMATION INCREASES PRODUCTIVITY FOR DSI UNDERGROUND

DSI Underground is a leading Australian provider of Ground Support Products and Systems for the Underground Mining and Tunnelling industries and has been manufacturing in the Hunter Region for over 50 years.

Their objective is zero harm to their people, the environment they work in, customers and suppliers.

DSI Underground recognises manufacturing to be a key driver for economic growth within the region and has adapted manufacturing processes accordingly to ensure the safety of employees and position the business for success in the future.

Historically bolt production has been completed in batches using a number of separate machines and assembly processes. This process resulted in high labour levels and significant manual handling as well as high levels of WIP and long lead times. By implementing robotics and automation we have boosted productivity and driven efficiencies.

Over recent years DSI Underground has been working towards bringing these processes together into a continuous production line (or several of them), eliminating a great deal of wasted movement and time. The implementation of advanced automation and robotics has freed up employees from repetitive tasks which in turn has improved workplace safety.

The first semi-automated line was put in service five years ago. The automation journey continued with the first robotic outfeeds commissioned in February and September this year. Productivity has more than doubled and the majority of manual handling within the manufacturing process has now been removed.

The introduction of new technology has also allowed for an increase in quality checks using cameras and other devices.

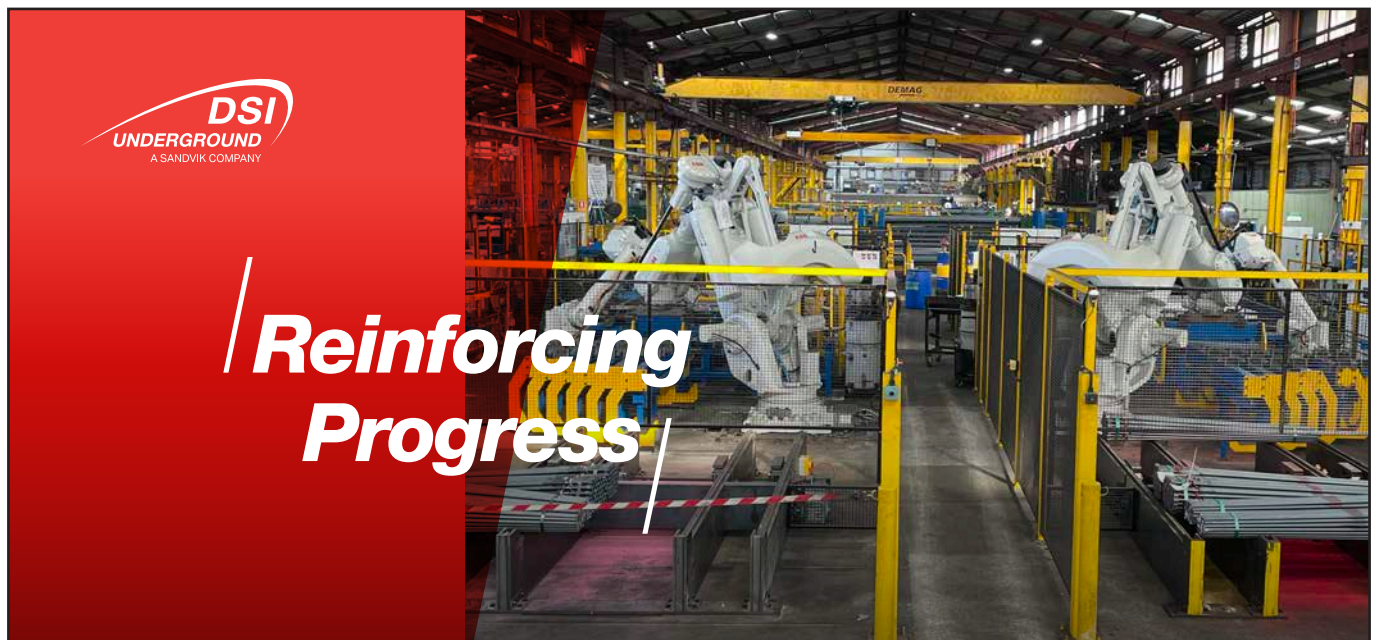


Packing quality has also improved significantly as a result of the implementation of robots.

DSI Underground is extremely proud that their design and equipment builds are all completed in-house using an experienced engineering team who has a thorough technical understanding of each process. The business invests in research and development and continuous improvements to ensure processes provide the required efficiency outcomes.

To further support improvements the next phase is well underway; installation of processing equipment is currently being manufactured in-house and will be installed into the manufacturing process within the coming months.

By adapting reliable and effective automated systems DSI Underground has created a safer workplace with increased efficiencies without compromising quality products for customers.



Locally manufacturing in the Hunter Region for over 50 years. DSI Underground is a leading Australian provider of Ground Support Products and Systems for the Underground Mining and Tunnelling industries

dsiunderground.com.au

NOVECOM HELPING FARMERS WITH IRRIGATION WATER STORAGE MONITORING AND REPORTING

Newcastle technology company Novecom has come up with a clever way for farmers to monitor their irrigation water storage and report levels to the governing body.

To maintain environmental flows and protect water supply for downstream users, the NSW government has introduced mandatory monitoring and reporting of water take from the floodplains.

Novecom, specialists in monitoring, sensors and the internet of things (IoT), has developed a device to meet the new regulatory requirements. Novecom's versatile smart telemetry solution, the SynaptiX Collector, has been adapted to meet the NSW Government's specifications for a robust, reliable, tamper-proof telemetry metering device.

Before leaping into the design process, the Novecom team worked closely with Water NSW, the division of NSW DPE developing the measurement system guidelines, as well as talking directly to farmers who would soon need a tool for measuring and reporting on their dam levels.

Principles guiding the design of the device were that it must add genuine value to the farmers' business, be considerate of the environment, be robust enough for harsh Australian conditions and be largely plug and play.

The resultant solution, known as the SynaptiX LID (Local Intelligent Device), has received the NSW government tick of approval to enable irrigators to comply with the floodplain harvesting measurement regulations. In fact, Novecom's SynaptiX LID is one of only two devices approved for use in NSW.

The LID is supplied as a sealed, maintenance-free unit with a pre-installed WaterNSW SIM for telemetry to the government's data acquisition portal. Once the equipment is installed and connected to an approved storage meter, data will be transmitted automatically to the NSW Government data acquisition system.

The SynaptiX LID is available now for installation by certified installers.



REGION SET TO BENEFIT FROM \$74 MILLION LOCKHEED MARTIN AUSTRALIA PROPOSAL

Lockheed Martin Australia (LMA) has announced plans to invest \$74 million into the establishment of a national integrated air and missile defence (IAMD) ecosystem.

The fully inclusive facility, designed to support Australia's sovereign capability and future defence projects, aims to foster technological collaboration and has been earmarked for development within the Williamstown Special Activation Precinct (SAP).

Newcastle Airport CEO Dr Peter Cock welcomed the news, saying the proposed facility is a considerable win for the Williamstown SAP, and for our region.

"We're incredibly excited by Lockheed Martin Australia's announcement, and we're wholly supportive of their proposal.

"Newcastle Airport is committed to being the airport the region deserves. The establishment of the newest Lockheed Martin Australia facility will not only play an important role in our region's growth, but also enable the airport to continue to deliver on its promise to the community with the

continued growth of Astra Aerolab, our 116 ha aerospace and defence focussed development.

"The news is testament to the long standing and collaborative efforts of Newcastle Airport and the Greater Hunter business community in supporting defence industry prime contractors in their submissions and proposals to the Australian Defence Force (ADF)," Dr Cock said.

"Williamstown and the Greater Hunter Region is proudly home to a vibrant defence industry ecosystem, and Astra Aerolab – located in the heart of the SAP – is being purpose-built to meet the specialised requirements of the defence industry and their people.

"The proposed location of the facility will further establish Astra Aerolab and Williamstown as the State's premier location for defence, aerospace and innovation. We look forward to engaging with Lockheed Martin Australia to help bring this project to fruition, and working together with them to help grow capabilities that will benefit our region for years to come."

SynaptiX® Collector Monitoring solution made in the Hunter

Designed and built in the Hunter for tough Australian conditions, the SynaptiX® Collector, coupled with Novecom's cloud-based information system, helps you manage compliance as well as informing your business decisions.

As a Farms of the Future AgTech partner and one of only two DPE approved IoT devices for measurement of floodplain harvesting, SynaptiX® is the trusted solution you need.

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FAMILY-OWNED HUNTER MANUFACTURER TO CELEBRATE 25 YEARS

Started by three partners in a chicken shed in Raymond Terrace in 1998, Industrial Gaskets and Sealants at Heatherbrae is now the biggest manufacturer of gaskets in the Hunter.

Industrial Gaskets and Sealants manufactures and re-sells premium quality gaskets, rubber products and sealing solutions to end users and other manufacturers throughout Australia. Many of their clients are fellow Hunter businesses.

They use only the highest quality materials and products supplied from well-established businesses Australia wide.

Getting their start almost 25 years ago making flange gaskets & distributing sealants, IGS now manufactures critical components of products used in larger infrastructure nationally and internationally, including:

- Neoprene rubber & compressed fibre gaskets in glass facades on buildings in North America;
- Plastic and steel shims along with compressed fibre gaskets in dewatering pumps in the Middle East; and
- High temperature silicone gaskets in the ventilation system at underground and open cut train stations in the NSW Government's Sydney Metro upgrade, Australia's biggest public transport project.

RMS boat registration stickers are also cut locally by IGS.

Their ISO accreditation has opened new markets and enables them to compete with larger companies in Sydney.

Unlike larger businesses, their relatively smaller size allows them to cut materials on site; provide quicker lead times; and be flexible to meet customer needs. Reduced freight cost is another benefit for their many Hunter-based customers.

Industrial Gaskets and Sealants invests in the latest technology to meet customer needs for precision, speed, and quality. Their machines include:

- Flow Mach 1 Waterjet Cutter, 4x2m cutting bed
- Zund L-2500 knife blade cutting machine
- Aristomat GL 2032-8 knife blade cutting machine
- Multicam Trident CNC Router / Cutter

Still a family business, Industrial Gaskets & Sealants is now owned and operated by Joel Gardiner, son of one of the founders.

"I'm proud to continue my father's legacy and support other Hunter Valley and Australian manufacturers and infrastructure companies do their best work. It's exciting to see the

development of manufacturing over the years in our local patch at Heatherbrae, and throughout the Hunter region."

Joel and the team are looking forward to the 25th anniversary of Industrial Gaskets and Sealants next year.

AMPCONTROL CO-FOUNDER WINS MAJOR AWARD

Peter Cockbain AM, Co-Founder of Ampcontrol was awarded Engineers Australia's most illustrious individual accolade, the Peter Nicol Russell Career Achievement Memorial Medal, in recognition of his lifelong dedication to the field of engineering and the broader community.

With a career spanning decades, Peter is a distinguished innovator, entrepreneur, industrialist, philanthropist, and one of Australia's most highly regarded and influential engineers. He has been a passionate member of Engineers Australia for more than 50 years, including a stint as National President and has served as a board member of Standards Australia, the University of Newcastle Council and the Prime Ministers Science, Engineering, and Innovation Council.

In 2010, Engineers Australia named Peter one of Australia's 100 Engineering Leaders of the past century. In 2015 he became a Member of the Order of Australia for his significant services to engineering.

On winning the Peter Nicol Russell Career Achievement Memorial Medal, Peter Cockbain AM said, "I have only ever been a willing participant in very talented teams. Collectively, we've achieved a lot. Our company logo is: 'I can't do it. You can't do it. But we can'. It's always been about what we could achieve together, not the individual achievement of one person."

With the many collaborations and partnerships Ampcontrol is part of, the aphorism "I can't do it, you can't do it, but we can" attributed to Peter is representative of how Ampcontrol values collaboration and group innovation, both internally and externally.

Peter's vision, energy and determination to continuously improve and innovate is supported by Ampcontrol's investment in research, development and commercialisation practices that have seen the company thrive over the last 50 years to become the global success story it is today.

The long list of high-profile awards Ampcontrol has received for innovation, design, and technology is a testament to Peter's founding philosophies set down when he and fellow Co-Founders established Ampcontrol in 1968.



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VARLEY GROUP GREEN ENERGY ENGINEERING EXPERTISE

Through its 136-year history Varley Group has continually evolved as a company to adapt to ever changing market demands. Most recently Varley transformed a part of the engineering expertise to satisfy the emerging clean energy development sector.

Varley MD, Jeff Phillips is an inspirational and transformational leader who has taken a small Hunter based family engineering business on a planned journey to be one of Australia's top private companies. Varley has grown from heavy industry maintenance business of 60 employees to be the largest privately owned Australian Defence Industry, the biggest provider of emergency response & specialized vehicles, a unique leader in commercialisation of Clean Tech hardware and is currently building a product lead Cyber business.

Now employing over 1100 people throughout multiple sites across Australia and overseas, the Varley Group has become a sought out, respected, successful leader in quality engineering & manufacturing with a solid reputation and diverse company portfolio.

The Varley Clean Tech journey began in 2012, where Varley was the first investor into Rapid DC EV Charging company, Tritium. As a Director, Jeff Phillips guided the start-up business for 10 years, where he then chaired the sub-committee for the first Australian company to de-SPAC on the NASDAQ. With this knowledge, a Clean Tech ESVCPL Fund has been established to take other emerging Australian technologies global.

Recently Varley was introduced to a new technology in long-term thermal energy storage by MGA Thermal. This core technology "Miscibility Gap Alloys" (MGA) was invented at Newcastle University by Erich Kisi & Dylan Cuskelly.

The MGA Blocks are used in Thermal Energy Storage Systems (TESS) which deliver continuous high temperature heat or

electricity that is safe, low cost, sustainable and high capacity. The MGA technology focuses on storing vast amounts of energy from solar & wind as heat, fed back "on demand" into the system, generating steam to provide base load electricity to the grid, or process heat to industry.

MGA Technology supports the circular economy and our renewable energy future. Creating a sustainable future means designing blocks with material availability and resource recovery at the core of our product. MGA Blocks can be made using recycled materials and can be recycled at the end of their long 30-year lifetime. MGA is unique as it unlocks true zero-carbon renewable energy storage for both the grid and industrial use.

Partnering with Varley Group, the MGA Thermal Energy Storage Project (TES) is a \$2.8 million pilot plant at Tomago that involves the design, manufacture, and operation of a 5 MWh demonstration-scale thermal energy storage (TES) system supported by the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA). This TES will involve testing scenarios that simulate a variety of end-use applications. The cases include providing dispatchable power, process heat, and green hydrogen production. The project will produce data and insights to inform business cases for future applications of the technology.

Varley Group has started the manufacture of the TES module design for MGA Thermal and the TES will complete installation and commissioning in early 2023, followed by 6 months of intensive experiment operation to demonstrate charge, storage, and discharge capabilities.

Utilising the knowledge gain from TES Varley will apply our commercialisation capability to finalise scalable production ready TES to be sold to the global market.



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HEALTHTECH STARTUP EZY AID LAUNCHES CROWDFUNDING CAMPAIGN

The founders of EzyAid, a revolutionary feeding tube adhesive, are seeking funding support for a clinical trial in the neonatal unit at John Hunter Hospital.

EzyAid founders Adam Geosits of Singleton and Jess Hay of Gloucester developed the new feeding tube adhesive after they experienced, first-hand, the difficulties of trying to attach a feeding tube to their baby. Adam and Jess's son Matty was born with a rare condition called MED-13L Syndrome which meant he had to be tube fed for the first two years of his life.

Jess says, "Matty was always pulling his tube out and the adhesive was just not sticking. We had to constantly change the tape – it was a difficult and traumatic process for everyone, but especially for Matty. Our design is simple to use and is a major improvement on the current feeding tube system that takes multiple pieces of sports tape and two people to install."

EzyAid, a slimline, transparent feeding tube adhesive that can be applied by one person, has been in development for eight years. After working through two patents, developing a working prototype, undertaking a mini trial evaluation at John Hunter Hospital, and sourcing a manufacturer in America, they have spent \$100,000, mostly of their own money.

Jess says, "We won a \$30K Beyond Bank grant a few years back, as well as an MVP grant from NSW Government and a smaller Pozible campaign at the start from friends and family but the rest has been funded by us and we have not paid ourselves anything. EzyAid has been driven purely by passion to help other people who are tube fed as our own son is no longer tube fed. The costs have mostly been patent fees, design, and prototype which Design Anthology Newcastle completed and company registration.

"There has been no blueprint for getting our product to market so there has been a bit of trial and error.

"The next stage of the process is to get TGA approval, get the product into a clinical trial at John Hunter Hospital and then step through commercialisation and distribution. This is going to cost upwards of \$200K, which is why we are asking for support.

"We are also open to the idea of partnering with a medical company, selling the product or accepting financial assistance from a venture capitalist or philanthropist to get EzyAid to market as soon as possible, and to start helping tube fed people, their families and health professionals" says Jess.

In terms of the medical efficacy of the product, Clinical Nurse Consultant, Justine Parsons, says, "In my role as the Clinical Nurse Consultant for the Neonatal intensive Care Unit of John Hunter Children's Hospital, I often review new products on the market. I have been working with Adam and Jess for some time now with regards to the EzyAid tube fixation device, offering clinical expertise and practical ideas.

"It has been wonderful watching the development of the product and seeing the commitment and passion that they have for improving care for infants and children requiring long term tube placement. I wholeheartedly believe that the EzyAid has the potential to be a staple product in healthcare facilities, as well as for use in the community. I am happy to continue to support Jess and Adam as they progress this product through to market."

In addition to babies that need feeding tubes, EzyAid can also be used for the elderly, cleft palate patients, cancer patients, patients with cardiovascular disease, patients with feeding issues associated with stroke, anorexia, dementia, diabetics, cystic fibrosis sufferers and animals requiring surgery and sedation and many other reasons.

To support the development of this simple but extremely effective piece of medical equipment, please visit <https://readyfundgo.com/project/ezyaid/>

PAVING THE WAY FOR FEMALE ENGINEERS IN THE WORKPLACE

Engineering as a profession in Australia is heavily weighted towards men - only 12% of women make up the Australian engineering workforce and only 16% of students studying engineering are female.

Despite education and communication campaigns encouraging STEM in females and engineering as an education option beyond school, the take-up has not increased significantly.

Beyond education, females who do progress through a university degree or TAFE certificate in engineering face challenges again when they progress into the workforce. It can be found that females are less likely to use their engineering degree after completion or, if they do, leave the industry not long after. It's unfortunate that most of the time this is due to engineering being so heavily male-dominated and the culture in certain roles that comes along with this.

Whilst discussions continue on the topic of encouraging women into the engineering sector, machining company Morgan Engineering has tackled this issue head on. The business has committed to leading the way in their industry for gender diversity in the workplace.

They are working to break the stigma by actively providing women with the opportunity to gain practical experience in engineering whilst gaining their trade certificate through RTO Gimbal Training.

The team is promoting and encouraging females to apply for their apprenticeship roles so they can get real-world experience and build a passion for their subject area.

Within the past year, the company has hired two female apprentices who are both undertaking their Certificate III Engineering – Mechanical. Erin Burns was employed first in February of this year, with Kerrie Jackson following close behind.

General Manager Jeremy Brett, explained that up until last year, the company had no female trade assistants, store persons, or apprentices. Which is what they want to put an end to.

"Since hiring two female trade assistants within the last year our company has been on an upward trajectory of growth and has been keeping diversity at the forefront of our minds," Jeremy said.

"We've had internal conversations about the importance of diversity and acceptance in our cultural journey discussions. To align with our Cultural Commitment Charter, it was a natural decision to employ the best candidates for both value alignment and cultural fit."

Erin Burns has been working for the company as an apprentice now for seven months and said she is thankful to find a business that not only supports but encourages diversity in the workplace.

"Working within the engineering industry is always something I've wanted to do, but didn't know how to go about it or if it was even possible. I was lucky enough that the available role at Morgan Engineering came up at the right time and I decided to go for it. They've been able to facilitate this opportunity for me which I'm so grateful for," Erin said.

Kyle Herbert is the Supervisor for Erin and Kerrie and has thoroughly enjoyed supporting and working with them both.

"We want to attract the right people, retain the right people, and develop the right people and we also want to be pioneers for change within our industry. We've absolutely nailed it with both Erin and Kerrie. They were offered the job due to their merits, and they've done, and are continuing to do, an excellent job."

All Certificate III Mechanical apprentices within Morgan Engineering are able to pursue Certificate IV CNC Programming which provides them with the required qualifications to further advance their career.



2022 Hunter Manufacturing Awards

For the first time in three years, the Hunter Manufacturing Awards (HMA) held a full gala event at NEX, Newcastle on Friday, 28th October. The event marked the 18th year of the HMA.

Jane Goldsmith of NBN steered the event flawlessly throughout the evening with 14 category awards up for grabs.

The event was opened with a very moving rendition of the Acknowledgement to Country with Brad Twynham playing the didgeridoo.

Earthen Rhythms, Newcastle's leading African Drumming and Rhythm Events entertainment provided an exciting performance including interaction with guests.

Chair of HMA, Steven Smith referred to the theme of "Expect the Unexpected" and said "This could mean different things to different people. With respect to the manufacturing sector, manufacturers are building back fast despite significant headwinds. The extraordinary levels of business uncertainty in the past couple of years have honed our instincts to expect the unexpected, and manufacturers have consequently developed greater resilience to sustain their momentum and competitiveness.



HMA is here for the manufacturers in our Region – to support where possible and we invite them to use HMA as means to interact with other manufacturers and have their company profiled and promoted."

Appreciation and thanks were extended to Downer, Major Sponsor for the 15th year and it was reiterated that without companies such as Downer, it would be difficult for HMA to continue to provide the recognition the region's manufacturers deserve. Adam Williams, Head of Growth, Downer, addressed the guests.

Steven Smith continued "The Hunter Manufacturing Awards would not exist without the commitment we have from our various sponsors, partners and supporters, some of which have been with us for many years and some more recently. We do not take that support for granted

Helloworld Business Travel, Newcastle, HMA's Travel Partner, was thanked for their on-going support. Despite the turmoil encountered by the travel industry, helloworld Business Travel Newcastle has continued to be the Partner of the Incentive Prize which is a trip for two people to a capital city in Australia and all 2022 finalists had an opportunity to win the prize.

Winners of the Manufacturer of the Year Awards – 50 Employees or More Award and Less Than 50 Employees' Award are both rewarded with an overseas trip to a country of their choice or a trip within Australia if preferred, to visit other companies, a trade fair or event that will enable their company to further their business or make important contacts in an endeavour to grow and develop their company.

Hunter Manufacturing Awards photographs are courtesy of AJM Photography

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2022 Hunter Manufacturing Awards

FINALISTS

Congratulations to the following finalists of the 2022 Hunter Manufacturing Awards. They are all winners in terms of being successful manufacturers and being significant contributors to the local and national economies.

3ME Technology	Bcompact
4ID Solutions	Chamberlain Group
Custom Fluidpower	Deeps Engineering
Design Anthology	Elecbreaks
Hedweld	Hi-Vis Group
Infrabuild Steel – Newcastle Rod Mill	
Kawal Rock Distillery	Loop Organics
McLanahan	Molycop
MITS Alloy	Morgan Engineering
Novecom	Nivek Industries
Regal Rexnord	Resourceful Living
Robotic Systems	Safegauge
Sirron Holdings	Steber International
Tomago Aluminium	TRL Products
Whiteley Corporation	

SPONSORS & PARTNERS

Many thanks to the following sponsors and partners of the Hunter Manufacturing Awards. It is only through the support of these organisations that the Hunter Manufacturing Awards can be held and the success of local manufacturing can be highlighted and celebrated.

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2022 Hunter Manufacturing Awards

MANUFACTURER OF THE YEAR – 50 EMPLOYEES OR MORE

Sponsored by: Downer

Winner: MITS Alloy

The winner of the Manufacturer of the Year – 50 Employees or More was won by MITS Alloy.

The judges said that MITS Alloy is an exciting Hunter manufacturer that is rapidly establishing itself as the leading light in the target markets. They have successfully combined a great passion for what they do with the discipline and holistic development of their manufacturing systems to quickly build a reputation for quality and innovation. They are now building a strong overseas presence with the US particularly falling in love with their products. An inspiring winner of the MOTY > 50 employees for 2022.

MITS Alloy said they are proud and humbled to have received the award for Manufacturer of the Year (50 Employees or More) at the Hunter Manufacturing Awards for 2022.

MITS Alloy employs over 75 staff who manufacture high-end aluminium ute trays and canopies for four wheel drive utes across the recreational touring and trade sectors from their facility in Mayfield North.

The previous 2 years saw unprecedented challenges and rapid growth across all aspects of their operations in Newcastle, with significant investment in machinery, personnel and systems to ensure sustainable future expansion.

Demand for high quality aluminium ute tray and canopy packages has increased across Australia, but also in several new markets for MITS Alloy, including USA, Canada and New Zealand.

MITS Alloy said that they strive for continual improvement and growth and this achievement is a reflection of the effort of their valued employees working towards future goals.



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2022 Hunter Manufacturing Awards

MANUFACTURER OF THE YEAR – LESS THAN 50 EMPLOYEES

Partnered by: NSW Government
Winner: Sirron Holdings Group

The Manufacturer of the Year – Less than 50 Employees was Sirron Holdings.

The judges commented that this Australian business demonstrates a resilient and flexible approach to compete and succeed on the world stage. Their submission reflected a well thought out business strategy supported by capital investment and key partnerships. Sirron Group Holdings said that they exist to support the vulnerable through charity and reward the efforts of our staff and shareholders. They achieve this by profitably manufacturing and distributing sustainable products and equipment of high quality and performance. They consider this intrinsic to outstanding operational conduct. By 2023, Sirron Holding's goal is that their brands will be accepted as the best value and quality available in Australia and that their service and warranty as second to none. Their long term goal is to be the first choice for every commercial and care establishment in Australia and New Zealand.

Historically, Sirron Holding's best innovation emerges when big problems occur. They say their strength lies in team collaboration, speed to action and being ok to make a mistake.

Sustaining a culture of innovation falls largely on putting their attention towards key issues internally and externally.



Sirron Holdings has always operated with sustainability in mind, guided by our founders' values to "leave the place better than we found it".

They implemented new policies, procedures and data capture systems to improve efficiencies and engaged a WHS consultant to audit following recent workplace changes, resulting in updated WHS training for the Board of Directors.

Sirron Holdings said that they share staff with collaboration partners, growing employee skill and vision for quality.

APPRENTICE OF THE YEAR – MANUFACTURING

Sponsored by: Ampcontrol
Winner: Alex Nivison, Chamberlain Group

The Hunter Manufacturing Awards Apprentice of the Year for 2022 is Alex Nivison. Alex was employed as an Apprentice in Engineering Mechanical with the Chamberlain Group in West Gosford. A strong passion for Mathematics and Engineering whilst at school led to him seeking employment in the engineering field. The apprenticeship with the Chamberlain Group soon proved a natural fit with Alex playing an integral part in a team that doubled the output of a robot assigned to a CNC machine. An outcome that won the "Kaizen individual Idea Award". Opportunities soon arose within the Chamberlain Group with Alex undertaking a Team Leader Role on the afternoon shift. As a leading hand and team leader he was able to put into practice the skills learnt during his apprenticeship. Away from work Alex was also able to put into practice his communication and organising skills. In 2019 during the drought Alex helped organised a fund raising appeal, raising \$16,000 to assist families in rural NSW.



2022 RISING STAR AWARD

Sponsored by: Whiteley Corporation
Winner: Luke Sasse, Hi-Vis Group

The Hunter Manufacturing Rising Star winner for 2022 is Luke Sasse. Luke is employed by the Hi-Vis Group in Carrington. In under 2 years Luke has progressed from Mechatronic Engineer to L.E.D Manager. Currently Luke is building the L.E.D team to more in-house designed and manufactured L.E.D products. This will mean bringing overseas L.E.D manufacturing back from China to be 100% made in the Hunter. Luke has been instrumental in several changes within Hi-Vis structure. The key driver in overhauling the sales process for L.E.D signage, adopted and championed the business and safety policies within the L.E.D team. Luke used market intelligence and consultation with stakeholders to select the NSW School Zone Alert signs and the Fire Danger Rating signs which both are now in Prototyping phase. In addition to his Mechatronic Engineering Degree Luke has completed his MBA. Executive Data Science at Oxford and the Professional Certificate of Agile Project Management.



2022 Hunter Manufacturing Awards

MANUFACTURING LEADER AWARD

Sponsored by: R&R Murphy

Winner: Bruce Hegan, 4ID Solutions

The Manufacturer Leader Award was won by Bruce Hegan of 4ID Solutions. The judges said that Bruce is relentless as he finds ways to improve products and processes and remain competitive with the goal of being ahead of the market and his competitors as opposed to just following current industry trends. During the challenges associated with COVID Bruce and his team pivoted their customer base into new sectors such as healthcare, medical, warehousing and controlled substances and they were also able to secure a preferred supplier arrangement with a major US-based customer. Bruce has a strong focus on people and is now coaching and mentoring the next generation of manufacturing leaders.



EXCELLENCE IN SUSTANABLE OPERATIONS AWARD

Sponsored by: Hedweld

Winner: Loop Organics

The Excellence in Sustainable Operations Award was won by Loop Organics. The judges commented that Loop Organics has emerged at the end of the long road of seeking regulatory approvals with a nutrient rich soil conditioner based upon sewage biosolids and waste cardboard. Key to the success of the product is that it is able to be used in many more applications than biosolids would historically have been approved for, particularly where close to populated areas.



COLLABORATION PARTNERSHIP AWARD

Sponsored by: BAE Systems

Winners: Sirron Holdings and Chesser Chemicals

Sirron Holdings and partner Chesser Chemicals won the Collaboration Partnership Award. The judges said that they provide an outstanding example of a collaboration encompassed by a commercialisation strategy from its very commencement. It is a delight to see a collaboration with impatience to see real cash returns from sales for a nationally novel product, with development to export already occurring. This translates to immediate and sustainable manufacturing outcomes, and both parties should be congratulated on establishing maintaining sound business goals and imperative.



EXCELLENCE IN INNOVATION AWARD

Sponsored by: TAFE NSW

Winner: Sirron Holdings

Sirron Holdings was the winner of the Excellence in Innovation Award at the 2022 Hunter Manufacturing Awards. The judges said it was a great submission, well thought out, for a very successful car cleaning tablet resulting from a disciplined agile approach to innovation. Sirron Holdings are demonstrating dynamic innovation in practice.



Innovation in the air Industry on the ground

The Hunter Valley is fast becoming Australia's aviation innovation hub, with 72 world-class F35 Strike Fighters to touch down by 2024. In addition to the Hawk Lead-In Fighter program, BAE Systems' F35 sustainment project will not only provide a supersonic boost to Australia's air capability, but will also create over 600 jobs in the Hunter Valley Region.

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BAE SYSTEMS

2022 Hunter Manufacturing Awards

EXCELLENCE IN MANUFACTURING CAPABILITY AWARD

Sponsored by: KPMG
Winner: Elecbrakes

Elecbrakes took out the Excellence in Manufacturing Capability Awards at the 2022 Hunter Manufacturing Awards. Elecbrakes was forced by supplier unreliability to take matters into their own hands and set up for manufacturing of components they'd previously bought in. They set up their own manufacturing line to produce the needed circuit boards and surface mounted devices, meanwhile almost doubling productivity.



EXCELLENCE IN PRODUCT DESIGN

Sponsored by: Biscit
Winner: SafeGauge

SafeGauge's "SafeTest - Dial Indicator" enables safer and more efficient inspections on heavy machinery. The judges said that SafeGauge has shown what it takes to do product design well. The device is innovative and the design has been carefully refined to be simple to use. The judges were particularly impressed how a remote blue tooth controller takes the operator out of harm's way, where traditionally the maintainer would be in close proximity of the moving equipment. With improvements in safety and dramatic reductions in maintenance tasks by up to 80%, the judges are confident the SafeTest will be a huge success.



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2022 Hunter Manufacturing Awards

EXCELLENCE IN BUILDING WORKFORCE CAPABILITY FOR THE FUTURE AWARD

Sponsored by: Monica Clare Recruitment
Winner: Morgan Engineering

Morgan Engineering were the winners of the Excellence in Building Workforce Capability for the Future Award. This Australian business has successfully identified, targeted and developed their workforce capabilities. There were tangible productivity and business performance results achieved along with improved employee and customer satisfaction which reflect the clarity and focus of this initiative. Their submission reflected a well thought out and executed business strategy.



OUTSTANDING START-UP AWARD

Sponsor: Molycop
Winner: Resourceful Living

Founded in the middle of the pandemic, Resourceful Living's mission is to reduce and re-use plastic waste. They turn plastic from yellow bins and industrial waste into furniture and common household items. The company has already recycled 10 tonnes of waste plastic and is a shining example of the circular economy in the Hunter. Resourceful Living ticks all the boxes proving that local manufacturing can have a strong impact on the local and global environment. Resourceful Living's commitment to Australian based manufacturing and a strong focus on environmental impact and the circular economy makes Resourceful Living a worthy winner in this category.



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2022 Hunter Manufacturing Awards

EXCELLENCE IN MARKETING

Sponsored by: The Measured Marketer

Winner: Sirron Holdings

Sirron Holdings set out to reimagine Air Fresheners in what was seen as a boring and low margin product category. The product Whiff Air Fresheners includes scents such as Aussie Bush Walks and Strawberry Daiquiri. The company used traditional and non-traditional channels to market to their potential customer base that includes both B2C and B2B customers. The campaign resulted in significant sales in a very congested market including new export sales in New Zealand. The product also reached number one in their category on Amazon. The company has undoubtedly created a market disrupting product and has executed a seriously good marketing campaign.



EXCELLENCE IN EXPORT AND GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS AWARD

Sponsored by: Nupress Group

Winner: Hedweld Group

Hedweld's Trilift range of component handling equipment has had significant export success. Currently Hedweld exports to 35 countries and has established agents/distributors in nine countries. Their export strategy is clearly articulated by the great explanation of how they reached export success by also reducing risk and cost, support from other agencies and groups over the years such as Austmine, Entrepreneurs Program in the past and export assistance grants, as well as hard work and commitment. Over the last two financial years sales to South America increased by 575%. It was great to see how the challenges of export during travel



and international freight issues from Covid, and any perceived payment risk scenarios were effectively overcome, including the development of online training packages for South America. Challenges finding solutions in the domestic market were overcome by engaging strategies utilising HR and staff, and ensuring work life balance. Having an effective export team has been vital to Hedweld's export success. Human elements can have a big influence on export operations and business performance as well.

A large background image for a Scorpion International advertisement. It shows a row of white trucks parked in front of a massive stack of colorful shipping containers (red, blue, green, yellow) under a sunset sky. The Scorpion International logo, featuring a globe and the text 'SCORPION INTERNATIONAL', is in the top right corner. A red curved banner at the bottom right contains the text 'SUPPORTING THE Hunter Business Supply Chain since 1984'.

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Visit hma.org.au to see who won and to view the gallery from the night.

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A man came to dentist to check his teeth. After the examination the dentist said that everything was alright but asked the man for a favour.

"No problem. What favour?"

"Could you please now start screaming at the top of your lungs?" asked the dentist.

"But why, I feel no pain, and you say all is fine?" said the man.

"Look! There are 10 people waiting behind this door, and I'm in a rush to get to a soccer game on time!"

Sarah, the self-appointed arbiter of the town's morals, stuck her nose into everyone's business. She made a mistake, however, when she accused her neighbour George of being an alcoholic after spotting his pickup parked in front of a bar one afternoon.

"George, everyone who sees it there will know what you're doing," she told him in front of their church group.

George ignored her and walked away.

Later that evening, he parked his pickup in front of Sarah's house and left it there all night.

I went for a job interview today and the interviewer asked me, "What would you consider to be your main strength and weakness?"

I said, "Well, my main weakness would be my issues with reality, telling what's real from what's not."

They then asked, "And your strengths?"

I said, "I'm Batman."

Patient: "Will I be able to play the piano after this operation?"

Doctor: "Sure! Of course!"

Patient: "That's awesome because I couldn't before!"

A plumber went to the doctor.

He said "Doctor, every time I try to sleep I close my eyes and see visions of PVC, copper, steel and corncob. Am I going mad?!"

The doctor replied "Relax. You're just having pipe dreams."

I reached the office this morning and the boss stormed up to me and said "you missed work yesterday, didn't you?"

I said "No, not particularly."

A man went to his lawyer and told him, "My neighbour owes me \$500 and he won't pay up. What should I do?"

"Do you have any proof he owes you the money?" asked the lawyer.

"Nope," replied the man.

"OK, then write him a letter asking him for the \$5,000 he owed you," said the lawyer.

"But it's only \$500," replied the man.

"Precisely. That's what he will reply and then you'll have your proof!"

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all."

- Peter F. Drucker

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