

Bowhill Engineering constructing a strong future for Murray Mallee

REGIONAL SHOWCASE

A small family business on the banks of the Murray River in the small town of Bowhill has been a major source of employment for the area for decades.



Bowhill Engineering managing director Jeremy Hawkes.

In the past 40 years, Bowhill Engineering, located 65km from Murray Bridge, has grown from a small local steel fabrication and construction business to a leading specialist in heavy and complex structural steel fabrication.

It's worked on some of the biggest infrastructure projects in South Australia, including the construction of steel bridge girders for the Darlington Upgrade, a stage within Adelaide's major North-South Corridor road project.



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Managing director Jeremy Hawkes says together these two projects were a turning point for the business, significantly boosting revenue and workforce numbers.

“Within 12 months we doubled our revenue ... admittedly, we were coming off a lower base because the industry was so depressed,” he says.

“It was still a massive jump for us to make in a relatively short period of time and it put a lot of pressure on our existing staff.



Bowhill constructed steel bridge girders for the Darlington Upgrade.

“We had to try and find new staff, get them onboard, skill them up and also make sure they fit in with our unique culture. Now we have a highly skilled and really engaged workforce of 30-plus that I’m really proud of.”

After winning the contract in 2017 for the Darlington Upgrade, Bowhill Engineering constructed the steelwork for two 3000-tonne bridges, built entirely off their permanent site, in what was an Australian first for civil engineering.

Bowhill's clients include major players, McConnell Dowell, Lendlease, LEED, and Laing O'Rourke, while the business prides itself on also supporting small local businesses through its supply chain.

"There is a local company at Mannum, TR Male Transport, who we have been using as our supplier loyally for about 40 years," Jeremy says.

"I'm really proud of the fact that we've been able to support them for a really long period of time, consistently all the way through. We have drafting people at Monarto who operate with us almost exclusively and that relationship has existed for about 25 years and spans two generations.

"We're SA-based so 99% of what we purchase is definitely from SA and we're very proud of that. We also have a very strong focus towards Australian steel and making sure we're contributing to a sustainable steel industry."

Bowhill Engineering is renowned for providing significant employment for the town, including young apprentices. It takes on at least one apprentice a year, and at the moment has six metal fabrication apprentices and one business administration trainee.



The Oaklands Crossing is also one of Bowhill Engineering's big projects.

"We had some research undertaken recently which found that Bowhill Engineering employs the same percentage of people in manufacturing within the Mid Murray

“That’s a pretty impressive stat when you think about it because Bowhill is such a tiny place. It doesn’t make logical sense (for the business to be located at Bowhill) because there are no support industries around us and we’re somewhat isolated. But we’ve made it work by focusing on our strengths.”

With Bowhill going from strength to strength in recent years, an expansion is on the horizon. The business is planning to underground powerlines that run through the property to give it the space and capacity for a physical expansion that could spur 20 new jobs.

The undergrounding project is a large and expensive feat costed at about \$1 million and will be made possible with a \$350,000 grant from the State Government’s Regional Growth Fund, in addition to Federal Government support through the Building Better Regions Fund for a similar amount.

Bowhill Engineering’s future expansion will mark a new chapter for the business which dates back to the 1970s, with Jeremy’s parents Brendon and Averil.

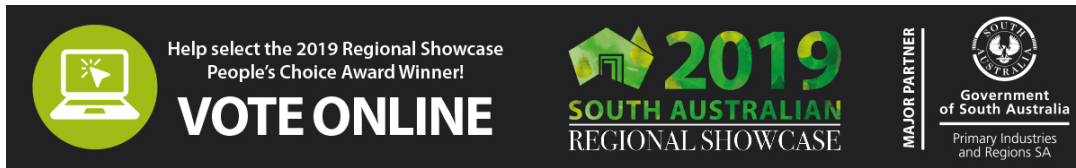
Brendon was a farmer with a knack for repairing and modifying farm machinery and equipment and so the mechanic workshop Bowhill Motors was born. Brendon turned the focus away from mechanics and towards local steel fabrication and construction in the 1990s, building on strong foundations of community, reputation and a positive attitude.

These values were instilled in his two sons, Jeremy and Simon, who both went on to play instrumental parts in the business’s success as they grew older.

But tragically in 2002, Simon was killed in a car accident at the age of 30. He left behind a legacy of bold thinking, strong work ethic and a dogged determination which has helped shape the business into what it now has become.

Family is still at the core of Bowhill, with Brendon and Averil still involved in the business alongside Jeremy and his wife Jodie, who have four children.

“I am genuinely excited for the future,” Jeremy says.



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Living colours inspire Wilmington fashion designer

REGIONAL SHOWCASE

From hues of toffee, brown and gold that add a softness to the harsh dry of the Flinders Ranges to the brilliant blues of the Spencer Gulf, designer Nikki Atkinson creates with inspiration from her 'backyard'.





Photo: Meridee Groves Photography

From the family property in the Flinders Ranges and nearby Wilmington to Port Augusta, where she has opened a boutique selling her own Liv Sienne designs and fashion from other Australian designers, Nikki says it is easy to see beauty in even the harshest conditions.

“My inspiration comes currently from the drought conditions and the colours, I draw so much from the environment around me,” she says.

Nikki first launched into design and production after studying at Marleston TAFE, going on to co-own the successful Betrothed bridal boutique in Adelaide at just 26-years-old.



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2019
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After eight years, love lured Nikki back to the country, when she married husband Dallas and moved to Wilmington in the Mid North. She continued made-to-measure couture and design from home for a number of years with her young children often playing at her feet while she sewed.



One of Nikki Atkinson's Liv Sienne bridal creations.

As a farmer's wife and mother of three, Nikki says her passion for the fashion and design industry was bubbling away under the surface and in 2013 she decided to launch her Liv Sienne label and eventually a store in nearby Port Augusta.

It has not been easy, but Nikki has been determined to make it work and share her passion for design and creating, forever fortunate for what her 'home' brings to her work.

“Life is busy, but I really needed some of me back. Designing and fashion is ‘me’ and so we make it work.

“When we’re shearing or crutching on the property, I have meals to prep before the kids go off to school, and it’s crazy and it’s busy but we make it work.”



Liv Sienne designer and creator Nikki Atkinson at home on her family’s Flinders Ranges property.

“I’m very passionate about wool – it’s such an easy fibre to work with,” she says. “It is amazing, it’s pliable, you can do anything with it. It’s a long way from the scratchy, itchy fibre people associated with wool before we really discovered the beauty and versatility of fine wool.

“I probably shouldn’t be so emotionally attached to Australian-made – it is more expensive to create and produce in Australia – but if we don’t, we lose the skills of being able to use a sewing machine, thread a needle and pattern making, and I’m passionate about keeping those skills.”

Nikki’s return to the fashion industry has been well-supported, her designs popping up at country race meets, weddings, formals and even as far as New York where she was asked to design the “perfect dress” for DeVoe magazine’s Full Figured Fashion Week.



One of Nikki Atkinson's Liv Sienne designs, photographed in the Flinders Ranges by Meridee Groves Photography.

Having concentrated the last 12 months on developing the Liv Sienne brand and storefront in Port Augusta, Nikki is now ready to launch back into her real passion for design.

“This is going to be a big year, I’m really excited for what lies ahead,” she adds.

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