

## Successful trip to the city for Bowhill

by Heather McNab

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Bowhill Engineering's Jeremy and Jodie Hawkes, and Tom Dennis accepted the Regional Business Award from Elizabeth Gunner at the 2014 Telstra Business Awards.

Being competitive on a global scale and striving for innovation doesn't always mean outsourcing or relocating.

For Jeremy Hawkes, managing director of Bowhill Engineering, staying local, being deliberate about sustainability, and making informed decisions about technology and the market is what makes a

company world class.

The second-generation family-owned engineering company knows all about staying local, operating out of rural South Australia.

Based on the Murray River, the business specialises in heavy and complex structural engineering, evolving over 40 years from a small machinery maintenance and modification workshop to an award-winning, nationally recognised brand.

“The company grew out of a need we saw in the market. The local community embraced the opportunity to access engineering goods locally,” Jeremy says.

“In the mid-1990s we started looking into the development of structural steel, and my brother developed a passion for it. We had to make a decision as to whether we were going to embrace the challenge, and remove ourselves from being a farming family.

“We do large components but small projects, and in that sense we are focused locally.

If we continue to win those local projects we can stay focused on our niche, and remain widespread in the industry in terms of the work we do and our range of skills.”

The company can certainly claim to be a force in the industry, winning the South Australian Regional Business Award at the 2014 Telstra Business Awards.

The company is no stranger to success, having been inducted into the Business SA Hall of Fame in 2009 and responsible for towering structures including the Wayville Station pedestrian overpass, the Southern Expressway pedestrian bridges and the Alice Springs Aquatic Centre.

“We want to be a sustainable business that is competitive on a global level, and to try to do that from a rural base is unique, but our aim is that our business model continues to be relevant in the marketplace,” Jeremy says.

“I grew up in Bowhill and it’s where I want to be.

We built the business around being here, so in that sense operating from a more remote location isn’t a new challenge, but the business evolved and changed in the way that the challenges are presented to us in terms of where the demands are coming from and the development of technology. “Massive growth without a solid foundation is a scary and reckless approach in the current market.

It shouldn’t be about legacy building, but about being real and sustainable.

For me, it all comes back to your purpose.

That's our underlying litmus test, making sure everything we do fits with our purpose and keeps us on the correct journey."

In a moving speech at the recent Telstra Awards, Jeremy acknowledged the integral role that his brother Simon, who passed away in 2002, played in the direction of the company.

"Bowhill Engineering wouldn't exist, at least in its current form, without Simon's vision and unwavering courage," he says.

"We are only here because of the direction he pointed us in and we are still passionate about his direction.

"We are doing it for our own reasons but it's definitely Simon's influence and the reason why we're doing what we're doing.

He was incredibly entrepreneurial, and loved technology. That's captured in our brand and that's the sort of people we are."

The company continues to be passionate about fuelling a sense of pride within South Australia and wants to see local businesses furthering a sense of community.

For Bowhill Engineering, this is all about responding to market pressures and new technology whilst staying true to the direction they have set for themselves.

"The award was wonderful and it's important to us that it's a win for the region as well. We want to see pride in the local population, because seeing a thriving community is what it's all about," Jeremy says.

"The purpose of our business is three pronged, in that we want to establish sustainability and security for ourselves and our staff, as well as our clients and suppliers.

We're about win-win situations because security is a fundamental need, and we want to address that.

"We want a reasonable work/life balance, and don't want anyone to be working in a way that is unsustainable.

We also want a thriving community, and set out to be supportive of it. We want to employ local people, be involved and give back to the community.

"These purposes are our identity statement. We want to be easy to get along with, incorporating our

country values, so that we're rugged yet easy to approach, professional and yet make our customers lives easy and fun.

There are so many elements to our company's personality that we want to represent.

"You build your brand around what you are, not just what you want to be.

That makes it more real, and I think my speech reflected that.

It came from the heart, and I think that even if it wasn't perfect, if a message is spoken with emotion it's often more powerful."

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