

Young miners rarer than gold in ageing industry

by Stan Malcolm

More school leavers are needed to take up well-paid careers in New Zealand's quarries, mines and other industrial resource sites.

The extraction industry has an experienced workforce, but not enough young people want to train in mining and quarrying work.

A recent Extraction Industry Training Organisation (EXITO) survey showed more than half of the industry's workers are over 40.

The survey showed 73% of workers are working 15 to 30 hours above a 40-

hour week and more than 45% of workers have been in the industry more than 10 years.

EXITO, which develops training programmes for the industry and sets workplace safety standards, was set up eight years ago and employs six staff under executive director Tom Reece.

Marketing and promoting the industry to students is a major focus.

"It's hard to get young people in when the government keeps talking about the knowledge economy and sitting in front of computers," says Mr Reece.

Steve Ellis, the divisional manager of quarries at W Stevenson & Sons, agrees rejuvenating the workforce is a priority.

"The average age here is around the 45 to 50 mark. Yes, we have all these ITOs [industry training organisations], but I don't see any budding quarry managers coming out. A quarry manager earns between \$60,000 to \$70,000 per annum and the lowest operator earns about \$14.70 per hour. The problem is when people go to Unitec and other polytechs, they aren't going to work in the dust and drive a loader. We'd like to get them

straight out of school," says Mr Ellis.

Mr Reece says EXITO is providing a progressive training system aimed at attracting school leavers to extraction industry careers. The system would allow trainees to do an apprenticeship and get a bachelor's degree in extractive industry management.

"We have appointed a person to create apprenticeships. We're creating a product that we want to sell. We want to make sure that kids recognise that there is a career path," he says.

This year EXITO sponsored a school geography competition, run by the New Zealand Geographical

Society. About 250 secondary schools competed in the competition and the regional winners competed at the society's conference.

The competition involved identifying places, minerals and products, and even orienteering – all facets of the geography syllabus.

"We are also creating a series of teaching and learning packages. The first one is about quarrying for geography students. The kids have to identify renewable and non-renewable resources. What we are trying to do is to give them a broader view of geography," says Mr Reece.

Kiwi design has runaway success

by Michelle Vollemaere

Entering a custom-built combat vehicle into an extreme British television series has proved to be a successful marketing ploy for its instigator.

Clad in a Swandri, jeans and work boots, Trevor McCoid from Albany Mowers and Machinery is an unlikely-looking marketing whiz.

He sits in the showroom office of his family-run business and describes how he managed to get the website address of Albany Motors beamed across the world on the Discovery Channel when *Full Metal Challenge* first aired in Britain last year.

The result was an increase of visitors to the site by "thousands of hits", many of which translated into extra local business for his company, which specialises in mowers, chainsaws and trimmers.

The series was also aired in New Zealand on Sky and will be re-run later this year on Prime.

When it does, says McCoid, "I'll be out there calling the newspapers, putting in ads and promoting our story."

"The idea was to do the *Full Metal Challenge* for fun and then market Albany Mowers from there... and lift the profile of the company, which we've done."

McCoid pestered Channel 4, the producers of the large-scale automotive shows *Full Metal Challenge* and *Scrapheap Challenge*, until they agreed to let him submit a design for a multi-purpose, all-terrain vehicle.

Among other things, the vehicle had to be smash-proof, splash-proof and able to drive on any surface. It also needed to be able to tackle a 30-degree slope, turn within a 24-foot circle, tow its own weight and have a reverse gear.

Inspiration for the design came from a ride-on mower in his showroom, that already fulfilled most of the criteria. McCoid knew it was an original concept because "who else would be crazy enough to take a big lawnmower to the *Full Metal Challenge*?"

Expert help came from David White, a senior lecturer in mechanical and production engineering at AUT,



MOBILE: Kiwi Thunder being trialled in Auckland before heading off to the UK for *Full Metal Challenge*.

and engineer Paul Varley of Vartec Metal Fabrication Ltd. Both men worked extensively on the design and construction of the vehicle in their spare time.

As part of the contest, the vehicle, now named Kiwi Thunder, had to be built within one month and sent to England for the filming of the series in late July last year.

McCoid's plan was to get a team of people together from mechanical and automotive industries who would work on a project like this "for free and for fun".

Eventually the team members could use Kiwi Thunder to promote their own businesses as much as they wanted to, with no one having any more right to the property than anyone else.

"I didn't want to use people but wanted them to feel as though they were part of it," says McCoid.

"It was a marketing campaign for all of us, to give us strength in what

we do and have fun along the way."

Part of the contractual obligations with the show's producers was that the vehicle and its driver could not carry any promotional material or advertising. Another part of the contract was that the vehicle would be retained by the producers and dismantled once the games were over.

"We had to sign over the rights to *Full Metal Challenge* because they'd paid," says McCoid.

Channel 4 gave each contestant £2000 towards construction costs, although McCoid says Kiwi Thunder cost much more than that, even with the unpaid hours of work and donated products from the team members.

He estimates that he put about \$15,000 of his own money into the project.

Discovery Channel filmed parts of Kiwi Thunder's construction process at McCoid's workshop and during that time McCoid was able to convince

them to film the outside of his shop, which boldly displays his web address on the showroom awning.

"I tried to get them to identify that we are a mower shop and not an automotive shop," says McCoid.

The result was that their shop front was screened on television sets worldwide and continues to do so every time the show is repeated. Albany Mowers has gained a continuing global presence.

The other team members have not been as vigorous in their use of Kiwi Thunder as a marketing tool.

Paul Varley says Vartec have not used Kiwi Thunder to promote their business, because they are not retailers.

"Trevor's got the public coming in and we don't have that."

David White, in conjunction with AUT, has used his designs and footage of the TV series in a promotional CD.

It is used both as a teaching aid for his classes in mechanical design and as material to help promote AUT and engineering as an exciting career option.

Upmarket hostel takes gamble out of backpacking

by Katie Newton

Budget accommodation doesn't need to conjure up images of scummy bathrooms and stolen belongings, say the team at one of Auckland's newest hostels.

Opened in the central city last month, Base Backpackers takes an upmarket approach to budget accommodation.

"There are so many fleapits and perverts out there and backpacking can be such a gamble," says manager David Green.

"We're not going to take the spirit out of backpacking, but we are offering cleanliness and safety."

Located in Fort Street, the 450-bed facility is the first in a string of Base Backpackers planned for New Zealand, Australia and the Pacific.

It offers many facilities beyond what is normally expected from budget accommodation, including a rooftop "chill-out zone" with an open fire, a fully-stocked library and individual storage lockers under each bed to store your backpack.

The fourth floor houses "The Sanctuary", a women-only space with its own separate facilities.

Behind some mirrors in the bathrooms are television sets. "So you can brush your teeth and watch the fashion channel at the same time," says Mr Green.

For the socialites there is a café, restaurant and a 24-hour bar on the first floor, which will also be open to the public.

"We are really setting out to be aggressively different. Above all though, it's just really cool," Mr Green says.

Statistics show that more travellers are opting to stay in backpackers and hostels, with guest nights rising 9% in the year to July 2003.

More than 210,000 backpackers spent over \$701 million in New Zealand last year.

But opinion about the current state of the market is varied among other hostel operators in Auckland.

Ali Lawlor, manager of Auckland Central Backpackers, says the market has room for more budget accommodation. She says hostels are often full from September to the end of March.

Other central city operators say the market is unusually slow due to recent international security scares and the Sars virus outbreak.

But most expect more than enough business to go around over the summer months.

"It's always been a given in New Zealand and Australia that you can just pack up and head off," says Mr Green.

"That's finally catching on in the UK. Employers are saying 'Go away for two years and we'll see you when you get back.'"

Home-grown baby products fill overseas gap

by Amanda Kyne

New Zealand baby and child products are carving a niche in overseas markets, producing around \$22 million a year in exports.

Phil and Teds Buggies, Nurtured by Nature merino wool baby clothes and Lanowool breast pads are some of the newest designs leading the way.

Stores in Britain, Europe and United States are impressed not only with the high quality of material and manufacturing of these products, but also with their capacity to fill a gap in the market.

London-based marketing consult-

ant Fiona Taag, who represents New Zealand Trade and Enterprise, says about 20 New Zealand brands of nursery products are sold in Britain.

"New Zealand's success in the nursery products sector worldwide is that the products are often created by parents for parents. A parent becomes dissatisfied with what is available on the market, so decides to develop a product to fit their need."

Lanowool breast pads, which have become a big hit with mothers in Scandinavia, Germany and Austria, developed in this way.

Christchurch mother Lene Alexandersen thought the available

breast pads made breastfeeding an unpleasant experience.

In 2000 Mrs Alexandersen teamed up with the Wool Research Organisation of New Zealand and designed a version that helped prevent chafing and discomfort.

At this year's Baby and Child International Fair in London she displayed her product at the New Zealand pavilion with 11 other Kiwi innovations sponsored by NZTE.

Her concerns that breastfeeding rates in the UK were too low were unsubstantiated. Hospital maternity wards, wholesalers, retailers, mail order companies and internet compa-

nies were interested, providing a whole new market.

Phil and Teds, leaders in the international kids and travel market, attracted the most attention at the fair this year.

The Wellington-based company launched their new E3 explorer buggy – a double-seater for all terrains, believed to be the first of its kind in the world.

Baby carriages were worth \$8.5 million of the export market in 2002, an increase of \$2.2 million from the previous year. Huge interest in Phil and Teds buggies at the fair suggests a similar increase for 2003.