

Apprenticeship programme a win-win

► Richard Loader

Hayden Wright, Co-director of Matamata plumbing, drainlaying and roofing specialist, Comag Ltd, says attracting enthusiastic young people to the company's apprenticeship programme has proven to be the best way of developing the skilled craftsman of the future.

"We have about sixty staff in our team, with a good mix of tradesmen and apprentices. We're very big on bringing apprentices into the industry and developing them.

"The apprentice gets to learn the trade and work ethic, our way. It's great to see a young person walk in the door after leaving school, and six years later that young person is a qualified tradesman. That's our main source of recruitment and we've put a lot of apprentices through over the years. That's a way of giving back to the industry, and looking to the future it's also how we can ensure the success of the business."

Comag's Matamata roots go back to the early '60's when it was founded by Bruce Magan. In 1994 a few staff got together with Bruce and agreed to buy into the business. Forming a co-op that allowed for built in succession and continuity of the business, the company rebranded as Comag Ltd.

While the original shareholders have either retired or moved on to take new opportunities, new shareholders have been progressively brought in from the shop floor.

"I commenced my apprenticeship here in late 2003, and took the opportunity to become a shareholding director in 2011. The company has evolved with a new generation of six shareholders.

"Anyone who walks in the door wanting a job, has the potential to own a share in the company, whether or not they start as an apprentice."

Over the years Comag's growth has resulted from building enduring relationships with large specialist construction companies, becoming their preferred supplier and undertaking complex projects around the North Island and even into the South.

Looking after residential, commercial and rural customers throughout the Waikato



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region, Comag has separated its business into two divisions each with specialist teams; Roofing, and Plumbing & Drainlaying.

"We look after everything from simple water leaks, to fitting out new residential and shop builds, through to providing plumbing services to rural and commercial customers, and through to looking after large scale commercial and industrial roofing projects."

Hayden acknowledges Comag's strong support from the local community over the last sixty years or so, and says providing spon-

sorship and donations to the many sporting teams including the Matamata Swifts Football Club, the Matamata Rugby Club, and the Hinuera Rugby Club to name a few, is one way the company can give back that loyalty.

"The Matamata College 1st XV is a big one. We've sponsored them for many years including having naming rights. We also attract a lot of staff out of this team as well. It is a small community and we think that it's important to support the community in that way. We want people to shop with us and want to give

back to the community and the people who support us."

Loyalty, having a good base of staff and customers, and forging great working relationships with many other successful businesses from the same district have been key to the company's success, says Hayden.

"We have built good relationships with customers and suppliers which are often intergenerational, spanning three or more generations in some cases."

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