



On the road to success

Michael Sharpe always knew he would follow in the footsteps of his grandfather, Doug, a reputable residential and commercial builder in 1950s country NSW.

Construction coursed through the veins of all the Sharpe brothers and the Gosford based business, Sharpe Bros (Aust) Pty Ltd, is now one of Australia's leading civil contracting and asphalt paving companies.

"It was almost guaranteed that my brothers and I would also follow in our father's footsteps," said Sharpe who is a joint managing director with his two brothers, Richard and Hayden.

"Growing up, Dad would take us to crush cans for Apex, learn marine radio at the Coastal Patrol and go door knocking for the Salvos.

"Once we built a BMX track for the Boy Scouts which was like a life-sized sand pit. Dad let us ride on the loader, in the old Bedford water cart and even drive the little Pit roller all by ourselves," Sharpe reflected.

The company began asphalt operations in 1970 with the construction of a drive-through chemist shop, today a core

aspect of the business. It was also around this time the distinctive green colouring of the trucks, plant, equipment, and signage was adopted.

Family, community and innovation are the cornerstones of success.

"Innovation", says Sharpe, "is in our blood." Solving a problem or finding a new way to do things, such as devising non-traditional methods of road repair, usually means drawing on family and company resources.

"After years in the asphalt industry, my brothers and I looked at the traditional methods of road repair and thought there must be a better way."

After a series of lateral thinking and problem solving sessions, the answer lay in the construction of a new machine. Their multi-million dollar solution – the Sidewinder – was born!

Decaying road edges result in narrowed pavements and dangerous edge drop-offs which pose a danger to motorists," Sharpe claims. According to the Federal Office of Road Safety, when traffic lanes are widened by just one meter, the rate of head-on and run-off road crashes can fall by 20%.

"The usual way of repairing broken edges is to dig up a substantial amount of the road before resurfacing, which causes major disruption to traffic over a period of time and is quite costly. The Sidewinder process extends the life of the road and reduces traffic disruption. What normally take at least a week, from digging up the road to the final bitumen sealing, can be completed in a day at a much lower cost.

"Safety Bro is a fun character who is featured extensively on all our safety handbooks, worksheets, coffee mugs, message boards, work stations, common areas, equipment and vehicles," said Sharpe.

"Safety Bro also has a dedicated website and MySpace page, which are used to issue regular text messages and OH&S announcements."

Sharpe fosters an environment where staff are taught to be

"We have proven that we can sustain natural resources by using recycled road gravels to make roads wider, stronger and safer."

"Why dig up the whole road when you can repair just the damaged areas with minimum disruption to the environment, residents and motorists?"

"We have proven that we can sustain natural resources by using recycled road gravels to make roads wider, stronger and safer."

Road construction is often dangerous and the company has created a safety mascot – Safety Bro – as part of its education and training program to improve safety in the workplace. The company was awarded the 'Best Workplace Health and Safety Practices in Small Business' prize in the 2007 WorkCover NSW Safe Work Awards for their comprehensive program.

innovative, to be continually proposing new ideas: "I've been thinking...". As a result, the company has designed purpose built low loaders for transporting specialised road making equipment around Australia while continuing to develop stronger, more efficient and safer technologies for road making equipment.

"It is wonderful to be able to draw upon a rich family history of knowledge and community involvement. As a result our company has a caring culture that benefits our staff, their families, and the wider community."

What are the benefits of using NSW Business Chamber?

> Sharpe Bros frequently uses the services of the NSW Business Chamber for ongoing business advice.

Business advice

> It is important to plan adequately for training. Your staff will want to grow with your business. Training can be interesting and fun for staff and valuable to the business moving forward.

> Getting involved in community events is a great way to boost staff morale. Our staff have built billy carts for local race days which involve the whole family and raise money for the community. We also provide funding and prize money for Australian artists as well as sponsor football clubs, surf clubs and medical research. The company volunteers services for bush fire brigades, Christmas street parades and clean up days.

> Plan for play. Rest time and holidays are vital to the ongoing success of a business. Put systems and structures in place so that you can be away from your business. And don't forget to switch off the BlackBerry for a while!

> The development of new technologies is hard work. When you've invested time and money as well as blood, sweat and tears to come up with a new innovation, it is vital to ensure it is adequately protected. Good housekeeping of Intellectual Property is important.