

# Forestry for Life



## Workforce doubled



WAYNE McEwan has just invested another \$2.5 million into his growing Blackstump Logging company. To keep up with that, the veteran forest worker has also doubled his workforce, and now has 18 on the books. The new 70-foot pole, to be used for cable logging, will primarily be used in PF Olsen forests, with his other crews in Hikurangi Forest Farms. "I talk to a lot of people and particularly those who have been in the industry for a long time," says McEwan. "I believe the industry is looking pretty good, and sometimes you just have to make a decision and run with it." He joined the forestry industry at 17 years old, when a mate asked him if he wanted to "pull trees for a living." "That was me. I love working in the outdoors. There are no suits here, you just roll up in your boots and get on with it." With wife Ange, he established Blackstump Logging eight years ago. "She keeps us all in line," he says. "In this game, you do rely on a bit of luck, but the key is surrounding yourself with good men." Staffing continues to be a challenge, and when the market is in high demand, so too are those good workers. "The conditions on the East Coast

can be rugged, and the weather can be tough, but when you have done it your whole life, that side doesn't worry you." McEwan thinks the industry is looking good. "There are so many job prospects out there for young guys — some of them will never even touch a chainsaw, and instead will spend their time plotting roads or doing other stuff. As soon as you mention forestry, everyone just thinks of a chainsaw, but that's just not the case." He is keen to see youngsters encouraged into the industry and trained from the start. "You see a lot of older guys out there in the bush but we need more younger ones. There are a lot of people working very hard out there." And they're a loyal bunch too. "Most of my staff have been with me since the start. As we have grown I have brought some in from out of town to try to bring fresh blood into the industry too." His own children are still a bit young to be swinging chainsaws but they do help dad wash the loaders and generally muck around. "I'd be happy for them to follow me into the industry, but that's a decision for them to make."

## Representing Gisborne

ROBERT Stubbs is Gisborne's representative on the Forestry Industry Contractors Association (FICA) board.

The principal from Stubbs Contractors has been on the board two years and says it is a challenge he enjoys.

"I am there to represent the district and am also involved on the Forestry Industry Safety Council, sitting on the Operational Advisory Group (OAG) under the council, and the Technical Advisory Group for Tree Faller Certification," says Stubbs.

FICA is a group of around 150 member companies made up of logging contractors, silviculture contractors and a range of associate members, providing practical workshops, industry developments, field visits and a national voice for the industry.

It was formed in 2002 with the aim of giving a common voice on relevant issues and to foster development and improvement in the New Zealand forestry contracting industry.

The safety council came out of an industry review done three years ago where it was suggested bringing together all the different parts of the industry — from managers to contractors, to workers, the Government and more.

"The OAG group does some of the decision-making for those working underneath us on individual parts of the sector that needed addressing."

That includes the likes of tree fellers certification, contractors certification, law and regulation and council safety regulations, crew culture among others.

"It was recognised the industry needed to take a good look at itself and come up with ways of improving safety and growing a good



culture moving forward," says Stubbs.

"Everyone realised we had to work together to come up with solutions to stop injuring and killing people."

And since then, huge inroads have been made from a combined effort across the industry.

"There has always been plenty of emphasis on safety and systems, and now it is about PCBU's, employers and employees embracing this safety culture and owning it every day while at work."

Eastland has led the way when it comes to addressing drug and alcohol use, and has led with safety systems nationally thanks to a dedicated and disciplined local Worksafe inspector.

"The contractors are now leading the way with mechanisation and other safety innovations."

Stubbs, who has been in the industry for more than 20 years and in business for 16 years, says forestry is a great industry to be part of.

"The people, the machines, the work, being outdoors and challenges all make it a great thing to be part of," he says. "Now, other people are starting to value it and appreciate the employment opportunities it offers."

"It can be a safe industry to work in and has a multitude of career choices that will and do support families and lifestyles very well."



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## 'There is a future in forestry'

WITH 30 years experience in the industry, EIT Tairāwhiti forestry tutor Alan Paulson knows what contractors are looking for.

Paulson is a heavy equipment automotive engineer by trade. He went into logging in the late '80s — starting off using a chainsaw and operating bulldozers and skidders, as well as maintaining and repairing his employer's logging equipment.

Paulson went on to manage his first crew as a foreman, eventually managing seven crews at one time.

"I have always been passionate about training and helping people get into the forestry industry," he says.

"With the courses I run, I aim to get students work-ready by the time they complete the certificate."

A big component of the programme is one month's work experience on site with a contractor.

This means students are up and leaving town for work before 5am, spending a full day in an industry environment.

It is Paulson's experience and real-world teachings that have paid off for Shaun Whyte, a recent graduate of the NZ Certificate in Forest Harvesting Operations (Level 3).

Whyte finished the 20-week programme early March, and 48 hours later started full-time employment with Blackstump Logging Ltd.

Previously, Whyte was working in a low-wage job and decided EIT posed a good way to get out of the low-wage, low-skill trap.

A couple of weeks and a couple of pay packets later, he says he is pleased with his decision.

"I just wanted something different. There is a future in forestry and I wanted the tickets to start."

Whyte was actually offered the job while on work placement with Blackstump before he even finished the programme.

"I am a lot fitter now and I have more skills.

Getting up early is not a problem now, so it was good to get used to it during the programme."

He has been working as a "skiddy" and doing a bit of breaking out.

"I am loving it. Blackstump is a good company with good people.

"The knowledge I got through the EIT forestry programme has been really handy. I would recommend it as a great way to get into the industry and hit the ground running."

Blackstump Logging owner Wayne McEwan says recruiting staff is a problem many in the industry face.

"This programme will get them a job. They get on a saw and they know the safe zones, they are coming out of it knowing what to do. It is something to be proud of because they started with nothing."

McEwan says he could see Whyte was "really good", straight away.

"Anyone would have grabbed him — he was getting out of bed early, showing up with a full lunch box and working an honest day.

"Starting work with those boxes ticked means people are more likely to get through the first couple of months."

McEwan says the combination of team spirit, variety and money are factors that make forestry a great industry for young people to consider — especially as it gets more and more high-tech.

"They are all on good money. A ticketed breaker-out is taking home \$2000 in the hand a fortnight. They just roam the hills with a t-shirt, shorts and a hard hat, hooking on logs and they love it."

Although he has just started, Whyte has an idea where he would like forestry to take him.

"In the future I would like to jump on one of those big machines," he says. "I think I might put the chainsaw down and fall in love with it."

The next intake for EIT Tairāwhiti's NZ Certificate in Forest Harvesting Operations (Level 3) starts in May.



**IT'S A FAMILY THING:** from left Loryn, Grant, Dan, Matt and Alyse Stewart out doing what they love.

## Dedicated, tight unit

THE Stewart family don't believe in doing things by halves.

Patriarch Grant, with wife Loryn, sons Matt (26) and Daniel (23) and daughter Alyse (20) all made the big move from Dunedin to Gisborne four years ago to continue their company Stewart Logging Limited.

It takes some dedication to live, work and play together, but this lot are a tight unit.

"I was hoping we would all be involved in the business together," says Grant, "but wasn't sure it would actually happen".

They sat down as a family before making the decision to move north, and haven't regretted it for a minute.

"There is plenty of work up here and if we wanted to expand our business and set the kids up in it, it had to be done."

Matt is the company's hauler operator and in charge of getting the wood to the landing, Daniel is an all-rounder and turns his hand to wherever it is needed, with Alyse the processor operator.

Loryn takes care of all the admin side of the business and Grant ... he runs the whole shooting box.

"We are blessed out of our boots to have three good kids who stand by us."

Forestry hasn't always been Grant's lot — on leaving school he followed his father and grandfather into the butchery trade, which led to the

freezing works — where he met Loryn.

In the off-season he did all sorts of jobs, including a stint as a tree pruner in a silviculture gang.

It was then his wife's stepfather asked him if he would join his forestry company, Saunders Logging ... and the rest is history.

He felled for him for 13 years before establishing his own business, contracting back to Wenita Forest Products.

"You have to be a special breed to be in forestry," says Grant. "I just love working outside ... it's hands on and just stepping back and seeing when you fell an area, well, it's pretty awesome. I like the challenge of being able to log a hard area."

He would be more than happy to see more generations of Stewarts follow the family business.

"A lot of people say forestry is for dummies, well, nothing could be further from the truth. You have to be smart. You have to be switched on — if you aren't on your game it's dangerous."

He too has seen plenty of changes over the years — all for the good.

"When I first started, you went out there and just did what you thought was right and hopefully survived the day.

"It's completely different now and everyone is looking out for each other."

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