

BACKYARD BLITZ

Words and photographs by Emily Weekes

Amey Bros has been a family transport business since it began in 1945. For the past 42 years, Bruce and his wife, Jennifer have sold and delivered wholesale quarry products to landscapers. But in 2013, they added another arm to the business – selling gardening supplies to householders.

Bruce and Jennifer didn't intend to take on a whole new business in their later years. But when the opportunity arose to purchase land in Pialligo they knew they had to act. Today, Amey Bros encompasses a retail landscaping and garden supply centre called Stonehenge Beltana, a garden and giftware centre located in Pialligo, a stone's throw from Canberra airport.

Up until this year, the couple had worked alongside Bruce's brother, Alan and his wife, Nanette. The four of them have been managing the family business since 1976 when the brothers' father invited them to take up a third each in Amey Bros. "Alan retired in January. He's gone fishing! He's the smart one," laughs Bruce.



L-R: Jennifer and Bruce Amey from Amey Bros with Kevin Adolphus (BPW Transpec)





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While Amey Bros have always supplied wholesalers, Stonehenge Beltana caters to an entirely different audience, a retail nursery that supplies consumers with landscaping and gardening features like pavers, ponds, pumps and pots – as well as selling giftware in the large onsite shop.

“Retail is very big here in Canberra,” says Bruce. “People have small gardens so they want to make them more attractive by putting things on the walls and adding water features.” It’s a sign of the times. Twenty years ago, residents in Canberra would

have come to this nursery to buy 40 or 50 metres of soil for their lawns. As one market quietsens, another perks up.

Stonehenge Beltana is located in Pialligo, a street zoned for nurseries. It’s where the locals come when they need landscaping and gardening supplies. There are orchids and nurseries dotted all along the street and one or two cafes for when shoppers start to fade and need reinforcements. Amey Bros has become a unique business – by offering both retail and wholesale supplies to its customers.

On the weekend, this site is booming. “Last Friday, you could hardly get a park in here, there were so many people around,” says Jennifer. While this business is thriving, Amey Bros simultaneously operates a fleet of trucks carting supplies to and from the quarries, for their own customers as well as other larger companies like Holcim and Boral. As directors, Bruce and Jennifer are busier than ever. They send their fleet to Canberra Truck Repairs for servicing – a 40-year-long relationship – and every new trailer comes fitted with BPW axles and suspension. For

Bruce, choosing BPW is about minimising maintenance costs and keeping the fleet on the road.

“We’ve got trailers with BPW suspension that are probably 10 years old and have never had a bush needed replacing. But there are other companies, every time you re-line the brakes, you have to do the whole lot,” he explains. “Our maintenance over five years is probably an eighth of the cost of other brands on the market.”

Bruce and Jennifer were married two days

after the brothers joined the family business. “I would never push my child to be a truck driver after being married to one,” says Jennifer, laughing. This year they’ll celebrate their 42nd wedding anniversary and their first as sole directors of Amey Bros.

“When I met Bruce, we saw each other two nights a week because he finished work at 2am,” explains Jennifer. “Later, when we married and had children, for a few years there, I reared our three kids on my own, but he always put the kids to bed with a story, before heading out again at 4am.” It’s a way of

life,” says Bruce. “You get used to it.” Today, their son, Jack manages Stonehenge Beltana. Their eldest son, Ben (and his business partner) runs his own landscaping business and their daughter has a successful career in the public service. “No headaches for her,” jokes Bruce. The couple are looking ahead, weighing up options and recruiting new staff to help them prepare for the future. “If we get the right help, we’ll be right,” says Bruce. “You have to have someone you can trust.”