

MBL wins prestigious award for our export **EXCELLENCE**



Delighted at MBL's awards success are (from left) Chairman Bruce Carter, Quality Assurance Manager Michaela Rock, CEO Warren McLean, Operations Manager (Merchandise Division) Bexley Carman and Operations Manager (Proteins Division) Gary Deutrom.

MBL's success at turning raw material into premium pet food for export has led to a major award for our "global impact, ambition and world-class capability."

MBL triumphed at the Impact Awards against 60 highly-credentialed export companies, including some world leaders in aerospace and advanced technology.

It's the most significant award win in our 113-year history, a stunning endorsement of MBL's modernisation and strong growth over the past decade.

As a Co-operative, benefits of our export success flow to our Membership in the form of consistent rebates and competitive pricing for merchandise under the Ikon brand.

Export profits also fund MBL's worldwide search for new, improved



products at competitive prices, and the development of our own products (see page 3 for a story on our new test kitchen).

"In the end, MBL's success is for our Members," says CEO Warren McLean of the Impact Awards triumph.

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MBL's Christmas Trading Hours

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MBL Christmas Trading Hours

Please note showroom counter sales and customer / members pick up will be closed early on the days detailed below.

These hours WILL NOT affect customer / members deliveries, however phone orders will be closed in line with these trading hours.

Country deliveries will be limited by regional transport timetables.

DATE	TRADING STATUS	TIME
Friday Dec 21	Early close	2pm
Monday Dec 24	Early close	3pm
Friday Dec 28	Early close	3pm
Monday Dec 31	Early close	3pm

All other days are normal trading hours

Big's not always better

Regular surveys of sales trends of individual products can result in saving time and money, helping combat the spiralling costs of running a butcher shop.

So says the Chairman of AMIC's Retail Council, Trevor Hill, after a survey at his Bruce's Meat store at Mitcham revealed some surprising sales trends.

The survey, on a recent Saturday, showed that 56% of total sales were made from just 25% of the tray display.

"Our full display has 120 trays yet 56% of sales came from 20 lines in 30 trays," says Trevor (pictured).

"My first reaction was, 'Hell, why did we spend three hours doing this big display?'"

"Surveys can make you evaluate just how much time is given to the different tasks of running a butcher shop, at a time when we're all looking at reducing hours.

"They can give you an appreciation of effort – there's no point putting money and effort into preparing a tray that won't generate income; time is best spent doing other things, like making sure there's good supply of your better sellers.

"It's all about making you focus on what you are doing – how to save time yet maintain your position.

"Sales are driven by consumers. We have no control over consumers but we can control how to best run our shops while still meeting demand."

Trevor, who first practised



detailed stock surveys when he was in the ice cream industry, says there can be value in surveys breaking down sales to different days of the week.

"You might know that you sold 30kg of rump in a week but a detailed survey can show that you sold only 2kg on the Monday," he says.

"So you may only need prepare and display 2kg of rump on one tray on Mondays. If you need more as you go, you can cut it.

"If you put out too much rump, it has to be made into stir fry after two days and if the stir fry doesn't sell, you turn it into

mince after another two days.

"Each step takes time in preparation and the rump keeps losing value."

Trevor organises his display by species, allocating space to reflect sales.

He says chicken is his top seller, with 35% of total meat sales followed by beef (32%), sausages (13%), lamb (12%) and pork (6%).

These figures are for Trevor's Mitcham store but he says they are similar at other shops in

MBL NEWS

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Bexley Carman in MBL's sparkling new stainless steel test kitchen with Darryl Vaitkus and sausage maker Dale Rowe.

NEW TEST KITCHEN

MBL has created a modern test kitchen at our Athol Park base, designed to develop better flavour profiles for a range of products, from marinades to sausage meals.

"We aim to take existing products and improve them to help butchers and our other customers keep up with trends," says Operations Manager Bexley Carman.

"There'll be some more flavours coming out and, in a case of everything old is new again, we'll be improving and reviving some things that many have forgotten about.

"The whole exercise is about being relevant by offering extra value adding options to butchers and others in their very competitive marketplaces.

"It's another example of MBL going the extra yard."

The test kitchen is being co-ordinated by Darryl Vaitkus, who has a strong understanding of MBL's broad operations, with experience in our blending, quality assurance, purchasing and warehousing sections.

MBL staffers Dale Rowe and Shane Reynolds have been reviving their old skills as butchers by making sausages with new sausage meals.

Bexley speaks of MBL's work with a sweet chilli marinade as an example of working to improve existing products.

"There was a sweet chilli marinade that needed improvement and we had an idea which basically involved using lime, a little

MBL's developing products to give butchers the edge

chilli and coriander," he says.

"Improving this marinade has been one of the first things we've worked on in the new kitchen, and we have plenty of other ideas to work with.

"We've also developed a new stroganoff recipe which is just beautiful. Stroganoff has gone off the radar a little but it's a natural for winter."

As well as developing our own products, Bexley says MBL is working more with current suppliers to "give us a say on what is offered to butchers."

"Some suppliers supply what they think MBL should stock. Through our reps, we can monitor the trade to understand what butchers want," he says.

"SA tastes can be a little different to other States; some things are more popular here than interstate and vice-versa.

"A supplier might offer us a product that we think can be improved, so we'll take it back and say, 'We want you to reduce the heat of the chilli a little.'

"Sometimes, a product may go back and forth between the supplier and us three or four times before we are totally happy with it.

"People judge food by how it looks as well as tastes, so how a product presents to the eye is also all important."

The new test kitchen offers good benefits yet MBL was able to set it up economically.

"We put in a new floor and stainless steel walls but we were able to use some materials that were already here, including stainless steel benches from the previous owner of the property," Bexley says.

"This has made it a cost-effective project, and our existing staff have the skills, including backgrounds as butchers, to operate it."

MBL Sales Manager Dale Rowe quickly got into the swing of making sausages again, enjoying testing new flavours.

"We installed a mixer mincer to help with blending and binding, and to emulate what our customers are doing in their shops," Dale says.

"We've been doing a lot of trials with sausages using new meals, doing taste tests to evaluate and tweak them before we offer them to the market.

"When we develop something new, we also supply it to a few selected outlets so we can get their feedback before we decide if we'll offer it to the wider market."

How MBL was modernised

CEO Warren McLean's acceptance speech at the Impact Awards

‘Wow, it's only taken 113 years for Master Butchers Co-operative to win a major award like this!

Ours is not a story about overnight success, rather the evolution of an old business into a modern business.

Many companies fail because they don't innovate!

Master Butchers Co-operative (MBL) has been in continuous operation since 1905 and is the last remaining butchers Co-operative in Australia.

The core reason that MBL is alive and strong as a co-operative today is that it has remained relevant to the needs of our Membership.

The Board of MBL gave me a mandate to modernise the Co-op in 2008.

Mike Rankin, Bruce Carter, Paul Slape and Marc Van Kleef were the directors who had the skill and foresight to allow me to invest heavily in capacity and acquire properties to enhance the business.

Appointments were made to key management roles...

Gary Deutrom was appointed Operations Manager, Proteins Division, after 20 years with MBL, from age 20, working in the division.

And Bexley Carman was appointed Operations Manager, Merchandise and Machinery Division, coming in from the wider food industry and giving us a fresh perspective.

The next step was to get serious about quality. Michaela Rock was appointed as Quality Assurance and WHS Manager.

These three executives form the backbone of our team under the CEO.

The teams under these executives have



been built and strengthened over time, improving our buying, quality assurance and export documentation capabilities.

Quality has become MBL's core value.

Core to our development of overseas markets was to make sure our operations could support delivery of the story. This includes practising quality every day, not just at audit time!

Our QA Systems were redeveloped from scratch, and we seek continual improvement in equipment and handling practices.

We aim to never “shut the container door on a problem!”

We got close to the end customers, finding them on the other side of the world and working with them to develop the products they wanted.

And we needed a brand that was recognisable.

Logos were developed to differentiate the three distinct operations areas.

The MBL part of our logos gives a simple, clear vision of who the customer is dealing with. It signifies quality and integrity, always.

In short, it has taken almost 10 years to turn the ship around and modernise a business that was 103 years old when we started on this journey.

- We found new products to replace falling demand
- We developed new products from our existing raw materials
- We found new ways to make products, and
- We found new customers who needed our products

I would like to recognise the support of the Board of MBL, and the loyalty of our Members, of our supply partners and of our very valuable customers, long term and new.

I would like to acknowledge the support of our bank, BankSA, who have been with us for 30 years, providing valuable funding and services.

Most of all, I would like to acknowledge the hard work of our management team and staff, which has led to our success.

Lastly, I would like to recognise the sterling support of the partners of our staff. Thank you.’

‘The core reason that MBL is alive and strong as a co-operative today is that it has remained relevant to the needs of the Membership’ – Warren McLean

“The judges couldn’t believe what we are achieving in what is a very basic industry compared to all the ‘smart’ companies, from aerospace to software.

“They found it amazing that we take waste from butcher shops, turn it into products for export and use the proceeds to give butchers competitive purchasing power.

“We have advanced from making cheap pig and chook feed to making premium pet food ingredients, mainly for North America.

“Judges were impressed at how much has been achieved by a small team with innovative ideas, and how we continue to overcome problems.”

Warren’s chuffed by the trophy’s strong wording – “Awarded for Global Impact,

MBL’s prestigious award for our export excellence

Ambition and World-Class Capability.”

Chairman Bruce Carter says, “Innovation at our plants and our persistence to keep improving have made us a market leader.

“We pride ourselves on getting our products exactly right for end users.”

The Impact Awards were instigated four years ago by the CEO Institute to recognise leading exporters. This year, some 60 companies entered. The list was cut down to 15 before five finalists were named.

Two judges visited MBL, meeting the leader-

ship team and staff to get a “real feel” for the business.

MBL’s financial statements from the past three years were scrutinised, and business and marketing plans were studied, along with references from clients and suppliers.

Judges said MBL “had a strong business plan and had demonstrated innovation in multiple areas.”

They said MBL “had demonstrated growth and market success in Australia, and now derived major revenues from competitive global markets.”



Warren McLean receives the Impact Award from the Department for Industry and Skill’s Executive Director Adam Reid.

Here’s what was said...

The Impact Awards presentation night, at Adelaide Convention Centre, featured a two-minute video presentation to announce MBL’s win. The video can now be viewed at MBL’s website, www.mblsa.com.au

Here is an edited version of the commentary which ran with photos from MBL’s various sites.

‘Innovation takes many forms. Mostly when innovation is uttered, many think of bling – technology that dazzles and delights. But there is a critical type of innovation that deserves the most respect if you value profitability – business model innovation.

An innovative business model can deliver exceptional value to create a strong company.

MBL has opened up export markets and goes from strength to strength selling a basic commodity – protein.

The judges were impressed with MBL’s strong long term financial performance due to innovation in the processing of protein for pet food across Asia, North and South America, and Europe.

MBL also provides tallow, meat meal, blood meal and feather meal.

MBL has a strong commitment to the environment and to quality systems. Their operation saves animal waste going to landfill.

And with \$7.2 million of upgrades to their recycling plants at Wingfield and Keith, they are saving energy and using odour containing biofilters.

International customers value MBL’s quality control assurance and customer service which provides more value than they can find locally – yes, even in the US and Europe.

MBL offers clear proof that the right business model can turn waste into money – even for export markets.

Congratulations to MBL! ’



FANTASTICO!

Nino celebrates **50 years** as king of traditional Italian smallgoods

Never cut corners – that’s the self-imposed golden rule at the core of Nino Deciccia’s unwavering drive to produce the finest Italian smallgoods.

From personally selecting pigs and cattle at markets through to maintaining a sparkling shop, his meticulous attention to detail is his trademark, underscored by his passion for his work.

His business, built from scratch, is presently celebrating 50 successful years, with Nino being a loyal MBL Member right from the start in November, 1968.

At 81, he still works almost 70 hours a week overseeing Nino’s Meat & Smallgoods, a pioneer of the celebrated Italian food scene in Adelaide’s north eastern suburbs.

His authentic smallgoods - headed by mortadella, prosciutto and cacciatore salami - were a godsend for Italian migrants yearning for flavours of home. Their children and grandchildren became fans, too.



“It’s hard to believe that we’re still here after 50 years,” says the fourth generation Italian butcher who migrated with next to nothing.

“I’ve stuck with the original ways of production that my father taught me in Italy. I have never cut corners - and it’s paid off.

“I’ve always worked 11 hours a day and I haven’t stopped. My health has been good - I’ve been lucky.”

Nino is fitter than many men half his age. In this year’s City To Bay event, he won the 6km walk for the over 80s in 53 minutes, 45 seconds.

His life story is inspiring, born in a lineage of master butchers in the small village of San Nicola di Caulonia in the isolated hills of Calabria in southern Italy.

People were poor and education was a privilege, with children working from a young age.

“I had an old photo of me trying to kill a goat when I was seven,” Nino says.

He left school at 11 to be trained in the family business by his father and grandfather who, as the only butchers, were well respected in the village. ➤



Prosciutto

➤ “We had the only shop in the village.

There was no power, so no refrigeration,” Nino says.

“We’d kill pigs in winter and preserve as much as possible. Salami was preserved in the moisture of lard so it would last a whole year.

“I still use my father’s recipe for sausages. I simply call them Italian sausages and they are always popular.

“The quality of what my father made was superb; it was all made from fresh meat and made in the right quantity.”

Armed with knowledge and skills, Nino left the village to work in Milan where he saved enough money to migrate to Australia at age 19.

He departed Messina in April, 1956, on the small ship Flaminia. He says he was lucky to survive the 35-day voyage.

“There were 1,200 people on an unsafe ship. It almost capsized off Perth, taking water. We thought we’d have to swim ashore,” he says.

“On our arrival in Port Melbourne, authorities were stunned that anybody had survived; the ship should never have been allowed to make the voyage.”

Nino found his way to Adelaide. He laboured on the first block of houses to be built in Elizabeth and later worked at GMH.

Life as a professional musician beckoned, after being taught classical music by the village priest back in Italy. He played the organ at Sunday mass for years.

He was also an accomplished accordionist, appearing several times on Channel 9’s Adelaide Tonight program and representing SA in a national competition in Sydney.

On returning to Italy to visit his family, Nino met his future wife Bianca in his home village. She eventually followed him to Adelaide, marrying 53 years ago.

Nino decided that being a musician was not



Nino (second from left) and his crew, pictured in the Paradise shop in 1970.

necessarily going to provide for a family, so he went back to being a butcher and small-goods maker.

From humble beginnings, including making mortadella at home, he established what was to become Nino’s Meat & Smallgoods.

He made small quantities with daily deliveries, quickly building a loyal following among



Proudly Italian... Nino’s main signage pinpoints the Calabrian village of his origin. His logo also features a map of Italy and the national colours.

the Italian community which had been “starved” of authentic smallgoods.

He bought a 630 square metre section of a market garden on Lower North East Rd, Paradise, and built a shop and manufacturing area.

“There was nothing here then apart from market gardens; this was just a part bitumen and part dirt road up to the Hills. There was no sewerage system at the start,” he says.

“I opened here at 10am on Thursday, November 28, 1968, and I still remember my first customer. She and her son had a market garden next door; I still see her at church.”

Nino’s shop has remained in the same location, being extended outwards and upwards over the years.

He was the first in Australia to import premium Travaglini curing equipment from Milan, and began selling his products interstate, mainly NSW, Queensland and the Northern Territory.

“A big store in Leichhardt (a stronghold of Sydney’s vast Italian community) used to buy pallets of my stuff,” he says.

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Cacciatore salami



Mortadella



Capocollo



Olga's turns 40

HOW IT ALL BEGAN WITH SIMPLE CHEVAPCHICHIS

Just what exactly is a beef chevapchichi?

A restaurateur's curiosity, in 1970s Adelaide, eventually led to the founding of Olga's Fine Foods, which is celebrating its 40th year with an expanding national footprint.

Managing Director George Ujvary says his father, also named George, was running a charcoal barbecue restaurant in Hindley St when he befriended a Yugoslav migrant.

"His friend spoke about how he missed Yugoslav chevapchichis which were simply not available in Adelaide in the 1970s," says George, 43, who is a Director of MBL.

"Chevapchichis were foreign to Dad, who

came from Hungary. He wanted to know more and he learnt how to make them with advice from his friend."

The spiced "skinless sausages" quickly became popular with diners at the restaurant. As word spread, there were persistent knocks at the back door as people lined up to take them home.

Recognising wider demand, George senior and his wife Olga began producing chevapchichis, meats and smallgoods for sale direct to the public in 1978 – Olga's Fine Foods was born.

Olga's was the first company in Australia to make and sell beef chevapchichis, which are still made to the original "secret" recipe and



are now sold by the major supermarkets.

Based at Wellend with a staff of about 30, the company has continued the tradition of innovation while staying true to its heritage.

It has expanded its product range over the years to include family favourites such as schnitzels, koftas, patties, burgers, yiros and marinated steaks.

Steady growth on the national stage over the past decade has been driven by George junior, who began his career in food by crumbing schnitzels at his parents' restaurant.

"My parents saw wide potential for their 'chevaps' and rented a small storage space in Light Square where they started production," says George, a self-confessed "obsessed foodie" with a host of degrees and awards. 



Like father, like son... chevapchichi pioneer George Ujary with son George in 2010.

▶ “They began by supplying Con’s at Adelaide Central Market and some other continental stores.

“They started supplying Foodland and then Woolworths approached them, and they moved to premises on Port Rd before shifting to bigger premises here at Welland in the 1980s.

“Dad hasn’t really retired. He contributes in a number of ways but’s he’s more in the background now.”

Woolworths is Olga’s biggest customer with Coles, Foodland and more recently Aldi completing the big picture.

“Aldi nationally has been really good for us, particularly for lamb yiros, marinated steak and beef schnitzel,” George says.

Olga’s also has slots in Aldi’s national seven-day specials program, in which one product - such as chicken patties - is supplied for one week.

“Supplying one week’s special for Aldi nationally equates to our total production for SA; it’s like adding an extra week,” George says.

“Over recent years, we’ve become more efficient in production; not wasting time. That’s what drives profit.”

George - food blogger, gastronomy lecturer and founding board member of Food SA - has been a judge at the prestigious Sydney Royal Show’s branded meat competition for



OLGA’S

FINE FOODS PTY LTD - EST. 1978

the past seven years.

He has been Chair of Judges for the past three years, giving him the opportunity to judge 100% Australian farmed lamb, beef and pork.

“I take my judging role pretty seriously. It’s a privilege to try some of the best meat that Australia’s producing,” he says.

“I get to work with passionate people from right across the chain; there are farmers, butchers and chefs on the panel.

“There’s value in connecting with primary producers and providing feedback that encourages the pursuit of excellence.”

George was previously a judge of small-

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‘Over recent years, we’ve become more efficient in production; not wasting time. That’s what drives profit’ – George Ujvary

Olga's 40 years

From page 9

goods at the Sydney Royal Show for several years, and this year Olga's came away with two medals.

Olga's chevapchichi won a silver medal and its Texas Beef, Cheese and Pork sausage was awarded a bronze medal.

"It's a prestigious competition and it was really good to get recognition for our products at national level," George says.

George accepted an invitation to join MBL's Board in 2015, saying he has thoroughly enjoyed the role.

"It has been refreshing to get involved with another business at strategic level and help answer some pretty big questions," he says.

"I've found MBL to be run like a regular business but decisions are made with Members' best interests in mind.

"Until I joined the Board, I didn't fully realise the vital importance to MBL of the Wingfield and Keith rendering plants.

"It has been rewarding to get involved with the rendering side; as well as producing valuable export products, rendering is a solution to the environmental problems involved with the disposal of meat industry waste, which can't be used as landfill."



Royal Sydney judge George Ujvary.



Nino's 50 years

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Nino has always supported MBL, joining on November 19, 1968 – nine days before he opened his shop. Conversely, MBL has always supported Nino.

"I became a Member straight away, back when MBL was in Waymouth St, and I'm still a Member. I've always been happy with MBL," he says.

He says he has "spent a lot of money with MBL over the years", adding he has also benefitted from the annual rebates.

Although Nino still works long hours and oversees all matters, his son Ilario and son-in-law Daniel now handle day to day production, business administration and quality assurance.

Nino still selects livestock, saying that the "secret" of quality smallgoods is to start with quality meat.

"I've always been extremely careful about what I buy and how we handle the meat. Attention to

Quality Assurance is vital – that's why we're still here," he says.



Young Nino was an accomplished accordionist, appearing on TV.

Kellie adds takeaway

Kellie Walduck has fired up the charcoal barbecue to enjoy immediate success with her Takeway Thursday nights.

Kellie, of St James Quality Cuts at Clapham, began with a burger night selling 106 beef, chicken and pulled pork burgers plus chips and corn on the cob.

Inspired, she had similar success with a yiros night of lamb and chicken yiros plus AB packs and chips.

Most sales were pre-orders for set-time pickup.

Bouyed by her success, Kellie plans more Takeaway Thursday nights, from 5.30pm to 7pm.

"It's a healthy twist on traditional takeaway, offering people something a little different," she says.

"People can see how we cook and later they can buy the same burger patties and yiros meat in our shop to try at home.

"We can't just be butchers; we need fresh ideas to engage people, hence our shop motto, More Than Butchers."

Master Butcher Dave Armstrong is marketing “private collection” smoked hams for Christmas as part of his strategy to upstage supermarkets with limited amounts of high-end products.

“Each ham will be from a small batch and will come with its own bin number, just like a bottle of fine wine,” Dave says.

“Each will have a tag which states the date and what South Australian farm it came from.”

Last year, Dave introduced popular whiskey dry aged streak as a flagship product at Goodwood Quality Meats, successfully driving up demand by limiting availability.

They are offered spasmodically and quickly sell out.

SELLING HAM LIKE WINE

A few weeks ago, in mid November, he emailed “a very exclusive offer” of “private collection” ham to his customer data base, with 30 people ordering within the first few days.

Dave and his talented team are making only about 50 of these bone-in hams to drive an image of exclusivity and quality which extends to the full product range.

“Our whiskey steak and these hams are wonderful products for us to market as they are special to us; they certainly aren’t super-market commodities,” Dave says.

“We’ve worked on the ham for the last two

years, on and off, playing with the flavours. We are very happy with the result.

“We use MBL wheelie bins, putting 10 hams to a bin and each is numbered, like wine.

“Free range Berkshire pork is laid down in our special blend brine, and we use a touch of Canadian maple syrup which has been aged in oak barrels.

“We smoke with apple and hickory, giving a delicate sweetness with a beautiful smoke flavour.”

The hams – full ones at 6-7kg and halves at 3.5kg – are priced at \$21.99kg.

Big’s not always better

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the Bruce’s Meat group.

At the award-winning St Agnes shop, Carly McLean trimmed her big-display double shop into a more manageable single shop a few months ago.

The site has featured a single-front butcher shop for many years until 2009 when then owner Pino Bria took the lease next door to double the size. The shop has changed hands twice since then.

By reverting back to a smaller shop but still meeting customer demand, Carly is saving time and money.

The biggest obvious saving is from rent but there are significant savings in time and wages, from having a smaller display to fill at day’s start to cleaning a smaller shop at day’s end.

“We’ve gone from about 160 trays in a long display; it was really more like a storage cabinet than a display. We had to put in so much effort to make it look full,” Carly says.

“Now we have 120 products in an L-shape, with extras like sauces and condiments on another wall. It’s more manageable and meets customers’ needs.



Carly McLean... her smaller shop is more manageable yet it still meets the needs of her customers.

“When I took over here, I thought a big display would be great for showing off all our things but we found some things simply didn’t sell well as people in this area tend to buy on price.

“Over the past 18 months, we have built trust and connection with customers and we’ve tweaked things to better provide what customers want.

“I love aged steak but it’s not a big seller here; we’re better off making sure we’re making enough schnitzels as there’d be uproar if we ran out.

“With the big shop, if we didn’t start cleaning at 4pm we

couldn’t be out by 6pm. We would have been better off using the time on other things.”

In 2017, Carly blitzed AMIC’s Awards for Excellence with her St Agnes and nearby Fairview Park stores each attaining the highest gold standard for management.

Judges praised the St Agnes store for staff development, customer service, product development and marketing.

While it made undeniable business sense to reduce the shop’s size, Carly remains dedicated to providing quality products and personalised service.

“Food is my thing. I want quality, and there are no short cuts taken here to deliver consistent quality. Consistency is essential, so that customers know they will get the same quality every time,” she says.

She gives all customers her full attention, no matter how much they spend.

“I have an older lady who comes in every week just to buy two tenderloins for \$2 and she likes a little chat,” Carly says.

“She once said she felt funny only spending \$2, but I assured her it’s fine by me. The more customers you make happy, the more word spreads about you.”

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Being a butcher is in Nyakong's blood

It seems only natural for Sudanese migrant Nyakong Duoth to aspire to be a butcher.

Nyakong, 16, has pleasant childhood memories of hunting deer with spears and watching the meat being divided for her family and friends.

With meat processing part of her early family life, a career as a butcher seemed logical and she's now impressing Carly McLean at Bruce's Meat, St Agnes.

She has stood out as a school based apprentice this year, leading to Carly taking her on as a full apprentice in 2019.

Nyakong, who migrated with her family from civil war-torn Sudan in 2008, is over the moon, saying, "I love meat; I grew up eating meat and I want a career in it."

Carly is quick to praise her young charge, saying she is "absolutely reliable" and her work ethic is "amazingly strong."

"We started with her from scratch and she's been a great blank canvass to work with," she says.

"She's a perfectionist, wanting to keep learning and improving. Her shift may be ending but she wants to stay until the job is done."

Nyakong says her school friends at Charles Campbell College, Paradise, laughed when she said she'd be doing a school based apprenticeship as a butcher.

"They were really surprised at first, thinking it wasn't something for a girl to do but I explained how interested I was and now they are fine about it," she says.

It's probably just as well that Nyakong didn't tell her friends all the gory details of hunting deer in Sudan.

"Going hunting with adults was more a thing for the boys but I

just went along with Dad when I was about eight or nine," she says.

"We had to use small spears because we were young. I had fun, but I didn't hit anything.

"Watching cows (deer) being

killed in front of me wasn't so much fun.

"We'd dance around the cow, kill it and drink some of the blood - it was custom."

Nyakong says she's enjoying her training with Carly and the other

butchers at St Agnes, saying she's learning all the time.

She usually does three shifts a week, mainly on Thursday nights and on weekends.

"I thought it would be easy but there's a lot to it. I'm learning about the different cuts and how to cut meat," she says.

Carly says Nyakong has a "fantastic work ethic for a young person in her first job."

"She'll stay back after closing to clean up with me, and she's happy to do extra shifts if needed," she says.

"A challenge has been teaching her about cooking so she can give advice to customers, but she's continually learning.

"It took time for her to understand how the heat goes through meat and how long it takes to cook, but she's getting there.

"One day she'll understand and won't need to look around to me when she's being asked cooking advice."

To gain experience, Nyakong began cooking meals for her family, initially learning to cook easy-carve roasts. Her success boosted her confidence.

She says, "Carly's very patient with me, making sure I understand what she's telling me.

"I'm enjoying learning to be a butcher. I realise I need to work hard and take it seriously, as it will be my career.

"I'm lucky there are good opportunities in Australia."

