



Looking good... the main section of the 10-metre, custom-made counter.

MAKE IT WITH

MBL

We project manage a new shop fit-out



Custom-made boning bench with nally tub holders underneath.



Delighted shop owner Jules Pfitzner with MBL's Ryan Mercier.

When South-East beef and lamb producers Jules and Ian Pfitzner sought guidance on how to fit out a butcher shop, MBL went the whole hog.

The Pfitznors readily accepted MBL Machinery Manager Ryan Mercier's offer to project manage the fit-out of their new "paddock-to-plate" shop at Nairne in the Adelaide Hills.

Ryan, a former butcher with engineering experience, liaised with the Pfitznors and their butchers to design the shop and production areas before stepping up to turn the concept into reality.

He organised the manufacture of a 10-metre counter which holds 70 large trays, made-to-measure workbenches designed for free-flowing production, and a purpose-built railing system.

Several fridges and POS equipment were added, along with a substantial list of MBL-supplied machinery and merchandise essential for the shop's launch.

The project came in at around \$250,000. It marked the first time that MBL has undertaken a shop fit-out, and is in keeping with our philosophy of going the extra mile in the service of our members.

The Pfitznors, from prime grazing country near Bordertown, expect to sell five bodies of their own beef and 10 of their lambs through the shop, which opened in February and is run by butchers Angus Mackay and Declan Wright.

"People love the paddock-to-plate story of our beef and lamb. The early response has exceeded our expectations; we've had amazing feedback," says Jules Pfitzner.

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OUR NEW NATIONAL CHAMPS

◆ Tim Von Stanke
of Mt Gambier

◆ Deryk De Kruyf
of Mt Compass

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Tweaks to AMIC competitions

AMIC's national body has tweaked its Sausage King and burger competitions for 2024, in further steps to streamline processes and raise standards.

Entries open in April for all competitions, to be held in June ahead of the SA awards night on July 13 or August 3, depending on venue availability.

The changes involve removing a layer of judging to determine the State champion in each Sausage King and burger category, and reducing SA's number of competition regions from four to three.

Each category for each region will be judged by the one set of judges on the same day at Regency TAFE to ensure judging consistency.

At day's end, regional points tallies will be examined as a whole, with the top three

points earners in each category being awarded first, second and third for the State.

The highest points earner will be declared State champion and advance to represent SA at the national titles in February.

This new system ends the previous final extra layer of judging involving a cook-off for the winning regional entries to determine State placings.

"We will put the judges through a judging masterclass so that we are able to obtain credible, fair and transparent judging," says AMIC's Chris Kelly.

Another main change in SA will be the reduction in the number of competition regions from four to three.

The Adelaide Metro region, which includes the Hills and Fleurieu Peninsula, and the combined Riverland and South-East region will remain, but the former Mid North and West Coast regions will merge to form the North West region.

Chris says North West will cover all areas of the State not included in the Adelaide Metro and Riverland/South-East regions.

"It will cover everywhere north of Port Wakefield, including the Mid North areas up to Port Augusta and Whyalla, as well as the Yorke and Eyre Peninsulas," he says.

"It's a case of back to the future. North West was split up in 2019 to form Mid North and West Coast but these regions have had low entry rates. Last

year, we had no entries in some categories.

"Low entry rates in the northern regions have partly been due to natural attrition, with some businesses no longer operating.

"It makes sense to combine the Mid North and West Coast regions to provide stronger and more credible competitions."

Chris expects the total number of entries from North West to be about the same as for the Riverland/South-East.

The Apprentice of the Year competition will continue unchanged, with the mystery box competition to be held at Regency TAFE on June 4.

The tweaking of the Sausage King and burger competitions continues an AMIC streamlining process.

Entry forms went online to simplify the process, and the traditional State smallgoods competitions were abandoned to make way for the national Australian Charcuterie Excellence Awards.

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VICKY SHOWS THE WAY

The chronic shortage of skilled butchers could be eased by more women taking up mature-age apprenticeships, with the Riverland's Vicky Yates a shining example. Vicky, 38, has completed her three-year apprenticeship with flying colours, admired for her diverse skills and work ethic. Her full story is on page 10.

Drakes, celebrating its 50th year in business, has paid high tribute to MBL's significant and growing contribution as a trusted supplier of packaging and ingredients.

Operations Manager Phil Shayler says, "Our relationship with MBL has been a long and rewarding one spanning nearly 25 years, commencing in 1999.

"The relationship that we have developed over the years has continued to strengthen and we regard MBL as one of our most professional and loyal suppliers.

"The trust, integrity and respect that we have for each other is unique.

"One of many reasons why we value MBL's support is the strong relationships we have developed over the years with the MBL team."

Phil says MBL works with Drakes to find or develop new products, utilising the latest technology.

"MBL has always provided us with the latest market trends so we can keep up with what is current," he says.

"Valuable insights into what is happening worldwide are accompanied by MBL's advice as to what we should be looking at.

"We are proud to be associated with MBL and we look forward to another 25 years of being a member of the co-op."

MBL CEO Jamie Higgins thanked Phil for his kind words, saying: "We, in turn, have the highest regard for Drakes as one of our biggest and most valuable members.

"Our relationship has stood the test of time and is growing. We heartily congratulate Drakes as they celebrate 50 years in business."

Drakes' impressive growth was underscored in 2020 with its accumulation of one million shares in MBL.

From humble beginnings as a



Drakes Managing Director Roger Drake and his son John-Paul... strong supporters of MBL.

Drakes praises MBL as a trusted key supplier

small, three-lane supermarket in Mitcham in 1974 with four staff, Drakes has become Australia's largest independent grocery retailer, with annual turnover topping \$1 billion.

The family-owned and operated business now has 66 stores across South Australia (44) and Queensland (22), employing over 6,000 people.

There are plans to grow its store footprint to at least 80 stores by 2027.

Reflecting on his 50 years in

business, Managing Director and Founder Roger Drake expresses gratitude to his supportive customers and hard-working staff.

"Our customers have always been the most important people in our business. We strive to provide superior customer service," says Roger, mirroring MBL's core business philosophy.

"Our strength also lies in operating on the principles of supporting local manufacturers, farmers and suppliers."

Roger began in the supermarket industry in 1965 at Coles.

"After a few years working my way through all facets of the business, I decided I could give this a go on my own and in 1974 opened my first small supermarket," he says.

"Then in 1977, I opened my first large supermarket and with the support of my staff and customers, the rest is history!"

In 2019, Drakes opened a \$125 million, state-of-the-art distribution centre in Edinburgh North, signifying the beginning of their independence as a grocery retailer.

The distribution centre is equivalent to three times the size of the MCG or 40 Olympic-sized swimming pools, utilising \$15 million worth of robotics and housing over 23,000 separate lines of products.

Second-generation Director John-Paul Drake says Drakes will always remain a family business, with three generations of family currently working in it.

"Drakes is long term. We will always be a family business with family values," he says.



At a dinner in 2020 to mark Drakes' one-million MBL shares milestone were (from left) MBL Chairman George Ujvary, Drakes founder Roger Drake and MBL CEO Jamie Higgins.

The Pfitzner family's decision to open a butcher shop was prompted by the farmgate price of their premium South-East beef plummeting by more than half.

"The price dropped to just \$4.50kg last year, down from \$10kg the year before. We needed to think outside the box," says Jules Pfitzner, whose 5,000-acre farming property is in glorious grazing country at Mundulla, near Bordertown.

Jules and her husband Ian decided to open a butcher shop at Nairne to sell their own beef and lamb, giving them control from paddock to plate.

It was barely six months from conception to the opening of Pfitzner Meats & Butchery after the farmers reached out to MBL for help.

In a first for MBL, our Machinery Manager Ryan Mercier project managed the shop's \$250,000 fit-out from go to whoa, and organised the supply of all machinery and merchandise.

The sparkling shop, with a large rear production area, opened in February and has already become popular, exceeding sales expectations.

It's run by butchers Angus Mackay and Declan Wright, with Jules overseeing customer service and handling bookkeeping.

"I've been blown away by the level of support and excitement from people. It's been amazing and it's only early days as we get ourselves more widely known," Jules says.

"We offer quality meat at affordable prices, with our motto *Savour The Flavour*.

"People love the beef and lamb from our farm; we've had amazing feedback."

Farming family realises paddock-to-plate dream with MBL's help



Shop owner Jules Pfitzner and manager Angus Mackay with prime South-East beef.

Promoters of the paddock-to-plate philosophy, the Pfitznors have the weekly target of selling five bodies of their own beef and 10 bodies of their lamb through the shop.

Jules was full of praise for MBL's help in setting up the shop. "Ryan has been very good. He's always helpful, always doing the best he can for us," she says.

The Pfitznors were given initial insights into retail butchery by Declan Wright who, in a change of pace from butchering, was working for them as farm hand.

A butcher with 12 years' experience and a

certified smallgoods maker, Declan told the Pfitznors all about MBL, saying the co-operative should play a key role as a trusted supplier of machinery and merchandise.

"From past experience, I had no hesitation in recommending MBL for advice and supply," Declan says.

After securing premises at Nairne, Jules took Declan's list of machinery requirements to MBL for what became a two-hour meeting with Ryan last September.

Ryan says, "Jules and Ian are farmers, not butchers, and they needed our help. I thought maybe MBL could project manage the fit-out even though we've never done it before."

MBL's senior management gave Ryan, a former butcher with an engineering background, the green light to proceed, much to the delight of the Pfitznors.

"From the get-go, I was able to bring a lot of businesses together to come up with what I regard as a beautiful shop," Ryan says.

"Just about everything was custom made. With my experience, I can speak to engineers, sheet metal manufacturers and butchers in their own language.

"All the work benches, including the sausage and brine tables, were



Custom-made benches ensure the new shop's large work area is free-flowing.

➤ made to size and welded, not bolted together, so they are sturdy and don't wobble.

"We designed a boning bench with an end at 45 degrees to best fit the space and with nally tub holders at an angle underneath.

"The washdown sinks and the railing system were also fabricated for this shop.

"As a quality fit-out, it wasn't cheap but the reward will outweigh the cost over time.

"The same applies to the machinery here. The Pfitzners invested in high-standard machinery from MBL, including a sausage filler, mixer/mincer, bandsaw and smoker.

"I worked with the manufacturer of the long display cabinet, and with GaP Solutions for POS equipment.

"The site used to be a butcher shop and the refrigeration was already here, which saved around \$50,000. Apart from that, everything else is new.

"We give a massive Thank You to Ian and Jules for investing in MBL and for their faith in us to deliver this project.

"They have a great business model in paddock-to-plate and I fully expect them to enjoy success."

Retailing butchery has been a new experience for the Pfitzners who were broadacre farmers before "going into cattle big time" 15 years ago. They have added lambs more recently.

They raised their four children on the farm, in one of the South-East's most picturesque areas. Their eldest son Sam helps Ian run the farm and another son, Jake, wants to follow suit when he leaves school.

"We're proud of what we make, of what we



Angus ages the Pfitzner's beef for a minimum of two weeks before processing it.



Declan gets to work cutting tomahawks.

grow. We look after our cows and the quality of our meat is high," Jules says.

The Pfitzner's cattle and lambs are slaughtered by Michael Richards and his team at the Richards abattoir on the outskirts of Bordertown.

Michael's cousin Steve runs Bordertown's

Richards Quality Meats, SA's biggest regional butcher shop and one of MBL's oldest members. The shop has operated in the same location for the past 88 years.

Declan Wright, originally from Victoria, worked in the Richards shop for seven years before joining the Pfitzners as a farm hand.

"I just happened to be in the right place to give Ian and Jules advice about opening a shop and knew from my time at Richards that MBL could be relied on to help," he says.

The new shop is managed by Angus Mackay, who joined from much-awarded Mount Pleasant Butcher after previous experience in shops at Hahndorf, Glenelg and Burnside.

"It's been a lot more to opening a shop from scratch than I expected so it's been a big learning curve. It's been a lot of work but rewarding. Everything's working pretty well," Angus says.

"We have a big counter, almost 10 metres in total with 70 big trays, and I didn't know if we'd fill it at the start but we did.

"A lot of people have helped us, including Ryan Mercier and rep Chris Rowe from MBL. John Hill from PIRSA has been great – he's a legend!"

Angus and Declan process beef and lamb carcasses delivered from Richards' abattoir. Beef is aged for a minimum of two weeks and lamb for a minimum of one week. Pork carcasses come from Kapunda and all chicken is free range.

Jules says, "We have artisan butchers. They break down carcasses; our meat doesn't come out of boxes.

"People love what we do. It makes you feel good to get great feedback."



Eye-catching... premium beef is showcased in the counter area closest to the front door.

AMIC national awards night sponsored by iKONpack

South Australian butchers stood tall at the iKONpack-sponsored AMIC national awards night on the Sunshine Coast. Here, we toast our new national champs Tim Von Stanke and Deryk De Kruyf, and the strong showing by apprentice Nick Parashakis.



Winners can laugh... new national Sausage King champion Tim Von Stanke in his new shop. Photo: Stock Journal.

Former South-East crayfisherman Tim Von Stanke has celebrated the success of his new Mt Gambier butcher shop by landing his first national Sausage King crown.

Tim, 50, who quit crayfishing to take up a mature-age butcher apprenticeship nine years ago, says he was “surprised and delighted” at winning the Pork category for his popular Traditional Pork sausage.

“It’s an incredible achievement and an honour to be recognised for our dedication to quality and flavour,” he says.

“We’ve been making this pork sausage for

quite a while but we’ve tweaked it a little with a few tricks like getting the ratios right, and it’s worked.”

Tim hails from a crayfishing-family based at Carpenter Rocks, 35km south-west of Mt Gambier.

He says he “naturally” became a crayfisherman, following the lead of his grandfather, father, uncles and cousins.

“I was a fisherman for 25 years and skippered my own boat for 10 years, but increasing operating costs and decreasing returns made it hard,” Tim says.

He took up an apprenticeship at age 41 with former national Sausage King Mick Lamond, an old friend, at Collins Court Butcher, Mt Gambier.

Tim purchased Swallow Drive Meat Supply near Mt Gambier’s famous Blue Lake a few months after completing his apprenticeship in 2019.

With hard work and enthusiasm, he built up the turnover of the small shop on the back of a growing reputation and success in AMIC awards.

He surprised himself by winning

Nick’s ‘cool’ learning curve

Nick Parashakis says he has become a better all-round butcher after the “cool” experience of competing in the national Apprentice of the Year competition.

“It was pretty cool seeing the other apprentices’ skill calibre and different ways of doing things,” says Nick, 23, of Campbelltown Centre Meats.

“They do more value adding in some other States and are a bit more flamboyant. We learnt things from each other.”

Only a few points separated the six apprentices at the end of the competition, with their overall standard rated the highest for many years by the judges.

The main event was a “mystery box” competition where competitors broke down beef, pork and chicken before making assorted products from a selection of supplied ingredients.

They were given little notice of the “surprise” ingredient leek,

needing to think quickly on their feet to come up with ways to use it in products.

“I made a mushroom and leek stuffing for pork rolls and used it for two or three other things, like folding it on top of some double-breasted chicken rolls,” Nick says.

Nick, who recently qualified as a butcher, worked with a set of Victronox knives donated by MBL.

“The State and national

competitions have been fantastic experiences and I thank everyone who has helped me, including all my workmates,” he says.



Nick Parashakis at work.

AMIC national awards night sponsored by iKONpack

➤ four Sausage King crowns in AMIC's Riverland and South-East regional competition in 2022.

He went on to win the 2022 State titles for his beef and pork sausages, giving him good promotional leverage. His customers "took ownership" of his success and his overall sales grew.

He was runner-up in last year's national

Gourmet category for his Spicy Pork sausage, but he was able to go one better this year by clinching a national title.

Last year, Tim swapped his small shop for larger, brighter premises in a better location, taking over the site of long-closed Margaret Street Meats.

He says of the new shop, which he named Da'Leni Meats: "It's working. We're going

well; we're cruising along.

"We outgrew the old shop and moved to bigger premises in the centre of town to try to pick up new customers. We've picked up quite a few so we're pleased. Winning Sausage King is a bonus.

"I miss some things from crayfishing, like the stunning sunrises, but I'm pleased to be a butcher now."

Photo stuns our burger king



Deryk De Kruyf (left) and offsider Will Draper with the trophy and the winning burgers. Photo: Victor Harbor Times.

Deryk De Kruyf thought it was just another random tingle on his mobile phone but it turned out to be thrilling news – his burgers had been judged Australia's best!

The news was delivered with a simple photo of the huge trophy for the winner of AMIC's national Best Butchers Burger competition. No words were needed.

The photo was sent by Trevor Hill, the Chairman of AMIC's SA Retail Council, from the national awards night in Queensland.

Deryk had been unable to attend as he couldn't leave his small Compass Meats shop at Mt Compass.

"It was a huge thrill when I opened Trevor's photo. I wasn't prepared for it. Then I started getting messages from other people congratulating me," says Deryk, 30.

Despite multiple people delivering the great news, Deryk says he tried to contain his excitement until he had official confirmation.

"Chris Kelly from AMIC phoned the next morning to confirm. He drove down (to Mt Compass) a few days later with the trophy," he says.

Since then, Deryk and his offsider Will Draper have been struggling to make enough of the winning beef, cheese and jalapeno burgers to meet soaring demand. They sell for \$22kg.

"It's a simple, tasty burger with a few good main ingredients. It's not overly complicated with ingredients, not too fancy. People love them," Deryk says.

"We started making them in 2020, making

4kg-5kg a week. Demand went up after we won the SA title last year and we were making 30kg a week.

"Now since we've won the Australian title, people are coming from everywhere to buy them and we're starting early to make enough. We're making 65kg a week just now."

With a sign out the front of the shop announcing the national triumph and the trophy taking pride of place inside, Deryk says he's been delighted at the response.

"Everyone in the town is really happy that we won; everyone absolutely loves it. People have taken ownership," he says.

Deryk's win was a win for perseverance after his original Mt Compass shop burnt down in June 2022. He rebuilt next door.



FAMILY TIES CONTINUE

Proudly continuing a family tradition of butchering... Shane Muller (centre) flanked by his son Brad and his father Des.

Shane Muller has extra spring in his step now that his son Brad has decided to continue a proud tradition of family butchering in the Riverland.

Brad, 28, is Shane's mature-age apprentice at Berri North Meat Store, becoming the third generation working at the stand-alone shop which has a strong reputation for quality mettwurst and other smallgoods.

Shane learnt the trade with his father Des who, at a sprightly 80, still works in the family business, helping where needed including doing deliveries.

Having his father and now his son by his side clearly delights Shane, whose wife Dee takes care of the shop's bookwork.

"Dad has given me great support since I opened here in 2015 and Bradley took up an apprenticeship here last November," says Shane, 51, who has always been a staunch MBL member just like his father before him.

"Brad wants to continue our smallgoods tradition. He's already right into (making) mettwurst and jerky, and he's keen to do other things.

"Having Brad here gives me motivation to make the business bigger and better for him to eventually take over. It's pleasing to think it will continue when I stop."

Brad says, "I started here in the leadup to Christmas so there were long days and long weeks but it's great to be here. Dad knows so much and it's fun learning from him.

Three generations work together in same shop

"It's good to be part of a family tradition. I hope to eventually take over but not for a quite a while yet – I have so much I have to learn from Dad."

While Shane is happy with trade in his Berri shop, he sells the bulk of his smallgoods from a refrigerated vehicle at markets stretching from SA over to Mildura in Victoria and Wentworth in NSW.

"We'll be going to almost 50 markets this year," he says.

He prides himself on his mettwurst, made to an original family recipe which has been honed over the years and is now branded as "Shane's Mettwurst."

He makes at least 200kg - and sometimes up to 300kg - of mettwurst a fortnight, using quality meat and time-honoured techniques.

"Mettwurst is not the easiest thing to make and there's a lot of handling involved," Shane says. ➤



Working together.... Shane says his dad's help was crucial in the shop's early years.

➤ “To make 200kg of mettwurst, I handle the equivalent of a tonne of meat, starting by lifting it from the fridge to the mincer and progressing through to the finished product.”

Mild and hot pepperoni are also Shane’s big sellers, along with fritz, jerky and twiggy sticks.

His other products include bacon, ham, saveloys, kabana, Polish sausage, pork and veal brawn, black and white pudding, and prosciutto. “There’s not much I don’t make,” he says.

He buys premium pigs and lambs directly from farmers, with processing by MBL member Chris Schwarz at Loxton Abattoir.

“I only buy the best; I don’t use second-grade anything. It’s all about quality – if I don’t make it, I don’t sell it,” he says.

Berri North Meat Store closed its doors in September 2013 after being run as a one-man shop for 49 years by Dean Tschirpig, the last of a long line of family butchers.

The shop sat idle until Shane reopened it in August 2015 after “buying everything” from MBL, from machinery including a mixer mincer, sausage filler, slicer and tenderiser, right through to knives and display ware.

Shane did his apprenticeship at his father Des’s shop and slaughterhouse at Monash, near Berri, learning the ropes from a fastidious “old school” butcher who made a reputation for his smallgoods.

“I started when I was 15 in 1987 and worked with Dad at Monash for 15 years. We had a reputation for our mettwurst, making 100kg weekly,” Shane says.

Shane later worked at the now-closed Lindner Meats shop in Renmark before moving to Berri North Meat Store.

As it turns out, Des did his apprenticeship at Berri North Meat Store in the 1960s so he returned to his old stomping ground when Shane took ownership.

It’s a destination shop in Berri’s industrial area, removed from other food shops, but parking is easy and customers are loyal, including some older ones from Shane’s days in Monash.

Des helped Shane get established in his new shop, making smallgoods, doing deliveries and serving during busy times.

“I couldn’t have done it without Dad’s great support. He has slowed down now but still does what he can. He makes deliveries and



‘It’s all about quality – if I don’t make it, I don’t sell it’ – Shane Muller

does pick-ups from Loxton Abattoir,” Shane says.

“I used to do deliveries for Dad when I was in primary school; now he does them for me!”

Still going strong is a “museum piece” Meatmaster bandsaw that’s older than anyone can remember and keeps working with help from MBL.

“Along with the showcase, the bandsaw was all that was left here when I bought the shop,” Shane says.

“It’s one of the originals and must be over

60 years old. Its blades are similar to modern ones and I get them through MBL.

“Dad dealt solely with MBL and I’ve always done the same.

“We have a good MBL rep in Ben Oerlemans who knows the butchering side well.”

Shane purchases machinery as well as merchandise from MBL, rating a mixer/mincer as “the best thing I’ve ever bought.”

“I used to have a small 40kg mixer/mincer but this new one handles 150kg at a time for better efficiency,” he says.



The bulk of Shane’s smallgoods are sold from his refrigerated van at regional markets.

VICKY SHOWS THE WAY

AMIC says women recruits 'vital' to combating chronic butcher shortage

Women taking up mature-age apprenticeships could help ease the chronic shortage of skilled butchers, with English-born Vicky Yates a glowing example.

Vicky, 38, completed a three-year apprenticeship last August at Rollbusch Quality Meats, Waikerie, where she is admired for her diverse skills and work ethic.

"She was keen right from the start and has done really well as her confidence grew. We're fortunate to have her," says shop owner Nigel Rollbusch.

Vicky says, "I love my job. I see myself in the meat industry in the long term and I'd definitely recommend it to other women.

"I think every butcher shop needs a female; we offer different perspectives."

AMIC agrees, saying females currently make up only 6% of Australia's butchers and small-goods makers but the national figure is increasing.

"Women are vital to addressing the trade skills shortage we have in Australia," says AMIC's General Manager of Retail Business, Stuart Fuller.

"Gender diversity is important, bringing in a broader range of customers. Shops with a strong and diverse workforce have greater insights and perspectives.

"It's important to showcase that being a butcher is a viable career for women."

AMIC SA State Manager Chris Kelly says promoting butchering to young females is part of AMIC recruitment plans to target school students.

"We're planning to start work-



Vicky Yates... took up butchering at 35 and loves the work.

ing in schools to promote the industry as a career," Chris says.

As part of this, school groups will be given the opportunity of visiting the meat studies facilities at Regency TAFE during National Skills Week in August.

While recruiting potential butchers straight from school is the traditional practice, hiring mature-aged women apprentices has become another option.

Vicky Yates is the latest female butcher to excel in SA, joining the likes of Sarah Hopgood, of Carve 'n Cut at Whyalla, and Nicole Dockerill, of SA Quality Meats at Tea Tree Plaza, Modbury. Both have been featured in MBL News.

All three women worked as butcher shop assistants before

taking belated opportunities to become apprentices. They have gone from strength to strength.

Vicky spent most of her life near Birmingham, England, before travelling alone to Australia in 2012 for a working holiday. She chose Adelaide as her base.

"I'd been coming to Australia since I was 10 to visit Dad's relatives in Adelaide," she says.

"My background in the UK was in transport, involving legal compliance at distribution centres, but the first job I took here was serving at the Springfield butcher shop at Marion.

"I loved the atmosphere which was so welcoming. I'd never worked with meat before. I loved it and I was gutted when I had to leave after six months under the terms of my visa."

(Visas for overseas people on working holidays in Australia limit work with each employer to six months).

Vicky spent three months fruit picking in Mildura before returning to Adelaide to again enjoy working as a butcher shop server, this time at Mawson Lakes.

Her visa work limitation was soon lifted. "I met an Aussie. Steven and I entered a partnership and I was able to stay permanently," she says.

The couple moved to the Riverland for Steven's work in 2015. Vicky managed a service station before Nigel Rollbusch approached her in 2020.

She says, "Nigel asked, 'How about becoming an apprentice?' I replied, 'Why not?'"

"I'd met Nigel years before and told him of my experience in butcher shops. He had nothing for me back then but circumstances changed.

"I love it here; it has been awesome. I get treated like one of the blokes and do all that they do, except hauling big beef carcasses.

"I do everything from breaking down carcasses to serving. We make some products here at Waikerie but sausage making and smallgoods making are done at our site at Barmera."

With all of Vicky's family in the UK, she and partner Steven successfully juggle their workloads to care for their six-year-old daughter Imogen.

"Nigel has been fantastic. As a working Mum, I'm proof that women can do mature-age apprenticeships with the support of the team," Vicky says.

MBL driver Matt Abbate takes pride in delivering sterling customer service - and the odd silly joke - with the assorted merchandise which keeps scores of businesses ticking over.

Customers tend to throw out the welcome mat to the big driver with the big smile, appreciating his attention to detail and willingness to go the extra mile for them.

The level of appreciation goes both ways, with Matt saying he loves his work and the friendships he has built with customers in his 11 years as an MBL driver.

"I enjoy my work immensely. I have a lot of absolutely fantastic customers. Many are friends. It makes my day to rock up and see smiles on their faces," says Matt, 53.

"They often say, 'It's great to see you. What joke do you have today?' I have silly dad jokes but we enjoy them for a laugh.

"I've got to know a lot of customers and they have got to know me. We take an interest in each other - they know about my family and I know about theirs.

"But nothing gets in the way of the job at hand. I go through every order to make sure they have everything. I do my best to answer their questions and give any advice.

"They depend on MBL to keep their businesses going. Imagining what it must be like to be in their shoes helps me strive to provide the best customer service.

"Our customers are part of MBL. I want them to know that they are important; that everyone is important in the MBL family."

A photo of Matt with his truck drew a big response from customers when it bobbed up some time ago on MBL's Facebook page.

Strathalbyn's Melissa Maidment wrote: "The team at Maidment's love this fella! Thanks for all you do!"

"Meet the Team"

Profiles on MBL staff members



Carly McLean, of Bruce's Meat, wrote: "Matt is an absolute gem! Always has a smile on his face, brings our order in quickly so he's got time to check in with us and have a chat!

"Takes the time to get to know his customers. Need more people in the world like him!"

MBL rep Chris Rowe wrote: "Matt's a great guy. Everyone says they receive 10/10 quality service when he delivers and he is always good for a laugh."

Matt drives between 300km and 400km daily on his rounds which takes in a host of Adelaide suburbs, much of Fleurieu Peninsula, Murray Bridge, the Adelaide Hills and the Barossa.

He joined MBL in 2013 at the recommendation of a close friend, former MBL salesman Russell "Rusty" Golding, after spending most of his working life at the Bridgestone tyre factory, Salisbury.

"I had different jobs at Bridgestone over 21 years, from the production line to leading

hand and then forklift driving," he says.

"I left Bridgestone in 2010 to join an aluminium scaffolding company. I loved it but it closed after three years and Russell Golding recommend me to MBL. I joined as a driver but first I had to learn how the warehouses operated.

"Around that time, a lot of people joined after being recommended by existing MBL staff as a place where everyone is treated as family and people get to know each other.

"It has worked out this way for me. MBL is a great place to work, with a good share of banter and laughter. On another level, it's the customers who make my job so worthwhile."

Matt starts at MBL at 6am but he's out of bed at 3am daily for a 90-minute gym session based around weights. "I do a lot of weights and cardio work - we have to look after ourselves," he says.

"I'm very conscious that I'm representing MBL when I put on the uniform. I'm always presentable, always neat and tidy. I've been brought up that way."

Q & A

Do you have a special interest or hobby?

Weightlifting, and spending quality time with my family.

What would you do with a spare \$50,000?

I'd pay off some of the mortgage, holding some back to buy a car for my wife Samantha and maybe go on holidays to the Greek islands and Italy.

If you were a car, what would you be?

I'd be a Shelby Cobra sports car!

What food can't you live without?

A delicious bowl of pasta, or a medium-rare steak.

If you could meet anyone, living or dead, who would it be?

Arnold Schwarzenegger. He inspired my passion for weightlifting.

What's the best thing about working at MBL?

Banter and laughter with work-mates, and seeing customers with smiles on their faces.



Making another delivery... Matt goes out of his way to best serve MBL customers.

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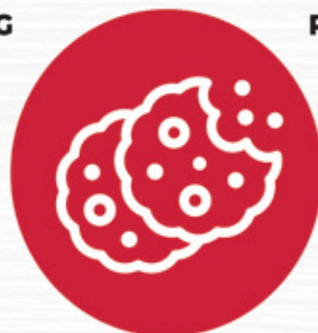
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