

Join us at AGM barbecue

A networking barbecue for MBL members and their families will be held after the co-operative's Annual General Meeting at our Athol Park base on the evening of Monday, November 7.

This follows the success of last year's inaugural post-AGM function, providing members with an informal opportunity to mix with MBL representatives and other members.

Winning products from the State industry awards will again be on the menu, follow-

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 7

ing AMIC's annual presentation dinner two nights earlier on November 5.

"We're pleased to again feature gold medal products. They generated a lot of interest at our BBQ last year," says MBL CEO Jamie Higgins.

"We're a co-op owned by the members, so come and have a bite and a drink with us and other members. It's your co-op and it's your AGM.

"So come one, come all – the more the merrier."

The AGM will begin at 6pm on Monday, November 7, at Athol Park.

Jamie and Chairman George Ujvary will both address the meeting. The agenda includes the performance of MBL divisions for the 2021-22 financial year, the outlook for the year ahead and question time.

The annual members' rebate will also be announced.



With hot lunches eating up more space in their popular Renmark butcher shop, Brett Gebhardt and his wife Sue went the whole hog by opening a dedicated takeaway food shop two doors away. Multi-awards later, they are setting the pace in value adding, from sellout lunches to mouth-watering ready products and complete family evening meals. See full story pages 8, 9 and 10.

SHOP'S NEW HOURS

From Monday, October 31, the new opening time of MBL's shop and showroom at Athol Park will be 30 minutes earlier at 8am for the convenience of customers.

Closing time will also be advanced by 30 minutes, making the shop's trading hours 8am to 4.30pm on Monday to Friday, says MBL's Kane Paues.

"People are often lining up waiting for the shop to open, while at the other end of the day, it's not so busy from around 4.20pm until the current 5pm closing," Kane says.

"It made sense to advance opening and closing times by 30 minutes for the convenience of members and customers."

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MBL, hammered by astronomical gas bills topping \$1 million a month, says the South Australian Government can fix the gas price-gouging mess by following Western Australia's example.

A guaranteed 15% of all gas produced in WA is reserved for use in WA, shielding that State's manufacturing sector from spiralling export-linked gas prices.

Manufacturers in WA have consistently been charged \$6 per gigajoule for gas this year – around the same price SA manufacturers, including MBL, were paying in recent years.

But SA's price has been skyrocketing, with MBL's average monthly gas bill for our Wingfield recycling plant jumping from \$150,000 in May 2021 to over \$1 million in July 2022 before easing slightly recently.

CEO Jamie Higgins says million-dollar monthly gas bills are crippling, threatening the co-operative's viability if something doesn't change.

MBL NEWS

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MBL's solution to gas debacle

"The simplest solution is for SA, and other gas markets across Australia, to follow WA's lead of reserving 15% of its gas for local use," Jamie says.

"WA's DomGas policy ensures continuous supply of gas for its gas power stations, domestic consumption and industry.

"MBL is lobbying our State Government to set a similar reservation mandate that ensures supply and keeps the price of gas under control."

As MBL News was going to press, Jamie was preparing for a September 27 meeting with SA's Minister for Energy, Tom Koutsantonis, to thrash out the issue.

"WA has presented the solution for Mr Koutsantonis to copy. Here is his chance to stand up for SA manufacturers," Jamie says.

MBL consumes around 270,000gj of gas annually – or 22,500gj monthly – at our Wingfield plant which has modernised and implemented energy-saving measures over the past decade.

Adelaide would face a major waste management dilemma and public health risk without our Wingfield plant as waste protein and fats generated by the meat, chicken and seafood industries cannot go to landfill.

Our other recycling plant at Keith does not use gas, rather it's powered by light fuel oil.



The huge Haarslev dryer in Wingfield's dedicated chicken plant.

MBL has little room to manoeuvre to counter gas price hikes because the value of Wingfield's end products – meal, tallow and oils – reflects global markets.

Because MBL cannot raise our by-products prices, our only option would be cutting the price we pay butchers and processors for raw material by as much as 80%.

"This would be a last-resort option, but it's something we've had to seriously consider because the co-operative must be sustainable," Jamie says.

While the State Government option of reserving 15% of gas is the simplest solution, the Federal Government can theoretically retain greater volumes of gas from export by applying the Australian Gas Security Mechanism, dubbed the "gas trigger."

"If the trigger is applied due to

domestic shortfall, LNG exporters are stopped from exporting uncontracted gas unless they first offer it to the domestic market at a competitive price," Jamie says.

"The problem is, at the first hint of a shortfall, the LNG industry steps in to supply the barest amount of gas necessary to avoid a shortfall being declared.

"A recent ACCC (Australian Competition and Consumer Commission) report indicates the timeframe for the trigger to have any effect is too long and must change to become more responsive to immediate energy concerns.

"As a result, the ADGSM in its current form is basically ineffective. It's had no real impact on domestic gas prices and has never functioned as a substantive export control capable of creating stronger domestic gas reserves."

'The simplest solution is for SA to follow WA's lead of reserving 15% of its gas for local use' – Jamie Higgins



Kane Paues takes the reins

Kane Paues brings wide industry experience and fresh eyes to his new role as MBL's General Manager of Sales and Marketing.

A family man and former butcher, Kane, 48, took over at the end of September from Bexley Carman, who resigned to pursue other opportunities after 11 industrious years of modernising and expanding our merchandise division.

Kane, *pictured*, takes responsibility for the running and business development of MBL Food Service, MBL Machinery, MBL Packaging and MBL Custom Blending, reporting to CEO Jamie Higgins.

Jamie says, "Kane is a great addition to the executive management team. I am looking forward to him building on the solid foundation we have at MBL."

"With over 30 years' experience in the meat and food industry, he is highly motivated and is already an integral part of our Athol Park business."

"He has such a positive approach and outlook and will be a key to the ongoing success of the co-operative's growth objectives and new membership drive."

Kane, who joined MBL at the start of this year as Sales Supervisor and Business Development Manager, says he's looking forward to further strengthening the MBL brand.

"After spending time this year familiarising myself with the business, my sleeves are rolled up and I'm fully into it," he says.

"MBL is such a strong brand in the trade, staffed by good people, and I joined because I wanted to be part of it."

"I love history and MBL has well over 100 years of it. The history was on display at the Centenary dinner in 2005 which I enjoyed attending as a customer."

Kane says he aims to continue delivering value to the co-operative's members.

"After all, MBL is their business. We're managing it for them, so we need to ensure they continue to receive the values and benefits of being members," he says.

Kane, educated at Birdwood High School, entered the meat industry in January 1990 when he began his butchery apprenticeship with Bi-Lo Supermarkets, working at several locations over five years.

He spent the next eight years as a meat manager with Foodland, across multiple stores, stretching from Croydon to Tanunda, before opting out of retail.

"Retail was going into seven-day trading, and working on weekends made it difficult for sport, which I enjoy, and being with my young family," he says.

"I opted to head into the processing and wholesale side, enabling me to work Monday to Friday and still enjoy my sport and family time."

"I joined Joe's Poultry as production supervisor of the tray pack section, producing products for Woolworths, Foodland and IGA."

Kane then spent almost 10 years at George Weston Foods, firstly at Chapman's Nairne facility and later at a Murray Bridge pork processing plant.

"When the Nairne plant was decommissioned, the fresh pork division was relocated to a new Murray Bridge facility (Big River Pork)," he says.

In 2010, Kane headed back to retail. He purchased his own butcher shop in Clovercrest shopping centre, Modbury North, building a strong reputation over five years.

"It was a small shop involving long hours, as our members would appreciate. I'm so glad I experienced it. I enjoyed the daily customer interaction but, in the end, I was happy to move on," he says.

Kane worked for a brief time with Holco's wholesale meat division before spending the last five years as State sales manager of an ingredient, packaging and consumables distributor.

"I joined MBL after hearing there was an opening from (Sales Manager) Dale Rowe. He was my boss at Bi-Lo in the 1990s and we've always kept in touch ever since," he says.

"I spent time getting to know how MBL operates. I had hands-on time in the shop and warehouses, and I accompanied the reps on their rounds."

"I'll be strongly supporting the sales and merchandise team to consistently deliver value to our members."



MEMBER SURVEY: Good work, MBL - but there's room for improvement

The latest independent MBL Member Survey points to strong levels of satisfaction with MBL Food Service but one surprise statistic has prompted a pledge to "do better."

Over one third (35%) of members still rate their experience of dealing with MBL as 10 out of 10, and 30% gave a perfect 10 for value for money, up 3% over last year's survey.

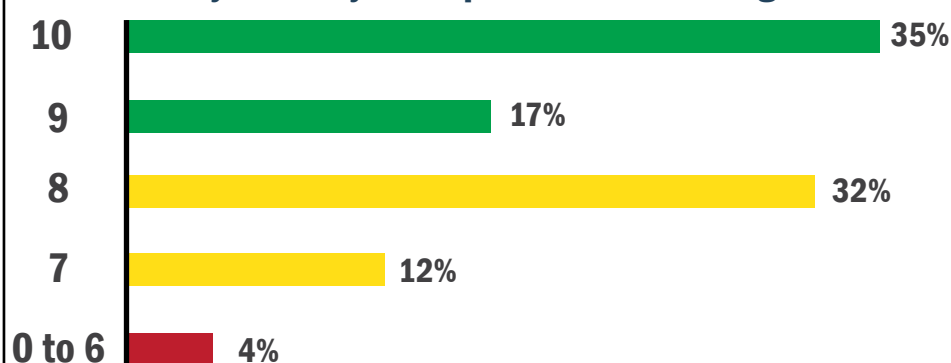
"MBL's overall results are very good, considering the post-Covid challenges of the market place. MBL is still in great shape, all things being considered," says survey co-ordinator Darrell Hardidge.

However, the latest "net promoter" score, which indicates survey respondents' general mood, showed a drop of 9% in overall satisfaction with MBL.

(The "net promoter" score is reached by subtracting "promoters" who score their MBL experience 9 or 10 from "detractors" who score 6 or less.

In the new survey, 35% rated their MBL

How would you rate your experience of dealing with MBL?



experience 10 out of 10 and 17% scored 9, while 4% gave 6 or less for a "net promoter" score of 48 compared to 57 in last year's survey).

The 9% "net promoter" drop is tied to supply, freight and staffing issues that continue to slow the availability of products and the progress of orders in the wake of Covid-19.

Members' patience has been tested and while MBL remains as frustrated as anyone due to lingering issues that are largely out

of our control, we are not offering excuses and will double down on efforts to improve.

"The new score sends a strong message. MBL is listening intently and action will be taken to address identified concerns," says Bexley Carman, who commissioned the survey.

"The survey results came with a raw data file to enable us to identify members and their feedback to help us make improvements."

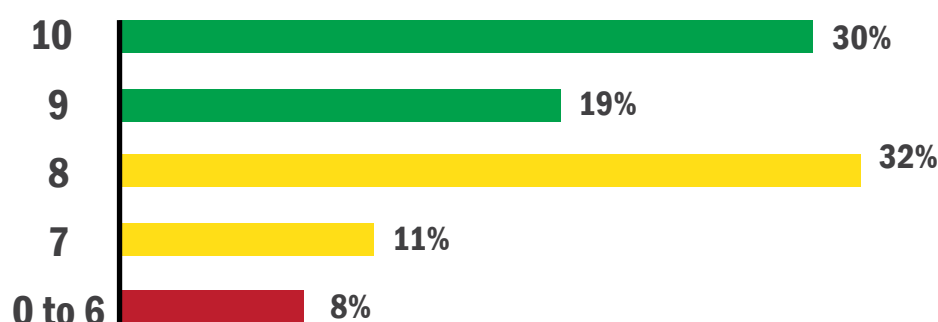
Melbourne consumer survey firm Saguity conducted the survey. Founder Darrell Hardidge says he's finding customers of diverse companies are expressing assorted frustrations in survey responses.

"Covid brought sickness and disruptions, including massive staff disruptions. Now people are tired and stressed. Interest rates are going up, there's inflation and crap news everywhere," Darrell says.

"We're finding frustrations are



How would you rate MBL in regard to value for money?



➤ being reflected in survey responses involving companies across diverse industries.

"With stock shortages and delays, sickness and understaffing, it's hard for any business to be remarkable."

The latest MBL survey involved telephone interviews with 83 randomly-selected members and Darrell says while the 9% "net promoter" drop is a concern that needs investigation, the co-operative is in "a very strong" position.

"It has been common for companies to have a 20% drop after Covid," says Darrell, who has overseen all three MBL Member Surveys.

"MBL's slip of 9% represents some customers shifting from being very happy to saying, 'You're still OK so we're giving you 8 out of 10 but we'll give you 9 or 10 again when things improve.'

"A score of 8 out of 10 represents a level of satisfaction which most companies strive for and are content to achieve but MBL wants higher scores."

Bexley Carman says the 9% overall score drop comes as a surprise and sends a strong message to MBL.

"After strong support in last year's survey, we expected to keep growing. To go backwards is a kick in the guts despite the on-going post-Covid challenges that we've had to cope with," Bexley says.

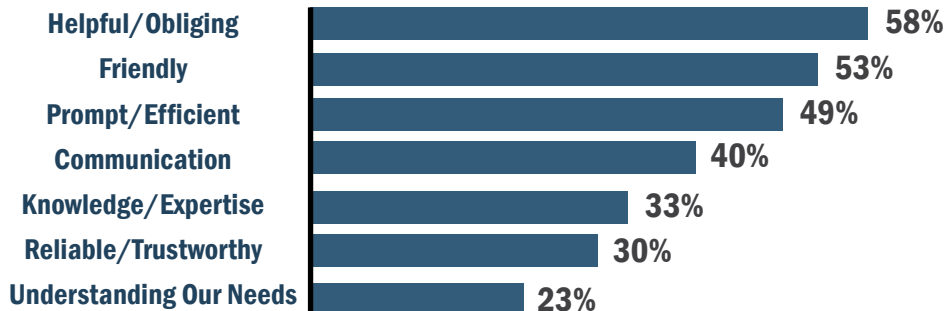
He says a further breakdown of the survey results shows a significant drop in the "net promoter" score of members who also took part in last year's survey.

"There were 65 members who were interviewed in 2021 and again this year. Their score dropped by 12%," Bexley says.



MBL is holding a record amount of machinery stock to overcome shipping delays.

Key reasons for Members' appreciation of MBL



Darrell Hardidge details the new survey findings at a meeting with MBL staff.

"It seems those members new to the survey are more forgiving than those who were also surveyed last year."

MBL has been proactive in trying to limit waiting time for merchandise, including machinery, by ordering larger volumes of stock.

"In response to our overseas orders taking so long to get here by ship and so many late deliveries, we're holding a lot more stock so more is available to the membership," Bexley says.

"There is light at the end of the tunnel as turnaround times and freight costs are improving, but I hesitate to say it too loudly because we've thought this before and have been let down."

Darrell says while MBL's overall rating slipped in the latest survey, strong support was still indicated to the key question, *How would you rate your experience with MBL?*

"A total of 52% of respondents said they were delighted or happy while another 32% were satisfied. Only 16% rated 7 out of 10 or less," he says.

When asked how they rate MBL's value for money, almost half - 49% - rated 9 or 10 out of 10 while another 32% were satisfied.

Asked for the key reasons for their appreciation of MBL, 40% said good communication, up from 29% in last year's survey.

"Effective communication is one of the biggest factors in today's climate. Most problems can be solved with effective communication," Darrell says.

"MBL understands it has caused issues for members, and members know MBL has had its issues. So many people are doing the best they can and everyone needs to try to be patient. Effective communication is so important."

Eligible food manufacturers can now apply to be MBL members. Broadening of the membership base increases MBL's merchandise buying power and grows the co-operative to the benefit of all. Among our first "non-protein" members are Spring Gully Foods, Beerenberg and Maggie Beer Products. Here, we begin an occasional series on our new members by profiling Spring Gully Foods.



Tegan Hack in Spring Gully's factory shop. Labels have changed over the years but the original recipes are religiously followed.

Welcome, Spring Gully

In a quirky twist, Spring Gully Foods is one of MBL's newest members and also one of the oldest in terms of operating history.

Spring Gully had humble beginnings in 1946 with Rostrevor egg producer Edward McKee selling his homemade pickled gherkins to local shopkeepers.

The gherkins came in earthenware jars topped with greaseproof paper. Edward attached handwritten labels, with the name Spring Gully inspired by three natural springs on his farm.

The business grew, soon becoming Edward's main income. Today, after 76 continuous years, Spring Gully is an iconic South Australian brand being run by the fourth generation.

The only MBL member with greater longevity is Bordertown's Richards butchering dynasty, established 87 years ago in 1935 and continuing to boom under the third generation.

Other MBL members with long operating



histories include Azzopardi Butchers at Whyalla (75 years) and SD Caputo & Sons seafood at Port Pirie (71 years). Both are now run by the fourth generation.

"We're delighted to become an MBL member and to be in such company," says Spring Gully's Head of Commercial, Tegan Hack.

Spring Gully has been an MBL customer for some time, utilising our Custom Blending division for premixing powdered ingredients for a range of cooked products.

"This has created efficiency for us. Now we're pleased to be able to become an MBL member, seeing benefits of partnering with another strong SA food business," Tegan says.

Spring Gully, which employs 45 people, produces pickled onions, gherkins, pickles, relishes, jams and honey at its Dry Creek facility and is a valued supplier to all major supermarkets.

After making honey for Leabrook Farms for years, Spring Gully

➤ bought the business from Coopers Brewery. The Leabrook Farms range includes jalapenos, kalamata olives and garlic-infused capsicum.

"Until the early 2000s, we were Spring Gully Pickles but our expanding range led to the name changing to Spring Gully Foods," Tegan says.

"We've modernised how we manufacture but we've stuck to our traditional recipes to ensure continuity of taste.

"We've collaborated with other brands by making chimichurri sauce and diablo sauce for Gaucho's At Home and we do cocktail onions for Never Never Gin.

"We always welcome conversations with other food companies about value-adding opportunities. There may be butchers who'd like to talk about us making a special marinade.

"SA is lucky to have a strong food culture with businesses supporting each other. We enjoy seeing other food businesses succeed."

Spring Gully was the focus of one of SA's most amazing business stories after entering voluntary administration on April 11, 2013, with debts to unsecured creditors of \$4.9 million.

The news sparked a stunning response from consumers who rushed to save the much-loved brand by purchasing all available Spring Gully products from stores across the State in a 24-hour buying frenzy.

As a result of this outpouring of consumer support, Spring Gully was able to stay in business.

"We announced we were going into voluntary administration a few days after Holden announced it was closing its plant at Elizabeth," Tegan says.

"Because we had done nothing wrong and had nothing to hide, our PR advice was to



'We're pleased to be able to become an MBL member, seeing benefits of partnering with another strong SA food business' - Tegan Hack

go to the media and tell our story.

"With 10 minutes of media training, our then Managing Director Kevin Webb walked out the front door and fronted the waiting media to tell our story.

"We never thought it would be headline news but we were all over the front pages and across radio and Facebook. It was unplanned and all very organic; it just took off.

"The response was amazing. People came into our shop from everywhere. I'll never forget a family with young kids driving all the way from south of Adelaide to support us.

"One man came in, grabbed a bottle of worcestershire sauce and wanted to give us \$1,000 for it!

"People stocked up on our products. Everything was gone across the State in 24 hours. We knew we had a strong brand but we didn't realise how strong.

"Everyone grows up having a product or two of ours in the fridge. Our products are part of people's lives, part of the family.

"Coming on the same week as Holden (announcing its closure) played a part. People were very upset about Holden but couldn't just go out and buy a car to save it.

"But they could try to save another big South Australian brand by buying pickles and other Spring Gully products.

"The worth of a brand is intangible and our eyes were opened to the strength of our brand. It was a call to arms for us to double down and fight even harder to save the business, not just for ourselves but for our loyal customers."

In 2017, four and a half years after entering voluntary administration, strong sales enabled Spring Gully to clear its debts, paying creditors 102 cents on the dollar as a gesture of goodwill.

"We experienced 30% growth around that time and we've sustained it," Tegan says.

Spring Gully emerged tougher and more innovative, with history and culture becoming even more important.

"We had humble beginnings and the response following voluntary administration showed us just how strongly people feel about us," Tegan says.

"As the fourth generation, we honour our past by working to continue the success of previous generations. We see ourselves as custodians of the business, building for the future."



SETTING THE PACE

Brett and Sue's tantalising treats lift value adding to the next level



Sue Gebhardt with two of her latest creations, stuffed capsicums and taco pies. Her amazing display (below) always sells out quickly.

Renmark butcher Brett Gebhardt and his inspired wife Sue were pleasantly surprised by the strong response to their initial dabbling in value adding.

They began with some ready products, pies and some cooked takeaway lunches, led by roasts with vegetables and gravy, before adding complete meals for family dinners, including bakes, curries and pasta dishes.

As the praise grew, they drew on their cooking skills to expand the range and

customers lapped up everything they offered at Riverland Country Style Meats.

Demand kept soaring as word spread, so Brett and Sue went the whole hog by taking over a shop two doors down from their butcher shop to open a stylish takeaway food shop, Riverland Country Style Kitchen.

As well as traditional fare such as shop-made soups, roasts and curries, they

have built a reputation for eye-catchers such as stuffed red capsicums, spinach ricotta cannelloni and lamb shank pies, winning AMIC awards along the way.

"People regularly come in and say, 'Oh my god!' The display just takes them by surprise," Sue says.

Brett says, "We're innovators, not imitators. We simply outgrew the butcher shop and had to double our space if we were to go close to meeting demand."



➤ However, it remains a case of get in quick or miss out as lunches usually sell out before 1pm. Sometimes, the lunch of the day sells out in under an hour.

"It's crazy on Fridays, especially. The four girls are flat-chat serving and butchers need to go next door to help," Brett says.

Sue says, "I take time to prepare a great-looking display in the morning but it's soon all gone. I'm so proud of our shop; we're very pleased at how well it has been received."

Brett, Sue and their eight staff are highly valued in the Riverland, as evidenced by glowing customer comments both in their shops and on Facebook.

They were recognised at State level for their innovative work when the business was judged AMIC's SA Regional Retailer of the Year for 2021.

They were surprised and thrilled at winning the accolade but such is their workload, they couldn't attend the presentation night as they were committed to catering for a wedding for 80 people.

The catering side, from 150-guest weddings and parties to smaller business functions, continues to grow but Brett and Sue aren't ones to shy away from the overall workload.

"It's a lot of work, out of bed at 4.30 every morning. Some days seem like groundhog day but it's certainly paying dividends," Brett says.

"We are both very committed to the business and we work equal hours. We're a good team and we take pride in what we do.



"We often brainstorm in the home kitchen on weekends, trying new things and coming up with new products. We have 63 lines all up in the butcher shop."

"People new to the shop say, 'Wow, a butcher shop's doing this?' Regulars now expect new things, asking: 'What's new today?' We keep evolving."

When MBL News visited, Brett's latest offerings were chicken and corn vol-au-vents and sausages flavoured with beer from the local Woolshed Brewery.

"We're trying to stay in front in a very competitive game. We are familiar with what supermarkets are doing and we listen to customers," he says.



Sue's lamb shank pies won gold for value adding at AMIC's 2021 SA awards.

Continued page 10



Brett Gebhardt's award-winning shop features a well-stocked dry ageing cabinet - with some AMIC trophies added for good measure.

SETTING THE PACE

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The two shops essentially work in tandem, with Brett running the butchery and Sue in charge of the takeaway shop. The shops share a similar stylish facade, with classy black-and-white interiors and timber floors.

“Basically, anything we sell in the butcher shop is sold cooked next door,” Brett says.

The couple, originally from Broken Hill via Mildura, started the butchery in 2015. The takeaway shop opened in August last year.

Brett started his apprenticeship in 1986 in Broken Hill, coming to Adelaide twice a year for training at TAFE SA Regency Park.

He graduated in 1990 and bought his first shop – Langtree Avenue Butchery – in Mildura in 2003, selling it in 2012 but staying on as manager.

Moving to Renmark and creating their own modern shop from scratch was an irresistible challenge for Brett and Sue.

“There have been lots of changes in my 35 years in the industry. We’re part of the evolution of shops to better meet contemporary customer needs,” Brett says.

“In our new shop, we polished our ideas from Mildura and placed strong emphasis on value adding by offering lunches and family meals as well as ready products.

“So many people want help with meals. They want ideas and love the thought of someone doing the cooking for them.”

Not that Brett paid any less attention to traditional butcher shop lines. He has everything you’d expect, including a well-stocked dry ageing cabinet for the barbecue set.

His smallgoods range, including smoked products, has done well in AMIC’s awards. The ready range stretches from schnitzels,



This old photo from the internet, with Brett’s logos added, gives customers a chuckle.



Brett proudly displays the AMIC trophy for SA’s Regional Retailer of the Year in 2021.

which carry the shop’s name on the Renmark Club’s menu, and kebabs to fillet mignons and assorted chicken products.

The popularity of takeaway lunchtime roasts and products for home meals was reinforced by the winning of three trophies at the 2019 AMIC industry awards.

Brett and Sue won the Ready To Eat Products section for a lamb shank pie with red wine, rosemary and tomatoes.

They came first and second in the Innovative Products category, winning with a lattice pastry with calabrese fillet, mustard, feta, prosciutto, spinach and sundried tomatoes, and taking second place for their Satay Chicken Pot Pie with chicken, capsicum,

mashed potato and onion.

In the 2021 State awards, their lamb shank pie again took gold but the biggest thrill came when they won the award as AMIC’s SA Regional Retailer of the Year.

“It was humbling. We’ve won different awards for products but to be named the best regional shop in South Australia was something else,” Brett says.

“We couldn’t make the awards night but AMIC’s Chris Kelly was great, making a point of coming here to present it to us.

“It’s industry recognition that we are doing a good job, giving us encouragement to keep pushing forward.”



LUKE LEADS AUSSIES TO GLORY

Luke Leyson's Australian team exceeded expectations at the World Butchers Challenge in Sacramento, California, finishing a close second behind powerhouse Germany with New Zealand third.

"It seems unbelievable; I'm still pinching myself," says Luke, 30, *pictured*, the Australian team captain and manager of Goodwood Quality Meats.

"To be a part of the most prestigious butchery event in the world is an amazing experience in itself, but to walk away with such success is an absolute testament to the standard of butchery in Australia.

"We had a new team and our preparation was fast tracked. We only had a little over five months to prepare, while other teams have been together for years.

"We were only able to get together in



Sydney three times before we flew out, having to do a lot of practice (manufacturing) in our shops, but we jelled well as a team."

Other team members were Victorian Tom

Bouchier, Queenslander Gary Thompson and the NSW trio of Brett Laws, Craig Munro and Garreth Gorringer.

MBL was a bronze sponsor of the Aussie team which used our Butchers Banquet gold range rubs in a competition billed as the "Olympics of meat."

A record 13 six-butcher teams entered from across Europe, North America, South America and Australasia in a two-day test of knife skills, creativity and presentation.

Each team had three hours and 15 minutes to turn a side of beef, a side of pork, a whole lamb and five chickens into a themed display of value-added cuts, requiring superior carving, boning and finishing skills.

In the last World Butchers Challenge held in Belfast in 2018, Ireland triumphed over New Zealand and Australia.

Old MBL plant bites the dust

The building that was MBL's first plant at Wingfield is set to be demolished, making way for a spacious warehouse for MBL Proteins.

For many years, MBL has leased the old building, on our large site fronting Grand Junction Rd, to paving and stone products maker Hewnstone.

Our "soap and tallow works" opened there in 1942 on land we purchased two years earlier from Sir Sidney Kidman, who used the 12.5 acres (5ha) site to hold cattle enroute to Gepps Cross saleyards.

This first plant was often described as the "plant from hell." A far cry from today's modern and best-practice plants, it omitted notoriously-strong odours.

For decades, people travelling on Grand Junction Rd would automatically wind up their car windows near the smelly plant.

But we had no neighbours for many years, being surrounded by stock paddocks and vacant land, so the old plant kept operating without interference.

The old plant finally became redundant in 1992 when MBL opened a new plant on the site. The plant has been since refined and modernised and is now best practice.

After the old building is demolished in a few weeks' time, MBL will raise the site with

earth taken from the Burnside Village shopping centre redevelopment.

"We need to raise the site, which is 1.5 metres below our neighbours, prior to building a new warehouse for MBL

Proteins," says CEO Jamie Higgins.

"We will lease spare land around the warehouse to a neighbouring transport company which will use it for parking trailers. This will generate \$200,000 a year for MBL."



Set to be demolished... MBL's first Wingfield plant in the 1940s and as it is today.



MBL Machinery Manager Ryan Mercier draws strong satisfaction from boosting the efficiency – and profitability – of butcher shops and other businesses.

“The right machinery creates efficiency and adds value, helping businesses remain sustainable into the future,” says Ryan, 29, a former butcher.

“Being a butcher is hard work and the right machinery can make working life much easier and save precious time.”

Ryan, who joined MBL early this year after a varied career in the meat industry, says he feels right at home with the co-operative’s ethos of working at multiple levels to benefit the membership.

“I’ve found MBL is like a breath of fresh air – it’s great for a business to really want to help people,” he says.

“MBL is best in class, with good people, a good reputation and a big history going back 117 years. I’m pleased to be part of it.”

Ryan is busy away from MBL, studying to complete his Master of Business Administration, a postgraduate degree for managers, through the Australian Institute of Business.

“It involves 10 to 15 hours of study at home each week, with regular assignments, and covers all aspects of business administration from leadership to marketing,” he says.

Raised in the Adelaide Hills on a hobby farm with alpacas and cows, Ryan left school at the end of Year 10 to start a butchering apprenticeship.

“I did some work experience while at school at Ian’s Quality Meats in Mt Barker. I enjoyed the work and took up an offer of an apprenticeship,” he says.

“I started the four-year apprenticeship when I was 16 but I completed it in three years before leaving to become assistant manager of the meat department at Foodland Mt Barker.”

In these early years, Ryan impressed as a quick learner with a flair for thinking outside the square – as he soon demonstrated with his own business.

“I set up a little business importing open cell foam trays and selling them to independent supermarkets. It went well and I expanded to sell film and marinades,” he says.

“I was a mini MBL for a year and a half but then MBL dropped prices and offered more value to the customer.”

(MBL’s move into spacious warehouses at Athol Park in 2013 enabled bulk buying of a

“Meat the Team”

Profiles on MBL staff members



wider range of quality merchandise at lower prices).

In 2014, all remaining stock from Ryan’s business was bought by his next employer, Holco. He joined as a business development manager, buying and selling meat across South Australia and the Northern Territory.

His immediate boss was Dave Culbert (now an MBL Director) when Holco was owned by former MBL Chairman Mike Rankin.

“I learnt a lot from both Dave and Mike; both were great leaders. Holco is where I gained my core sales experience and built most of my industry contacts,” Ryan says.

“After all my industry experience had been in retail, Holco introduced me to the whole new world of wholesale.”

Two years with an industry supplier followed before Ryan, along with his boss Kane Paues, left about the same time to join MBL at the start of this year.

Ryan says, “MBL gave me the opportunity for a new role managing the machinery division. I’m thoroughly enjoying the role.

“My experience as a retail butcher is

extremely important as I know the process and understand what butchers require.

“I was exposed to the processing side at Holco, seeing machinery in action and seeing the benefits. Now I’m trying to get smaller operators to see the benefits, too.”

Q & A

Do you have a special interest or hobby? I have a number of interests - metal fabrication, engineering, motor bikes and mountain bikes.

What would you do with a spare \$50,000? I’d Invest into the housing market.

If you were a car, what would you be? A Ford Mustang.

What food can’t you live without? That’s easy - yiros.

If you could meet anyone, living or dead, who would it be? Apple co-founder Steve Jobs.

What’s the best thing about working at MBL? New experiences and learning new things every day.