

## CONTRACTOR PROFILE



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# A hard day's work

ALAN TITCHALL catches up with Bradley Day who won the Warren Drake Memorial Trainee of the Year Award category this year at the NZCF Northland awards.

**IT IS NOT OFTEN** an employer nominates one of its young workers for a *Contractor* magazine profile.

When Annie Johnston from Robinson Asphalts extolled the work record of trainee Bradley (Brad) Day we just had to meet him.

Words such as “hard working” and “dedicated” are not what we have come to associate with a young generation that wants it all now, and is quick to move between jobs to achieve it.

While working full time at Robinson Asphalts, Brad is also studying part-time towards the NZ Diploma in Engineering (Civil) at Northtec.

But that is only part of his routine. He not only studies in the evenings after a hard day's work that starts at 7am and finishes at 5pm or even 5.30pm (with two, half hour, smoko breaks in between), but fits in rugby training and Saturday games (playing on the wing with the Hora Hora prems), and training for an annual boxing tournament organised by Northland contractors. If that is not busy enough, Brad also finds time to drive up to Kerikeri from Whangarei to see his girlfriend.

Any time left to read industry magazines, I ask? “Until the other day, when I was told about this interview, I had never heard of *Contractor* magazine,” he says with a laugh.

A subscription is on its way Brad.

So how did you get here?

“I started working here when I was still at school, during the holidays. When I left school I was offered a cadetship. That was three years ago.”

Not untypically, contracting was not on his career wish list at the time.

“I wanted to be an electrician and I worked free labour for a company hoping to get an apprenticeship, but they had no work for me – that's what they told me anyway.

“I could have got an apprenticeship at Northpower but, by that stage, I had been working here for a while and was enjoying it.”

And what do you actually do at Robinson Asphalts?

“I do a bit of everything, depending on the job, machine work and labouring, setting out levels.”

Best part of the work?

“Working with the other ‘fullas’, we have a lot of fun, and the variety – you are not doing the same thing every day.

“Although I like the bigger commercial sites – bit more interesting.”

Worst part of the job?

“Working in the rain – which is worse than the

summer heat. I don't like getting wet.”

This boxing stuff sounds interesting, can you tell us a bit more?

“I did a lot of amateur boxing for a long time and last year three of us from work fought for the Fulton Hogan team against the Downers team in the Contractors for Charity Boxing Tournament.”

When was that?

“December last year.”

Did you win?

“We all won our fights and I beat the other fellow pretty convincingly in my opinion.”

This annual event raises funds for a chosen charity each year. Last year it was the ‘Choose Life’ suicide prevention charity and was organised by local contracting firms in Northland, and supported by Robinson Asphalts. The other contestants last year from Robinsons were David Wright, Brad's stepfather, and Sam Johnston, the son of the company's owners – Alan and Annie Johnston.

“I will be fighting again this year as well in the middle weight section [under 85 kilograms].

“The heaviest I fought as an amateur boxer was 69 kilograms, which was welterweight. I had 24 fights and won the Auckland champs and Central North Island champs once, and went on to New Zealand champs and Golden Gloves twice, but didn't do any good – lost in the first bout of both of those tournaments.

“But it kept me fit and off the streets, and I never went partying because I was always training. That's until I turned eighteen and started going out with my mates.”

You won the Warren Drake Memorial Trainee of the Year Award this year?

“I was presented with a hand-carved greenstone trophy [pictured] and a \$1000 scholarship towards my studies.”

At what point in your studies are you up to?

“Third year and the diploma takes around four years. Study involves a day on a Tuesday and a night class. And they give me time off from work to study before an exam.”

Are you going to specialise when you graduate?

“Papers have five electives to choose from – that include waste water, waste water management, land surveying and highway engineering.

“I've gone for land surveying. I only have one more paper in this subject and a few core papers and I will be finished at the end of next year, or even earlier.”

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What happens then?

"After graduating I will carry on working for Robinson Asphalts for a few more years and then I might go overseas. I will see what happens at the time."

"I am in no hurry to leave – you can go further in a company of this size and earn faster."

So your stepfather and younger half brother also work here – you all get on?

"Yeah, yeah ... [pause] ... they put us in our separate corners sometimes."

"No ... it's fairly good ... everyone's laid back."

It's mid Friday afternoon and I'm aware Brad has been given the rest of the afternoon off work. We end the interview with a quick photo session and he's off – studying, rugby, girlfriend... I didn't ask, but at least I knew it wasn't to read industry magazines.

Brad's employers Annie and Alan Johnston hung around to get in the last word. Robinson Asphalts is really a family affair and it occurred to me to cover their story in the next issue of *Contractor*.

Alan and Annie bought the company (founded in 1972) off her father in 1992. Alan's brother and Annie's nephew work for the company and their two sons have both worked their holidays there.

"How did the interview with Brad go?" Annie asks.

Good I say.

"Brad's stepfather David also used to work here after school and also left school to work here.

"Apart from a stint doing heavy haulage for about four years he's been here ever since."

As Annie explains it – when David's generation left school they learnt a trade through experiential learning and now encourage the next generation to get a qualification as well. "And Brad came here on the understanding that he gets a qualification."

These days represent a different time and a different work ethic among young workers, Alan adds.



"Every now and again we get a really dedicated young worker, particularly if they have been raised on a farm where they contribute to the daily operation.

"Brad was one of these. From day one he had a very good attitude and work ethic."

Staff cultures are closed shop, says Annie, and they don't take on newcomers easily.


"It is the core staff who put the new ones on trial and it is they who decide if they are keepers or not, not just us, and they soon let us know. Once they do accept a new employee, they are as good as family.

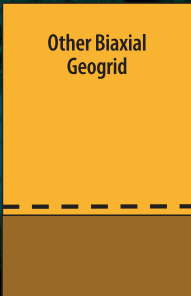
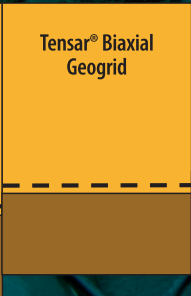
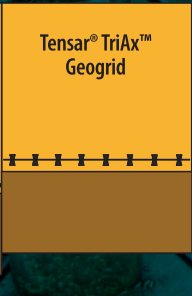
"When Brad came here straight from school, he was accepted within a week.

"And, when he finishes his studies, I am sure we will lose him overseas for a period of time – it's inevitable – but he will be back – we hope."

### A FAMILY AFFAIR

Alan and Annie Johnston bought Robinson Asphalts (founded in 1972) off her father in 1992. Alan's brother and Annie's nephew work for the company and their two sons have both worked their holidays there.



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