

FOCUS ON ... FAMILY OWNED BUSINESS

The first family of makers

The late Tom Hartley once described his business, Hilton Manufacturing, as being "like a family".

Based at Dandenong South, Hilton employs about 300 people from 25 cultures.

It was founded by Tom and his wife Margo in 1976 in a tin shed in Hilton Street, Dandenong, with three employees. Tom worked from 7am to midnight, while Margo cared for sons Todd and Mark.

Mr Hartley had arrived in Australia in 1956 as a third-year apprentice toolmaker. He met Margo through the youth group at St James' Anglican Church, Dandenong.

"This company is like a family to Margo and I. You do the right thing by your people and that manifests itself," Mr Hartley said in an interview with the Journal in 2014 when he and Margo were named the newspaper's People of the Year.

"People are proud here, they're proud to talk about working here, and the vibes go to your customers, to your suppliers."

Mr Hartley died in August last year aged 80.

However, his legacy lives on with Hilton Manufacturing going from strength to strength under the stewardship of Todd Hartley.

Hilton manufactures precision engineered sheet metal products. The company is the preferred supplier to Volvo and Mack, Kenworth, Mercedes, Iveco and Western Star for fuel tanks and associated mounting components.

Hilton Manufacturing also supplies all Australian truck companies with after market products and is a major supplier of its own unique fuel tanks via its distributors located around Australia.

Hilton recently established a second manufacturing plant in the South West region of Brisbane.



The late Tom Hartley, wife Margo and son Todd.

Todd said his father "had a great mind for lean thinking".

"His continual mentoring on waste whether it be movement, offcuts, rejects or excess inventory was a common theme. By doing this well, it allowed us to invest back into the business to ensure our long term sustainability," Todd said.

"He challenged staff to always find a cheaper and smarter method to manufacture a product, whilst supporting them via his experience and wisdom.

"These are just some of the reasons Hilton become a preferred supplier to many of our blue chip customers. We became the 'go to' company over the years for customers who required solutions to manufacturing problems."

Todd said his parents also passed on the

importance of the family's relationship with staff, customers and suppliers. Their message - all are equal.

"As the company grows in excess of 300 people, the challenge now is to maintain the family business feeling to ensure everyone feels welcome and part of the team."

Tom Hartley received a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the Queen's Birthday Honours List shortly before his death last year.

In 2014 Mr Hartley joined the Victorian Manufacturing Hall of Fame Honour Roll, a nod reserved for individuals or organisations that have made an outstanding contribution to manufacturing excellence in Victoria.

Greater Dandenong Chamber of Commerce inducted Mr Hartley into its Hall of Fame in 2015.

For her part, Margo Hartley has also given tirelessly to the Dandenong community. In June 2015 she was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for service to the Dandenong community and to youth through the Scouting movement.

She's been a vestry member at St James' Anglican Church in Dandenong for more than 25 years, has been attending its services for 50 and helped to organise the church's 150th birthday celebrations, held in July last year.

She met Tom through the church's youth group and started her 20-year service to the Scouting movement when a vicar asked her to be a 9th Dandenong St James' Scouts Cub leader at age 17.

"The promise I made to do my best is one I've kept ever since," she told the Journal.

Margo raises funds for Dandenong Hospital and has been involved with Mercy Ships since 2007.

Margo is also the founder of care and empowerment centre Brand New Day. The restored 1920s home in Foster Street East is a safe haven to enjoy activities, learn new skills and meet new friends.

The care the Hartleys show their employees is illustrated by a story Margo tells about a "guy from the country" who asked for a

job at Hilton. His dad had worked with the company so the Hartleys were happy to offer him extra support - an apartment, furniture, even

sending his supervisor to get him out of bed when he failed to show up.

"He now owns a signwriting business," she said.

"Simple acts of care can indeed change lives."