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Blind faith draws family together

By Casey Neill

Sharon's Curtains and Blinds is a real family affair. "They're all one heart, one focus," said owner Sharon Habib.

Sharon started the Dandenong business after arriving in Australia from Lebanon where she was a teacher.

"When we came here I couldn't speak a word of English," she said.

"In Lebanon I used to do sewing for my kids, for my friends. So when I came here, I had some knowledge of sewing."

With help from her husband, Sharon successfully approached a sewing shop for a job.

She later found a curtain shop closer to home and her children's school in Box Street.

"I used to do 30 curtains a day while the others were doing 10," she said.

"I'd finish at 4.30pm and take home 50 curtains."

"I used to stay in the garage until 1am or 2am. The kids were small. They used to help me, hold the tape for me."

Sharon went into business for herself, working in her garage for about two years before buying a small factory in Cheltenham Road, Dandenong, in 1979.

"My oldest daughter Suzanne, she joined me too," she said.

"She married and now she has her own business in curtains with her husband."

"My other son, Bruce, he finished high school and took on a carpentry apprenticeship. When he joined the business he was able to help with installation."

Bruce remains with the business today as the sales and production manager.

The Cheltenham Road site soon became too small so Sharon's moved to its current Princes Highway location about 16 years ago.

Sharon's Curtains and Blinds continues to grow and expand year after year.

Sharon's son Jack and daughter Peggy also joined the business in sales and accounting respectively.

"Then my other son, Francois, he's by trade an electrical engineer but he was working at ANZ bank for 19 years," explained Sharon.

"One day he came to me and said 'mum I want to join the business'."

"I said 'Francois, I can't afford you.'"

She said he was stressed at the bank and relished the change of pace.

In 2006 National Blind Suppliers went bust. The company owed Sharon's about \$90,000.

The family assessed the situation and decided to acquire National Blind Suppliers. Bruce negotiated a good deal in the acquisition.

Francois now manages the Gippsland Highway site, which employs about 65 people.

National Blind Suppliers also grew under the Habibs' management at a rate of 10 per cent per year.

Sharon manages the work room and five or so workers at the Sharon's site and is as passionate as ever about window furnishings.

"I like decorating houses, plus you're with people," she said.

"Our customers, most of them become friends."

Both Sharon's Curtains and Blinds and National Blind Suppliers support Australian made fabric and Australian made products.

Sharon's stocks curtains, blinds, cushions, bed spreads, awnings, plantation shutters and more.

Sharon's Curtains and Blinds is at 217 Princes Highway, Dandenong, and can be contacted on 9794 9205.



Sharon Habib, the founder of Sharon's Curtains and Blinds. 159327

SHARON'S - CURTAINS AND BLINDS

BUSINESS