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U-NEEK BENDING

Unique products could shape the future

By CASEY NEILL

A DANDENONG South company hopes some unique products will come from a CSIRO partnership.

U-Neek Bending managing director Les Sabo applauded efforts to connect businesses in the south east with scientists.

"Our biggest problem always has been how do we make contact," he said.

"You might have an idea of some sort and you just don't know where to go."

He toured the CSIRO facilities at Monash University in Clayton.

"They showed us all their latest gear," he said.

"We've got some ideas we want to explore with them."

"I really think it's a really big step forward for us."

"Whether those ideas materialise or not I'm not sure yet, but at least we've got some ideas."

"At least we know where to go and talk to someone. We'll see where it takes us."

"If we can develop something that's unique to us, hopefully we can export it as well."

The U-Neek name might not be instantly recognisable but most people regularly encounter its products, from the unique roof that marked Spencer Street Railway Station's transformation into Southern Cross, to hand rails on buses, trains and trams.

"We do a lot of work for power stations. You don't see it. It's all hidden," Mr Sabo said.

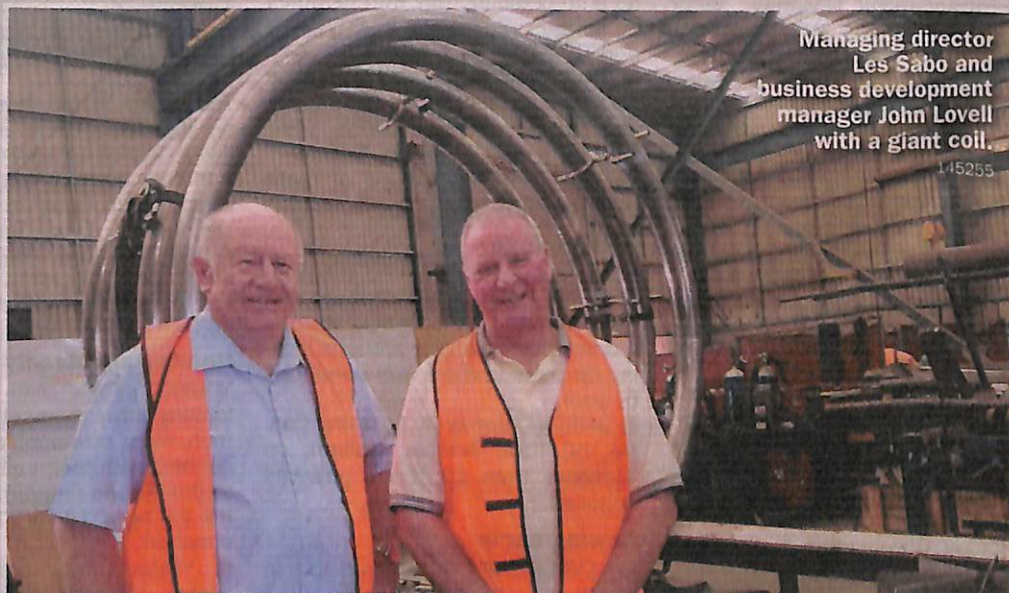
U-Neek has been rolling and bending metals since 1964, and also supplies the defence, transport, mining and architectural industries.

"Our strength's been that we've been able to change over time," Mr Sabo said.

"What's the future for us?"

"I think it's to be more service-oriented perhaps - even more than what we are now - and having more of our own products, whatever that might be."

Business development manager John Lovell said value-adding had helped the business to grow.



Managing director Les Sabo and business development manager John Lovell with a giant coil.

"So instead of just bending componentry for other companies we're manufacturing the whole unit," he said.

Mr Lovell came on board in 1998.

"I worked for an automated design house where we manufactured concept cars," he said.

"That was purchased by an American company and shipped offshore."

"I saw an ad, applied for the ad and met Les."

"I didn't know there were companies that bent steel!"

Mr Sabo joined in 1989. He was a young engineer out of work and was offered three jobs on the same day.

"This was the smallest company. It offered me some sort of challenge where I thought I could see that I could make a difference, maybe," he said.

He said competitors were always biting at their heels.

"I think there's people that try and copy us or emulate us," he said.

"That's probably a compliment."

"You can't run away from it but you can try and stay ahead of it."

"That's what we try to do by investing in new machines and getting good people."

"We can't compete on price so we've got to compete on service, delivery, quality, back-up, reliability of supply - sometimes those things are more important than price to some people."

Mr Sabo said U-Neek could get parts to repair breakdowns within hours.

"You can't get that from China," he said.

"We want to remain the leaders in our field and we manage to, I think."

Mr Lovell added: "And we have a bit of fun doing it."