

Solid foundation for growth

Townsville-based manufacturer Tropical Fabrications is ready to tackle the effects of the global financial crisis head-on.

Tropical Fabrications is well placed to punch through the economic downturn and continue to grow, according to general manager Barry Whiting.

The Townsville-based company's competitive pricing structure and the quality of its work were key factors in this positive outlook, he said.

And holding the Queensland licence to manufacture and

supply Industrial Light Beam (ILB) – an innovative, lightweight building system – provided a distinct advantage.

“We plan to take on this global financial crisis head-on,” Mr Whiting said.

“Our outlook is not just business survival, but to grow our business even in these troubled times.

“I'm not a ‘doom and gloom’

person. We are aggressively going after a lot of jobs.”

Mr Whiting said the jobs on the company's books at the moment included a \$1.5 million-plus contract to fabricate and erect the structural steel for the new Tropical Science and Innovation Precinct in Townsville for James Cook University and CSIRO.

Tropical Fabrications has been involved in metal fabrication in North Queensland for more than 30 years, starting out as a business catering for the home building sector with light steel

work, stairs and handrails.

Mr Whiting said the company now had an extensive client list across the construction, mining and industrial sectors.

It employs 30 people and has an annual turnover of more than \$5 million.

As well as being able to offer clients the innovative Industrial Light Beam building system, the company last year purchased Maxi Resources – adding the fabrication and supply of steel grating, handrails and stanchions to its capabilities.

The Tropical Fabrications

workshop, based on a six-acre

(2.4ha) site on Ingham Rd in Mount Louisa, includes an ILB manufacturing mill, two overhead cranes, repetition component machines and an in-house drafting office.

Mr Whiting said he hoped to see the business expand to other centres eventually.

However the immediate priority was to “keep our staff” and maintain a healthy turnover during the challenges presented by the global financial crisis, he said.



An example of the ILB system at a Townsville construction site.



General manager Barry Whiting and director Brian Yu.

Photo: Stewart McLean

Innovative system lightens the load for steel costs

Use of the ILB (Industrial Light Beam) system can cut structural steel costs by as much as 50 per cent on building projects, according to its creator Ian Berryman.

The design also reduces the number of columns required in a structure, providing the potential for dramatic architectural spaces with clear spans of up to 100m.

Mr Berryman, director and chairman of ILB and ILB Steel Buildings, developed the system in 1998 after his experience in building sheds highlighted the shortcomings of universal beams.

“They were too heavy and they weren't laterally stiff enough – they tended to twist,” Mr Berryman said.

“To stop them from twisting, we put in a web stiffener. But they were still too heavy.”

He came up with a lighter alternative and – after spending \$600,000 on research, development and testing – is marketing that same design today in a business quickly spreading internationally.

“To make a lighter beam we use a hollow tube top and bottom, with a pressed metal web centre,” Mr Berryman said.

“By combining the two elements, we end up with a beam that is an average of 50 per cent lighter than the standard universal beam and 70 per cent stiffer laterally.”

The reduced weight and stiffer beam created cost efficiencies in handling, freight and erection, he said.

Mr Berryman said the ILB system had been tested by independent parties including Lynar Consulting Engineers, CSIRO Division of Building Research

and Professor Nicholas Trehair of the Sydney University Centre for Advanced Structural Engineering.

Tropical Fabrications has had a licence to manufacture and supply ILB components since 2000.

“It's a permanent fixture of the business – we have a mill here and manufacture it, press the web etc on site, as opposed to someone who would just resell,” general manager Barry Whiting said.

And the company was seeing a growth in demand among its clients for the innovative system, he said.

“Depending on the structure it really comes down to the dollars and cents,” Mr Whiting said.

“They can get a 50 per cent saving on structural steel as opposed to hot-rolled or welded – the normal universal beams and columns.”

Mr Whiting said his business had supplied prefabricated ILB framework for projects including the Shafston Avenue tunnel for the cross-city tunnel project in Brisbane, the IPS Logistics building in Brisbane and various shopping centres and warehouses in the Townsville and Mackay districts.

“We do a lot of tilt slab warehouses tied together with ILB,” Mr Whiting said.

“We've done 30 to 40 structures in Townsville and probably about 10 in Mackay in the last three years.

“Being able to offer ILB strengthens a core part of the business, because we can offer clients an alternative price using ILB.

“Because the ILB system is lighter than the alternative it also offers savings in galvanising costs.”

BlueScope Distribution: proudly supporting local business.

BlueScope Distribution are proud to supply to Tropical Fabrications and support their business.



646 Ingham Rd, Bohle, Townsville
(07) 4755 3939
www.bluescopedistribution.com.au

Relatively speaking

It's the Cantoni connection - two North Queensland brothers drawn to the same business as well as the same sport.

Stuart and Louie Cantoni share much more than a name.

The brothers, who grew up in Ingham, both have a long work history with Tropical Fabrications and a strong commitment to grassroots rugby league.

Tropical Fabrications production manager Stuart Cantoni said he had returned to the company just over a year ago after stints working with Blackwoods and Hanson Masonry.

However, he had previously worked for Tropical Fabrications for seven years "out on the tools", he said.

Brother Louie Cantoni, the workshop foreman, has worked with the company for 21 years.

As production manager, Stuart said his role involved overseeing projects from the time the company received a contract

through to the point when all the structural steel went up.

"I organise the drafting, ensure it goes out on time at the customer's request and get the material list together," he said.

"We meet our customers' deadlines and if there is going to be an issue we try to get to it earlier rather than later.

"Our customers keep coming back to us because they know the quality of work they will get and they know they will get that on time."

Outside of his paid work, much of Stuart Cantoni's time is consumed by his role as North Queensland Co-ordinator of Referees with the QRL (Queensland Rugby League) Northern Division.

"That entails looking after the running of the referees' association and hired appointments for referees with



Long-time Tropical Fabrications employee Dale Nofz, left, with brothers Stuart and Louie Cantoni. Photo: Stewart McLean

potential, covering an area from Mackay up to the top of Australia and out to the border," he said.

"At the moment rugby league in North Queensland is expanding, with teams starting to come into our northern division from the Torres Strait and Cape York - so there is plenty of work ahead of us to get referees trained up in those areas."

For Mr Cantoni, the major drawback about the administrative role - which he

took up five years ago - is not the amount of work involved, but the fact it precludes him from throwing on the boots and whistle and acting as a match referee in QRL fixtures.

Mr Cantoni, whose father Louie Snr has been heavily involved in league in the Ingham district for many years, served as a ball boy before joining the refereeing ranks at 15.

"I was the first referee in Townsville used to be the standby referee at NRL games, I've been a Queensland Cup

referee and at the moment I'm employed by the NRL as official timekeeper at the Cowboys home games," he said.

Brother Louie started his playing career in the Herbert River competition and also played for Centrals in Townsville. He has played Foley Shield football, has extensive experience as a team trainer and is a strapper for the Cowboys Under 20 side. Another brother, Alan, played in the Herbert River competition and made that district's representative side.



TROPICAL

FABRICATIONS

- Heavy Fabrication
- General Fabrication
- Structural Steel Fabrication
- Forge Welded Grating
- Industrial Handrailing

SECTORS...

- ✓ Construction
- ✓ Mining
- ✓ Oil & Gas
- ✓ Industrial
- ✓ Infrastructure

Phone: (07) 4774 4882
 Fax: (07) 4774 4889
 592 Ingham Road
 Mt Louisa, Townsville,
 Queensland 4814, Australia
www.tropicalfabrications.com.au
info@tropicalfabrications.com.au



MAXIgrate
MAXIrail
MAXItread

Manufacturers & Suppliers of...



ILB
 Industrial Light Beam

