

Hard work and blind devotion paying off

NIGEL AUSTIN SILENT ACHIEVER

RHETT Payne was just 25 when he was unexpectedly thrust into the hot seat as general manager of his family's Country Blinds business in Mt Barker in 2013.

Since then the company's expansion, 20 extra jobs and growth in factory floor space, has been nothing short of remarkable in a competitive market against many cheap imports.

Mr Payne, 27, was elected general manager of Country Blinds by his two business partners, his elder brothers Jake and Shannon, when the long-time general manager left the business in 2013.

"My father at this point had experienced some poor health and was unable to fill the position," Mr Payne said.

"I felt that not only was I ready for the responsibility, but I was also keen to embrace the opportunity to help formally shape the business and its growth every day."

Receiving strong support from his two brothers, Mr Payne has achieved rapid growth in Country Blinds, partly through opening an Adelaide showroom on Unley Rd, Unley, to better serve city and metropolitan clients, 12 months ago.

Mr Payne's success led to him being awarded an Industry Leaders' Fund grant of \$8000 in 2014 to attend the General Management Program at the Melbourne Business School at Mt Eliza.

The fund's chief executive Geoff Vogt said Rhett had to satisfy rigorous tests to be competitive for a grant, including demonstrating the same standard of leadership potential as a Rhodes Scholar, offer a commitment to SA and be genuinely building jobs and wealth.

Country Blinds, specialising in window furnishings for internal and external use, was started by Mr Payne's parents, Colin and Wendy Payne, in sheds near the family home at Echunga in 1987.

As sales and the production team grew, a decision was made to buy an industrial block in Mt Barker and build a purpose-built factory and showroom in 1994.

Mr Payne's involvement with the company started early in his life, when he worked after school and on weekends, doing menial tasks such as sweeping the floor and emptying bins. The business and its products were soon in his blood and he began working full time for the company following school, starting on the factory floor, making security doors, learning the "ins and outs" of production processes and gaining an understanding of all roles in the business.

From there he progressed through the business, sometimes by design, sometimes due to positions becoming vacant and at other times by seeing opportunities to open up new product lines.

His production experience culminated in him becoming the production manager, in charge of scheduling production and booking installations with customers.

“From there my progression through the company took me through a stint in sales where I learnt how to properly sell our products and services to many residential and commercial customers throughout the state,” he said.

Mr Payne said Country Blinds had never stood still with its manufacturing facility evolving into a large, modern plant in which it has constantly invested and a philosophy that it manufactures virtually everything that it installs.

Robotics and computer controlled precision manufacturing is all part of its focus on streamlined delivery and quality control.