



Australian Technical
Millers Association

GEOFF WISE MEMORIAL AWARD CITATION

Ronald Ian Plant

Ron commenced employment with Defiance Milling Company on the 2nd of January 1968 as a Trainee Flour Miller at the Toowoomba Mill. He completed with credits the Technological Certificate in Flour Milling with City and Guilds of London Institute in 1974. Within a few years he became Head Miller with the mill working 24/7. In 1976 to 1978 Ron helped remodel the old bucket elevator mill from 3 tonne per hour to a modern 7 tonne per hour pneumatic mill complete with new bulk flour silos and valve bag packing equipment. Ron's planning and scheduling skills enabled continuity of production requirements during this intensely busy period and was an indicator of Ron's exceptional talent foreshadowing a remarkable career in the cereal milling industry.

At this time in addition to his heavy responsibilities at the mill Ron and his wife also purchased and ran a corner store, an indication of his entrepreneurial nature.

1981 Ron was approached by Fielder Gillespie Pty Ltd to work as Production Manager in the new Associated Flour Mills Port Moresby (PNG). His principle role was to assist in the installation and commissioning of the mill within a 16 week time frame and thereafter have operational control of milling, premixing and the unloading of 3000 tonne of bulk grain at the port every 6 to 8 weeks.

When Defiance took over the Fielders Gillespie's mill at Albion Ron returned to Defiance in May 1983 as the Mill Manager of the Brisbane site. He held that position until 1986 when he was transferred into the Corporate Milling Division of the company as General Manager with operational control of 9 mills throughout Australia & New Zealand.

In 1992 Ron left Defiance to form a business partnership with two ex Defiance personal in a Greenfield operation to manufacture generic breakfast wheat biscuits for the grocery trade in Australia and New Zealand. Manufacturing knowledge and availability of suitable equipment was limited and the partners designed equipment to be manufactured by local companies. Typical were the "wheat biscuit formers" which in one revolution of 2.5 minutes could compress 50kg of loose damp gelatinized wheat flakes into 2400 perfectly shaped wheat biscuits ready to enter the travelling oven.

The company Lemlodge Pty Ltd was fully operational within 8 months, 2 months behind a contract schedule with Franklins Supermarkets. During commissioning 40 tonne of cooked wheat was dumped prior to having saleable wheat biscuit in the market place. Once the process technique was mastered it was easy sailing and within 4 years the company was turning over \$6 million with gross profit of 24%.

In 1996, 5 small companies within the partnership were brought together as Day Dawn Pty Ltd and as a shareholder Ron was appointed the Operations Director of the 24/7, muesli bar and wheat biscuit operations. About 5000 tonne of wheat per year was consumed to produce large quantities of wheat biscuits. This volume of biscuits required many staff to manually pack the product. The shareholders upgraded the plant and installed robotic wrappers and packers from Italy and Germany, the first of their type in Australia. The sale figures equated to an almost unprecedented share in the breakfast cereal trade over a very short period of time which attracted the attention of all of the major breakfast cereals manufacturers in Australia.

Due to a restriction in rolled oats supply, Day Dawn was forced to install a new 2 tonne per hour oat mill sourced from Germany, to mill the rolled oats to the specification required for the generic Muesli bar lines that had achieved 14% of the entire muesli bar market in Australia.

Day Dawn was approached by Kellogg's to manufacture various products for them and over a period 18 months the business was sold to Kellogg's in March 1998 with a turnover in the vicinity of \$30+ million and a staff level of 250 people manufacturing 24/7.

A condition of sale was Ron had to stay on as Operations Director for 18 months and during this time he visited many of Kellogg's factories around the world and supervised a \$15 million capital expenditure project on site.

Ron continued to have other interests including Non-Executive Director with a 33% shareholding in a company Freer Foods Pty Ltd, the manufacturer of Snack Foods with a turnover of \$8 million per year. Ron subsequently sold this interest when he got involved with OBP Milling.

Ron's contract was completed with Kellogg's about the time that Defiance had been sold to Goodman Fielder, who had to divest a number of flour mills (incl. the Albion Mill) as part of the sale approval. Patrick J O'Brien approached Ron to join him in buying a 33% shareholding in the Albion Mill. The mill was purchased on August 12 1999 and operated as OBP Milling Pty Ltd and within 6 years secured a large share and tonnage of the Queensland and Northern NSW free flour trade market. Within 12 months from purchase the milling capacity was increased to 10 tonne per hour, an 8 tonne per hour "in line" weighing bread premixing facility and packers with a fully automatic bag palletiser plant were installed. Ron contributes the success of OPB Milling trading under the name of O'Brien Flour to the number of ex-Defiance staff employed. "We were a great team of mates".

Due to council and development pressures it was time to move on and sellout. In March 2005 the trade, name, plant and equipment were sold to Weston Milling and in September 2005 the land and building was sold to FKP developers.

In January 2006 after a short break Ron was approached by the directors of Philp Brodie Grains Toowoomba, grain traders specializing in Soya bean over 30 years, to take up a shareholding, and manage the small Soy Bean mill, Maralong Milling Pty Ltd. Ron went about revamping the operations and hiring redundant Defiance personal into key positions. Within a year Maralong was looking to expand and they purchased an existing company which was grading, packing and exporting Mung beans into Asia. This new acquisition had ample bulk silo storage capacity, and factory space for Maralong to install over 6 months a new 2 tonne per hour pneumatic mill for Soy and Mung bean flour and kibble. To maintain the ever demanding high specifications of whole grain export mung and soya beans the entire grading plant was totally upgraded and color sorters installed.

An opportunity arose in 2007 for Maralong Milling to purchase an underperforming stock feed mill next door to Maralong with the capability to mill feed grade soy meal and soy oil plus horse feed pellets, trading under the name of Hyfeed Holdings. This operation was an ideal purchase for Maralong as it utilized out of specification soya bean and product.

An existing premix plant within the building was commissioned and upgraded to produce dry loose lick supplements and concentrates for feedlots, dairy, sheep and beef. These products trade under the name of PBA Feeds.

The directors of Maralong have negotiated the purchase of a complementary operation outside Toowoomba. This purchase will see out Maralong's 5 year future plan and Ron's retirement!

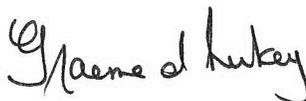
Ron has also played a key role in the Technical Milling industry through membership in the Australian Technical Millers Association in Queensland since 1984. He attend his first ATMA conference in 1982 at GreenMount Resort on the Gold Coast, served on the committee for 19 years (11 as President) until the integration of the branch into the national ATMA Inc. in 2010. During this time Ron has been a driving force for the Australasian Milling Conferences in Queensland & since 2006 has taken on the role of exhibit co-ordinator growing the number of exhibitor companies at each subsequent conference.

Ron started at the bottom (sweeping floors) in his milling career and worked his way up to senior management quickly gaining respect for his great ability to initiate milling and production process projects and achieve outstanding results. He has been able to integrate his technical know how with commercial acumen to achieve outstanding results for the companies he has worked with. He is recognized as a master networker who knows and understands thoroughly the cereal processing industry.

In recognition of outstanding achievements in diverse projects that have contributed to the development and growth of the cereal milling and food manufacturing industry and in appreciation of support for future industry development through the ATMA and Biennial Milling Conference Ron Plant is a worthy recipient of the Geoff Wise Memorial Award.



Paul Martin
President
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Graeme Lukey
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