



## ADVANCED MANUFACTURING GROWTH CENTRE

## MEMBER PROFILE



Tomago-headquartered Varley Group has been around long enough to see the results of every industrial revolution so far.

It was one of these revolutions that saw founder George Henry Varley move from Sydney to Newcastle, chasing ship repair work as vessels went from sail to steam power, and starting the company in 1886.

Today, ship repair is the smallest part of revenues, and is retained mainly to honour the rapidly-evolving company's history.

The breadth of work carried out by the 1,000-person diversified engineering and manufacturing business is staggering. A growing amount of this is in increasingly sophisticated defence and aerospace contracts.

One example is a partnership with Israel's Rafael Advanced Defense Systems to produce and support Spike LR2 anti-tank missiles. Another is in avionics systems with the USA's Coherent Technical Services (CTSi).

“We are finding that there are things we can do that are quite complementary to the capabilities of certain high-tech overseas firms,” says Business Development Manager Pierre Sidorow, who has been at the company since 1988, around about the time it began defence work.

“They're increasingly looking towards the skills that we have to help what they're doing.”

These skills and a reputation for reliability see Varley regularly awarded contracts to fit-out government vehicles (two-thirds of their work is government contracts) ranging from paddy wagons to mobile libraries to fire engines to ambulances.

To begin with, projects are often a “clean sheet of paper” with a client relying on Varley to take care of a product's entire lifecycle. A vast store of in-house expertise - around 20 design specialists are concerned with a NSW government ambulance project alone, for example, then moves things from raw design concept and to through-life support.

Collaboration with regional businesses and those further afield is important to success.

“Another project that comes to mind is we have an involvement with a company that makes electrical charging systems for electrical vehicles, and they have been involved in growing their business quite significantly,” Sidorow offers.

“We have been of assistance to them in setting their manufacturing process up, and it's nice for us to see what we're doing here other people can apply in totally remote businesses in a different field to what we are. Nonetheless our expertise allows us to join the party.”

Going along with this expertise and experience is a wealth of tradition as well as commitment. One employee (he has passed on and has a 30-year long service roll of honour board named after him) had a stint of 70 years with the company, aged 16 to 86. People tend to stay.

“I think it's testimony to how the business has survived as well, because people come here and it's not just a job, it's really an involvement in the whole business that's been going a long, long time,” says Sidorow.

Varley is a part of the Advanced Manufacturing Growth Centre as part of its commitment to staying around. The family-owned business is carefully watching the next big industrial shift, currently moving full steam ahead. Keeping up with technological change isn't something that can be done by looking inward.

“Clearly the 131 years didn't come by accident and for us we are always learning,” says Sidorow.

“And so our connections with the university, the CSIRO, with the various manufacturing associations is all about learning new ways, new techniques, trying to evolve this business. Because we fully realise if we don't change the business, the business will go away.”



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