

Breathing fresh air into a business

Chris Rethus – The Aircon Shop

AFTER years of living it up in the Caribbean and Western Australia, Chris Rethus has returned home to Nhill to start his own business.

But Chris believes you don't have to be a born and bred local to start a successful business in Nhill.

"I think anyone can come in and make a go of it, you don't have to be local," Chris said.

"But it's not going to be an easy business to run just because it's the country – you still have to put the effort in and make things happen."

And Chris is certainly doing that with his new business The Air-Con Shop, setting up a new premises, complete with new logo, signwriting and vehicles, in the centre of Nhill.

The new premises will feature a showroom with working units on display, giving people an opportunity to see what the range of air-conditioners look and sound like.



Chris bought Lowan Refrigeration Services from Ian and Carmel Morgan, after doing some subcontracting work for them.

He had returned to Nhill, working for Luv-A-Duck for a couple of years, where he was a refrigeration mechanic and project manager, overseeing the construction of the company's Adelaide warehouse, with 12 freezer rooms, and Brisbane warehouse with 23 freezer rooms.

Chris grew up in Nhill, but moved away to Western Australia in 1999 for five years, firstly working for a local Daikin dealer, and then starting his own business.

He went to the Caribbean for nearly three years, installing air-conditioning in beachfront condominiums and then working as refrigeration manager and assistant engineer at a luxury resort.

Chris said while the Caribbean was "great fun", mixing with the rich and famous, he wanted to return home.

"I always knew coming home to Nhill was a guaranteed safety net but I didn't consciously think about what exactly I was going to do," he said.

Instead Chris just made the most of the opportunities that were presented.

Once he purchased the business, his aim turned to planning a growth strategy and focusing the business more on the installation of new air-conditioners and repairs and refrigeration for commercial customers, rather than domestic.

Chris is in the process of setting up a new premises, with better exposure in a great location.

He currently employs three staff – Marilyn in the office, Josh – a first-year apprentice and Adam, who is nearly qualified.

Chris said he often received comments from customers about his staff being polite and trustworthy.

"I think there are opportunities that can arise in the country that come from you doing the right thing - as far as doing what you say you are going to do, when you are going to do it and for the price you said you were going to do it for," he said.

Chris said his company was the only Daikin dealer from Bordertown to Horsham, with a lot of work coming from Nhill, Kaniva and Warracknabeal and as far away as Murtoa, Rupanyup, and Edenhope.

"I really think there is any amount of room for expansion here", he said.

"I don't see why we couldn't get two or three times more work than what we are getting now."

Chris said operating a business in a rural area was different to the city, and his customers valued service and quality, over price.

But there are added perks to working in a rural area.

"Our customers often insist that we stay for lunch if we're installing air-conditioning, they will bring us out coffees and cool drinks - I'm pretty sure they're the things you won't get in the city," Chris said.

Chris said while freight costs were manageable, being located in Nhill did mean he had to be well-organised in planning and ordering.

He believes Nhill has strong potential for other businesses to be successful.

"I see the town being more than suitable to deliver what I want from it, I don't think it's too small at all," he said.

"You have to be aware of what the town consists of, the kind of people in it, the age groups and just adapt to that and target that audience."

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