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AUSTRALASIA



Leading the industry

The history of rehabilitation company Interflow is interwoven with the Weaver family. Here *Trenchless Australasia* speaks with Interflow Managing Director Geoff Weaver about the establishment of the company and his personal experience in the industry.

Mr Weaver has been working in the wastewater/water industry for over thirty years and has been involved with the trenchless industry in Australia since its inception.

"Since our involvement in the trenchless industry, we have watched the industry and the people grow to a high level of sophistication. I think that it would be fair to say that Australia and New Zealand have played their part in the development and promotion of technologies both locally and internationally, perhaps driven in the early days by our relative geographic isolation and more recently by the impetus created as the industry matures," he says.

Mr Weaver lives in Sydney with his wife. He has five children and two grandchildren, "When I am not working on the business I spend my time with my family. Between the two, I am kept pretty busy."

The early years

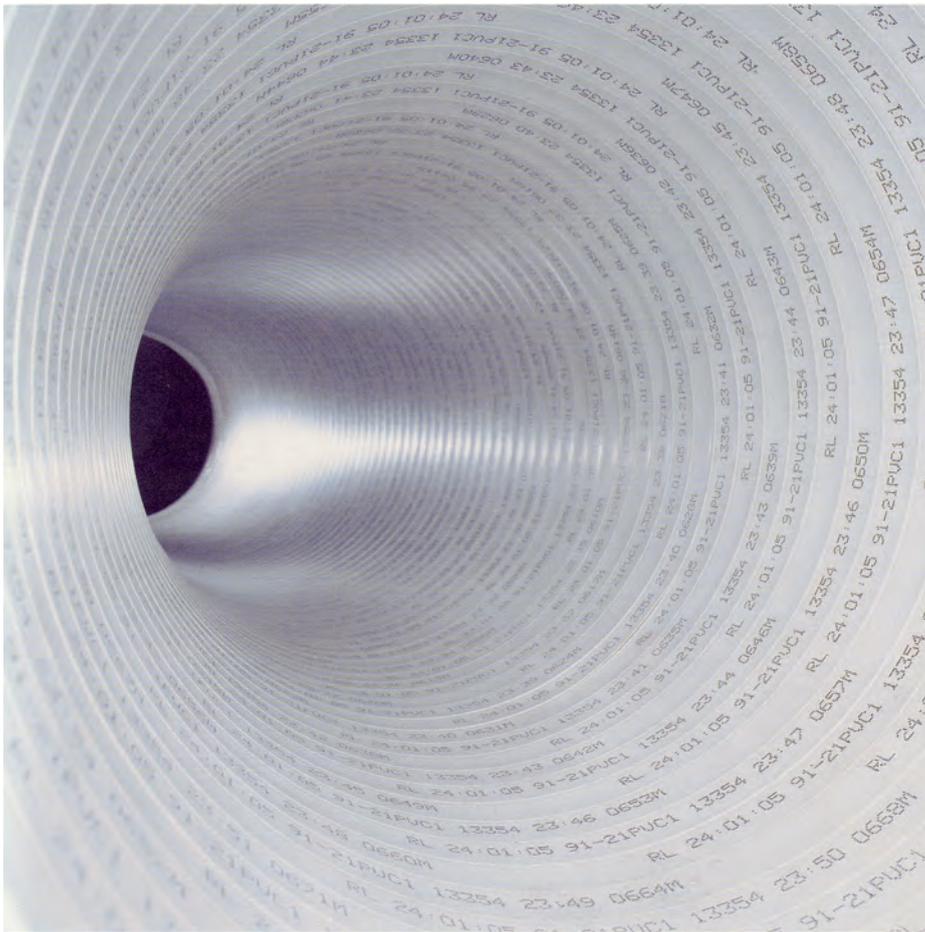
The Weaver family and Interflow have a long history in the water industry, dating back to the foundation of the business by Mr Weaver's grandfather Harold (known as Bill) in 1936. The company, then known as General Constructions, completed its first job in 1936 – the construction of sewers at Northbridge in Sydney for the Metropolitan Water, Sewerage & Drainage Board (MWS&DB), now called Sydney Water. This was followed by a job at West Wyalong, which is where one of the crews struck a gold seam.

"The story goes that my grandfather promptly took out Miner's Rights for the area, staked his claim and then the trench took a slight detour for a week or so, as they chased the gold seam. The seam eventually disappeared and the crew went back to laying pipes. Regrettably, without the pot of gold!"



Geoff Weaver.

The West Wyalong job was under the management of consulting engineer Geoff Davey – a young engineer who had previously started a company with two other colleagues, and that company today is GHD. →



"I do enjoy working in a team environment, brainstorming solutions which often don't exist at the time, turning the idea into reality, winning the job, and then delivering it successfully. That's why we became engineers!"

Bill Weaver always strived to keep ahead of competition by seeking out and providing innovative and cost effective solutions to clients' needs and to this end, in 1938 he imported the first Barber-Greene Trencher to Australia from the USA.

Operating under the guidance of Mr Weaver's grandfather, and then his father Ron, the company constructed new sewerage and water supply systems all over the eastern part of Australia, building a reputation throughout the industry for its reliability, honesty and competence. "We still live by these tenets today," says Mr Weaver.

"When I was at school my holidays would often involve going to work with my father, working with the mechanics servicing our equipment and then progressing to get hands-on experience on construction sites. I learnt a lot from these experiences and developed a keen interest to follow in my father's footsteps."

After leaving school Mr Weaver studied Civil Engineering part time, mostly at night, while working for the company during the day. He started with the basics; doing the contract clerical tasks.

"In those days, you did everything from lick the stamps to make up the progress claims and I worked my way up the project management path. Being a relatively small family company, I was fortunate to be

given a fair amount of responsibility from a young age and learnt to deal with the consequences of my decisions, whether good or bad. If I made a mistake, I had to get on with it and fix it."

In 1990, Mr Weaver's father asked him to take on the responsibility of managing the company. "At that time, constructing new water and sewer pipes had become an extremely competitive business and in order to maintain a competitive position, alternative solutions or technologies needed to be found."

Developing the trenchless industry

"Interflow's relationship with Rib Loc began in 1991, when we (amongst others) were invited to bid on the open trench replacement of a failing 300 mm sewer in the middle of a busy road, 5 metres deep in water-charged ground. I knew that the competition would be fierce and had read a few articles in various magazines about a new Trenchless Technology called Rib Loc, and was intrigued with the possibilities.

Mr Weaver understood the need for an alternative approach to open trench solutions that was cost effective and that, in most cases, technological advancements are developed through necessity. "With a clear need, I made contact with Rib Loc in early 1991 to discuss the problem. After a number of discussions they agreed that

they could install the liner (Expanda Pipe) with our help, but we would have to reinstate the lateral connections. This was a big problem because we didn't have, and didn't know the first thing about, lateral cutting robots.

"So with the tender deadline looming," Mr Weaver tells, "I jumped in the car with an offsider, took a level and staff and re-designed the laterals by installing a shallow sewer along the footpath, thereby picking up the laterals and redirecting the flow into the manhole through an internal drop.

"The idea worked a treat and we won the project, delivered the solution and never looked back.

"We have continued this attitude of thinking outside the square and delivering competitive solutions to this day," he says. "We are continually on the lookout for alternative techniques, innovative ideas, both commercial and technical which would give us an edge to win the next job," says Mr Weaver.

The voice of experience

When asked about the most important lesson learnt in his role, Mr Weaver recommends listening carefully to what the client is saying, "whether this be directly or indirectly. And respond with solutions that meet the client's needs. This becomes a 'self fulfilling prophesy' because if the client knows that you can help and add value, he will call you again.

"This has been my experience in the trenchless industry. As you bring forward new solutions that meet a client's needs, more complex needs arise and so the industry continues to evolve."

Throughout the company's history, Interflow has always endeavoured to take a leading position by searching for state-of-the-art solutions to give that competitive edge. Some of those technical achievements include being the first company in Australia to introduce wellpoint dewatering for trenches and excavations; and the →

TRENCHLESS AUSTRALASIA 2009

“ The Conference and Exhibition is an obvious venue for those interested in Trenchless Technology to come together in a planned timeframe and environment to learn, look at what’s new and talk to Industry Experts and Colleagues with similar needs. The ASTT itself is a very important link for the industry to the local and worldwide network of those with this common interest. ”
– Geoff Weaver



“As you bring forward new solutions that meet the client’s needs, more complex needs arise and so the industry continues to evolve.”

first to introduce modular trench boxes, which have all but replaced the use of timber and trench sheeting for trench work. Both of these initiatives led to the formation of successful business ventures in the hire and sales field of the industry.

More recent achievements include the successful introduction and deployment of the Rib Loc technologies, including Rotaloc and Ribline, along with Interflow’s own developments such as the ‘Interfit’ Lateral Connection Repair system. The Rib Loc technology, coupled with its own innovations, has seen Interflow become a successful supplier and market leader in this field, now employing more than 280 people in both Australia and New Zealand.

“To find, develop and retain the appropriate people to help us achieve and maintain the goal of market leadership continues to be the greatest challenge,” says Mr Weaver.

At an industry level, ensuring the generation of sustainable growth is one of the major challenges facing the trenchless industry, identified by Mr Weaver.

To address this challenge Mr Weaver says the industry will require adherence to standards that maintain consistency of outcomes and expectations. “We will need to continue to demonstrate that the solutions offer good value for money and by meeting the needs of the market, new opportunities will arise.”

Together with standards for the industry Mr Weaver identifies training in both the

technical and practical aspects of pipe rehabilitation, as an important component for future growth of the industry.

Looking to the future

When asked about goals for the future Mr Weaver says he along with the Interflow team, will continue to grow this great company in a sustainable way and hopefully lead the industry in this journey.

“I am extremely optimistic about the future of the trenchless sector. There are still many untapped market segments and developments yet to come. Market maturity in some areas, however, is inevitable, so we will all have to keep looking past the current horizon in order to ensure that Trenchless Technology continues to grow and play a major role in the broader field of infrastructure construction and renewal.”