

# Relining Ringleader

John Monroe has served on the board of the ASTT for eight years. A qualified engineer, he has been involved with Trenchless Technology since the early 1990s. *Trenchless Australasia* spoke to John about his take on the industry and his career so far.

After graduating from Queensland University John spent four years in the UK as a 'proper' engineer working with a contractor and a consultant before returning to Australia and obtaining a position as Civil Engineer – Marketing, with a prominent pipe manufacturer.

"I've been doing that kind of work ever since, for a few different companies always in various forms of the pipeline industry. I became involved in Trenchless Technology after I commenced with Rib Loc in 1994. It was an exciting time working to gain acceptance for a new type of pipe liner installed by trenchless methods in an industry that was in itself still new. Since then it has continued with Interflow."

## ASTT

John says the ASTT's role has changed as the industry has changed.

"In the early days of the industry, which really only dates back to the mid-1990s, its role was to promote the fact that there was an industry developing that addressed the installation, maintenance and rehabilitation of underground pipelines using methods that did not require excavation. The slogan was 'Why dig? There may be a better way'.

"That slogan largely became obsolete as the industry matured and became mainstream. ASTT then became more a forum where industry practitioners could get together to discuss matters of mutual interest."

Turning his attention to where he sees the ASTT going in the future John says "the next step, I think, is for the ASTT to become the voice of the industry, providing independent services to members and lobbying the wider engineering community. And that would be a big step that will take some courage but the ASTT cannot do it with volunteers only. Appropriate personnel will need to be employed.

"Currently the ASTT is run by volunteers who all have full time jobs – anything done for the society is done in their spare time.

"Conversely, corporate membership of the ASTT is only a couple of hundred dollars per year, not the thousands, in some



John Monroe speaking at Trenchless Australasia 2009.

## *Australasia has a vibrant industry with committed and motivated suppliers and industry users.*

cases tens of thousands, of dollars companies pay to be members of those other organisations," explains John.

"There are many things that can be done to promote the Trenchless Technology industry – specifications, training, lobbying and endorsement – but the ASTT cannot do it with volunteers only. Appropriate personnel will need to be employed.

"This will be a challenge, but I believe members would meet the increased cost if they can see that they will obtain value. Of course it will need to be done in consultation with the entire industry."

## Looking to the future of the industry

John sees Australasia at the forefront of advances of the industry, and believes that Australasia has a vibrant industry with

committed and motivated suppliers and industry users.

"Development isn't going to stop, and I think it's obvious we're going to continue to see exciting advances."

John says that an important reason for the success of the Australasian trenchless industry is the fact that clients have been willing to evaluate and accept innovations that technology developers propose. It's like a partnering arrangement.

For example, there has been client specifications challenging the industry to develop advances. And the industry has responded, which is why Australasian companies and Australasian projects are over represented when international awards, such as the ISTT No-Dig awards, are handed out. →

When asked about the main changes in the industry to occur over the last decade John says that companies come and companies go. Many enter the industry thinking it complements their current work as pipe manufacturers or civil contractors, without realising the challenges that lay ahead of them.

"It's the same with technologies. They are constantly developing and improving. Capabilities are always being expanded and extended. And it's pleasing to see so many of those developments happening here, or if they happen overseas, being rapidly introduced here."

### Trenchless Technology – it's different

For people entering the industry, John believes they need to be ready for the challenge.

"Putting a pipe inside a deteriorated pipe in the ground isn't like making pipes in a factory. Installing a pipeline by directional drilling isn't like digging a trench. Every job is different."

People will need to recognise that there will be continual challenges with each job, which you will have to overcome to be successful, he says. And to be really successful they will have to continually be thinking "is there a better way to do this?" Because if there is, then you are working in an industry that will encourage you to develop it.

"It will sometimes be frustrating, it will often be difficult, but it will never, never be dull."

### An impressive list of achievements

John has been lucky over his years within the industry to have been involved with some exciting projects – especially those projects that have won awards.

Rib Loc has won two ISTT No-Dig Awards for the most important developments in the industry worldwide in the year of the Award, for two different types of liners for large diameter pipes.

"Accepting an award on behalf of the company at the ISTT conference in Copenhagen was a particular thrill."

Interflow has won two CCF National Awards and one New South Wales Award for Construction Excellence for pipeline rehabilitation projects. John says that what is particularly satisfying is that these were won against competition from the entire construction industry – not just pipelines or Trenchless Technology.

Other memorable awards included Interflow's two ASTT Project of the Year Awards and two Engineers Australia commendations.

John thinks that seeing these projects go from a stated problem in a project speci-



John Monro and ISTT Vice Chairman Dr Sam Ariaratnam.

fication, through to the development of a new idea to carry out the work, developing a new product or work method, working with the authority to ensure it is acceptable, then seeing the project completed in a world-first application is exciting.

He adds that "promoting Australian achievements around the world is a particular buzz!"

### A little help from a friend

The late Bill Menzel, founder of Rib Loc, was one of John's mentors. John says that Mr Menzel had the energy and enthusiasm of someone half his age.

"His career included developing drip irrigation which he sold to sheiks in the deserts in the Middle East. The original Rib Loc liners he developed started out as an idea to efficiently supply pipes in remote areas."

As well as his uniquely innovative engineering ability, Mr Menzel was a showman who could promote his company's developments. He was a fascinating person, says John.

There have been many others, including those who have supported him in his time as New South Wales Councillor for the ASTT.

John is currently living in Drummoyne, in Sydney's inner west – where he feels is well placed for the city, the beaches, the airport, work and various sporting venues. This is good for him with two sport obsessed teenage boys.

While most of his spare time seems to be spent at their training sessions and competitions he is happy to take them.

"Happily they have more talent than I ever had, and it's actually lots of fun." 

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– John Monro