

THE VANTAGE  
**Advocate**

Today	Tomorrow	Forecast
 9°-19°	 11°-21°	Saturday 12°-19° Sunday 11°-19° Monday 11°-21° Tuesday 11°-21° Wednesday 12°-22°



# Great Lakes Windows

*From then to now*

WHEN YOU MEET STEVE BUTCHER, owner of Great Lakes Windows, the first things you notice about him is his drive, larrikinism and down-to-earth attitude. But the most obvious thing is his absolute passion for his work.

Before starting his business, Steve was a glazier in Sydney and his wife a university student. They were excited about their future and thought that the north coast of NSW would be a great place to live and work. In 1983, at the tender age of 19, they packed up, moved to Forster and opened what was then known as Great Lakes Glass and Mirrors. They supplied and installed glass and aluminium windows and doors, balustrading, security doors, shower screens, mirrors and general glazing as well as a 24 hour call-out service.

Steve was a Vincent Windows fabricator and when David McCleary and Gavan Pead left there, they started AWS and commenced designing the product for Vantage. Steve was approached by Design Director, David McCleary, and General Manager, Gavan Pead, to become a Vantage fabricator in 1995. Steve agreed and this made Great Lakes the first Vantage fabricator in Australia.

This is a story Steve tells with a big smile on this face. As a practical joke, Steve went out and registered the name 'Vantage Aluminium Windows'. Steve knew that the General Manager at the time, Guy McDonald, would have a 'dummy spit'

about it and needless to say, the dummy spit happened. Steve had his laugh and ended up giving him the name, so all was right with the world.

The original shed was 200m<sup>2</sup> in Tuncurry and Steve was there from 1983 to 1986. He then bought the shed next door which was double the size of his first and outgrew this one in 2000. Steve leased the shed next door to the one he bought which was 300m<sup>2</sup> from 1992 to 2000.

In 2000 he decided to focus on one thing and excel in that market and windows and doors was the obvious choice. So they relocated to a custom built factory which was 1,000m<sup>2</sup>. In 2010 they relocated again to their present location which is 1,000m<sup>2</sup> but on 4,000m<sup>2</sup> of land. Steve is currently negotiating a 6,600m<sup>2</sup> block with 2,000m<sup>2</sup> for manufacturing. He has gained 6,400m<sup>2</sup> in 35 years.

In 2002, when Steve's son Brad was 14 years old, he started working for his dad in his school holidays. According to Steve, he's had "a million proud moments" but the biggest one was when Brad, whom he thought wanted to be an architect or an engineer, said he wanted to work in the family business. Steve says he's still finding it hard to understand!

As you walk around the office and the warehouse it is clear there's a wonderful work culture. The workspace is packed with hard workers with smiles on their



Owner Steve Butcher outside Tuncurry showroom

faces. Great Lakes also services southern Sydney so some of his drivers are in the trucks at the crack of dawn and not back until after dark. They have also shipped windows and doors overseas to clients in Norfolk Island, Guam, Hawaii and Taiwan. Even though they work long hours, they still love their jobs. Steve, as they call him, is very proud of his team.

Great Lakes Windows now has 32 staff and continues to grow. Steve is committed to really looking after his people and the result is amazing staff retention. In fact, Steve had two guys, now retired, who worked with him for 20 years. He currently

has two employees who have been with him for 16 years and three employees who have been with him for 13 years.

When asked about a mission statement or specific goals, Steve's response was, "To make money and retire". He says he never planned for the business to be as successful as it is now. The demand was there and they responded to it. He believes that, because AWS is the leading supplier, the product sells itself. In turn, that makes it easier for him and his team to sell it. Word of mouth and recommendations are where a lot of their work comes from, however, Steve says that Brad's enthusiasm has also grown the business by 15% just this year.

AWS is grateful for the long-term support and partnership with Steve and his team. It has been a pleasure to watch them grow and succeed and we look forward to the future ahead of Great Lakes and what will happen when Brad takes the reins.

When asked where he sees Great Lakes in 10 years, Steve answered, "From a distance." There has been continual growth over the years with plenty of ups and downs in both turnover and profitability, but he has the utmost confidence in Brad's ability to take it to the next level. Brad agreed. It is humbling to see the two of them together, a team with confidence aplenty.