

# Strong and STEADY

Diona Civil Engineering Contractors is taking it one step at a time as the 34-year-old company continues to build a long-lasting legacy.

Images by Scott Ehler

“I started off with just one man and one machine, and the company has grown tremendously since then. We just got more machinery and more people as we developed.”

- John O'Connor

As one of the most respected civil engineering companies on the east coast of Australia, Diona Civil Engineering Contractors has developed an enviable reputation over its 34 years of operation. Since its establishment in 1980, founder and Managing Director John O'Connor has worked with his loyal team to deliver a range of high-quality and on-time projects. John says the company has grown steadily over the past three decades.

“I guess I just wanted to get away from being a direct employee and I saw an opportunity there,” says John. “I started off with just one man and one machine, and the company has grown tremendously since then. We just got more machinery and more people as we developed.”

Originally a contractor business, Diona is now a major player in the industry with the company securing government contracts and taking on large tenders. Today, Diona is an accredited service provider to Ausgrid, Energex, TransGrid, Sydney Water, Brisbane Water, APA, Jemena, Telstra, and many other asset owners, including

local councils across the greater Brisbane and Sydney regions. John believes that it is Diona's commitment to its values and strengths that has seen the company grow substantially.

“We have built that respect over the years, and we're still serving some of the original clients we had when we started—for example, Sydney Water and Jemena, previously AGL. We've retained those clients because we've given them a good product, and the quality and openness was always there. We were able to retain our relationships with all our oldest customers.

“It's a matter of training people and letting them know what you want and that you won't take second best. You've always got to be open and honest with your clients. You have to tell them upfront if you see a problem coming up that's going to cost them, and then you can work on it together. It's all about hard work, being open and honest with your clients, and giving them a high-quality project.”

John and his team at Diona take this same approach with their suppliers and subcontractors. “We do a lot of training, and we give

them the confidence and empowerment to make decisions for themselves. If they need support, we always have someone there to support them. They can come to anybody at any time if they have problems. We're very open, and everybody is engaged and interested in their projects. We have incentive programs where employees get rewards if their project comes in on time, on budget, and at a high quality.”

This commitment to continual training saw Diona establish its own registered training organisation in 2008 to better develop and deliver specialised training to its people and the industry in general. John states, “There weren't enough outlets, and we weren't happy with the quality of the training we were getting. The opportunity was there for me to train people and to train them properly. When they go on a project now, they're properly educated. It's not just about ticking boxes and passing people; we like to make sure that when they walk out our door they're trained properly.”

“It's definitely been hard work and it's been a bit of trial and error, like everything else. We went through a few different people >



As featured in  
The CEO Magazine  
For more info visit  
[theceomagazine.com.au](http://theceomagazine.com.au)





before we found the right people to do it. We believe that we now have the right mix there.”

In addition to rigorous training standards, Diona sets strict safety standards as well. “When the awareness of safety started to become an issue and you had to start allowing for it in your budget, people were just complying and going through the motions,” explains John.

“That’s changed completely now because it’s not an extra thing that we feel we have to do; it’s a standard, fundamental part of our business that we do every day. They’re very aware and very conscious. Instead of treating it like a problem, they’re treating it like a safety risk, as they should.”

To instil that vital culture and attitude across Diona, John says he led by example and worked at it every day. “There were a lot of toolbox talks. You really have to shift their mindset. They can’t view

“There were a lot of toolbox talks. You really have to shift their mindset. They can’t view the safety officer like a policeman; they have to view them as a friend who’s just trying to help them. He’s just trying to make sure they get home safe.”

- John O’Connor



the safety officer like a policeman; they have to view them as a friend who’s just trying to help them. He’s just trying to make sure they get home safe.

“It’s a matter of turning people’s thinking around. This guy is not here to smack you across the wrist all the time; he’s here to help you. Now it’s just part of what we do. It’s one of those things we do every day.”

As Diona looks towards the future, John says he and his team will take it slowly and steadily. “The vision is to move along steadily and consolidate on our financial strength. We’ll continue to take it one step at a time.”

With an impressive portfolio and a strong team behind it, Diona Civil Engineering Contractors will continue to deliver exceptional projects across Australia’s east coast. ◦

# Great businesses make changes to improve performance

**EEA and Case Construction** are ready to help you achieve your business goals.

Call us for personal service and support. We don’t have call centres, just real people providing real solutions, to achieve your goals.



**FOR PERSONAL SERVICE**  
Tel (02) 9671 1000  
[www.eeaustralia.com.au](http://www.eeaustralia.com.au)

Specifications shown are subject to change without notice.

