

# Family Values



As featured in  
*The CEO Magazine*  
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As an 80-year veteran of the engineering and manufacturing sector, Wilson Transformer Company (WTC) has nurtured and developed three generations of Wilsons.

Images by Estelle Judah Photography and WTC

In 1933, Jack Wilson founded Wilson Transformer Company in a small garage in South Melbourne. Today, the company is the largest Australian manufacturer of power and distribution transformers. Jack's son, Robert, has been leading the company as managing director since 1978. Robert's sons, Ed and James, have been working in the business in various roles for a combined 20 years.

The engineering, manufacturing, and field service of transformers has been the primary passion of the Wilson family for eight decades. Transformers are essential in the generation, transmission, and distribution of electricity, and in industrial, mining, transport, and commercial activities requiring electricity. As the company has grown, Robert has ensured that his father's vision lives on, with the company maintaining and

nurturing both a domestic and an international reputation for quality, reliability, and service.

This dedication to meeting customers' needs has been the core driver for Wilson Transformer Company (WTC) and its passionate people. To meet these needs, WTC continually enhances its products to achieve superior lifetime performance and competitiveness. Through its global network of offices and partnerships, WTC explores best practice in its sector and incorporates world-leading, innovative initiatives and technologies into its product and service range.

Robert Wilson has spearheaded this forward-thinking approach across WTC's operations, ensuring that the business is successful and sustainable in the years ahead as his sons continue the family tradition. Robert says

the transformer business is in his blood.

"Through my early childhood, I used to visit the factory on Saturdays with my father," he says. "Later, during September school holidays, our family travelled around Australia with my father visiting customers. As a teenager, I also worked in various parts of the factory, as have my children. The business has always been part of our family life. I joined WTC in November 1970 after graduating in engineering with honours from Monash University. Shortly after, in March 1972, my father died.

"I think the primary thing you learn over your career is that you've got to change, innovate, adapt, and be at the forefront of what's happening in your industry."

To ensure that WTC continuously innovates, Robert says, he focused on the heart of the business. "We >



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endeavour to have the right people in the company and provide leadership to those people, while also understanding the market we operate in, whether in Australia or overseas.

“If you looked at our organisation up until the early 1990s, we were a domestically based business. In fact, the majority of our company is still domestically based, but we’re much more global in our approach, particularly in regard to our overseas distribution transformer joint ventures, our power transformer sales, our dynamic ratings monitoring and controls

business, and our TJ|H2b Analytical Services joint venture.”

Robert built on the firm foundations that his father began to lay in 1933. Dubbed ‘The Chief’ by most of his early employees, Jack Wilson was a forward-thinking man who knew how to turn ideas into reality. As the years went by, Jack steadily reinvested in his people, technology, and assets.

In the early 1950s, after outgrowing its premises in South Melbourne and Port Melbourne, WTC moved its operations to Glen Waverley, the present 10-acre site of its head office and power transformer manufacturing operations.

Between 1963 and 1982, WTC operated a small distribution transformer manufacturing plant in South Australia to supply the South Australian market. From 1983 to 1989, WTC also produced distribution transformers and locomotive transformers in a small plant in Maryborough, Queensland, which it acquired with the takeover of Baldwin Transformers.

“Up until 1980, we were almost a regional company focusing on

Victoria, South Australia, and Tasmania. In 1981, shortly after I took over leadership of the business, we built a new factory in the Albury–Wodonga National Growth Centre. This greenfield site had excellent transport to customers on the Australian eastern seaboard, and enabled WTC to use modern manufacturing techniques and production flow to produce our newly developed range of distribution transformers.”

With the abolition of state preferences in state government purchasing during the 1980s, and the reduction in tariffs from 25 per cent to 5 per cent between 1988 and 1996, WTC closed the small South Australian and Queensland factories and established two focused factories in Glen Waverley, building larger power transformers, and in Albury–Wodonga, building smaller distribution transformers. Over the years, those factories have been improved and expanded.

WTC has always encouraged the active involvement of employees in the business. Annual childrens Christmas parties, annual staff functions, and regular get-togethers have been the norm. The company supports and rewards long service with the presentation of gold watches and recognition on a formal honour board. “Over time, 120 people have achieved 25 years or more of service, and three people have achieved more than 50 years of service,” Robert says.

WTC has been a strong supporter of the local communities in which it operates. In the Albury–Wodonga area, WTC supports the Regional Albury Wodonga Safety, Health & Environment (SHE) Group and various community groups.

Some of the key projects that WTC has spearheaded include the Wilson Transformer Company Aboriginal Youth Development >



Program, which provides an opportunity for Indigenous Australian youth to receive training and practical experience and access to manufacturing and engineering jobs; the Youth to Industry project established by the City of Wodonga; the Wodonga Manufacturing Local Industry Workforce Development Group; and the Albury-Wodonga Solar Car Challenge, where teams from different schools supported by industry members race their model solar cars at Wilson Transformer Park.

As the company continued to grow, a strategic decision was made in 1994 to create separate power and distribution transformer business units to generate focus within the businesses and product range. Following this decision, the remaining distribution transformer manufacture was transferred from Glen Waverley to Wodonga. As the market recovered in the 1990s, this decision necessitated two

expansions of the Wodonga site, which enabled the operation to be further developed into a world-class facility.

Today, WTC operates from both factories in Glen Waverley and Wodonga, employing more than 600 Australians. A sales and customer support office in the United Kingdom services the UK, Europe, and the Middle East markets.

Robert says while WTC has grown steadily, its competition has changed. "Since I joined the business, we've had substantial competition domestically, and many of those competitors have also been multinational businesses as well.

"Since 2000, as Australia's costs have risen compared to our region, most of our multinational competitors have closed their Australian manufacturing facilities and focused on offshore manufacture, while our focus has

remained on Australia. We have a very strong commitment to supporting the Australian power industry from our Australian manufacturing and service facilities, which are readily available to our customers.

"Focusing on an Australian domestic market means that as local conditions change, workload changes unless exports are achieved. For example, in the early 1990s, we had a significant recession, but were able to achieve sizable exports. Today, it is more difficult to achieve volume exports with the strong Australian dollar. We are also challenged by marginally costed exports from countries in our region. To combat this, WTC is currently pursuing a dumping case for power transformers 10 MVA and above with the Australian Anti-Dumping Commission."

Utilising his decades of industry experience, Robert predicts that the nation's economic troubles are

far from over. "My view is that we're currently moving into another recession in Australia in terms of infrastructure, so while it may not be happening in some sectors, it's certainly happening in the infrastructure sector, and one must adapt to those conditions."

Robert believes that now more than ever in Australia's history, there needs to be a national focus on sourcing from within Australia from competent and committed Australian manufacturers. Regional countries provide strong support for their domestic manufacturers who are our competitors. Australia should be doing the same, particularly for those that support critical national infrastructure and the wider economy.

WTC is involved with various institutions to provide support, sponsorship, and expertise to develop the Australian power industry and the younger generation who will be responsible for the electricity networks of the future.

**"We have a very strong commitment to supporting the Australian power industry from our Australian manufacturing and service facilities."**

- Robert Wilson



Since 1969, the Jack Wilson Prize and the Wilson Transformer Company Prize have been awarded to third- and final-year students in electrical and computer systems engineering at Monash University who have shown proficiency and initiative in electrical power engineering.

Along with other leading Australian companies, WTC participates in the Leadership in a Technological Environment program at Monash University,

providing engineering students with scholarships and opportunities for work experience.

WTC was one of the platinum partners of the EnGenius Trade Fair 2013 at RMIT University, which showcases the projects designed and developed by the students in electrical and computer engineering.

Since the inception of the Australian Power Institute (API), WTC has been an active supporter >



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and provides vacation employment work experience for engineering bursary students during their summer breaks.

WTC is also a corporate member of the Electric Energy Society of Australia (EESA). As part of this responsibility, WTC participates in major conferences and occasionally provides transformer factory tours to members and non-members of the EESA.

Since 2000, WTC has hosted the annual TechCon® Asia-Pacific conference with T|J|H2b Analytical Services. The conference focuses on innovative approaches to diagnostics and the maintenance of high-voltage equipment. It attracts around 300 delegates each year, with speakers and exhibitors from Australia and overseas.

Robert is a member of the national and Victorian executives of Australian Industry Group; a former president of Australian Electrical and Electronic

Manufacturers' Association; a former board member of the Australia National Committee of CIGRE and the Centre for Power Transformer Monitoring at Monash University; and a trustee of the CEDA [the Committee for Economic Development of Australia]. Robert's eldest son, Ed Wilson, the general manager of the power business unit, is a board member of the Australian Power Institute, and recently became a board member of the Australia National Committee of CIGRE.

The future of manufacturing in Australia is a topic that Robert and his team are very concerned about. "Within Australia, I believe it's vitally important that we have a manufacturing base. It clearly won't be what it was some years ago, and it will have different elements, but I think it's important to have a manufacturing base providing rewarding jobs and contributing to our balance of payments.

"Our manufacturing operation supplies and services our customers who deliver electricity, water, and gas as well as operate major industrial facilities and mines. The services we provide are difficult to provide from offshore. For example, if a power company, industrial site, or mine has a major transformer failure, we can repair it on site, bring it to our factory for repair, or supply a replacement product in a much shorter time period than from overseas.

"The WTC business supports all forms of infrastructure development, whether it's a CBD expansion, suburban or regional development, or power generation, including wind and solar, rail systems, process industries, mining, and the oil and gas sector. Currently, we are supplying products to liquid natural gas projects, large solar farms, mines, and process industries. Where there's a large demand for electrical power, there's a demand for our products.

"Being Australian based enables engineers from our customer base or consultants to visit our factories as part of the contract design review or inspections. We also conduct training sessions and host visits and factory tours for engineering groups as part of their education and training."

Robert and his team continually strive to improve their products and processes. In 2009, WTC commenced a major upgrade of its manufacturing operations to ensure its facilities were globally competitive. At the time, WTC also recognised the need to expand its customer base to fully utilise the upgraded facilities. With the support of the Industry Capability Network, WTC approached Chevron in an endeavour to become a supplier to their Australian-based projects.

The Chevron supplier multistage qualification process took more than two years. "WTC had a demonstrated track record in export success and innovation, and was committed to working with customers to develop the business. The qualification process was extensive, with WTC teams visiting Chevron's procurement team in Houston and Perth, and Chevron teams conducting audits and inspections of WTC's factories and worksites."

Robert says WTC was able to satisfy Chevron's technical, commercial, manufacturing, and quality requirements with the upgraded manufacturing facilities. However, WTC needed to develop an entirely new health, safety, and environment management system to meet the high standard required by global oil and gas companies. This was completed over a six-month period, and benefits have now been delivered through improved safety performance.

As a result, WTC became the first Australian business to become a fully qualified global supplier to Chevron, and was awarded the transformer supply contract for the Wheatstone LNG project in Western Australia. >



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"With the manufacturing climate growing more and more competitive, Wilson Transformer continues to be one of the leading transformer manufacturers in the world. Furthermore, Robert Wilson's leadership towards human dignity is extremely impressive within the industry."  
- Ee Joo Lee, CEO, Sam Dong Co

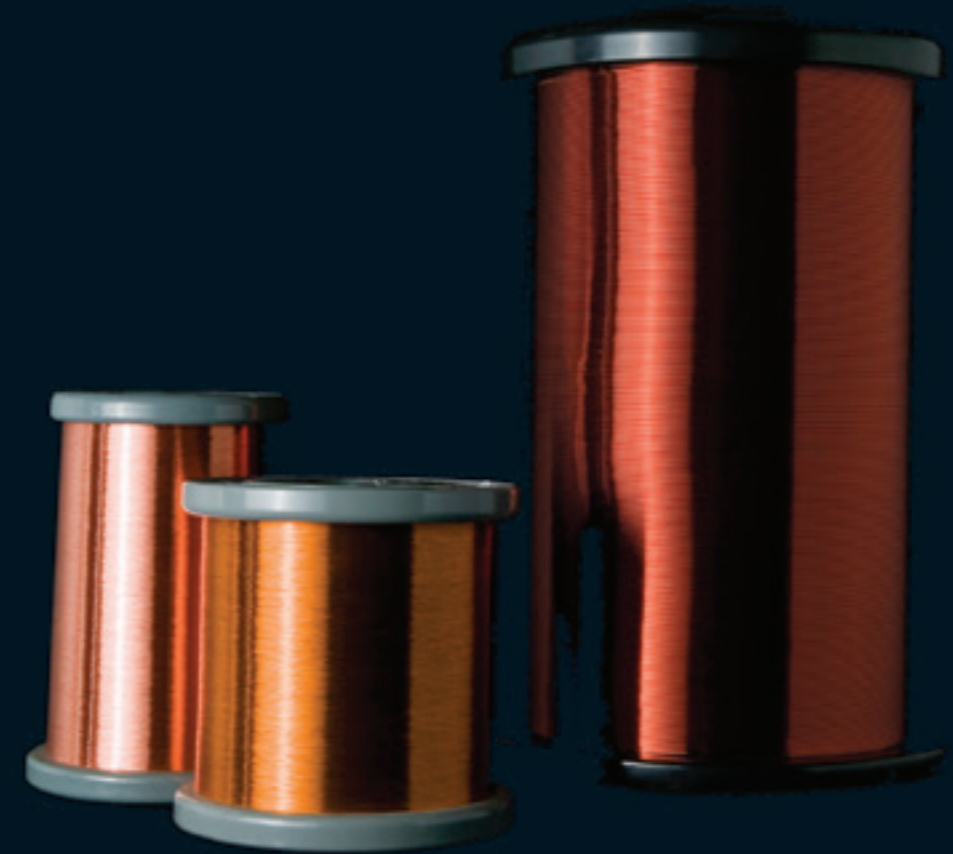
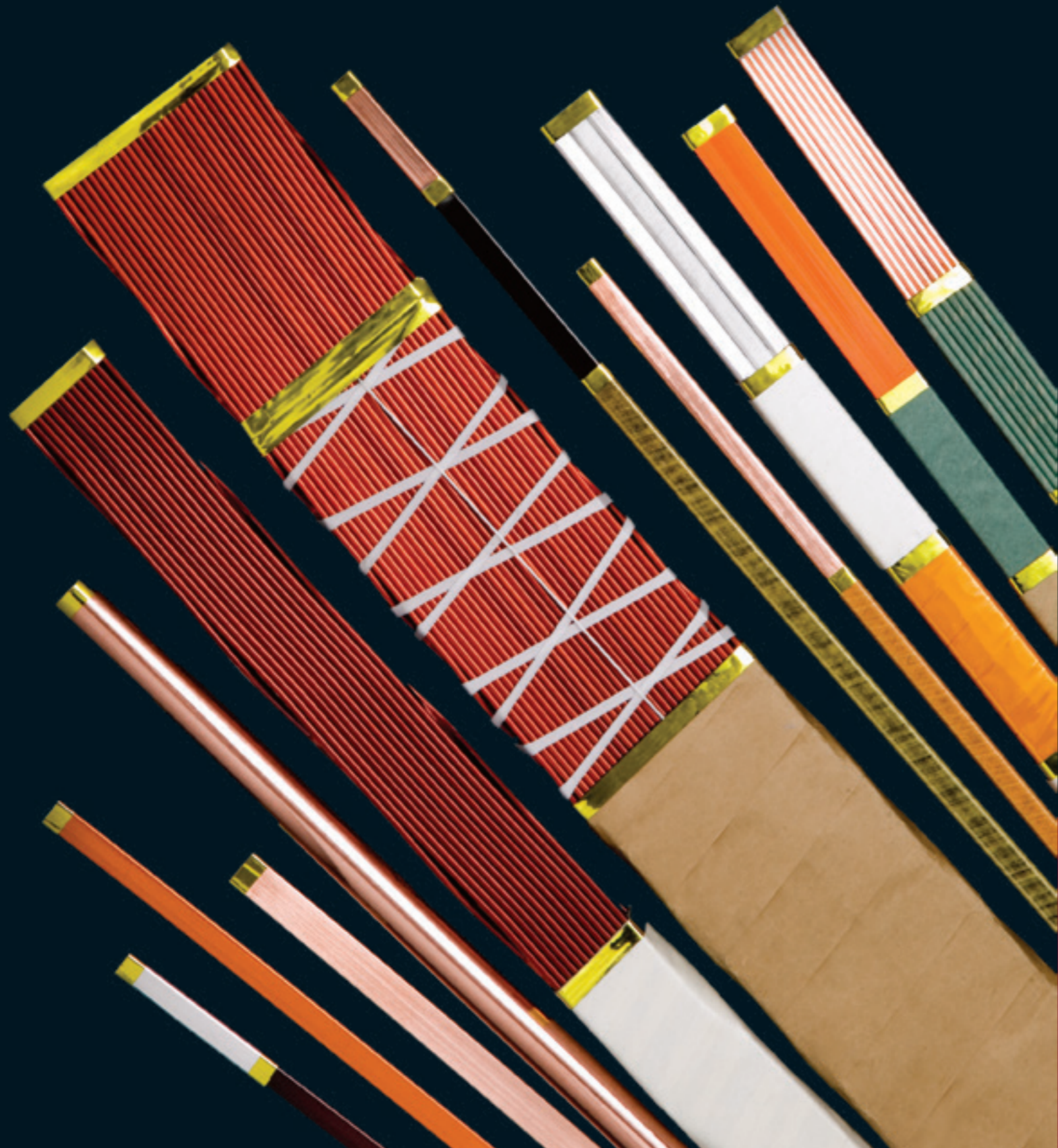
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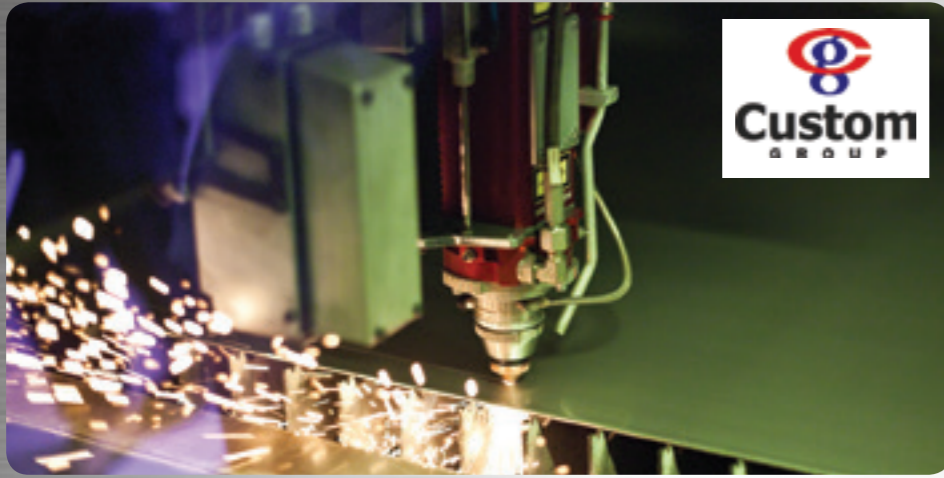
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office was established near London in 1999 for the UK, the Middle East, and Africa markets.

Thanks to this commitment, the majority of central London substation upgrades in the past five years have used Wilson transformers. Some of WTC's major projects in the United Kingdom include the Bankside Substation, supplying the West End, Central London, and the Southbank areas; Kings Yard Substation, supplying the London Olympic site; the Eurotunnel Substation upgrade, and the Scotland Clyde Wind Farm grid connection transformers, which is the largest land-based wind farm in Europe.

"While we're very much an Australian business, we do have arms that stretch across the world," Robert says. "We have formed joint-venture distribution transformer manufacturing operations in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia to supply their regional markets. We have a range of other businesses. One such company is Dynamic Ratings, which has a general manager in Australia and a general manager in the United States."

Dynamic Ratings, a wholly owned subsidiary of Wilson Transformer, provides monitoring, control, and communication solutions for electrical power apparatus. Started in the 1990s, Dynamic Ratings has grown to become a global leader in its field. The Dynamic Ratings engineering team provides complete solutions from the initial design through installation and commissioning to diagnostic support.

In addition to these international arms, Robert says, WTC stretches across Australia. "We have a services business that is Australia-wide. We have another company involved in laboratory testing and analytical services, which is a joint venture with an overseas company that's related to our service business."

The Wilson service team has more than 60 full-time employees,

including 10 engineers, and utilises in excess of \$6 million of specialist equipment for the management and service of transformers. The team specialises in transformer life optimisation, utilising comprehensive transformer audit services to provide accurate condition-assessment reports, and recommendations for strategic management.

The team is well equipped to respond to the full range of transformer maintenance and repair requirements, including oil vacuum trucks, purpose-built test vans, dry-air machines, and specialist test equipment.

Opened in 2009, the dedicated service centre in Dandenong South, Victoria, is used for transformer repair and refurbishment works, storage of new transformers, plant and equipment maintenance, and training facilities for customers and employees.

The Wilson service team also has several regional workshops to service customers around Australia, including Silverwater, New South Wales; Northgate, Queensland; Bassendean, Western Australia; and Cambridge, Tasmania.

With so many arms throughout Australia and overseas, Robert says he focuses on ensuring that the strategies and values of WTC are ingrained throughout its network. "I think we achieve this by primarily ensuring that the managers are working closely as a team. There's no extremely hierarchical process in our business; we talk to each other on a daily basis and we're very involved."

WTC has a very simple vision, which is displayed around the business for the company and all employees to aspire to: "Zero Harm, Zero Waste, Complete Customer Satisfaction ... Always."

Robert says Wilson employees are the core strength of WTC. "We encourage excellence among our >

"Due to Chevron's rigorous global supplier qualification process, other project developers have also approved WTC as a supplier," says Robert. "Chevron's commitment to provide opportunities for and engage with Australian suppliers is to be commended."

WTC has also worked to expand its global reach through developing strong partnerships around the world. One of its major export achievements has been the supply of power transformers to the United Kingdom. To support this activity, a sales-and-support

*"Our partnership over the years has enabled SRS to grow significantly. We now operate more than seven locations throughout Australia. Wilson Transformers is one of our major customers, and our continued collaboration ensures we continue to deliver a complete solution." - Tony Sipos, Managing Director, SRS Electric*



people. We certainly want the right people in the business. We also strongly encourage family values, so there's a very strong culture of being a Wilson person in the Wilson Transformer Company. It's not a public company where at the end of the day everything comes down to the next quarter or six-month results. We're much more long term in our thought process and strategies than, say, a public company.

"We're more concerned about the survival and long-term prosperity of the business and intergenerational change. In that sense, I succeeded my father in the 1970s, and we're currently in the process of making a transition to the next generation. In fact, my son, Ed Wilson, was our representative at *The CEO Magazine's* 2013 Executive

Conference. He certainly enjoyed it immensely and found it very valuable.

"The values that I have and our general managers have are very much shared among the staff. In our Malaysia and Saudi Arabia joint ventures, our partners and the people in those businesses basically regard me as their friend and, in many respects, almost a fatherly figure, even though they're majority-controlled by our partner offshore."

As the leadership changes hands and the next generation steps up to the plate, WTC will ensure it maintains its dedication to superior quality and service. As the only manufacturer and in-factory repairer of large power transformers in Australia, WTC plays a pivotal part in Australia's

**"The values that I have and our general managers have are very much shared among the staff. In our Malaysia and Saudi Arabia joint ventures, our partners and the people in those businesses basically regard me as their friend."**

- Robert Wilson

manufacturing industry and national security.

"We're not a major global player, although we supply transformers into Asia, the Middle East, and the United Kingdom and support those markets. I would say we're a medium-sized enterprise in the global market.

"Therefore, rather than having a large range of suppliers in one commodity area, we tend to move down to either a small number of suppliers or, in some cases, a single supplier. We work very closely with our suppliers."

For instance, Robert says, WTC works very closely with JFE, a Japanese company that makes electrical steel. "We've been sourcing from JFE, previously Kawasaki Steel, continuously since 1965, and we've been almost exclusively sole-sourcing from them since 1993. We became important to them, and they're obviously very

*"We first had the opportunity to work with Wilson Transformers nine years ago. Since then, we have built a fantastic relationship in both work and community projects. It's pleasing to be connected with someone still manufacturing in Australia." - Raymond Bertazzo, Managing Director, Bertazzo Engineered*

## Working together allows us to continue manufacturing in Australia

Established in 1997 in a backyard workshop, Bertazzo Engineered has grown to a company with 26 employees working out of a 3,500m<sup>2</sup> facility in Wodonga, Victoria.

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important to us. While a major multinational might source from four or five suppliers, we will tend to source from one or maybe two, so we become very relevant to those suppliers.

"Again, in the electrical conductor area, we work with Sam Dong, a South Korean company. While JFE is a very large corporate enterprise in Japan, the Sam Dong business in Korea is a family-owned business, and Mr Ee Joo Lee, the managing director, runs a

business very similar to ours in terms of its values.

"He's one of the major suppliers of electrical conductors to the global transformer industry. He visits us twice a year in Melbourne and Wodonga, so he goes to both plants as a chief executive of a company that has operations in Korea and multiple plants in the United States. He supplies materials globally, and he regards us as an important customer."

These relationships will prove crucial in coming years as Robert and his sons strive to position WTC as their industry's market leader in Australia. "We want to be regarded as the natural choice for anyone who needs our products. We want people to automatically think of Wilson when they're looking for a transformer.

"We offer competitive value, high quality, and exceptional support. Our facilities are very modern; they're clean and bright, and they create an image of a company that is modern and forward-thinking in what we do.

"My aim for the business is to transition the leadership into the next generation and leave it up to them as to how they run the business. I'm 65 now. I'll still be around and I'll probably work in the business for the rest of my life, but on a part-time basis rather than a full-time basis, probably from late 2014 or so."

As his sons Ed and James take over WTC's reins, Robert says the business is continuously evolving. "One of the things we have found is that the business has grown over the years from essentially a small family company into a medium-sized business. Even as a medium-sized family business, in the past we were able to rely on interpersonal communication and the individual skills of our people to get things done.

"With today's compliance requirements and changing workforce, we're becoming more of a systems-type business, so the processes in the organisation ensure that things happen correctly while being supported by highly capable people who make sure that those systems are appropriate and correct."

Wilson Transformer Company will draw on the dedication of its people, the quality of its products and services, its commitment to customers, family values, and its strategic, long-term thinking as the business develops into the future. ●

