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BUILDERS
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BUILDING STORIES

GLENN JONES

Managing Director
BOSTON GROUP

Life Member
MASTER BUILDERS VICTORIA

Glenn Jones has been a Master Builder for four decades. In that time, as well as being an award-winning homebuilder and consultant, he's served on numerous committees and boards for MBV. He's a true believer in MBV's mission to create a better, safer industry.



Fair trader: Vermont builder Glenn Jones with the awards won last week. Picture: 815.9315
JO PATTERSON

Fair trader of the year

VERMONT builder and managing director of Boston Projects, Glenn Jones, has been named Victorian Fair Trader of the Year.

Mr Jones was presented with his award by Fair Trading and Business Affairs Minister Jan Wade at a ceremony at the Grand Hyatt last week.

Earlier in the ceremony Boston Projects also took out the award for the building industry category.

The fair trading awards were launched in 1995 to reward initiatives in customer service excellence and this year there were more than 850 entries across nine categories.

Mr Jones said Boston Projects had hoped to win the building industry award but he never expected to be named overall winner. "I was shocked, I'm still in shock," he said.

Mr Jones said he was surprised Boston Projects was chosen as the overall winner ahead of the other section winners, which included a professional ironing service, computer services, real estate agent, video production company, car trader and shoe manufacturer.

Mr Jones formed Boston Projects in 1993 after 20 years' experience in the building industry.

About 18 months ago, in an effort to improve communication with customers, Mr Jones implemented the consumer management system.

This step-by-step program keeps customers informed during the entire pre-contract and building process.

"Every consumer is different and they've all got concerns but you can't learn consumer communication out of a textbook. If you want to develop proper communication with customers, you can only do so by working with them."

Mr Jones said he had also learnt much from consumer advocates and he encouraged other builders to do so as well.

The Fair Trader of the Year award is the most recent success for Boston Projects, but the business has won many other awards. Two weeks ago Mr Jones received the Master Builders' Association of Victoria (MBAV) award for best home under \$80,000. Mr Jones said he hoped other builders would follow the lead of Boston Projects and improve communication with their customers.

He also called on other builders to enter next year's award, but warned Boston Projects would be trying for back-to-back success.

— JULIE DOYLE

I suppose you have to be a born builder to understand it in some ways. MBV is very democratic in my view, and it's got a spirit to it. It's like a big family.

The year I got seriously interested in constructing was 1984. My father, Barney, was general manager of Larwin Shiff Development Corporation, developing large tracts of land in the eastern suburbs. And he was already on the Housing Sector Group Committee. I said to my old man that I wanted to become a builder, so he took me down to meet Brian Morrison (then-MBAV CEO) in October of 1984, and they signed me up as a member.

I remember the office was very antiquated, with teak-lined walls and these cattle-grid partitions. It was very hard to get around, very old style. Not much light in the building. My dad did the intro for me and then left me to it.

I wanted to make money and build quality homes with a view to building a reputable brand. We started the Boston Group in the early days of '84, '85. We'd buy land, and we had four basic models we'd build,



Once I got into the housing sector group, the camaraderie was very good. That's what we're about. We look after each other.

and then we sold it at auction. We did that very successfully for a long time. We used to keep the display home open for sixty to ninety days, because in those days I couldn't afford to have a display centre. Then we started slowly moving into the order job market. We were making money out of it – not a lot, but we were remaining solvent and moving forward, so it was a good thing.

In the late eighties, we got involved in the MBAV awards program, and over twelve years, the Boston Group won many awards, including Best Town House (1989), Best Home Under \$80,000 (1996 and 1997), and the Department of Justice Victorian Fair Trader of the Year (1997), to name a few.

One day in 1995, Barney called me up and said Digby Forbes was going to call me. I knew who he was – he was sort of the godfather of MBAV. Barney said, 'Do whatever he asks you, and don't refuse him.' He did call, and he asked me to join the Housing Sector Committee.

I think my old man thought I'd been building long enough now to know what to do and what to address. And I had. So I think he just thought it was time for me to do some work at MBAV. Digby got his old shepherd's hook out and hooked me in. And the next thing I know, I'm sitting down with great people like Don Ravida, Trevor Fasham, David Newnham and Michael Rigg. Really smart men, and gentlemen all.

Once I got into the Housing Sector Group, the camaraderie was very good. That's what we're about. We look after each other. And even though I was a young practitioner, I was welcomed in with open arms, particularly by Trevor Fasham and Len Barlow, who was the president at the time. It was absolutely cutting edge. It was state-of-the-art and I can tell you that there were a lot of entities in Australia that were very interested in what the Housing Sector Group Committee was doing.

In 1996, I got a phone call (oh, these phone calls I get out of the blue!) from Brian Welch. He said, 'We need you to take on a role at the Building Control Commission' (BCC). They wanted me to sit on the

OPPOSITE Glenn Jones wins the Victorian Fair Trader of the Year award, 1997.



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BELOW (L-R) Mort Mitchell and Sir Albert Jennings, 1980s.

OPPOSITE LEFT Building Practitioners Board, Builder Registration Committee: (L-R) John Hadden, Glenn Jones, Kate Hammond, Alan Coleman, Roger Vella, Geoff Swann and Peter Mahony, 1997.

OPPOSITE RIGHT (L-R) Digby Forbes, David Newnham, Mort Mitchell and Don Ravida, pictured at Don's presidential inauguration, 2004.





Building Practitioners Board to assess registration for builders and help with implementation of the new *Domestic Building Contracts Act*. 'It'll be a piece of cake, Glenn. It'll only take one day a month out of your calendar. You'll get \$8 an hour.'

So I go in there and they hand me a BIC biro and a Post-it notepad and they say, 'You'll need these two things.' I thought – what is going on? We started off with about eighty registration files piled up on a side table and they said, 'Get to work and assess them.' No instructions.

It became a shitfight of the highest order. They developed a leak, and the media got into it. Every second day, there was an article about builders, cowboys, consumers getting hurt. I started to learn, pretty quickly, that the industry is not exactly clean. I learnt that there were a lot of builders out there that were doing the wrong thing. I learnt that people were dying of suicide. The whole idea of the new Act was to protect consumers.

The basic criteria for registration was that you had to demonstrate three years of practical experience as an apprentice. When we started, there were no bankruptcy checks. There were no director checks, no nothing. It was really rough.



These basic registration requirements were poorly thought through and led to major conflict between the Department of Justice and the BCC. I was surprised how much the BCC depended on MBV support.

The intake each week was roughly sixty to ninety applications. Pretty shortly, I found myself deputy chairman of the BCC, and working two days a week, as well as running my business. We got into interviewing every single applicant. We developed a system to determine who was good and who was bad. My rate was around 43 per cent pass, 57 per cent fail. About seven minutes into one interview, two coppers burst in through the doors. I'm sitting there going, 'What is going on?' They put cuffs on this guy. He'd breached bail and he wanted to be a building practitioner.

I quickly realised that the BCC was clueless on a lot of issues and looked towards us to help out. MBV is the leading housing and commercial construction group in Australia; there's no doubt about it. We've got the most members and we've been around the longest. But knowing what I know about this movement, people come to us for assistance all the time – not just members, but government departments and more. Because we're at the coalface every day.