



A future in your hands

Tradies are aiming to change their image to one of a master craftsman

QUEEN Street Mall was a flurry of scissors, saws, trowels and knives this week as would-be apprentices and trainees turned their hands to different trades.

Budding bricklayers, beauty therapists, sheet metal manufacturers and hospitality workers had a glimpse of their potential future at WorldSkills Australia's Try'a Trade – a free, interactive program designed to inspire a new generation of skilled workers.

Trades are viewed as a second-class career option in this country, says WorldSkills Australia chief executive officer Mark Callaghan, and events like Try'a Trade aim to trigger a shift in that national mindset.

"In Europe, trades have always had a 'master craftsman' status and they still do," Callaghan says.

"In Australia, however, there was a push in the 1970s and 1980s for young people to get a university education so we had parents and career advisers saying that to be successful, young

people needed to get a degree rather than learn a trade.

"These days, of course, you only have to go down your own street and you can see how successful the plumber is – his house is the one with the big boat and nice car outside."

Visitors to Queen Street Mall last Thursday were able to make their own metal box, mix a cocktail, help lay a brick wall and apply make-up at booths provided by not-for-profit organisation WorldSkills Australia, and Southbank Institute of Technology.

The one-day event is just a taste of what will be on offer in May when the WorldSkills Australia National Competition is held in Brisbane.

More than 500 of the country's top

apprentices will demonstrate their talents in 50 different trade and skill categories, while would-be tradies can try 30 various jobs ranging from carpentry to hairdressing. Competitors aged from 16 to 23 will vie for bronze, silver and gold medals at the competition. Some of those who win the medals will be selected for the Team Australia Skillaroos, the national squad which will be competing at the International WorldSkills Competition in London in 2011.

Former MacGregor State High School student Dan Karanges won a bronze medal at last year's international competition in Calgary, Canada.

It was the first time that Karanges, who dropped out of school after Year 11, had been overseas.

"It's changed my life," he says.

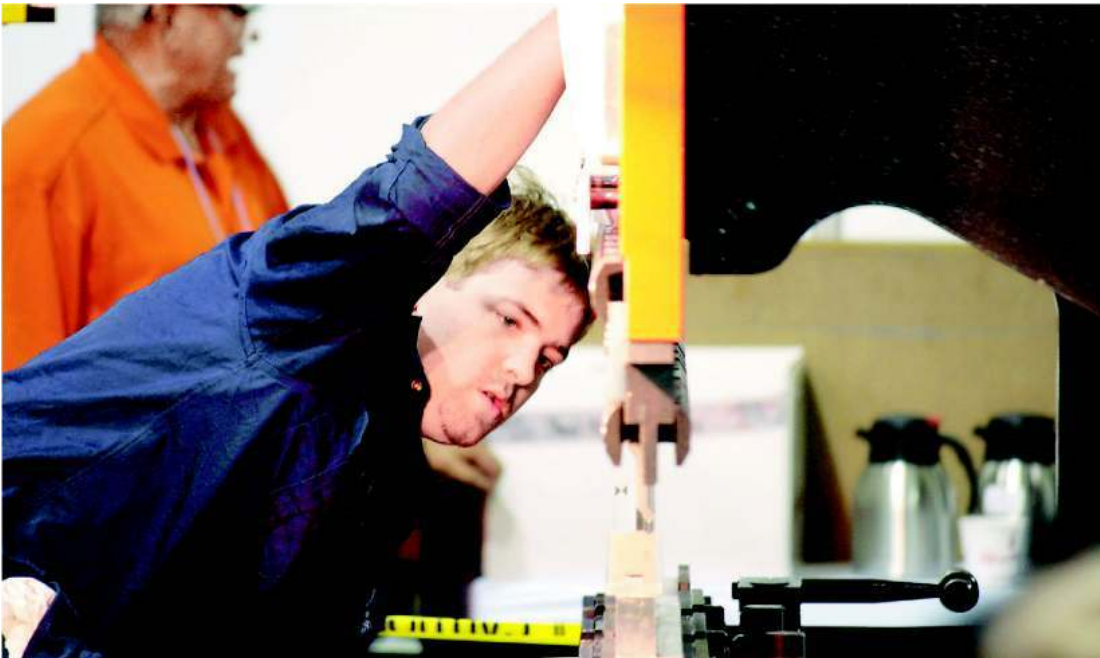
"The confidence I have got through WorldSkills has been fantastic. I mean, quitting school after Year 11 doesn't put a nice taste in your mouth and it makes life harder.

"But coming third in the world in my trade just shows that if you work hard, you can still come out on top."

Karanges, who helped Try'a Trade visitors make metal boxes in the mall, completed a four-year sheet metal fabrication apprenticeship at Stoddarts Manufacturing, at Sunnybank. He was selected to compete at a regional competition in Brisbane in 2008 where he won a gold medal. Later that year, he became national champion in his trade at the Australian competition in Sydney. From there, the 22-year-old was selected to go to Canada.

"When I came back, Stoddarts asked me if I wanted to do a diploma in engineering at SkillsTech Australia so they're paying for that and I'm studying one night a week," he says.

The WSA national competition, Brisbane Convention Centre, May 7- 9, www.worldskills.org.au. Fran Metcalf



CUTTING EDGE: Dan Karanges won a bronze medal last year at the International WorldSkills Competition in Canada