

## “Missed ... by 'that much!'”

Gill Christiansen came within a fraction of a percentage point of being named Pest Manager of the Year 2004.

Judging panellists Associate Professor John Harden; AEPMA representative, Geoff Hawes; and Sorex International nominee, Bob Gillespie said they had their work well and truly cut out because all the entries in the inaugural Pest Manager of the Year were of an exceptionally high standard.

Separating the two finalists, Peter Arnold and Gill Christiansen, was, however, particularly tough: “like splitting hairs”, according to Geoff Hawes.

Apart from both living and working in Queensland and starting out as migrants to Australia, Gill and Peter have a lot in common, not the least of which is their passion, commitment to excellence, and dedication to the highest possible levels and standards of customer service.

Gill Christiansen and his wife, Maree, own and operate Environ Enterprises in Townsville.

Gill became involved in pest management in 1994 after a highly successful career in the meat industry in which he managed meat processing plants with over 1,000 employees.

“I worked my way up through the meat industry over 18 years and through 22 processing plants around Australia,” Gill said.

“When I started off, as a young man, I was packing kidneys. Over time, I worked through pretty well every single meat plant job including foreman, QA manager, training manager, microbiologist, sales and marketing and technical management, eventually becoming general manager.

“It was a huge responsibility but, working with some of the most amazing characters and mentors, I had the time of my life,” he said.

Now, Gill says, he is having the time of his life in pest management.

When it comes to racking up professional qualifications and expertise, there would few if any pest managers within a bull’s roar of Gill. Amongst those listed on his CV are:

- OLI Urban Pest Control;

- Competency Units 5,6 and 18 in Asset Maintenance Pest Management;

- Competency Units 8 and 10 in Asset Maintenance Pest Management;

- Certificate II in Asset Maintenance Pest Management;

- Certificate III in Asset Maintenance Pest Management;

- Certificate IV in Asset Maintenance Pest Management; and

- Certificate IV in Assessment and Work Place Training;

Gill has also sought a range of professional expertise for input into his business in the areas of marketing, accounting and quality management and plans to enrol in a university entomology degree this year.

He is a fully qualified Justice of the Peace; a qualified Work Place Health and Safety Officer, and holds a Senior First Aid certificate.

In addition, he has a comprehensive understanding of ISO 9000:2000 and is qualified to conduct in service testing and inspection of in house electrical equipment.

Gill counts himself as an avid reader of industry and technical journals and magazines and is also something of a computer buff.

“We have an up to date library which includes all relevant Australian Standards, Building Codes Queensland, and the Work Place Health and Safety Act,” Gill said.

### Professional image

Gill believes business success does not come simply from being good and doing a good job but from being seen to be doing a good job and 'looking the part'.

That thinking influenced Environ's recruitment policy: looking for and finding top quality professionals, not just in technical pest management but also in architecture, quality management, accounting, and operations management. For good measure, Gill also retains a specialist marketing and corporate imaging strategist.

“Importantly, all our pest managers are not only fully trained and skilled technically but also schooled in being highly effective communicators, at all levels,” Gill said.

“We also keep our employees happy, providing excellent remuneration packages which include performance based incentives and conditions,” he said.

Quality is not just a token word, for Gill. It is a burning objective and a badge he wears with honour and pride.

Few pest managers, for instance, have qualified to use and wear the cherished 'Five Ticks' quality-assured logo. Gill is one of those few.

Environ has also proudly held 'ISO9001:2000 Third Party Certification' since October 2002.

While Gill admits there is a lot of hard work, procedure and process involved in gaining and holding ISO9001:2000 status, to him and his team, it is well worth it, not just because it helps demonstrate their commitment and sets them apart from competitors but because it provides a mechanism to continually improve on their already high standards.

Not content to get it right with quality service and delivery, Gill went on to seek, qualify for and gain the prestigious ISO14001 Environmental Management System quality assurance, and then, to round things off, AS/NZS 4801 Occupational Health & Safety Management System accreditation.

### Recognition

It is not just Gill, Maree and their team who think their business is a good one. Their peers and suppliers do as well.

Three years ago, Environ Enterprises took out not just the State but National Bayer Environmental Science 2001/2002 Excellence Award. A year later, in 2003, they did it all again.

2003 also saw them win the 'Outstanding Achievement in Trade Contracting - Termite Protection' award presented by the Queensland Master Builders Association.

“But, what’s the good of doing good things if you don’t build your business around and on top of them,” Gill asks.

Gill does not hide his light under a bushel.

He has put a lot of time and investment into advertising and promotion using media, Yellow Pages, and his own website to help get the message across that Environ Enterprises is not your average pest management company.

The same carefully crafted image carries across to all other 'visibles', including trucks, uniforms, stationary, and direct mail materials.

And then, there is the quality of his business tools and resources. Environ boasts an office, in modern design specific premises, with all the latest computer technology and equipment, not for its own sake but because it makes them more efficient and able to deliver a higher quality service.

They also invest heavily in what they regard as their number one asset, their staff, not only recruiting from the top but spending heavily on on-going staff training and development.

Client handbooks have been specifically developed for 'Termite Management Compliance Pre Construction' termite protection, as have 'Duty of Care' Protocols for Termite Management Compliance.

Environ Enterprises is also a registered builder and its resident architect is also a qualified installer of many termite products and an expert in 'Design Application Risk Management'.

### Customer relationships

The building of relationships with customers to understand and respond to their requirements, is an essential part of the Environ way of doing business.

“We conducted our own survey of local operators, looking at things like phone manner, pricing, information provided and the general attitude of our competitors,” Gill said.

“In most cases, we found that when prospective clients asked for a service to be provided, they were given only a price and that was the end of the phone call. The attitude of some operators was, to put it bluntly, 'quite lacking'.

“Then, when we surveyed consumers, we found what they were looking for: more information; guidance; and piece of mind.

“While we found some made decisions on price alone, most were looking for quality of service.

“My feeling is, if you treat your prospective clients as long lost friends and are genuine in your concern, caring and compassion for people, then you are on a winner.

“On many occasions, I have talked to prospective clients, answered their questions, or given them solutions and not even discussed pricing. We have conversations about 'stuff' and, when they are ready, they ask to be booked in.

“As part of our operating protocol, we always use people’s given names in the first instance, which shows respect and immediately builds a rapport.

“Our training guidelines stipulate the use of documented processes all laid out in our 'Quality Procedures Manual' for every inquiry, be it for general pest management or inspections.

“We also regularly carry out customer care surveys and constant individual staff performance evaluations and reviews, we also have a specific follow up protocol for all our clients.

“And, we not only provide advice to the public. We also have a commitment to and continually provide support for architects, builders, engineers, council certifiers, private contractors and many other professions ... as well as other pest managers.”

To state the bleeding obvious, Gill Christiansen’s achievements and the way he and Maree conduct their business must have made the judging of the inaugural Pest Manager of the Year exceptionally difficult.

But did missing out on the top award by a fraction of a point get Gill down? Not Gill. Apart from being a perfectionist, Gill is also a fierce competitor.

“I was thrilled to be named runner up this time around and I am full of admiration for Peter and Elaine Arnold. However, entry in this prestigious award has been a tremendous learning experience and I am hell bent on making sure we not only continue to improve what we do but also improve how we present ourselves next time around. We'll be back!”

As far as PPM is concerned, whoever beats Gill Christensen and Peter Arnold for the 2005 Pest Manager of the Year award will have to be, as the bishop said to the actress, 'bloody good'!