

Cosmo's superstore opening

On 15 May, Pierre van Nieuwenhuizen, director of Cosmo Industrial, had the pleasure of standing with his three daughters and his business partner Rossouw van der Merwe, while his eldest cut a yellow satin ribbon signalling the opening of a new R31-million one-stop welding and industrial superstore – 4 500 m² of purpose-built floor space in Silverton, Pretoria. *African Fusion* reports.

The story of Cosmo started in 1994, when Van Nieuwenhuizen and Van der Merwe decided to start, what was then, a small entrepreneurial business in a house in Silverton. From these premises, the business sold welding products, a limited amount of safety equipment, and gas. The two partners secured their first agencies, with Lincoln Electric for welding equipment and consumables, and Air Products for industrial gases. A decade and a half later, it has retained these same two key brands in an expanded company

with 40 employees and 2007/2008 turnover of close to R50-million.

Cosmo Industrial's new facility brings together all of its historical companies under one roof – United National Gas, Cosmo Gas and Welding, and Silverton Welding Repairs. The consolidation means a greatly-simplified paper trail and one integrated accounting system. "After barely three months here, we have been able to greatly increase our levels of efficiency," says Van Nieuwenhuizen. "The consolidation of the company has improved our potential

sustainability and created more value for the owners and the staff."

When the business comprised three separate companies, customers had to shuttle from one Cosmo company to another to buy all their welding-related products. Now Cosmo has a super-efficient conduit from which to move equipment and consumables from suppliers to customers. "When a member of my team sees a major industrial or mining customer, they can present the full range of Cosmo's products at the same time. Also, while Cosmo staff make sure that they are as conversant as possible with the products and ranges supplied, the company is of sufficient size to be able to call on the services of its suppliers and their in-house experts. For example, if one of Cosmo's major clients has a question concerning welding gases, Air Products would be happy to send its experts to support Cosmo's customer," he says, "and Lincoln's full



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A view of the inside of the store which caters for both the DIY, the industrial and the welding markets. Brands include: Lincoln Electric, Jonnesway, Gedore, Ingersoll Rand, Harris, Abicor Binzel, Jonsson Workwear, Air Products, Tork Craft, Pferd, Uvex and Makita.

range of local and international expertise is also available should we need it."

When asked why he chose Silverton as his base, Van Nieuwenhuizen explains that it is well sited for numerous industrial areas, as it has easy access to the highway. In the immediate region, there are the industrial areas of Samcor Park and Waltloo. "From here, Cosmo can service most of the provinces through various means such as courier services," he explains. The company also has a lively export business to South Africa's neighbouring states.

When it comes to its customer profile, the company serves the petrol and petrochemical industries, the pipeline industry, the mining industry, heavy manufacturing and its associated body of contracting firms as well as training institutions. It also supplies the railways, as evidenced by the number

of Transnet people at the opening. The motor industry, structural architectural steel fabrication and engineering shops are also regular customers. In addition, Cosmo is a very keen supplier to the DIY market and the home welder.

A relatively new departure for Cosmo is the company's involvement in training.

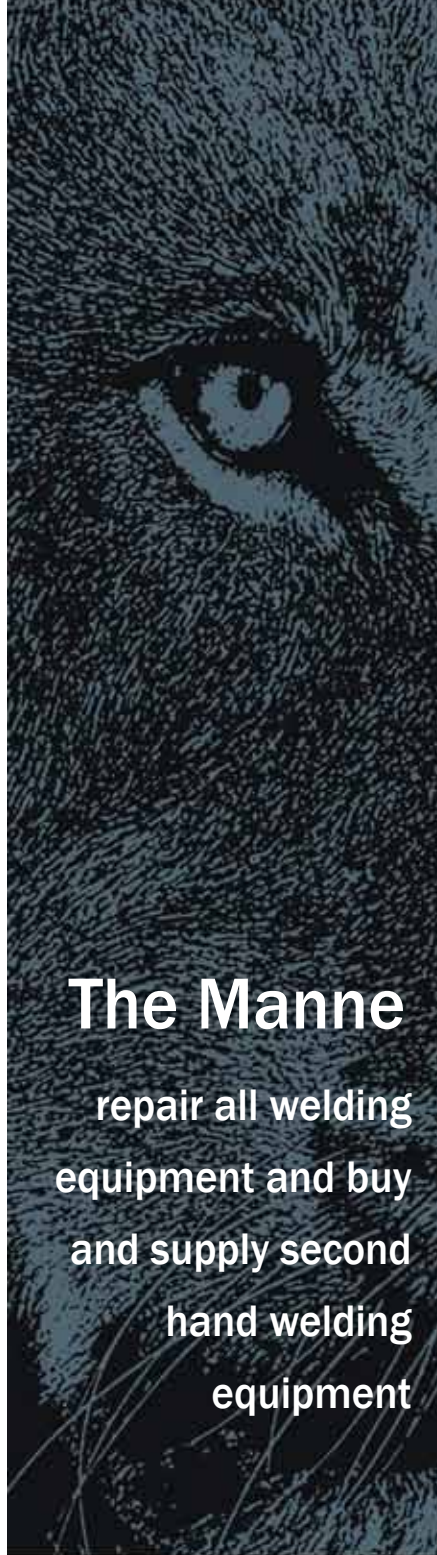
From its suppliers, Cosmo is able to tap into the expertise of excellent engineers and welding experts. Van Nieuwenhuizen intends to work with the Merseta to open up an accredited training facility to provide training from entry-level to expert welding workplace qualifications. Also, the opportunity exists for experienced welders to obtain a formal qualification through the 'recognition of prior learning' process.

Other training initiatives include providing basic welding training for the DIY market, ie, the crafter and the handyman. One thing Van Nieuwenhuizen has repeated many times is that he wants to get people's hands onto welding equipment – "if you've never had the opportunity to swim, you'll never swim," he says.

In the development of Cosmo, Air Products has been an anchor supplier during this 15-year journey, having been the supplier to the former United National Gas part of the business. At the rear of the building, there is an innovatively designed gas-dispatching bay. Here, the company works with Air Products who supply Cosmo's extensive range of gases. Van Nieuwenhuizen is proud to point out that his facility has been designed with safety very much in mind.



A ribbon is cut to mark the official opening of Cosmo Industrial's welding and industrial superstore. Left: Rossouw van der Merwe and Pierre van Nieuwenhuizen with his three children Jada, Miné and Lente.



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Cosmo stocks the full range of welding gases, shielding gases, acetylene, oxygen, nitrogen and argon to name but a few. This gas is not only available in cylinders, but is also supplied to large volume users in Air Products' ultra-convenient Minitanks and Maxitanks. This has been a bonus as the market has grown rapidly in the past five years, explains Van Nieuwenhuizen.

With the Minitanks and Maxitanks and Air Products' TelAlert gas level monitoring system, Cosmo's customers never have to worry about running short of gas. This is because this particular system warns the supplier when its clients' tanks are nearing empty. "Our larger users of welding gases have found the Minitanks and Maxitanks an amazingly convenient, trouble-free way of being supplied with gas," he says.

Cosmo Industrial has chosen Lincoln as its total solution welding equipment partner and is an authorised distributor of Lincoln products. "We are now total solution Lincoln people," says Van Nieuwenhuizen. "Sales people need to know they are selling the right product for the right application and with Lincoln, our whole sales team is very comfortable."

He sees a great opportunity for the Lincoln brand in South Africa. Cosmo has the people on the ground that can take the Lincoln brand to the market, he says. "We have the opportunity to make a real big difference."

Cosmo is one of Lincoln's top distributors in South Africa, says Nahanni Nagle, regional manager of Lincoln in South Africa. "With the new building, we think Cosmo will really shake things up," he says. "We like welding and we can see that the Cosmo team likes welding too."

Van Nieuwenhuizen particularly likes the distributorship system that is favoured by both Air Products and Lincoln Electric, as it gives him a free hand when it comes to growing Cosmo's business.

This attracts entrepreneurial people to work with these companies, he says.

Environmental systems and solutions

Cosmo Industrial has also diversified into several other product ranges and services, including environmental systems such as industrial sweepers and welding fume extraction equipment.

Reno Industrial Africa has chosen Cosmo to distribute its range of cleaning equipment and in particular the range of Dulevo Industrial Sweepers, imported from Italy. Dulevo started building sweepers 30 years ago initially for the cement industry where there was a need to effectively collect and filter cement dust. It now has a range of products to cover the commercial, industrial and municipal markets. Dulevo sweepers combine a sweeping process – where the larger material is lifted by a conveyor system – and a vacuum system – which allows the fine dust particles that are lifted by the main broom to be filtered and clean air to be released back into the environment.

Legislation in Europe and throughout the world is becoming more and more stringent regarding health and safety, and environmental emissions. This is being measured by concentrated limits of airborne PM10 (10 micron particles). Dulevo is responding to this challenge by introducing a new range of the Gore sweeper filters, capable of meeting current industrial standards for PM10, PM5, PM2,5 and PM1 particles.

The prevention of inhalation of welding fumes has also become a priority. The Lincoln Electric ProSource environmental product range, which includes portable, mobile and engineered static installations, is Cosmo's chosen solution. This range offers a wide choice of safe working options for those wishing to increase productivity in a cleaner workplace environment.

Jonsson's Workwear is another key brand in Cosmo Industrial's superstore. Like Air Products and Lincoln, Jonsson has a company policy to use resellers to get its brand into the workplace. Cosmo is stocking all of Jonsson's five clothing ranges: the Image range, a stylish and fashionable range of durable clothing; the Glow range of high visibility clothing; the Defence range of flame and acid resistant garments; the Elements range of outdoor and waterproof clothing; and the Jonsson Classic range – a collection of multipurpose garments to suit a wide spectrum of workplaces.

We ask Van Nieuwenhuizen about his future outlook. "We will be looking at various other opportunities once we have thoroughly bedded the new consolidated operation down," he responds. "But for now, with the new building, we can serve all customers with unsurpassed levels of efficiency," he concludes.



The Lincoln Electric display of products at Cosmo.



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