

The trend is all upward



CHAMBER UPDATE
with Bernadette Uzelac

Confidence on the rise

GEELONG'S business community are a resilient lot.

They've endured some tough economic times, but an enduring legacy of this city is that we always seem to bounce back.

The past few years have been tough on Geelong's economy, with the closure of Alcoa's operations at Point Henry and the end of manufacturing at Ford's Norlane plant.

The sacking of Geelong's council a year ago, and its replacement by administrators, also caused uncertainty.

The Geelong Chamber of Commerce conducted our annual Geelong Business Trends Survey of our members, in partnership with Deakin University and Deakin Business



Geelong Chamber chief executive **Bernadette Uzelac**, Deakin University Vice-Chancellor **Professor Jane den Hollander**, Deakin Business School Professor **Barry Cooper** and Geelong Chamber president **Kylie Warne** with the chamber's new report.

Picture: BAREFOOT MEDIA

School, late last year and I was delighted with the findings.

After such a difficult and turbulent year for the city's economy, to see such optimism and positivity from the business community surrounding our future is encouraging.

In the past two years the survey has revealed a 10 per cent rise among our members

in the high to very high category in general confidence around the Geelong region's business environment.

One of the sectors that showed a significant upward spike in confidence is manufacturing, with an 18 per cent rise in the level of confidence in Geelong's economy among businesses in that sector.

These findings are backed up by the release of the Australian Chamber-Westpac Survey of Industrial Trends for the March quarter, where the manufacturing sector posted a third straight quarter of improved performance.

Geelong's manufacturing industry is reinventing itself in the 21st century.

Deakin University is at the forefront of helping move this sector forward, with 1000 jobs created in the past five years through the Geelong Innovation Project at its Waurin Ponds campus through industry partnerships and co-location opportunities.

Recently, Geelong company Axio announced a \$3 million

investment into a new facility at Lara and extra jobs to allow the plastics firm to boost export to Asia and the US.

Chief operating officer Jade Weiss said the company had considered moving its operations away from Geelong. So it's a credit to them, and an indication of the optimism in the city's economic future, that they decided to invest here.

Another sign of confidence is the interest the chamber has received in this year's Powercor Geelong Business Excellence Awards since we opened for nominations in January.

More than 200 businesses registered to attend one of the three business awards' information expos the Chamber has hosted over the past month, so we've scheduled a fourth expo on March 27 at Deakin University's Waterfront campus.

Two new categories were introduced this year to recognise outstanding individuals in business: Young Entrepreneur of the Year and Business Leader of the Year. We encourage every Geelong business, big and small, to enter.

Bernadette Uzelac is chief executive officer of the Geelong Chamber of Commerce.