

Keeping it in the family

JWH Group Managing Director Julian Walter's illustrious career in building is tightly intertwined with Plunkett Homes.

Graduating with a marketing degree from Western Australia Institute of Technology – now Curtin University – Mr Walter's first job was selling bricks for Calsil-Besser before joining Plunkett Homes as Assisting Marketing Manager at 22 years old in 1977.

Moving on from the company in 1983, Mr Walter began working for AVJennings based in Victoria. However, with AVJennings being mostly focused on east coast home designs that didn't cater to WA blocks, he decided to venture out on his own that same year, co-founding J-Corp and marking a significant personal milestone, with his wife Cheryl Walter falling pregnant with their daughter Alicia Kelly (nee Walter).

J-Corp would eventually grow into a diversified housing group with 19 separate operating divisions before Mr Walter accepted an offer from his business partner to sell his half of the business and start the JWH Group, bringing across The Rural Building Company, WA Country Builders and Oswald Homes to form the group in 2003.

Mr Walter said when he left Plunkett Homes, he always had the intention to one day buy the business, which he did in 2006 – a process that took about 18 years of negotiation with the previous ownership.

Once JWH Group acquired Plunkett Homes, Mr Walter said he wanted to keep the feel of the business much the same while instilling a sense of the Plunkett pride back into the company.

"Back then, if you worked for Plunkett Homes, you'd puff your chest out," he said. "It was a real honour to be a Plunkett employee and that's something which lived on for many years."

Sharing an anecdote of an elderly woman writing a letter to Thomas Scott Plunkett Junior about a problem with a leaking back verandah at her Plunkett home, Mr Walter said Plunkett Homes' values had been carried on from the inception of the business until this very day.

"Typical of the Plunkett family, Thomas went out and had a look at the house in Floreat," he said.

"He found a leak but she'd been in the house for around 27 years and, even then, he instructed then Building Manager Graham McEwan to go out there and fix it.

"The theory was if something wasn't done properly, just fix it and that's something we stuck by."

For the Walters, Plunkett Homes has incredible significance, with Cheryl's family also having links with the building company.

"Cheryl's uncle was involved in construction – in fact, he used to live in Plunkett's original Wright Street house, while quite a few of her relatives worked in various parts of the Plunkett business," Mr Walter said.

"She recalls playing in the backyard of the Wright Street home which used to link into the joinery shop and all the other businesses that were based out of Highgate."

This family tie has continued to evolve, with Mr Walter's children Jay Walter and Alicia both spending their early days in the building industry working for Plunkett Homes.

He said he felt an immense sense of pride continuing the Plunkett Homes legacy, along with other building companies under the JWH Group banner such as Oswald Homes, which turned 50 last year, and WA Country Builders which has been in operation for more than 35 years.



Julian at Plunkett Homes in the late 1970s.

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