

SA-based SME gives locally-made more legs

By ALAN MARSHALL

There's one small furniture maker that is definitely not sitting down when it comes to making the most of Australian-made steel, South Australian-based Peppertree Furniture.

While Peppertree's steel furniture business has only been operating for just over 16 months, monthly turnover has grown in that time ten-fold.

And bucking the current 'downsizing' trend, the new business already involves five people and the company's founder and Managing Director, **Mark Tozer** reckons they "could honestly do with two or three others on the floor."

A cabinetmaker by trade, Mr Tozer said the steel part of the business has the biggest potential for growth too.

For instance, the company has been successfully making steel-framed educational furniture such as tables, desks, trolleys and lockers for the local market and may well sell a lot more soon as opportunities ultimately flow from the Australian Government's Economic Stimulus Package.

"The South Australian Government alone has pledged to invest millions into new school facilities," Mr Tozer said.

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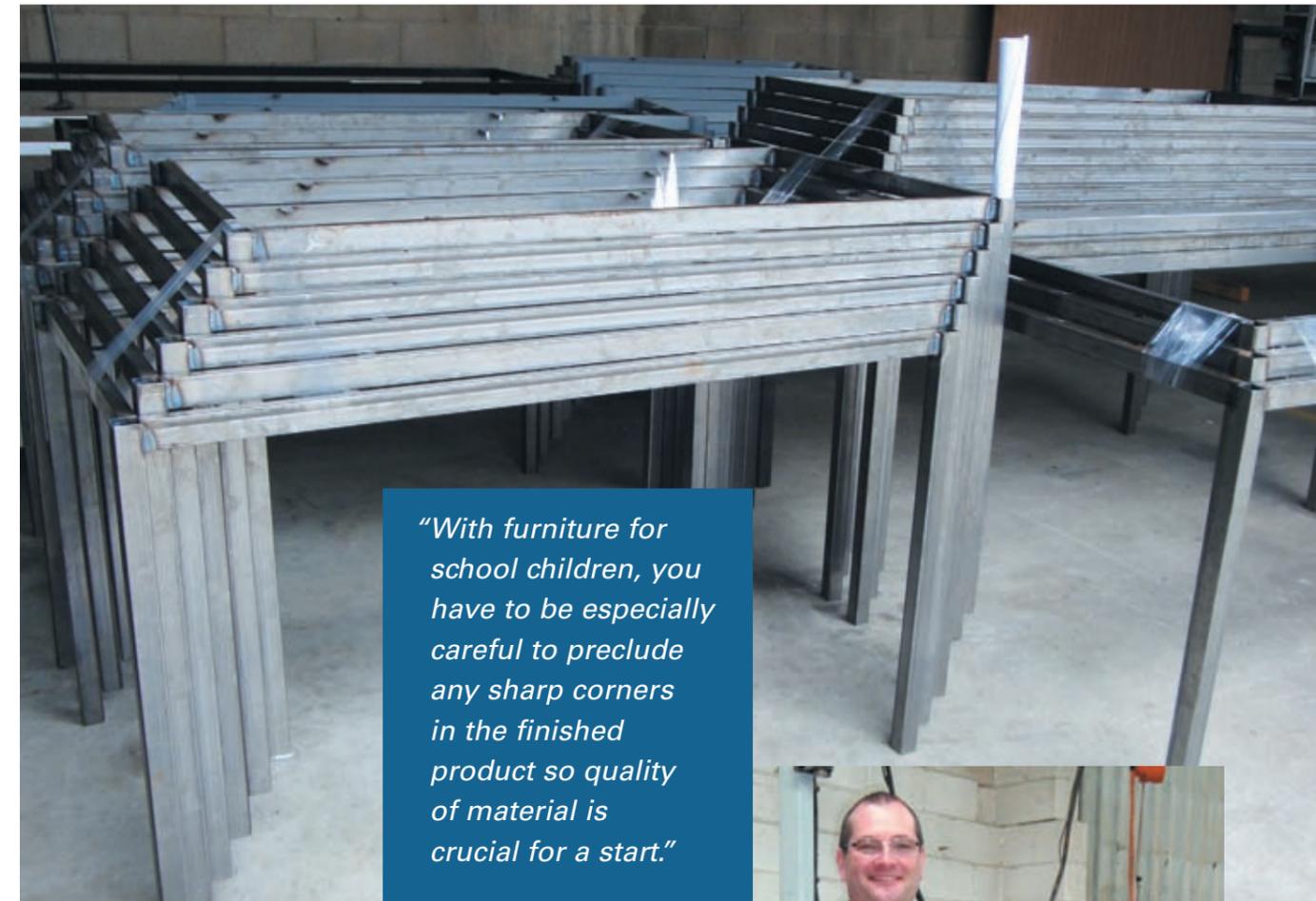
All the company's steel-based product is sold for either civic use or to commercial clients.

About two-thirds of the company's steel furniture sales currently go locally and about

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40 percent of total sales are to small towns and regional centres.

Many of Peppertree's bigger customers such as Mile End Office Furniture, Corporate Express and ANZ Office Furniture in South Australia show no signs of scaling down their orders any time soon.



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The company is currently building a new production facility at Lonsdale which will house 4000sqm of dedicated plant to help expand their steel furniture manufacture.

Mr Tozer is expecting the plant to be in full production by January 2010.

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"We have a very good and responsive account manager at BlueScope Steel and usually get next day delivery," he said. "And on those rare occasions when there's a delay, they refer me through to OneSteel so I'm fully covered."

At the end of the day, the company remains an agile SME through all hands pitching in as needed to meet work demands. The steel furniture is actually AutoCAD designed personally by Mr Tozer.

It was with the encouragement and grants from the South Australian Department of Industry's Centre for Innovation that helped get the new venture off the ground.

The business' first employee is a qualified boilermaker who was rehabilitated through Workcover SA and now works full time for the company. At first, they simply invested in a range of basic welding and cutting equipment, although is now looking at installing more capital equipment like bending machines.

"Getting into the steel business was the best thing I ever did," Mr Tozer said



Steel furniture making proprietor, **Mark Tozer** at home on the shop floor.