

**Press Release:**

***Women of Steel: 'tempered' by empathy and experience and taking the industry forward***

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Despite the many women making a sterling contribution to many facets of the local steel industry today – from management, finance and procurement, sales, marketing, production and on the shop floor itself - the pivotal role women play in this sector is not widely known and seldom acknowledged.

With this in mind, the South African Institute of Steel Construction (SAISC) recently held what is envisaged as the first in a series of events to highlight and showcase the increasingly influential role which women are playing in the sector.

Speakers included women who have achieved senior positions in the industry, having progressed through its traditionally male-dominated ranks. The speakers shared their career experiences; as well as advice about how to succeed in challenging world of steel.

Furthermore, in his remarks, SAISC CEO Paolo Trinchero challenged the more than 80 female attendees – representing the entire spectrum of the downstream steel industry – from value-adding processors and merchants to fabricators, and many more – to assist the SAISC in achieving its vision of 50% female representation on their board in the future.

SAISC member and leading local value-adding merchant and processor, Allied Steelrode, was represented at the event by Chief Sales and Marketing Officer Sharon Brits. Enthused and excited by this initiative and the motivational messages which speakers at the event shared, Brits concurs wholeheartedly with their observations about the tremendous importance of women in the steel industry and the contribution which they can – and do – make daily.

"My steel career has spanned some 33 years - 12 of which have been spent at Allied Steelrode: initially in internal sales – learning to read the market and trade - and latterly in my current sales and marketing management role. It has been a phenomenal journey, in which I have learnt about every facet of this industry, and I work with an amazing team of people - many of whom are women, in aspects of the business such as sales, production and exports, as well as in technical positions," Brits remarks.

For Brits, working in the sector meant not only learning to sell and trade steel; but also getting 'hands-on', practical knowledge about it: such as the different applications for rolled coil steel

as opposed to flat sheet, and between slitting and cutting steel – not to mention the myriad other capabilities and features of this dynamic and complex material.

Asked about the general role of women in the steel industry, she elaborates: "Women are very good at building client and inter-personal relationships. They have natural empathy and are very good at multi-tasking; and also at winning and truly maintaining loyalty in customer relationships."

Furthermore, she adds that women have good organisational skills, and are able to use all these positive attributes to build really strong bonds, not only with internal team members, but also with their customers.

"I consider myself extremely fortunate to work at Allied Steelrode, as it is a company which has the vision to invest with its people - and the future - firmly in mind. A great example of the fruits of this foresight has been the development and growth our iconic ASSM (Allied Steelrode Stretcher Material) brand. We were the first company in the country to import a dedicated stretcher leveller; and the success thereof has prompted the recent purchase and commissioning of a second stretcher," she enthuses.

In addition, Brits points out that Allied Steelrode's executive management saw the limitless opportunities of steel tube, and imported a BLM LT20 tube laser some three years ago. The value - and demand for - this remarkable fibre laser by a number of key industries locally and in sub-Saharan Africa has been growing, leading to its use in the fabrication of, amongst other applications, airports, shopping malls, sports stadia and game lodges.

Moreover, the company has upgraded its steel cutting lines with advanced control software systems.

"It is important to note that both our investment in technology - and in people - continues to be made at a time when the steel industry is experiencing considerable turbulence, particularly within the downstream sector," she comments.

Allied Steelrode was founded through a merger which grew into a strong partnership generating a host of productive synergies. In the steel sector, women form a similar partnership with their male counterparts; as they both bring different, yet complementary skills to the steel industry.

This synergy has seen Allied Steelrode prosper, in spite of the economic headwinds which the steel sector is contending with at present. Currently, the company is employing more staff, several of whom are women.

"However, technology investment and having the latest from a technology perspective is all very well - but this alone is not going to produce results," cautions Brits.

Here the Allied Steelrode team – of both genders – demonstrates its strength, and the differentiating factors such as strong customer relationships, loyalty and customer service excellence which have seen the company becoming one of the top steel majors in the country.

Increasingly, women are taking centre stage in the industry, not only as MDs and CEOs of steel companies, but also as middle management and technical staff on the shop floor.

"It is important that we make ourselves heard and participate in advocacy around gender stereotyping and roles in the industry, to advance women in this critical economic sector," she adds.

However, the overriding question remains: what is going to see the industry through the current period of turmoil, and will women help to make the difference?

Brits asserts that women's increasing important role in the steel industry will definitely assist in seeing the sector through this exceptionally difficult period.

"With the very talented women and men we have in our company, our dedication to customer service excellence and very loyal relationships – together with our significant investment in the latest steel technology - we are certainly optimally positioned to power through the tough times," she comments.

"Ultimately, both men and women of the steel sector need to constantly work not only on what each, by their nature, can bring to this industry; but also on their cooperation and cohesion – irrespective of gender.

This ethos forms the very foundation of successful teamwork, and is our watchword at Allied Steelrode," she concludes.

***Ends***

***(1049 words)***

## **Note to Editors**

### **About Allied Steelrode**

Allied Steelrode was founded through a merger of Allied Chemical and Steel Pty Ltd and Steelrode Pty in 2011. The company has grown to be a leading independent steel supplier

and processor, which supplies high-volume merchants and end-users with bulk coils, slit strip, flat steel, steel pressings, standard sheets and the entire structural steel portfolio of products.

To differentiate the company while adding value to customer processes and maintaining consistent growth, Allied Steelrode has systematically invested in the most advanced steel processing equipment such as a tube laser and a dedicated stretcher leveller facility for upgrading steel sheet.

Quality improvement, consistency and reliability of supply and customer service excellence are key drivers for this Alrode-based company. Hand-in-hand with this is a dedication to the highest levels of efficiency.

Allied Steelrode is ISO 9001:2015 certified.

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