

Press Release

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Allied Steelrode supports the 'sisters of steel' in serving the Pretoria region

The steel business has always been perceived as a male preserve. However, in Rosslyn, north of Pretoria, there are two vibrant women who are challenging this traditionally-held perception on a daily business – literally, the 'sisters of steel'.

Gwen Mahuma and Monika Pretorius are respectively Business Development Director and Managing Director of BBD Steel Supplies. Since its inception in 2014 – and despite the extremely tough economy of recent years – the business has doubled its turnover every year since then. From a three-person start-up, it now employs 27 people in a 75 percent black women-owned business, working from a well-equipped 4000 m2 facility.

Mahuma and Pretorius have both had previous experience in the steel sector. "While we also have a similarly strong entrepreneurial drive, we realised early on that we needed to have the synergistic benefit of a senior, successful industry player and mentor," explains Mahuma.

They found such a strong supporter and mentor in seasoned steel supplier and processor, Allied Steelrode. "From our side, we had been contemplating establishing a branch in Pretoria to service the automotive heartland and other industry sectors in this region," says Chadha.

However, when Pretorius and Mahuma called on Allied Steelrode at its facility in Alrode, the commonality and synergy between the two companies in terms of a dedication to quality, customer service, integrity and reliability was evident to Allied Steelrode's CEO, Arun Chadha.

"Much like Allied Steelrode, BBD is owner-driven by self-made entrepreneurs; and, as such, also has the decision-making agility, flexibility and robust approach required to succeed in today's challenging and dynamic steel market," Chadha explains.

With the strong ethical and operational alignment of the two companies, an agreement was speedily concluded. "We thought it was very important - rather than opening our own branch - to assist and empower women already in the steel sector here in Pretoria," he adds.

"Every parastatal in this country – and many in the private sector too - want to see empowered women in business. And while there are many women in business in South Africa, there are very

few top executive women in the steel business, which has always been very male-dominated,” Chadha continues.

“The potential for a fully woman-owned steel company in Pretoria is excellent as this an area experiencing good industrial growth. There is also no major steel business in this area, as most are based in Johannesburg, some with minor outlets in Pretoria. Importantly, there is no other company here offering stretcher-levelled steel. Our branded ASSM (Allied Steelrode Stretcher Material) is used by Transnet in its ongoing locomotive renewal programme – also one of BBD’s major customers.

“It is an ongoing educational process because customers are often unaware of the quality of stretcher-levelled material. However, when they have used ASSM material once, they do not want anything else - as they quickly realise that the benefits are tremendous,” enthuses Pretorius.

“In terms of our customer base, apart from the rail transportation sector, there are many others sectors, such as correctional services, power generation and many of the large automotive manufacturing companies in the Rosslyn area. We now have SABS certification in addition to ISO 9001: 2008 certification, and are proactively marketing our value-added steel products – including Allied Steelrode’s ASSM - to these companies,” she comments.

In these efforts, Allied Steelrode supports the company wholeheartedly – from a mentoring perspective, but also in terms of stockholding and with BBD being their local representative of their iconic ASSM branded product.

“Furthermore, we are a bulk supplier and not a merchant, so BBD extends our merchanting footprint throughout Pretoria and northern environs,” Chadha explains.

Asked what differentiates BBD from its competition, Mahuba explains that – like mentor and supporter Allied Steelrode - the company places a great emphasis on customer service excellence and quality. “For us it is not just about selling steel, we really get to understand our customers and work with them to find tailor-made, optimal solutions,” she says.

She adds that the generally more empathetic and nurturing approach women adopt – not to mention their capacity for multi-tasking and attention-to-detail – stands them in good stead in the challenging environment that is today’s steel industry.

In line with this approach, BBD takes pride in listening to both their customers and their own team. “For example, internally, we manage our people by values: because if someone has integrity, you do not need to have an overly disciplinarian approach with a multitude of rules,” explains Pretorius.

“In addition, we also have a proud record of close collaboration with customers such as our emergent black fabricators in this region, encouraging their growth and development,” Mahuma adds.

Running a steel business is however not without its challenges. “A significant challenge is maintaining our cash flow while balancing our inventory. Typically, BBD holds some R27 million worth of stock, which is a very strong commitment to our customers,” she points out.

A further challenge is that the steel industry is an extremely changeable market. “Just when you think you have the right product mix, then something changes. Gathering market intelligence is therefore of prime importance, and an ongoing process. We talk to our clients and our sales people are briefed to find out what projects they have in the pipeline so we can accurately gauge and meet their steel supply requirements,” explains Pretorius.

“We need on occasion to educate our customers about what products are available. It is often incumbent on us to suggest alternative, better materials for projects,” adds Mahuma.

“We really appreciate Allied Steelrode’s unwavering support and the opportunity we have as their exclusive representative in the Pretoria region. For us, building the reputation of being a truly quality steel supplier is extremely important. In common with our valued mentor and supporter, we do not necessarily want to be the biggest - but we do want to be the best,” Pretorius concludes.

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(981 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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