

WILLIE'S BUNDLES OF JOY

Subsea 7's pipeline Bundle fabrication site has gone from strength to strength over the past 35 years. One man who has witnessed this growth is General Manager Willie Watt, a former agricultural mechanic who joined the site as a young man in 1982 and has worked his way up through the ranks.

"Subsea 7 has been good for Wester," he stresses, "but Wester has also been good for Subsea 7." The site employs between 130 and 150 people, a number of whom are 30+ year veterans like Willie. Along the way, Subsea 7 has built up a core of highly talented engineers, welders and support technicians: "over 90% of our team are local born and bred, often from fishing or farming families who really appreciate the influx of marketable new industrial skills," says Willie.

"Although we have retained a tremendous local team here, Wester has also launched many global Subsea 7 careers. You'll hear good Highland accents on many of our international spoolbases, and I'm proud of people like Shona Dunnett who started her career in our canteen, then worked with the stores team and now travels the world as one of the specialists in our SAP team." Shona is just one of many similar successes throughout the company who have built on the start they made at Wester.

"It's amazing that a little community like this can become a world leader in sophisticated pipeline fabrication. We've only been able to do this – and deliver consistent results in one of the most demanding industries on earth – by

working like one integrated family team. Wester is so remote; it's almost like living on an island.

"We have developed our own group capability based on centuries of combined experience on the site. Many Caithness folk have fishing and farming roots. They are ingenious by nature and that spirit of innovation thrives here. We often get suggestions for new, better ways of doing things from throughout the team."

"Local presence" has been Subsea 7's watchword in this sparsely-populated area for many years of production.

"We have always tried to be good neighbours," stresses Willie. "Our site has around a dozen bordering farms and landowners, and we've had to ask permission to extend our production lines three or four times down through the years as Bundles get longer. The community appreciates that it's all in the cause of progress and jobs for people in the area.

"To let the community view our progress at first hand, we regularly hold neighbourly works visits at weekends for everyone from primary school kids to the local Tractor Club.

"We also put a lot back into the community. We donate to local causes, we support local suppliers and we carry out regular beach-cleans." (Sinclair Bay, where the site is based, has pristine white sand and has been voted one of the world's ten best beaches.)

To cement the community relationship, Willie wears a multitude of hats, including Chairman of the Harbour Board ("one of the best marinas in the country – I've a wee yacht there myself, and it's a wonderful de-stresser") and Deputy Lord Lieutenant of the County of Caithness.

"It means constantly engaging with politicians and local stakeholders, but that's the best way to maintain mutual respect," he confirms. "Our success



Willie Watt, General Manager at our pipeline Bundle fabrication site at Wester, UK.



Willie's granddaughter is a proud member of the Subsea 7 family.



here has a positive economic impact – not only on local service companies like construction companies and catering suppliers, but also on introducing small niche fabricators of oilfield components like pipeline spacers into the global Subsea 7 supply chain."

Behind every successful man, they say, there stands a woman, and in Willie's case, it's four: wife Valerie, daughters Sarah and Emma, and – the latest and

brightest star on the horizon – first granddaughter Caitlyn.

"You live the job up here, and I'm very lucky to have had such a supportive family," he acknowledges. "I'll still never forget the launch of the first Bundle I supervised – Voyager 21 back in 1992. It was a summer night launch, all went smoothly, and I remember driving home at 2am with dawn about to break thinking to myself: 'now this really is special; like living the dream.'"