

Scholarship programme seeds success

BY JACQUIE WALTERS PHOTOGRAPHY TIM CUFF

Nelson's Christoph Riedel has a long-standing passion for trees, the timber they produce, and the way they look. To some extent it runs in the family; one of his great-great-grandfathers worked as a forester in Germany and one of his great-grandfathers was a sawmiller in Zimbabwe.

Christoph wasn't seeking a career in forestry at first, but his enthusiasm for biology, nurtured by Nelson College's Johnnie Fraser, (whom Christoph describes as one of his top teachers), his passion for woodworking and a love of being outdoors all seemed to point in its direction.

"I had decided I wasn't going to go and study and that university wasn't really for me. I took a year out after college and went and did some shearing, worked in some sawmills, did some tree planting and decided that I wanted to do a different type of work. I thoroughly enjoy manual work, but I'd rather be out there doing less labour-intensive work so I have more energy after work to go mountain biking and hunting.

"I also worked for Ruth McConnochie for a little bit and I really liked her job. Ruth contracts to Nelson Management Ltd (the management company for Nelson Forests) and a

number of other companies doing tree trials, breeding and testing. When I started studying I thought I would like to do her job. Ruth and my dad encouraged me to apply for a scholarship with NML."

"I'm just learning as much as I can about everything. I'm focusing on whatever's in front of me."

Christoph was the recipient of a multi-year scholarship from NML while doing his forestry degree at the University of Canterbury, the only university in Australasia to offer a degree in forestry science.

The beauty of the scholarships that NML offer is that in addition to a \$4000 grant for each year of the student's four-year degree programme, the company offers work experience during semester breaks throughout the year and during the long university summer holiday.

"It has helped financially but it's definitely helped me learn what's

most valuable to take in at university. University offers a broad degree and that's good because it covers a range of subject areas and each person will take away a different set of skills that they will then go on to use from their degree. Working with NML during my studies has helped me focus more on the tools that I wanted during my time studying."

Christoph was fortunate to be offered a fixed-term graduate role at the end of last year and is currently working with harvesting crews in the Golden Downs forest. "I'm just learning as much as I can about everything. I'm focusing on whatever's in front of me."

Learning about work on the ground from the different crews' perspectives is invaluable he says, especially if he ends up working in a harvest planning position. "I'm gaining an appreciation for what the guys go through and what's important. They work long days and it's tiring physical work in the sun and wind all day. They're all very nice guys and they work hard. I'm taking in and learning as much as I can."

Christoph is grateful to be gaining experience working in a range of areas within NML's business. "I want to be able to fill whatever gap might pop up if an

opportunity to work here permanently presents itself. I really love Nelson and I've just bought land here."

This year NML will have five students on scholarship. Typically, the company has four at any one time and takes on a new student each year as older students finish up their degrees. The company's scholarship programme has been running for many years, with recipients going on to have successful careers in forestry. Currently, NML's supply chain technician Danielle Inglis is just one example.

Forestry as a whole offers a high level of employment for graduates. All of the students in Christoph's graduating cohort who wanted jobs have found employment in the industry. "Since I've been at forestry school everybody who wants a job has got a job, if they're willing to go where the jobs are. I've been very lucky to get a job in Nelson. There are definitely more jobs in the industry than there are graduates to fill them."

Christoph's vision for the role that trees and wood will play in his life extends beyond his work with NML. Christoph and his fiancé (Anna) share an appreciation for trees and have just purchased four hectares of land outside of Wakefield where they intend to plant more than 40 different species of trees.



ABOVE: Christoph Riedel. BELOW: Learning about work at ground level.

"That might be my retirement project. I'd love that, to grow old, have my own little mill and workshop, cut down my own trees, and turn the wood into something beautiful."

In the shorter term, Christoph and his fiancé hope to set up an Air BnB on their property that's similar in style to what has been built at Tasman's Jester House and Solscape in Raglan. For now, they will move the tiny home that

they built together while they were at university onto their land and live in it.

At just 23, Christoph has a beautiful long-term vision. He insists, however, that he doesn't usually think too far ahead. "I'll be happy doing whatever gets put in front of me and I'll figure my way from there. I love Nelson and I want to be here long term."

Meanwhile, Christoph has made a positive impression on the team at NML.

"During his time as a student, Christoph showed enthusiasm and energy for his work and had personal qualities that align with our company values (teamwork, respect, integrity, balance, community)," says NML's Estate Forester Craig Brown. "Christoph is both a hard worker and a creative thinker shown by him constructing his own tiny home. Since joining NML, Christoph has continued his eagerness to learn and is quickly adding to his skill set from the Bachelor of Forestry Science."

"We were excited to offer a graduate position this year, which will give Christoph hands-on experience with our contractors in the forest," says Jenny van Workum, Human Resources Manager for NML. "He will then undertake a number of projects that will give him exposure to all aspects of our business. This broad experience will be invaluable for him as he continues his career within the industry." WT



Contact

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