



FROM A BUSINESS THAT STARTED IN A SMALL SHED TO WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S LARGEST HYDROPONIC AND AQUAPONICS RETAILER, AQUAPONICS WA AND HYDROPONIC XPRESS ARE ON THE VERGE OF A LANDMARK OCCASION WITH THE GRAND OPENING OF ANOTHER EXPANSION ON SEPTEMBER 10. ERICA ROBERTS EXPLAINS HER PARENTS' JOURNEY, THEIR SUCCESS IN BUSINESS AND THE STRENGTH OF FAMILY.

**ANSWERS FROM THE PROFESSIONALS."**

After trying with little success to grow vegetables in gutless grey sand, Delia van Aurich was inspired after attending a hydroponics party plan in 1985 to grow food this new way. She and her now late husband Robert virtually dropped everything and opened their own hydroponics business, Aquaponics WA, the following year.

The beginnings were humble; Delia and Robert initially operated the business out of a small shed. They were determined to succeed, however, and took night school courses to obtain their trade Certificate in Horticulture to gain as much knowledge as possible. The consummate perfectionist, Robert was soon offered a job at the university and lectured in the horticulture department for many years while Delia focused on getting the business off the ground.

"Both Robert and Delia worked tirelessly and became leaders in the commercial and retail hydroponic industry," says Erica Roberts, their daughter and current advertising and accounts manager for Aquaponics WA. "The struggle of starting a new business with limited cash flow meant that mum and dad became a free source of information to anybody who showed an interest. So not only were demonstrations set up in shopping centres, but commercial growers came

to learn how to grow vegetable crops in this new way," she says.

For years, Robert and Delia worked long hours, seven days a week. Over time, the effort began to pay off. They moved to a larger site with better exposure and the business gained traction. In fact, it is the same facility in the Canning Vale area of Perth where Hydroponic Xpress is located today.

"The area of Canning Vale has continued to grow and allowed us to enjoy major exposure with high traffic volumes nearby every day," says Erica. Over time, Aquaponics WA grew as well, expanding with increased inventory and expanded staff. The Canning Vale site of Hydroponic Xpress and Aquaponics WA now consists of several buildings with a sum total of more than 1,000 square metres of retail and warehouse space, plus more than 1,000 square metres of greenhouse and display area. Erica says customers are often overwhelmed by the size and scope of the business.

In 2011, Robert became ill and passed away. Delia wasn't left alone. As a young man, their son Maurice obtained his Bachelor of Business at Curtin University and moved to Sydney, accepting a job offer from Kodak Australia. He worked and lived there for five years before marrying and moving back to Perth to join the family business in 1996. Today, Maurice manages purchasing and marketing, successfully landing Bunnings WA as a core customer. Erica started in her role in 2007, and Erica's daughter, Maggie, works part-time in customer service and administration while working toward a Diploma in Business Commerce at Curtin University.

Together, they continued to grow the business with 10 employees and the largest selection of nutrients, additives, fans, filters, grow tents, aquaponics trays and tanks, pumps, filters and lighting in Western Australia.

"Our shop is the largest in Perth and we have a strong online presence and strive to stay current with the latest technology," says Erica. "We have staff that are knowledgeable and friendly and are always willing to help our customers and connect with them."

Along with the family members, Mike is the floor sales manager, Tara is the weekend floor sales manager, Rob Sr. is warehouse manager assisted by Andrea, and Rob Jr. is the sales assistant and is in charge of the aquaponics display. Brian is the company's all-around handyman and performs deliveries. He also works in the display centre and brings invaluable knowledge of aquaponics to the team.

"We couldn't do without any of them," says Erica. "Each and every one of our staff play a pivotal role in helping make Aquaponics WA and Hydroponic Xpress a success. Our team share a love of gardening and fish and we all share a passion for environmental success for now and future generations." Also contributing are seven massive 50-centimetre barramundi that people love to visit. During a newspaper photoshoot, the fish managed to soak Erica and Maurice head to foot. "We finally got the perfect shot, but we both ended up soaked," she says.

In 2005, Delia was nominated for The 2005 Prime Minister's Employer of the Year Award, a prestigious event held in Canberra to recognise

excellence in the employment of people with a disability.

Through ups and downs, hard work and times of laughter, the team at Aquaponics WA and Hydroponic Xpress continue to move forward. They have just completed a \$500,000 expansion with the intent of educating even more people on aquaponics and hydroponics and in the future have plans to refurbish the display centre that may incorporate a massive aquarium to hold the big barramundi.

To celebrate the expansion, the team at Aquaponics WA is hosting an Open Day on September 10, 2016. Members of the public, schools, churches, local businesses and dignitaries are welcome to attend. The event will feature prizes, demonstrations as well as free hot dogs and refreshments. **MY**

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