

# INSPIRING FEMALE TRADIES

## LIGHT-BULB CAREER MOMENT writer PETER WHITE photographer SANDRA HENDERSON

"I'd love to inspire other females to join the trade and give it their best shot and we can make a very cool community of female tradies taking over the world," says **NICOLA VAN DER WESTHUIZEN**.

Nicola is an electrical apprentice with Silver Fern Farms and is based at their plant in Hāwera, Taranaki.

"There are so many things that really inspire me. I really like doing the pre-inspections in the morning to make sure the machines are working and I also like fault finding when something goes wrong. It gives me an adrenaline rush to solve problems on the spot.

"An example is when we had a motor that decided to give up during production, so we spent half the day trying to put parts together to make this one conveyor go. Five hours later and tuckered out, we managed to fix it."

The 22-year-old will be two years through her apprenticeship in October and being a woman in a male-dominated industry does not faze Nicola.

"It's great. I think a lot more women can be confident of going down

the path that I did. You get to see a different perspective and it is challenging to work alongside knowledgeable men.

"The culture at Silver Fern Farms is that everyone is very hard working and they are a great team."

annoying me. I thought it would be a good idea to invent a Taser to taser them! I guess that was my childish version of thinking of electrical stuff back then.

"Then the COVID virus happened and I saw people were struggling to find jobs. I looked at trades and saw they were looking for people to come help out around New Zealand.

"I thought I would give it a go as I still had my plan of becoming an electrician and Silver Ferns took me on.

"Silver Ferns gave me the opportunity; they kept encouraging me and gave me the ability to study while still working."

Nicola went to Stratford High School. In Year 13, she took Calculus, Physics, English, History and Tourism.

She wanted to get as many credits as she could—in case she did not get a trade and had to go to university.

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**NICOLA VAN DER WESTHUIZEN**

"They strive to motivate me to be the best version of myself by giving me the freedom to input ideas when problems arise, instead of leaving me on my own.

Nicola's desire to be an electrician began when she was just 10 and steadily grew through her teenage years.

"I was sitting in science class learning about batteries and these guys were



Her dream is to become a project engineer one day and design better electrical systems to make a difference to the planet by reducing waste and plastic.

Her advice to school leavers is to take NCEA subjects like Maths and Physics as they help, as does having some practicality skills and being fit too.

"But most of all have a good, positive attitude and don't be afraid to get your hands dirty."

### KEY FACTS



- **NICOLA VAN DER WESTHUIZEN** IS CURRENTLY COMPLETING HER **ELECTRICAL APPRENTICESHIP**. SHE WORKS AT **SILVER FERN FARMS** AT THEIR PLANT IN **HĀWERA, TARANAKI**.
- SHE RECOMMENDS THAT **SCHOOL LEAVERS INTERESTED IN AN ELECTRICAL APPRENTICESHIP STUDY MATHS AND PHYSICS, HAVE A POSITIVE ATTITUDE AND ARE PHYSICALLY FIT**.
- **NICOLA** STUDIED **CALCULUS, PHYSICS, ENGLISH, HISTORY AND TOURISM IN YEAR 13**.



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