



WORLD EXPO 88

1988)(2008

20th Anniversary Celebration

<http://www.foundationexpo88.org/20th>

20 CELEBRATION CORPORATE VIGNETTES

EDITION # 1 SEPTEMBER 2006 – 20 MONTHS TO GO!

A CELEBRATION FOCUS ON 20 CORPORATIONS AT WORLD EXPO '88 AND TODAY

***Interview with
Mr Geoff Slade,
Managing Director &
Chairman,
The Slade Group
at his Melbourne Office***

28 September 2006



John McGregor, Executive Director, speaks with Mr Geoff Slade, Managing Director & Chairman, The Slade Group, Melbourne, about The Slade Group, World Expo '88, and The Slade Group today... Exclusive Interview via Telephone

[INTERVIEW START]

Well, first of all I'd like to thank you for this very gracious opportunity for this interview.....it'll only be 15, 20 minutes....I'll be as quick as I can....Part of the work I do with Foundation Expo '88, which I established in 2004 as a non-government, not-for-profit entity commemorating Brisbane's World Expo '88, it was a very very big event for Brisbane, and a very very big event for 1988, the largest event of the Bicentennial Year of course, and as part of the 20th Anniversary Celebration, which is coming up very shortly in 2008, what I've been doing is going through all of the representatives at the Expo, whether they be nations, or provinces, or states, or cities, and also the Corporate representatives, and the Corporate Sponsors and Suppliers as well, and as part of a special 20th Anniversary focus for the website, what I've decided to do is to select a different corporation for each month for the remaining 20 months until the 30 April 2008, so I'm very very glad that you're happy to accept this interview. You're the first off the rank as they say and I think it will set a very good precedent for the remaining 19 months until 2008. Well, first of all, I'd like to know about the start of the Slade Group.....when did the Slade Group start, what were it's original origins....did you start in the 1970s, 1980s? When did it actually start?

...Well, it started in 1967, when I borrowed \$300 from my late mother, and started my own company, having worked in HR on the other side of the fence, nearly went broke so many times it wasn't funny in the first five or six years...and after seven years made a healthy profit, and I guess you can say never looked back since...

And that was in Melbourne was it?

Yes, it was initially in Melbourne, yes..

And when you say working on the other side of the fence, what do you mean by that?

Well I was the HR Manager for a major international construction company at a young age...and whilst I had been

employed to be the HR Officer, my boss became ill, and I was promoted into the job...and it was for the building of a refinery, an oil refinery, and that project came to an end in 1967, and I started my own business in May 1967.

And were you in the suburbs in Melbourne, or in the City?

At the corner of Elizabeth and Collins Steets...

So you were right in the middle of the City there...

Yes.

And what was the original scope, how many employees did you have?

Well, it was myself and a Secretary...then we soon built it up over six or seven years to about twelve to fifteen people, focussing in Secretarial Recruitment, then in 1976 I went into Executive search and selection, and that has been a fairly substantial focus of the company since, although we still do Secretarial recruitment and the provision of temp help...

So the focus right from the start has been Secretarial and as well as Executive level management...?

Yes.

And do you have a particular niche within that market that you personally enjoy? You mentioned earlier about the minerals industry....

Well, it's been really quite large ranging...we now have about 80 people around...well, let me give you a bit of background...by 1988 it had become the largest executive recruitment company in the country with a turnover of \$25 million and I was offered for it to be bought by a major international company out of the U.K., then I sold the business, then I spent two years as HR Director with Pacific Dunlop, then I started again the group which is known as Slade Group today....and by the time I sold out the business was in seven cities throughout Australia and New Zealand...initially in Melbourne only from '67 to '74, then went in to Sydney in '77, then into Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Christchurch and Auckland...

Talking about 1988....when was the first thing you knew anything about World Expo '88...?

Well, it would have been in early 1987 we were invited to submit a proposal for the Expo, and we were fortunate to be appointed...

And that contract was with the Expo Authority....

Yes, I met Sir Llew Edwards once or twice...most of the Expo business was looked after by the Brisbane Office, and once we got onsite, I spent some time there attending Expo and that sort of thing...

And what was the type of staff they were looking for.....do you recall what type of people they were looking for when they engaged you?

Well, mainly service people who could show people through the various Pavilions, also, Secretarial support staff...

OK, and this would have been from late '87 onwards....can you recall how many persons you engaged for World Expo '88..in terms of your own staff and persons recruited?

I would recall between 25 and 30 persons....

And the Brisbane office?

Probably about a dozen...

And when was it that you first heard Brisbane was going to host a World Expo?

Yes, I was interested in it from a while back, because I had attended the Osaka Expo in Japan in 1970, 1971...

The Osaka 1970 Expo?

Yes, that's right...

Was that as a professional engagement, or as a visitor?

As a visitor.

What was the first time you had heard about World Expo '88 – was it by newspaper, a colleague?

I read about it in the newspaper...I thought it was very exciting, for the City and the State, at that time I didn't know we had been involved. I was very impressed by Osaka, and I thought Brisbane did her Expo proud eighteen years later...

And that was your first trip to Japan? You visited the Expo site there for a few days....

Yes...

Did you visit the Australia Pavilion at Osaka as well?

Yes, I did.

And what was your overall impression of Osaka Expo '70?

Well, I was a young man at that time, and I guess the world was my oyster, I was lapping it up....I had only been overseas once before that....and I was on my way to England to set up my first business in England, and I went via Japan to specifically to look at Expo '70...

Well, that's interesting, we briefly touched on your Australian and New Zealand expansion....what was the first overseas office apart from New Zealand...

London.

And what year was that?

1970.

And do you still have that London office?

No, I had to sell that when I sold the business in 1988...

So, it was your Australian offices, New Zealand offices, and London office?

Yes.

So, you were engaged for World Expo '88 in late 1987....what was your first visit of the Expo? Did you get to visit the Expo site before it started?

Yes, I did.

As part of your engagement for World Expo '88?

Yes, it gave us an opportunity to look at the site before it actually opened...

And this would have been in early 1988, late 1987?

January, February 1988...

And what were your impressions?

Very positive, I was very excited to be a part of the whole thing...

And in terms of the Bicentennial...what were the big events that stuck out in your own mind....because there would have been many events in Melbourne and other cities....

Well, the biggest thing was watching the Bicentenary from Sydney Harbour from the Governor-General's Residence...

Well, that would have been for Australia Day....?

Yes, my daughter was a friend of the Governor-General's daughter, and we were able to view the harbour from the Governor-General's residence...

Well, that would have been truly spectacular, because they say Sydney Harbour was never so beautifully jewelled as it was for Australia Day in 1988....it certainly would have stuck out in my mind...And when did you visit the Expo?

Well, I took my children as well...we were staying at a resort at Surfers Paradise (Exec Dir Note: Just 100kms south of the Expo site) nearby and we took a private bi-plane service and landed on the Brisbane River at the Expo site....it took us a few minutes to land...

And you would have come in at the Ferry Gate which was very popular...was that for the Official Opening?

Yes, I attended the Opening Ceremony, and took the children another day...

Did you get to visit the Expo many time during Expo '88?

Probably three or four.

Was there anything in particular at the Expo that stands out?

Well, the Australia and Japan Pavilion were the two that most attracted me.

And are there any further particular memories with regards to your work engagement with World Expo '88...that this was something of a particular challenge, or not foreseen...that differs it from your other work engagements?

Well, I had done other work with regards to provisional support staff, of a temporary nature, and this was probably our first major project in terms of supplying people who would be working in the very front line with the public, it was pretty much around the need to make sure those people were well trained, and great communicators, and prepared to be very flexible in the way they went about work, and in terms of being 'on-call' as required...these are the sorts of things which was a challenge to us which we hadn't experienced previously...

And in terms of Conferences, Exhibitions, and Events, have you done much further work in this area?

We were the preferred supplier for Executive recruitment for the Sydney Olympics.

Really, well that would be one of your career highlights then, wouldn't it?

Yes...

And when you think of all the different types of recruitment that you have to do, do you find that recruitment in Events Management, or Hospitality, does that have a special ring for you? What area of recruitment do you personally favour?

Well, me personally, I tend to work at the very top of the market, CEOs, and very Senior General Management, so I do a lot of work in that area of the market, that has a special ring for me...and I have also been attracted by special events, because they are always a bit different, and challenging...

Excellent, so you've had a really wonderful engagement there...a metetoric rise from the 60s, into the 70s, expansion throughout Australia, one of Australia's largest privately owned recruitment agencies....and just one other question...was it called the Slade Group right from the beginning?

Well, it was called Slade Consulting at first, then it had several incarnations...when I sold the business in 1988, I wasn't allowed to use the Slade name again when I re-started, so I began again as Lyncroft Consulting Group in 1991, then the people who had bought my company originally, came into trouble, and pulled out of Australia, which allowed me to use the name Slade again..., this time as the Slade Group, in 1996.

And since 1996, you've regained executive control of the Slade name...and that would have been a specially poignant moment for you, in that your company had been sold, then they had their own internal re-structuring, and then you started up a new entity as the Lyncroft Group, and then later on in 1996, you were able to use your own name again...surely that would have had personal blessings for you as well..

Yes, it did.

Did you find it was a personal triumph in a sense that you were able to use the Slade name again in 1996?

Well, yes, I suppose, although I didn't think of that at the time...

And the most fulfilling project, apart from Expo and the Sydney Olympics?

Well, I did Executive recruitment for a company named Coates, I put the new CEO in there and that company four years later is now turning over \$700 million with a profit of \$100 million...

Well that's an excellent outcome, isn't it?

Yes, and I did most of the Executive recruitment there...and I can justifiably say that I have played a leading role in the turnaround in that company.

And today, how many offices are there of the Slade Group?

Brisbane, and Melbourne.

And it's now coming up to 20 years since the Bicentennial, looking at the 20th Anniversary of Expo, in 2008, and twenty years ahead of that, in 2028? What are your projected goals?

Well, I'll be 81 then, so I won't be too worried about the Executive....(laughs...)

Do you think you'll go back into New Zealand or other parts of Asia....?

It's probable that we'll have an expanded presence in Europe or Asia.

Well, thank you Mr Slade for your time today....

Thank you.

[INTERVIEW ENDS]

...extra.....extra.....extra.....

Slade Group and Foundation Expo '88 are working together on a heightened presence for the World Expo '88 1988-2008 20th Anniversary Celebration. Watch the 20th Anniversary page at Foundation Expo '88 for further details!

Slade Group

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Progressing the World Expo '88 Vision

- A non-government not-for-profit entity celebrating Brisbane's World Expo '88 -

Visit the Slade Group at
<http://www.sladegroup.com.au>

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