ROB WAY VALE

In late September, The Crane Industry Council of Australia (CICA) sadly announced the sudden passing of CICA Life Member and "crane safety pioneer", Rob Way.

Rob Way receiving the Constantine Alexander Popov award for contributions to the Australian Crane Industry.

ROB WILL BE REMEMBERED AS AN innovator of the Australian crane sector and someone who identified safety and operator training as major issues for the fledgling industry.

Rob was a third-generation member of a family scrap metal business, and the company's first crane, a Butcher crane mounted on a Blitz truck, was purchased to lift tram bogies as part of a scrap metal contract.

He could see the potential and need for cranes and started Robert Way Crane Services Pty Ltd. Initially, his fleet comprised of several Blitz-based Butcher and Chaplin cranes and a Coles wagon crane. Rob also had some cranes built on AEC and Leyland all-wheel-drive chassis.

In 1961 Rob placed the upper from a six-tonne Coles wagon crane on an FWD six-wheel-drive chassis and had Lance Kirtland build a 90-foot boom for it. A year later he bought a 16-ton Link-Belt HC70 crane with an extra winch that was used for grab work or pulling a tag line for work with a demolition ball.

By the late 1960s Rob could see that hydraulic truck cranes were the machines of the future, and bought a Grove TM 250 (then the largest hydraulic truck crane in South Australia, at 50,000 pounds capacity), two 15-tonne capacity Kyoei truck cranes and a nine-ton CAP truck crane, to replace some of the older cranes in the fleet. He had previously visited Japan and seen the progress of hydraulic cranes there and kept abreast of developments elsewhere in the world.

The size and diversity of the cranes in the Robert Way Crane Hire fleet saw its services used over a wide geographical area; lifting steelwork at BHP's Whyalla shipyards, erecting steel at the Gidgealpa oilfields, erecting sheds for Portland Cement at Portland (Vic), working for Peko Mines at Tennant Creek (NT), and erecting the rocket launcher at Woomera. Machinery installation and dismantling (including packing) was a specialty, and literally hundreds of machines were stripped and packed for Actil Cotton Mills over a two-year period.

A separate company, Robert Way Constructions Pty Ltd, undertook steel erection work.

This level of activity attracted the interest of Brambles when it undertook a period of expansion and Brambles took a substantial shareholding in 1973, although Rob continued to run the business for a number of years afterwards.

Rob also provided a starting place for a number of people who have gone on to be successful hirers in their own right – amongst these Nick Eleftheriadis of Nick's Crane Services.

Nick was attracted to cranes from an early age and couldn't wait to drive one. In fact, he joined Rob Way Crane Services as a 13-year-old, though Rob only became aware of this much later, after Nick had been operating a crane for some time.

To Rob this was a dismissible offence, but Nick's strong work ethic saved the day; and Nick worked for Rob for 24 years before starting Nick's Crane Services

in 1974. Nick and Rob remained good friends, frequently catching up for a coffee and sharing stories about the business and the crane industry.

Robway Safety Systems was established in 1971. Rob's experience with cranes had made him acutely aware of the need for a safety system that effectively monitored the load of a crane, to ensure the machine was not in danger of tipping over.

After importing systems from the UK and America, he found they were not always suitable for the harsh Australian conditions; unveiling a niche market that has since seen the company establish a lucrative export market and grow to 25 employees.

Robway Safety Systems manufactures and supplies around 10 types of safety systems, with more than 100 variations to suit the specific needs of offshore oil and gas platform cranes, tower cranes and all types of mobile cranes and forklifts.

The load monitoring system operates by sounding a warning signal when the crane reaches lift capacity. If the operator continues to lift the load to a dangerous level, the warning signal increases in intensity and may stop the motion of the crane.

This innovation has significantly reduced the number of crane tipping incidents - not only in Australia, but also in Asia, the Middle East and the US, where approximately 70 per cent of the company's annual production is exported.

Over the years, Robway has been recognised for its achievements with several awards, including the 1996 Cathay Pacific China Trader Award, the 1991 ANZ Australian Business Innovation Award in Hong Kong and the MMI Commerce and Industry Award. In 1998, Rob was the first to receive the prestigious Con Popov award for his contribution to the Australian crane industry.

Rob was also a key figure in the formation of the first recognised industry association for the crane industry. This started in 1952 when a mobile crane division was added to the South Australia Road Transport Association.

This then developed into a more professional state association by using the SA Chamber of Manufacturers as the secretariat. Rob was a founding member and then president of the Australian Crane Marketers Association (ACMA).

As the industry kept growing, the association established its own secretariat and finally merged with The Crane Industry Council of Australia.

After several years trying to get the state associations to agree to an unofficial national conference, it finally happened in 1979 at Broadbeach. Approximately 150 people attended. This proved a great success and then following the conference the committee met in Perth and it was then that The Crane Industry Council of Australia was conceived.

As far as Rob was concerned, this proved to be one of the greatest achievements in the history of cranes in Australia.

While cranes and safety were a big part of Rob's life, his wife Elaine and his family meant everything to him.

Rob's daughter Vicki said "I had Dad on a pedestal, and he deserved to be there. My brothers Robert, Garry and I grew up learning the values of a good work ethic, earning respect, being grateful for what you have but striving for more."

Rob's family witnessed firsthand, how he went above and beyond to help them and many others with anything, anytime instilling his motto "there's a solution to every problem."

Rob was a great father in law/friend to his son in law Noel and a wonderful grandfather to his seven grandchildren and their partners, who loved him dearly and miss his stories and fun-loving nature. He was so proud of them, their achievements and especially his two great grandsons, born this year.

Rob was always "up" with the latest technology which amazed his grandchildren; and he kept a busy schedule, was still on committees, enjoyed daily swims, dart club, exercise classes and Qigong (Tai Chi) until his passing. He lived a full and wonderful life.

Hockey was another one of Rob's passions, he was a major contributor to Forestville Hockey Club, where he played for approximately 30 years and competed for South Australia and Australia in Masters Hockey.

Rob will be sorely missed by his family, friends, employees, and those who were fortunate enough to have worked alongside him. The crane industry is better for the level of engagement and time that men like Rob Way and Bob Parker gave to it. We are grateful for their generosity, pioneering spirits and 'can do' attitude that has contributed to the organisation being able to improve and achieve positive change for crane owners over the years.

Rob with his wife Elaine and daughter Vicki.