

Building homes from rice straw

Australian expertise saves air, money

Australian expertise is showing Filipinos how they can take a massive waste product - rice straw - and turn it into safe, comfortable and affordable houses, schools and hospitals.

In the process, the technology from Melbourne-based Ortech Industries is helping to clean up the Philippines environment (by eliminating air pollution from burning waste straw), creating new income for Filipino farmers (by creating a market for the straw) - and turning a tidy profit for its originators.

The Ortech system, which turns rice straw into panels for building construction, was one of the major hits of last year's PhilConstruct exhibition in Manila - the largest exhibition covering the construction and architectural sectors staged in the Philippines.

One of the coordinators of the Australian presence at PhilConstruct, Austrade Senior Trade Advisor Ron Jackson, said the Filipinos were excited by the flexibility of the system, its cheapness (a modest house can be constructed for around \$2,000) and its efficient use of local waste product.

Local business people told exhibitors they were especially enthusiastic about the Filipino style of the buildings - the first

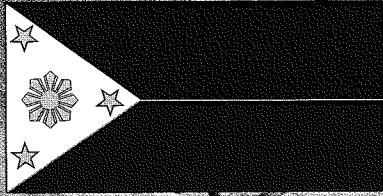
low-cost houses that were truly Filipino in nature and not something just low cost.

They were also impressed by the fact that a house could be constructed in a single day, using paneling produced by the Ortech Industries technology. One Ortech plant is already operating in Iloilo Province, owned by a local cooperative and financed by a loan from the national government.

The 48 Australian construction, design and architectural companies which displayed at PhilConstruct made up 40 per cent of all the exhibitors at the show and were the biggest national exhibitor group. Australia showed products and services ranging from bricks and paving to plaster mouldings and computer software.

"Estimated sales within 12 months of the display for the Australian participants are \$15 million, with several joint ventures currently under discussion, and at least three distributors appointed," Jackson told *Overseas Trading*.

"The large Australian presence to PhilConstruct was the result of factors such as continued positive growth of the Philippines - unlike many of its South East Asian neighbours - and general business confidence with President Joseph Estrada's new administration, which is seen to be business friendly. The



Philippines - Facts & Figures

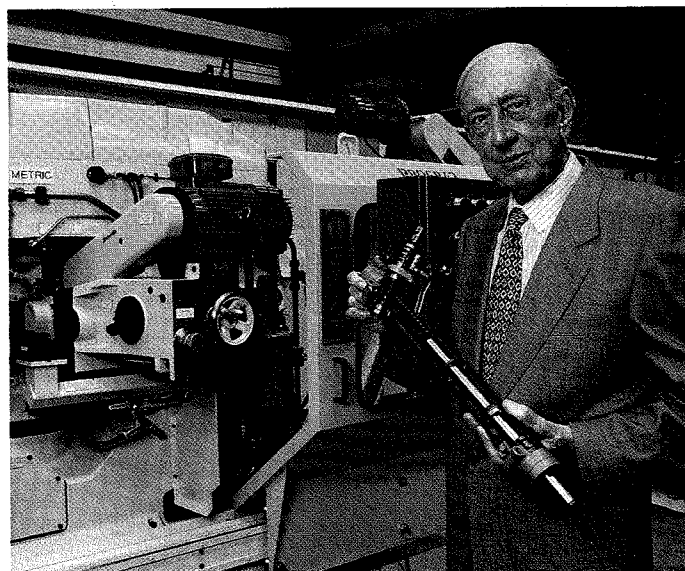
President: Joseph E. Estrada
 Population: 73 million
 Capital: Manila
 Currency: A ₱ equals 24 pesos
 Legal System: Based on Spanish and Anglo-American law
 Major agricultural products: rice, coconuts, corn, sugarcane, bananas, pineapples, mangoes, pork
 Opportunities: Energy, telecommunications, mining services, infrastructure, agribusiness
 Exports (12 months): US\$29 billion
 Source: DFAT

government's 'steady as it goes' approach to economic policy is being well received by Australian exporters."

The Australian display included James Hardie Industries, promoting Hardiflex products being made in the company's recently commissioned \$50 million plant on the outskirts of Manila.

One of the surprising export items were bricks, with three Australian manufacturers exhibiting: Boral from Sydney, and Metro and Midland from Perth.

Jackson said one company that was particularly happy with its participation was Myttons of Queensland, which introduced a stainless steel urinal, something very seldom seen in the Philippines where porcelain has long ruled the roost in Filipino "comfort stations".



Dr Arthur Bishop's motoring achievements have been recognised

Auto pioneer honoured

Leading Australian innovator and intellectual property developer Dr Arthur Bishop (left) who has earned world-wide respect for his work in the automotive and engineering industries, has been awarded the 1999 David Robertson Motor Industry Award for outstanding achievement in the Australian motor industry. Bishop-designed components are built into one quarter of the vehicles produced world-wide each year and the company licenses its steering technology to some of the largest auto companies in the world.

Late last year, Bishop Steering - one of four business units in the company - signed a deal with Mercedes-Benz Lengkingen, a division of the Daimler Benz group, to manufacture variable ratio steering racks in Germany. The Bishop Group was founded in 1957 and the company has built up a world-wide network of almost 500 patents and patent applications.

Previous winners of the award include Holden, Ford, Toyota and component supplier, Howe Leather.