



Lifelong friendships are rewarding

By AIDAN SMITH

MEETING new people and building friendships is what wool and livestock agent Stephen Keatley enjoys most about his job.

Mr Keatley manages the Westcoast Wool & Livestock wool store at Brookton and also undertakes all the other roles of a livestock agent in the Wheatbelt region for the Western Australian business.

For the past three years he has covered areas including Brookton, Pingelly, Narrogin, Wandering, Corrigin and Beverley, which means he's on the road a lot, meeting people every day of the week.

"My favourite part of the job is getting out and meeting new people," Mr Keatley said.

"You never know what is up someone's driveway.

"Everyone is welcoming at their farms and you make lifelong friendships in this industry.

"It's one of the great perks of the job."

Mr Keatley said over the years it has been a "very rewarding job".

"I wouldn't want to do anything else – it's in the blood," he said.

"I'm not going anywhere else.

"There are new challenges every day."

But Mr Keatley conceded to be successful, an agent needed to be a people-person.

If he hadn't chosen livestock as a career path he would have done something else in agriculture, hav-

ing a "keen interest" in machinery and cropping as well.

"I'm very happy running my own agency now," Mr Keatley said.

As part of his job he finds buyers for producer clients, as well as sourcing livestock that suits their requirements.

Mr Keatley helps class their sheep and selects rams for breeding – on top of his day-to-day running of the wool store.

He encourages young people entering the industry to think about a career path in livestock as well as considering undertaking the available university degrees in agronomy and animal health science.

"All these are good to have," he said.

"I encourage people to give whatever a crack, even if it might not be what you think.

"You might not be looking at doing it but it might turn out to be something you do the rest of your life."

Mr Keatley grew up in Kojonup on a farm where his family managed Hyfield Merino stud for about 20 years.

He attended Narrogin Agricultural College, taking an interest in wool classing and completing a Certificate II in agriculture.

Mr Keatley said the sheep industry "runs through his veins" and because of that he chose to follow a path in livestock rather than machinery or agronomy.

After high school he started a traineeship with another livestock agency, where he worked for seven years.

"From there I went farming at



Westcoast Wool & Livestock Brookton store manager Stephen Keatley encourages other young people to think about a career in livestock.

Gnowangerup for four years, before I went to Woodanilling for a year (both jobs involved sheep studs)," Mr Keatley said.

"These five years were a great experience in that I have seen farming from both sides of the fence, the farmers' side and the buyers' side.

"Then in 2017 I was approached to take on the wool store in Brookton, as well as build a client base for livestock."

Mr Keatley said the sheep industry had experienced some interesting times lately with meat prices high and wool prices up and then down again.

"In the past year the State flock has come off a bit," he said.

"Numbers had been dwindling a fraction as mated ewes have been transferred to the Eastern States and anything that can be processed here has been."

Despite the challenges he said it was an exciting time to be in the industry and there were opportunities available for those seeking a secure career.

Apart from work Mr Keatley said he is into his football and is a keen Eagles supporter.

He is involved in the local footy club and volunteers where and when he can in the community.

"I still play some footy – just not at the same level as before," Mr Keatley said.

"I put the boots back on this year to help out the club (due to the uncertainty around COVID-19 and how many players they would have)."

Due to the success and support from their local and surrounding communities, Mr Keatley, his wife and young daughter recently purchased their first home in Brookton.