

Kitchen firm hot, hot, hot

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By JOHN MYERS

STEVE Chaning-Pierce is best known to Manawatu business through his long-time role in low-profile, high-achieving NZ Pharmaceuticals. But his previous business life was in kitchens and bathrooms, not laboratories.

And that explains why he developed an interest in Chris and Jan Prier's Pridex Kitchens — enough to put together a small investment group which is putting its money behind Pridex growth.

The expatriate South African's former life was at the head of a group of companies specialising in kitchen and bathroom joinery. He turned the group around from 1985 insolvency to a \$30 million turnover by 1991.

Mr Chaning-Pearce said he'd watched Pridex and known the Priers personally for several years. He knew the product line and the business approach was sound, and the company was successful and growing, but at a modest pace.

He'd studied the position from the viewpoint of his business development experience in the joinery and pharmaceutical industries.

"If we can use some of the development skills we applied at NZP, Pridex can really be Number One," he said.

Mr Chaning-Pearce said he had no intention of having any role beyond a half-day a week as mentor to the Priers and their new management team, now being sought. Chris Prier was still the man in charge of his company.

Mr Prier said the programme now launched — the staff were briefed on Friday and Monday — would triple the Pridex locally-based workforce to about 90, but the business output would multiply six-fold.

The Pridex plant is already highly automated, and that is about to increase. Parts of the factory area look more like a high-tech engineering plant than a joinery factory.



Pictures: GRAEME BROWN

PRIDEX Kitchens worker Trevor Wyatt attaches the job and part identification to a panel from the computer-driven profile cutter. It can handle sheets more than 4m long.

Computer-driven profile cutters handle all the sheet-cutting for assembly, cut sheets are edged-capped by machinery in turn served by a sheet transport system developed in-house by Mr Prier.

More computer-driven manufacturing equipment is on order. Mr Prier is confident the factory will be fully geared, equipment-wise, within six months.

A feature of Pridex is that the production equipment is linked directly to the same computer system that manages sales and ordering, ensuring sales and production staff always "sing from the same sheet".

The new factory, more than 3000sq m, is about twice the size of the previous Rangitikei Street premises. It's owned by the Priers and had a previous transport industry life.

Mr Prier is planning to start the hunt for franchise operators next month, targeting regions which have a high stock of existing houses ripe for remodelling and with the earnings to support it, as well as regions with high residential building rates.

Pridex was created as a man-and-wife operation 22 years ago by Mr Prier and his wife Jan. It now employs about 30 people.