

g a successful om adversity



Helen and Stephen Nugent:
'We learned lessons
during the downturn'
Picture: Tony Keane

carried out on the Aviva Sta-
and Croke Park, while the re-
source of government-funded
projects, including those
related with motorway works,
and Nugent Manufacturing get
on its feet.

ay, it employs 18 people and
ure once again looks bright.
a steep learning curve for
nt, his wife Helen (who is a
or in the business) and his
but one that may well stand
company.

ndoubtedly, we learned les-
during the downturn and,
they hurt at the time, they
credibly useful as we aim to
on. At times, it felt like hell on
," said Nugent.

we were trying to make sav-
everywhere - even down to
ing our telephone providers.
times it felt like we were just
ing in there by our fingernails.
very day was a struggle, but
eathered it, and now are all
stronger for the experience."

w technology

nt Manufacturing has invest-
a 3D drawing system and an
niser programme to cut steel
efficiently and limit waste.
eel is the most recycled sub-
e in the world, but we are
ng far less of it to recycling

than we did before," said Nugent.

"During our most recent audit, the auditors told us we had increased turnover by 11 per cent but reduced the amount of material used by 14 per cent, which was very satisfying.

"Our larger competitors operate along these lines, and we had to change too. By better organising our cutting sequences, we have also reduced our energy bills and also our labour costs."

British base

In recent months, Nugent has looked into the possibility of establishing a British base. With the construction sector there showing signs of a steady (if slow) recovery, it's a potentially lucrative market.

Though the company's fortunes have improved, he remains cautious. "Small firms, such as ourselves, who got through the worst of the economic downturn now face a less precarious future, but I wouldn't say we are all out of the woods yet," he said.

"We need to keep working hard, adapting where necessary, and must not take our eye off the ball. Every aspect of the business must be right, from product selection to the employees we take on. But I'm immensely proud of what we achieved in recent years."

The Construction Sector Outlook 2014 report, produced for the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland (SCSI) last year, predicted an increase of 30 per cent in construction output here between now and 2018 - with the creation of an additional 30,000 jobs.

Investment in commercial property has grown rapidly, benefiting companies such as Nugent Manufacturing.

Bright future

While it's unlikely that the embattled industry with return to pre-2009 levels of activity any time soon, Nugent believes the future for businesses such as his is bright.

"We know that by offering a personalised service to our clients, we can secure contracts and move forward," he said.

"The efficiencies we've made since the downturn and the change in the way we operate means we are more flexible and business-savvy, which is something all small firms need to do if they want to survive and grow."

Improving every facet of its offering, Nugent Manufacturing will launch its new website (nugentmanufacturing.ie) later this month.

Nugent recently attended a course given by Wexford-based business consultant Blaise Brosnan, which he said had been invaluable.

"We became aware of this business management course through our local enterprise office, and it has really helped our outlook," he said. "Blaise Brosnan asked us to analyse our business from the outside and look in to see what improvements could be made."

"When you step back like that, you spot things which could be overlooked when you're flat out in day-to-day management. Little things can make a big difference, and I'd really recommend such courses for small business owners."

Stephen Nugent will speak at the SFA Annual Conference taking place on Wednesday, June 10, in the Clyde Court Hotel, Dublin 4. The SFA has a special offer for readers of The Sunday Business Post - two delegates for the price of one at €90 plus Vat until May 24. Ref SB-PSEAcnf by e-mail to: aisling.heaton@sfa.ie or call 01-6051668. Log on to sfa.ie/conference for further information