

Professional, Profound & Productive

Anura Yapa

By **MAX AGNEW**

When one checks out the dictionary for the word 'professional', you may well find next to it the pen picture of Anura Yapa JP, these days Chief Engineer with the Menzies Hotel Sydney.

Professional, profound and productive – that sums up much of the qualities of this much travelled gentleman who helped establish the first Victorian Chapter of the AIHE and is today the President of the New South Wales Chapter of AIHE.

Anura was born in Sri Lanka, the former Ceylon that was ceded to the British Empire in 1815, then gaining its political independence in 1948. It is best known for the export of tea, coffee, coconut, rubber and cinnamon, and this Hotel Chief Engineer if you listen to his staff.

When choosing engineering to be his first choice for a career, much of his early learning was out of books before then being able to successfully study in Mechanical Engineering category, then securing work within the private sector in Refrigeration and Air-Conditioning where he was specialised in.

It was exciting for him when successful with his application to work for the Hilton International in Dubai, a remarkable complex of 39 storeys Office Tower and 403 excellent hotel rooms, 3 large Exhibition Centres and 3 Apartment blocks.

This was his first taste of being involved in hotel engineering, until love beckoned.

He returned to Sri Lanka to marry his sweetheart Dayani, going back to work again with Ref & Air; now as the Design and Installation Engineer and having the opportunity of being involved with sales from time to time. Then as the Senior Engineer and Department Head of Ref & Air-Con., and Low temperature Biomedical equipment division with Sanyo agents where he had extensive training sessions in Japan, Singapore and in Malaysia.

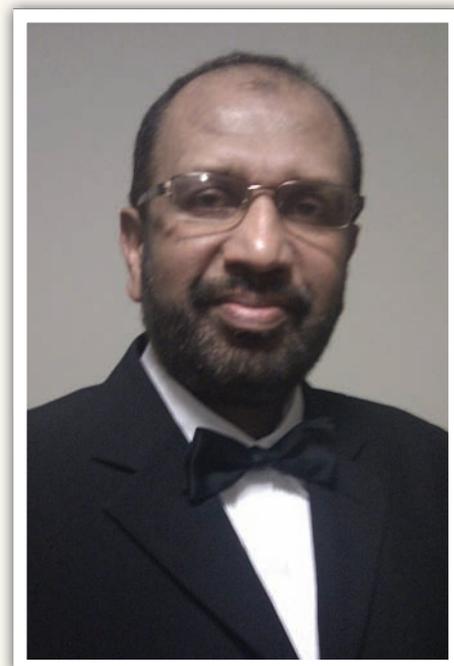
An old colleague and a good friend from his days in Dubai, Kingsley Lawton, offered to put him in touch with the right people in Melbourne for he and his family to be sponsored if they were still keen moving to Australia.

The job he obtained was in his specialised area of Air-conditioning and the person who brought him here is Bill UHE. Back in the hotel business, impressing Hilton on the Park to the point he was given an opportunity to prove himself where was in the role of Plant Operations Engineer. The family lived in the suburb of Keysborough to the south-east, commuting to work in the city for the following seven years.

His next move was to accept the position of Chief Engineer across the continent at Perth's Novotel Langley. Among those he came to know well while there was Doug Stemp, the ex-president of AIHE - WA chapter, who remembers Anura as a respected, an honest and reliable colleague to be involved with. Anura was the treasurer of AIHE - WA Chapter.

After two years in Perth, he was invited to transfer to Sydney with in the same group of hotels Accor. Anura says it is comfortable to work with known people where Accor is the same managing company of Novotel Perth and the Menzies Sydney. Further there is link between Hilton on the Park Melbourne and The Menzies Sydney are own by the same owners, Thakral Holdings one of Australia's largest long term hotel owners. Anura again as the Chief Engineer at the Menzies, operating with a staff of 12 others. It is not unusual when called out by other hotels from the group if some special assistance is required, such is the respect colleagues have for his knowledge.

Today Dayani and Anura have a daughter Yushani at University of Western Sydney, and a son Lahiru in his final year at secondary school. The latter is not certain at this stage what to specialise in when leaving school, but his father says it will be certainly something that is technical, as he seems very keen on this area.



Anura Yapa likes to help teach some of his staff when possible, though most of his staff are qualified technical personal and usually are quite good operating without too much assistance.

Colleagues are likely to be quick to describe him as a workaholic, which he is not likely to argue about. This is why it has been years since he played sport, though he does enjoy following cricket and soccer.

Anura is kept busy these days, not backward in remaining on the job for long hours, as sometimes he knows that one can catch up on paper work staying on into the evenings.

Whilst one of his staffers, says Anura's sincere concern for the wellbeing of those around him and his open-door policy make him both extremely approachable and well respected, one of his former bosses Alan Burrows, describes Anura is a capable, knowledgeable and dedicated Engineer. Michael Smith the General Manager of the Menzies appreciates the experience and the talent Anura brings to the position of Chief Engineer is just what is needed at the Menzies, which is in its fifth decade.

He remains constantly interested in The Menzies having a key role including Risk Management and OH&S. Anura as an accredited Assessor of NABERS program of the Department of Environment Climate Change and Water, assessing other properties to help global sustainability.

"He's not loud or demanding, yet he always seems to get the job done, with everyone who comes in contact with him being quick to see Anura an inspiration for all." ■