

Southern Gazette

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BELMONT

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2016

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Kais a winner for women

Sophie Moore

AS a woman in a male-dominated industry, the 23rd Belmont and WA Awards' Business Person of the Year hopes her success will be an inspiration to other women.

Sharon Kais was recognised at last Wednesday's awards ceremony at the Perth Convention Centre, for her success as founder and CEO of plant equipment hire company Kais Contracting.

"I was overwhelmed," Ms Kais said of receiving the award. "For anyone who's won an award recognising how professional you've been ... for small business owners it gives you the strength to keep going.

"It gives you recognition, opportunity and a chance to draw attention to your business."

Ms Kais decided to start her own business after the strain of raising young children with a FIFO husband began to take its toll.

"(Husband) Dave had been working in the civil and mining industry since he was 17 so I realised the only answer was for me to follow into the industry and have us work together."

But she was reluctant at first, after seeing too many friends go bankrupt. "I decided it was up to me to make it a success and bring him in on it," Ms Kais said.

"But as soon as we bought



Sharon Kais with her husband Dave (left) and Bob Barbagallo at the Belmont business awards.

KAIS Contractors has been hit hard by the mining and construction downturn.

"It's been a hard 12 months, we've had a huge decline due to oil prices, earthworks, mining constructions - fewer new mines starting up. We've had to make 50 people redundant."

But Ms Kais said they were now re-hiring

staff. "We're still not there ... and we're not making enough to recoup the losses we've had," she said.

"(But) winning (businessperson of the year) gives you the strength to keep going. As small businesses we employ and support so many people in the community, we bear it on our shoulders."

our first grader, he loved it."

Despite 26 years' experience working for companies such as Woodside and Austral Bricks, Ms Kais said dealing with clients was difficult at first.

"The older ones, to them I was this woman who had

come out of nowhere. Some refused to deal with me," she said.

Ms Kais said she had seen a big improvement in the younger generation.

"They're culturally more aware," she said.

As well as supporting

young women as a member of Women in Mining, Ms Kais also dedicates her time to community work.

"I believe small business owners are a vital part of the community. For Dave and me, everyone we employ is part of our family," she said.