

Justin Hall has come full circle and now he's starting all over again.

He and business partner Scott Chapman purchased Redwood Cellars in 2006, driving the once-troubled business to become winner of the Westpac Nelson Tasman Supreme and Large Business Awards in 2010.

Two years later, industry heavyweight DB Breweries bought into the business, renaming it Redwood Cider Co. Chapman left but Hall stayed on board to take it to the next level of gaining international markets and exposure for the brands they had created before DB fully took over last year.

“It was a way of making a graceful and amenable exit,” he says.

Redwood Cellars employed about 14 staff when Chapman and Hall first purchased it. At the time of winning the supreme business award they had about 20 employees. They had entered the awards the year prior and a follow-up visit by one of the judges put them on the path to the ultimate success.

“Both Scottie and I are competitive buggers. Failing in that first year – I don't use that word in a bad sense – made us realise we'd done it a bit half-baked and late.”

They spent about four months working on their 2010 entry, involving everyone across the business.

Hall says one of the key differences between their first and second year entries was the inclusion of a SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis which they completed at board level.

“We'd done a little bit of it with our previous entry but it was more back of mind than front of mind.”

That's an advantage of entering the business awards – it forces you to formalise your ideas which helps to achieve goals, he says.

Redwood Cellars continued to grow after receiving the award. “It was amazing how many people took notice of it. Because Redwood Cellars had such a colourful history, it bought a real legitimacy to our business.”

Redwood Cellars employed up to 50 people at its peak under Chapman and Hall's ownership, developing brands including Old Mout Cider and Orchard Thieves Cider.

Although owned now by DB, it continues to operate in Redwood Valley. Hall is confident it will remain there because of the need to produce cider close to product source and he is keen to see its brands go from strength to strength even though his attention has turned elsewhere.

Hall's main focus now is on a new algae business – an interest that was sparked by his exposure to biology when producing vinegars in the early days at Redwood Cellars. The business is still in the research and development stage but he's full of enthusiasm and confidence about its potential, both nationally and internationally.

Hall is also branching more into governance, seeking company directorships that draw on his business skills. In a voluntary capacity, he's engaged on the Rainbow Ski field committee and with various sporting and community endeavours that involve his family.

Having built a successful business once before, Hall knows the importance of networking and has recently re-joined the chamber as he seeks to realise his latest aspirations.

“I’ve really felt it in the six months that I was out and wasn’t going to chamber functions. It’s amazing how quickly you can feel isolated in the paddock.”

FACT BOX

Redwood Cellars (now Redwood Cider Co)

Fruit wine and Cider Maker

Founded 1947

Purchased in 2006 by Justin Hall and Scott Chapman

Won Westpac Nelson Tasman Chamber of Commerce Supreme Business and Large Business Awards in 2010

Employed up to 50 staff

DB Breweries bought into the business in 2012

Justin Hall left in 2014

Entries for this year’s Westpac Nelson Tasman Business Awards close on Friday, September 25. For more information on the awards and how to enter, see www.commerce.org.nz

CONTACT INFO:

Justin Hall

Ph 027 572 7476

Nelson Tasman Chamber of Commerce

Phone 03 548 1363

CEO Dot Kettle

Operations Manager Michelle McCree