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## Everyone wants a butcher's as girls get in for their cut

**Helen Greenwood**

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WOMEN butchers are good for sales. Since Craig Cook hired two women in the past 12 months, he has had a 20 per cent increase in sales at his shop, Prime Quality Meats in Northbridge.

Mr Cook has been in business for 30 years and runs 18 shops. He is amazed by the impact of having trained women butchers cutting and selling meat. "If you'd told me before they started, I wouldn't have believed you," he said. "You couldn't have sold it to me by writing it in the paper for a year."



Impressing the clientele and proprietors as well ... Rebecca Vote and Erin Dolan of Prime Quality Meats in Northbridge are even making the male customers feel more comfortable. JAMES BRICKWOOD

Now he is convinced. "They get behind the product and talk about it. Our women customers seem to like talking to another woman about what's for dinner tonight. Even

the men seem more comfortable to me. And the girls are gentle with the meat. The blokes are rip, tear and bust. It's exciting for me to see more women come into the industry."

Mr Cook's store manager hired Erin Dolan, 26, first and then her friend Rebecca Vote, 23. Both women started as cashiers at two other meat retailers, Joe's Meat Markets and Bush's Meats, before doing their apprenticeships on the job and studying at Granville College - TAFE.

"I can break down bodies. I cut meats for display, steaks or chops or roasting pieces. I marinate cuts and arrange the window display," Ms Dolan said.

"Most customers are really impressed that Erin and I are both butchers," Ms Vote added.

Ben Barrow, the college's acting head of meat and allied trades, said there had definitely been an increase in the number of women going into butchery, once a male-dominated domain.

"We have 170 students and eight of them are women. Five years ago, you would possibly have had one," Mr Barrow said.

He attributed the increase in women in the trade to it being less physically demanding and because there is a national shortage of trained butchers.

"The mindset of the butchers has changed a lot," he said. "There is a different style of butcher to compete with the fast-food chains and the supermarkets. They have to provide customer service, attention to detail and product knowledge."

Mr Barrow said butchers were actively recruiting women because they were better employees.

"They are more dedicated, a bit more mature. They definitely show the boys up," he said.

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