

*PrintNZ media release (June 27, 2026)*

– pics supplied last night –

AotY bestowed on Travers Dobson

Travers Dobson of Christchurch's Leading Label Company was named the BJ Ball Apprentice of the Year at the 2026 Pride In Print Awards held at Christchurch's Te Pae Convention Centre on Friday June 26.

Mr Dobson, who with family has since relocated to Auckland, says it was "unreal" hearing his name read out accompanied by Leading Label Company managing director Bryce Coulbeck.

"My former boss gave me a big hug on stage and that was pretty cool," says Mr Dobson.

"You have the interview that morning and you have no idea how you did. I was just impressed with myself to finish the actual apprenticeship, so to get Apprentice of the Year is pretty unreal.

"And Leading Label is based in Christchurch, so all of my former workmates and suppliers were there – it was awesome to be named Apprentice of the Year in front of them."

Mr Dobson recalls becoming captivated by the print industry.

"I remember in my first week at Leading Label, there was a supplier on site chatting to a printer about labels on a press and they were talking really passionately, and I recall thinking 'it's no big deal, they're just some stickers'. Well, about six months in, it became a pretty big deal as I developed quite a passion for labels and the whole industry, it really grew on me.

"The day-to-day job of running a press is pretty good work. I was totally unsuspecting."

As well as expressing gratitude to his wife, trainers, colleagues and industry bodies for their assistance along the journey, he also credits Leading Label Company for having facilitated a "full understanding of the production side of the business".

"I was involved in everything at some stage – from unloading paper off the truck, prepress, printing, finishing, despatch and even helping the courier load the van at times. I was given every opportunity to learn new equipment.

"There is a big passion for the craft at Leading Label but the biggest thing was everyone was always genuinely keen to share what they know and help me learn and progress. Leading Label had merged with two other companies recently, so there is such a broad range of experience in the company.

"Working at Leading Label is about as good as it gets. Everyone there wants you to be as good as you can be."

Mr Coulbeck describes Mr Dobson as being a "particularly adaptable person with high intellect".

"Given the combination of his practical knowledge of mechanicing along with his computer skills, I believed he could be an asset in either the conventional or digital printing space," says Mr Coulbeck.

"He was well liked by all staff and not an employee that you needed to give direction – he just got on with whatever was required."

“Outstanding batch of candidates”

PrintNZ chief executive Ruth Cobb says Mr Dobson exemplifies a tradesperson who has “thought a lot about print”.

“Not just where it has been and where it is now, but how things might change in the future,” says Ms Cobb.

“You are engaged, motivated to solve problems and lead by example. You are an asset to your employer.”

Ms Cobb says there were an “outstanding batch of graduates” in 2025.

“Each of them have chosen a career in the printing industry and worked hard to complete their apprenticeships. Four years is a long time to commit to and life always throws out a few curve balls but they stuck with it and hit them out the park to come out on top.

“This is a testament not just to them, but to their trainers, the businesses they work for, their Competenz support team and of course their families. They have shown the great heights they can reach and they should each be very proud of themselves, as I am sure are their trainers, employers and families.

“And this is just the beginning of their journey – they all have aspirations to go further and learn more, and we are so lucky they have chosen our industry to do that in.”

#### Top 5 Apprentices of the Year

- Dry Offset Printing – Rebecca Tipene of Visy Rigid Packaging, Auckland
- Label Printing – Travers Dobson of Leading Label Company, Christchurch
- Packaging – Kai Devereux of Pakworld Christchurch
- Reelfed Printing – Kapareira Hannon of Accolade Packaging, Auckland
- Sheetfed Printing – Don Moonjely of Opal Packaging, Christchurch

## Prestigious PrintNZ Awards

Other prestigious PrintNZ Awards bestowed at the 2026 Pride In Print Awards Evening were:

- Business Awards Category (Sustainability) – SCG
- Trainer of the Year (Joint) – Rhys Fauvel (Blue Star Wellington) and Matthew Moore (Opal Fibre Packaging Christchurch)
- Training Company of the Year – Opal Fibre Packaging New Zealand

Additionally, Business Awards Gold Medals were presented as follows:

- Big Ideas Group – Innovation
- Blue Star Group – Sustainability/Wellness
- Custom Teez – Innovation
- Forbes Packaging – Innovation
- Gratpak – Sustainability
- Kale Print – Sustainability
- Kiwi Labels – Wellness
- ProAmpac New Zealand – Sustainability
- SCG – Sustainability
- The Print Room – Innovation/Sustainability/Wellness

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