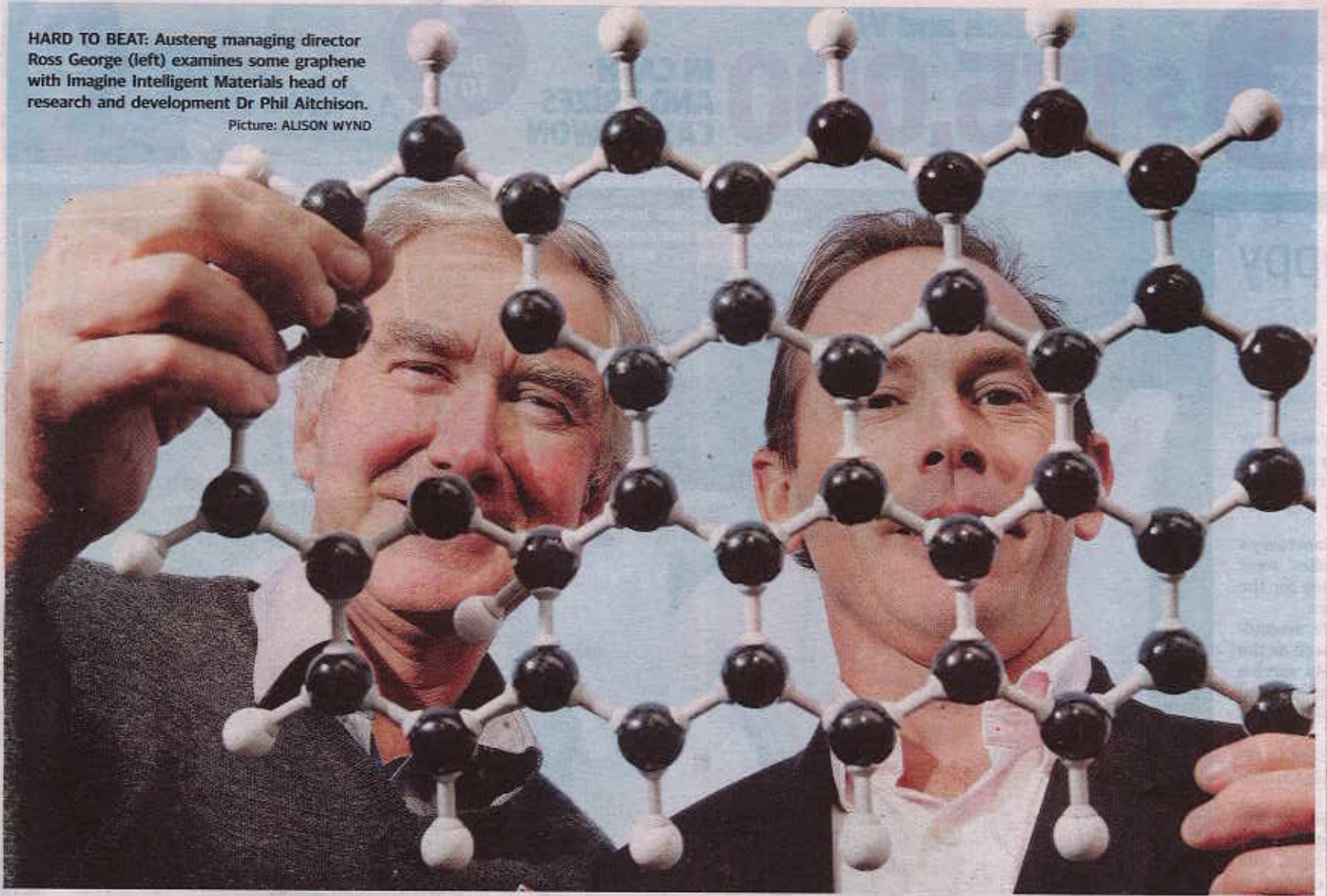


HARD TO BEAT: Austeng managing director Ross George (left) examines some graphene with Imagine Intelligent Materials head of research and development Dr Phil Aitchison.
Picture: ALISON WYND



Unique material a Geelong world-first

SHANE FOWLES

A WORLD-FIRST geotextile with untapped potential for industry and consumer products will be created at a factory in Geelong.

Imagine Intelligent Materials opened the country's first commercial graphene plant in North Geelong yesterday.

Through a partnership with local engineering firm Austeng, Imagine IM is at the forefront of the graphene revolution in Australia's advanced manufacturing sector.



The pilot plant, built by Austeng, will produce up to 10 tonnes of graphene annually.

Imagine IM has developed technology to produce a world-first conductive geotextile that will be launched into the national market by Geofabrics Australasia this year.

Chief executive Chris Gilbey said the Geelong plant

would cater for Geofabrics over the next two years and produce sufficient graphene for other products in the research and development stage.

"The commissioning of this plant positions Imagine IM as one of the few graphene companies anywhere in the world with a path to market," he said.

"Geelong can now consider itself the graphene capital of Australia".

Made from carbon, graphene is an unmatched two-dimensional material that is impermeable to gas, stronger than steel, harder than dia-

mond and electrically conductive. Making it for manufacturing use has been difficult, but interest in its commercial applications is growing rapidly.

BCC Research estimates graphene's global market value will reach \$1.3 billion by 2023, with a focus on electronics, fashion and sports wearable technology, mining, water conservation and energy storage.

Austeng managing director Ross George said he hoped the partnership would enable his boutique firm to capitalise on an innovative market.

"We believe that building

Imagine IM's initial plant will lead to Austeng developing the skills and knowledge to build further plants that will be exported to the world," he said.

Imagine IM's chief operating officer and R&D head, Phil Aitchison, said the project tapped into other areas of expertise in Geelong.

"Austeng came highly recommended as tech enablers and we have also undertaken R&D work at both CSIRO in Geelong and Deakin University," he said. "Geelong is one of the most innovative Australian cities in which to work".