
Well-deserved award for veteran Darwin lawyer

By Alastair Shields, Acting Executive Director Policy, Department of Chief Minister

When news of the award of the Public Service Medal to veteran Darwin lawyer Robert Aubrey Bradshaw (aka “Tiger Bradshaw”) became known on Australia Day this year, a ripple of congratulations started in the Northern Territory legal community.

The official citation for Robert’s award, “for outstanding public service to the development of public sector administration in the Northern Territory”, is as understated as the award recipient himself.

Robert has made an enormous contribution in his 32 years in the Territory, and the quality of many of the laws on the statute books, and the informed policy decisions by Governments of both political persuasions over the years, are due, in no small part, to the hard work and dedication of Robert. This is reflected in Hansard – the record is littered with compliments to Robert from MPs of all political persuasions.

Those who know Robert understand when I say that his work is often completed at odd hours of the night and day, and sometimes in the company of the family dog, Trouble.

I first met Robert when I was a teenager, and he was a fresh-faced graduate from the University of Sydney. Robert commenced as a newly admitted solicitor with the then Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department where he worked for my mother, Juliet Shields.

For many years Juliet and Robert were the backbone of the small group of commercial lawyers who were working for the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department before Self-Government, and who were transferred to the new



Robert Bradshaw PSM

Department of Law to become some of the first Territory Public Servants at Self-Government.

They had exciting, but difficult and complicated jobs. In the lead up to and the aftermath of Self-Government there were no established processes to get things done, and no precedents for interpretation of the constitutional and other complicated legal effects of the Commonwealth’s *Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act*. All of this was combined with an energetic young Government, anxious to make its mark upon the world.

By the mid-1980’s, however, Robert was ready to try out other areas of the law. Robert’s subsequent collection of statutory hats including Registrar-General, Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Public Trustee, Commissioner for Consumer Affairs, Registrar of Land and Business Agents, Registrar of Escorts, NT Censor and member of the Planning Authority, is legendary. I have probably missed a few.

It was during this time that he met

his future wife, Barbara. Their combined family collection of statutory appointments is probably second-to-none in the Northern Territory and Australia, if not the modern world.

In the period when Robert and Barbara were collecting statutory appointments, they celebrated the birth of their daughter Mary.

Mary demonstrated a considerable insight into the personalities of both of her parents when I interviewed her in preparation for this article. The interview went something like this:

Me: “Mary, so what do you think of your Dad’s award?”

Mary: “I think it’s pretty cool.”

Me: “Me too. So who is the most excited, your Mum or your Dad?”

Mary: “Oh, Mum of course - Dad’s excited on the inside.”

In about 1997, Robert decided that legal policy was the area where he could most make a difference, and that is where he is today, as Director, Legal Policy. The enormous quantity of legislation and other policy initiatives that carry Robert’s fingerprints would take up another article altogether.

Of particular note for the purposes of this article is that the legislation that governs our profession, the *Legal Profession Act*, was very much a product of the partnership between Robert in his role at the Policy Division of the Department of Justice, and Barbara, as CEO of the Law Society. I am reliably informed that, in respect of the *Legal Profession Act*, the partnership was not without difficulty, but I am pleased that there was never any question of that difficulty affecting their private lives!

In former times, I have been

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slightly saddened by the grant of an award like the Public Service Medal, because it often signalled the impending retirement of the recipient. I am, however, pleased to say that in Robert's case, there are no plans for retirement on the horizon, which is something of a relief.

For those of you who have seen the state of Robert's desk, and my desk, you will understand immediately

when I say that Robert has been something of a mentor to me over the years. However, I don't believe that I have ever matched Robert's file management achievements!

Robert's legendary pen chewing abilities, which once led to many a stained shirt pocket and stained fingers, seem to have been replaced in current times by a quirker style of dress. Robert's bright shirts and mis-matched socks are a source of

pleasure for many.

One area where Robert has continued the tradition that he and Juliet established many years ago is in the provision of mentoring and support for younger members of the profession. This commitment, combined with Robert's quick wit, is part of the reason that the ripple I mentioned earlier quickly turned into a Tsunami of congratulations.

Pro bono progress for the NT

The Law Society's Access to Justice Committee is seeking expressions of interest from practitioners wishing to participate in the Northern Territory's new pro bono scheme, which will commence in May 2008.

Developing a model for the Pro Bono Clearing House scheme has been a major priority for the Access to Justice Committee over the past year. The initiative was a direct outcome of the 2006 NT Pro Bono/Legal Aid Conference and a related survey, in which a number of local practitioners expressed interest in undertaking pro bono work under a more structured and monitored regime.

Access to Justice Committee Chair, Jo Pattinson, will soon contact partners of private law firms and sole practitioners to invite them to register for the Territory's official pro bono scheme.

Ms Pattinson encourages firms and individuals interested in contributing to the scheme to register with the Law Society.

"The pro bono register will be kept confidential, and member firms or individuals will nominate the frequency at which they will accept cases, and what type of cases they will accept," Ms Pattinson said.

"No firm or individual will be compelled to undertake pro bono work. The register will give the Access to Justice Committee an idea of who can be approached when pro bono service is required for a particular case which meets our criteria," she said.

As well as being encouraged to undertake work referred by the scheme, all members of the legal community will be able to refer cases to the Clearing House, and legal practitioners are encouraged to participate in the assessment of Clearing House applications.

The assessment and referral function of the Clearing House will be undertaken by members of the Access to Justice Committee, which will meet once a month. The Law Society's Project Officer, Research & Policy, Angus McDonald, will work closely with the Committee,

undertaking the role of Clearing House Co-ordinator. Angus commenced employment with the Society on 18 February 2008.

The Law Society Access to Justice Committee (formerly known as the Pro Bono Committee) consists of representatives from a range of firms and agencies in the Northern Territory. Members include: Jo Pattinson (De Silva Hebron), Caitlin Perry (DCLS), Alix Cameron (Clayton Utz), Fiona Hussin (NTLAC), Jo Martin (TEWLS), James Docherty (AGS), Jason Schoolmeester (DOJ), Sue Phoo and Helen Wodak (NAAJA), and several Law Society representatives.

The Territory's new pro bono scheme will be officially launched at the opening of Law Week on 26 May 2008.



The Pro Bono Clearing House is an outcome of the 2006 NT Pro Bono/Legal Aid Conference