



Vern Donovan FLGMA

Vern graciously took part in an interview for LGMA's Oral History Project and provided the following insights into his long and illustrious career within Local Government.

Included as well are highlights showcasing his career and life milestones.

Questions & Comments.

Question: Did you have a long career in Local Government?

Answer: Yes. It commenced in 1952 (Bauhinia Shire Council) and concluded in 2006 With the Rockhampton District Saleyards Board, a Joint Local Government. Spanning some 54 years. But there may have been other Local Government Officers whose length of service extended even further than that.

Question: Do you believe your career was a successful one?

Answer: I feel the answer to that is better left in the hands of the Councils and Communities for which I served.
I am satisfied that I did the very best I could in the circumstances but other people are better positioned to judge or assess to what extent my overall career achievements would rate.

Whatever level that sense of achievement might rate, it is so essential to remember that I could never do it on my own. I had the benefits of a huge team effort involving Councillors – My staff (both Admin. And Field); Networking arrangements as encouraged by the Local Government Managers' Association; Assistance and advice from both State and Federal Government officers; and last but not least, the great support of my Wife and Family.

The following are important aspects of my career in Local Government that I consider were absolutely essential to any perception of success I might have achieved along the way.

These I do not quote in any particular order but I can guarantee from my experience they are all vitally imperative. If I had chosen to ignore any of these it would surely have been at my own peril.

- ❖ The connections I made and continued to maintain with relevant State Government Departments, particularly the Department of Local Government, up to the position of Director.
- ❖ The connections I made and continued to maintain with relevant Federal Government Departmental officers of all levels.

(I recall in my younger days listening to advice from my Dad who never ceased to amaze me with his use of carefully calculated plans to solve all types of problems which he confronted during his management of large rural properties across Queensland. He said, "Always try and use plain old common sense to solve a

problem and if you are ever seeking assistance or advice from someone, approach them in a humble manner and you will gain their confidence and respect and always be thankful and appreciative of their response. If they perceive you as a smart-Aleck you will get little or no help whatsoever.”

From these sources I received an extensive amount of guidance and this ultimately aided both my Council and the Community of our Shire.

- ❖ My Administration and Field Staff relationship. From an office staff of 2 back in 1961 with Fitzroy, I ended up with 22 in administration as our population continued to grow over the years. The Field staff increased from 15 to 70 over the same period to the year of my retirement in 2000.

Along the way I quickly learned how important it was to have a good team approach with your Staff and through my departmental Directors I maintained a personal contact with all employees with strict protocol always acknowledged. Over the years all staff were significantly instrumental in enabling me to reach Council’s objectives, and we did this as a Team.

- ❖ My constant networking with many other Chief Executive Officers across this State and in particular those in the Central Queensland region.

From time to time such officers frequently assisted me when difficult and unusual problems arose and I am very much indebted to them for their sincere friendship and willingness to discuss difficult and sometimes delicate issues with me resulting in better outcomes for my Shire Community.

- ❖ Elected Representatives serving Council over my time at the helm of more than 44 years. I consider it was my good fortune to be privileged to work for and with genuinely concerned Chairpersons/Mayors and Councillors throughout my career who were dedicated to the tasks of achieving a good outcome for the Ratepayers.

In nearly every instance they recognised that to achieve this, it was essential to join the Team approach model I favoured and encouraged.

- ❖ The wonderful support and encouragement that I received from my Wife and Family.

My advice on this delicate issue is - Never forget or underestimate the importance of your Family. Despite the long and late hours demanded of you on your work program, always set aside other special times to be with your loved ones.

As your children arrive on the scene and commence their speedy transition from babies to kindy, then school etc, never never forget this extremely important phase of your life and theirs only passes you ONCE. THERE ARE NO REPLAYS. So make

every opportunity to experience the joys of their company and prove yourself as a good loving Dad or Mum and Husband or Wife.

I offer this advice as I had some sincere regrets. A wonderful wife and two magical daughters with whom I should have spent far more time.

Last of many milestones

By CLARE WILLIAMS

RETIREMENT is something Fitzroy Shire Council chief executive officer Vern Donovan is eagerly anticipating.

After 36 years as chief executive officer, 44 years with Fitzroy Shire Council and 49 years in local government he has certainly earned a break.

Mr Donovan, 63, is the longest serving employee and the longest serving shire clerk/CEO in the shire's history.

He is moving aside for director of administration Lyle Harman to take his place.

Although retiring when Fitzroy Shire is on the brink of major industrial development, the 63-year-old Mr Donovan has been involved in many milestones during his career;

The first he recalls was his promotion from assistant shire clerk after the death of incumbent shire clerk Ralph Arlott.

"When I became shire clerk that was a milestone. It was an unexpected promotion in unfortunate circumstances," he said.

Another major change during his career was the relocation of the administration building to Ranger Street, Gracemere in 1994.

This was the first time the administration centre had been located within the shire.

Mr Donovan has also seen Gracemere swell from 200 residents



□ August 1 is Vern Donovan's last day as Fitzroy Shire Council chief executive officer after 36 years on the job. He first served under chairman Richard Edward Pierce (pictured in background). Picture by PETER SAVILL. 329/34

to about 4,500 with the shire's population jumping from 2,500 to 10,500 with further growth predicted.

The commencement of large scale industry in the shire is another highlight.

He said the Bajool Saltworks in 1957 was the start of many developments, with another saltworks introduced in 1967 and the development of the Stanwell Power

Station in 1984, the largest power station in the state at that time.

Recently the focus has been on the Australian Magnesium Corporation's proposed \$1 billion magnesium plant at Stanwell.

"With all these milestones and points of excitement I felt (the council achieved something for the area," he said.

He said he will miss working for the council and will especially

miss his hard working and supportive staff.

"The other thing I'll miss is the present council."

Mr Donovan said the council was looking very good at the moment with the mayor and councillors working well together.

"I've enjoyed working with the current council. They've been great and they focus on benefits to the community and that's what

council is all about.

"It's also the first balanced council with four men and four women councillors," he said.

"But you've got to call it quits when you've got to call it quits."

Mr Donovan delivered his final CEO's report to last weeks council meeting and withdrew from the meeting.

He will never be far away as he will retain his part-time position as CEO of the Gracemere Sa leyards Board.

Although he wasn't expecting a send off, the long standing CEO will be farewelled at a testimonial dinner on Friday night.

After Mr Donovan's last day on August 1, he will travel to London with his wife Audrey to see their daughter Karen and her family.

He said his wife had always been very supportive of him and it was time to devote his attention to his family and six grandchildren.

"There are things I know I'm going to miss but there are other things I have to do."

"It's time I took a break to do the things I like to do that I've never had time to do," he said.

The Donovans' also hope to tour Australia and visit friends in Canada.

Mr Donovan would also like to improve his golf game and loves fishing and gardening.

"It might be a busy retirement!"

Fitzroy CEO hangs up his hat

By **JENNY LIGHTFOOT**

AFTER almost 49 years in Local Government and having established an excellent working relationship and strong rapport with councillors and staff, surrounding and regional councils, industry leaders and the community, Chief Executive Officer of the Fitzroy Shire Council, Mr Vern Donovan, is about to take a well earned rest.

On Tuesday, August 1, he will retire from the Fitzroy Shire Council that he has helped grow from very humble beginnings to become the hub for major industrial development over the past 44 years. On Friday evening (July 21) Local Government and community leaders will pay tribute to Mr Donovan's achievements at a Testimonial Dinner at the Gracemere Community Centre from 7pm.

For Mr Donovan it has been both a rewarding and exciting period of his life.

Born at Springsure, Mr Donovan joined the Bauhinia Shire Council almost 49 years ago. After three and a half years with Bauhinia, he moved with his parents to Rockhampton, where he joined the Rockhampton City Council as a Junior Clerk.

Eighteen months later a position for an Assistant Shire Clerk came available with the Fitzroy Shire Council, then located in Denison Street, Rockhampton. Encouraged to apply, Mr Donovan was appointed Assistant Shire Clerk to Mr Ralph Arlott on July 31, 1956.

"I owe a great debt of gratitude to Shire Clerk, Ralph Arlott, who was my teacher, and to the Shire Chairman, the late Mr Richie Pierce, who gave me great guidance - he was a very wise gentleman. Between the two, I could not have been placed in better hands at an age when I was young and impressionable," Mr Donovan said.

In the years that followed he himself was appointed Fitzroy Shire Clerk, a position he has held to this day.

"In those days the entire office staff consisted of a Shire Clerk and one office girl, Peggy Beal (now Mrs Peggy Graham). From just two, we have now grown to an indoor staff of 22, and from 15 outdoor staff we now have between 50 and 90 (including the Work for Dole programs)."

Mr Donovan said he had also seen the township of Gracemere grow from 200 people to almost 4,500 people in the town and immediate surrounds.

Fitzroy Shire itself has seen the population soar from 2,500 to 10,500, with a further projected growth to 17,000 people over the next 10 years.

Mr Donovan said among the proudest achievements of Fitzroy Shire Council was its pursuit and encouragement of major industrial development.

"This Council has moved ahead in leaps and bounds. We have seen the great benefits of industrial development dating back as far as the Bajool Salt Works in 1956-57, the billion dollar development of the Stanwell Power Station (the biggest in the state) in 1984, and now the unprecedented potential of the Stanwell Industrial Corridor and the soon to be established Magnesium Plant.

"This huge growth in industrial development will have a major impact on employment opportunities for our younger generation and for the growth of our shire," he said.

Mr Donovan said it was disappointing to be leaving right on the brink of such major development in the shire - "I am 63 years of age, so it is time to make-way for younger people, who will keep pace with the demands of our growing shire."

Mr Donovan said there were many people he wished to thank for their support, assistance and co-operation over the years, who together had made his role much easier.

First and foremost his wife, Audrey, who accepted his often working to midnight and who had to telephone him on one occasion to remind him it was Zan, and his daughters, Karen and Janelle. During his retirement Mr Donovan plans to enjoy the company of his family, to

travel to Britain and later Canada and to enjoy a round of golf and the pleasures of fishing more frequently.

He will also continue his role as CEO of the Rockhampton Saleyards Board. "I have a great interest in the progress of the Saleyards Board, and feel I still have something to offer," he said.

His greatest joys however, will come from spending more time with his wife, two daughters and son-in-laws and six grandchildren.

"My daughter, Karen (Mrs Bates), left for London at the age of 16 to join the Saddlers Wells Royal Ballet Company. She has now retired from dancing to raise a son and a daughter with husband, Nigel, who is the Head Percussionist with the Covent Garden Orchestra.

"Our youngest, Janelle (Mrs Anderson), has four sons and she and her husband, Murray, run a cotton and cattle property at Theodore.

"Audrey has booked the jumbo, and we will all fly to London to spend time with Karen and her family on August 4," Mr Donovan said.

He said from day one as Shire Clerk he had been blessed with a wonderful staff.

"To be successful in any way, shape or form, you must have a good staff, who will work as a team.

"Right the way through, I have had a brilliant staff and the encouragement of the Elected Members and that gives you the momentum to go forward. I am also grateful for the support and assistance from Ratepayers and residents and Council's Field Workers down through the years."

As Fitzroy Shire Clerk Mr Donovan has served six Shire Chairmen (now Mayors). They were: Richie Pierce, Ian Besch, Cedric Archer, Rod Douglas, Mary Seierup and Don Close.

He has also formed a very close association with the Executive Officers of the Stanwell Corporation, Australian Magnesium Corporation, Local Government and surrounding shires.

Mr Donovan said he would also like to see the close working association that is now taking shape between Fitzroy, Livingstone, Mount Morgan and Rockhampton Councils continue and strengthen. He said each Council in its

own right had something major to contribute — **working together that contribution could become immense.**

"I am not a proponent of amalgamation as each council has its own unique identity — but it shouldn't stop there," he said.

"Working together as a team is an essential requirement in order to benefit the entire regional community.

"Any politics should be set aside to give our region's ratepayers and residents the top priority they deserve."

Mr Donovan will hand over his role as Chief Executive Officer to Lyle Harman, who has had 20 year with the Fitzroy Shire Council as Deputy Shire Clerk and Director of Administration.

"He was selected by the Council from 30 applications, which came from throughout Australia and New Zealand.

"I guess, looking back over the years with Fitzroy, I have given it my best shot and I am certain Lyle Harman will do the same. I have a lot of good memories and have made many strong friendships down through the years, and these I will cherish," Mr Vern Donovan said.



TWO FOR ONE - THE SUPEROPTION

In these days of economic uncertainty the aging baby boom generation is concerned about retirements security. "People worry that the real long term value of superannuation is being eroded," Ray Hooper, Principal of Ray Hooper & Co Real Estate said, "it's ultimate spending power often ends up being much less than people anticipate." According to Ray Hooper, as the boom generation ages and retires, pressure is put on welfare funding and there is widespread concern that the government might not be able to provide. "Growing numbers of home owners are looking for other income sources for their retirement," Ray Hooper said, "and residential property is a popular choice. Many choose to start by swapping their current home for two smaller homes, one of which they rent out."

According to Ray Hooper, this is not because they are finding things tough, but because they have shrewdly opted for the long term financial benefits. "Many people live in houses too large for their needs or in houses in sought after areas

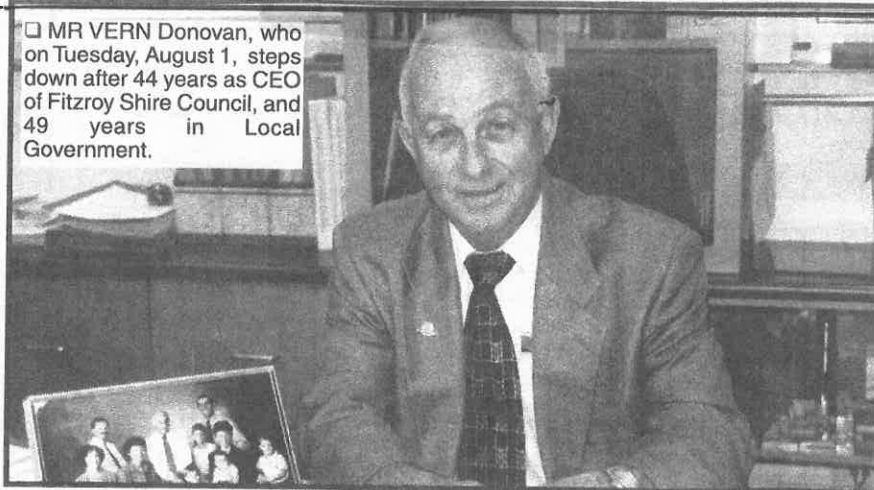
where the value of the property would allow them to buy two comparable homes," Ray said, "but there are just as many people who choose to remain in their current home and borrow to buy their rental property for a negative gearing tax advantage."

Ray Hooper said that now is a great time to invest in residential property, as prices are still low but the market is on the turn. The low or negligible growth of the last few years has been absorbed by the previous owner and capital appreciation will be felt very quickly. "Many home owners who have cashed in on the benefits of their existing property owner-

ship say that they have bought a second property without even needing to own their own home outright," Ray said. "The important thing is to ensure that mortgage borrowings are structured correctly. Talk to your accountant or financial planner as well as your real estate agent. Getting the right advice can save most borrowers thousands of dollars."

Ray Hooper

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MR VERN Donovan, who on Tuesday, August 1, steps down after 44 years as CEO of Fitzroy Shire Council, and 49 years in Local Government.

Lessons Learned

Long-term LGMA member, Vern Donovan has written a book about his life in local government. Highlighting what has changed and what remains the same in Queensland councils, Vern's book is a worthwhile investment of time for those wanting to understand why we have the local government we have today and to learn from our recent history.

Like all local government reflections, some of the stories may seem unbelievable but those in the sector know that the crazier it sounds, the more likely it is that it happened!

Contact LGMA to find out how to access a copy of this self-published memoir.

