



Mayor Damien Ryan in full regalia, in the Bangtail Muster. John Huigen (below right).

Looking for leaders

By KIERAN FINNANE

If part of what makes a leader is a good mentor, Desert Knowledge Australia wants to make sure those people are available for the next generation of leaders in The Centre.

They're creating an Alice Springs Desert Leadership Program, under the guidance of established leaders, including the town's Mayor Damien Ryan.

Providing mentors to the participants is an important part of the overall program.

The Alice News asked Mr Ryan who mentored him and why the town would need a formal program now.

"We had subliminal mentors, or I did, people I looked to – my father, my first boss Paul Egar.

"I was only a kid, I

CONT. PAGE 8.





Mentoring tomorrow's leaders

FROM PAGE 2.
learnt from him punctuality and turning up with the mindset to do the job for the day, not turning up with a 'I'm here to mark time', I always respected that in him."

When he entered the full-time workforce, at the Alice Springs Camera Shop, a business he would eventually own, he encountered a "hard task master" in then owner John Cumming.

"But he was also a mentor as well", as was his manager, Gordon Nielsen.

"He taught me so much about how to buy, how to sell, how to maintain stock. All those things are mentoring."

The leadership program is as interested in leaders in the business community as in the public and NGO sector – what it wants is a good spread of mentors and program participants across the community, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike.

A key goal is for people to learn how to work well together "inter-culturally".

Mr Ryan has made a point of working in this way in his role as Mayor, from having good working relationships with Lhere Artepe and Tangentyere Council to getting to know "street kids". The News asked him what kind of inter-cultural working experience he grew up with.

"My uncle ran a cattle station, I spent a lot of time there as a youngster – there was no difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

"When I went through primary school here there were only seven boys and twenty-odd girls. David Ross [now Central Land Council director] was in my class, Peter Laurie who's now deceased, a young lad from Melville Island, we lived like that together.

"In the sporting field, Graham Ross coached Federal Football Club. I used to hang around there. He was a man who taught me a lot about how you should respect other people.

"I used to buy Indigenous art for John Cumming and I spent a lot of time with [W.] Rubuntja. He taught me a lot.

"And Keith Namatjira, he was a scallywag but, by God, he taught me a lot. He was one of Albert's five sons, he's gone now."

So, is there something missing about our social relationships now that we need a program to teach us how to work together and how to lead?

It's more case of value-adding, according to Mr Ryan: "We do hear people saying, 'where's the next batch of leaders?'."

"I'm pretty new to this game and I'd like to see others come along.

"People think you have to go out and pick the brightest stars, but there are people who are out there who are leaders who you wouldn't normally think of – they could be our next members of parliament, the next owners of a big business.

"The mentor has got to give a commitment to this, got to be available over two years when a person rings up and says 'I'm tearing my hair out over this'.

"And I'm sure these guys, the ones being mentored, will create their own alumni, like people do through sport or through school – if we can start that sort of process, it will be great for the town."

Other established leaders to join Mr Ryan in the program reference group are former Territory Administrator Ted Egan AO, former Mayor Fran Kilgariff, CEO of the Central Australian Aboriginal Legal

Aid Service as well Senior Traditional Owner and Native Title Holder Pat Miller AO, Deputy CEO of MacDonnell Shire and Desert Knowledge Australia Board Director Des Rogers, Desert Knowledge Australia CEO John Huigen, and Interpreter and Bi-Cultural Consultant Kenny Lechleitner.

The program, being developed in partnership with the national organisation, Social Leadership Australia, is at the stage of calling for expressions of interest from people who would like to become mentors.

A "self-assessment pack" has been developed to help identify them, says Mr Huigen.

If the person then decides they have the necessary qualities, there is an expression of interest form to fill out.

This will be followed by an orientation program over four weekday evenings which will include "clarifying the role and making sure everyone is on the same page".

These early time commitments should also help establish for the people concerned whether or not they have the time to take on the role.

When the program begins, the mentor will be required to take part in an initial "orientation connection session" with the person they are mentoring, followed by monthly contact for an hour and to be available for telephone contact.

Those applying to participate in the leadership program – adults from their late twenties to early forties who have already demonstrated leadership capability and impact – will go through a selection process.

"We'll tap into the wisdom of our reference group to help us with this," says Mr

Huigen, and the group will also help "match" the mentors and participants.

The program proper should get underway in April next year.

Apart from their person-to-person contacts with mentors, the participants will also have a range of learning experiences, some of which will take place away from Alice Springs.

"This is about learning to speak the language of metropolitan Australia, where so many of the decisions affecting desert Australia are made, and getting an understanding of how Alice Springs is seen from an outside perspective," says Mr Huigen.

In the last six months of the program – April to October, 2011 – the participants will come together as a group to work on a project that will bring about important community benefit.

"This will be particularly about learning to work together as a leadership group," says Mr Huigen.

What evidence is there of this kind of program achieving its goals – that is, contributing to the development of the leaders of the future?

Mr Huigen says it's "always challenging to prove that the program is the one thing that made the difference" but there is a lot of qualitative evidence of their usefulness.

There's also "huge investment" in leadership development programs worldwide, which "is reflective of a perceived need and value".

DKA is in fact involved in helping deliver such a program for top-ranking executives of the National Australia Bank and is drawing on the bank's expertise in the area to develop the local program.