

Eulogy for Tom Pyne – 4 November 2011, Cairns

When Tom Pyne was working as a billy boy on a Queensland Railways gang in 1949 - having lived through the hardships of World War 2 - **who would ever have thought** that 60 years later he'd be farewelled by hundreds of people, with tributes and accolades heaped upon him from across the region, the state and the nation? As I look around this chapel I can see former mayors, religious leaders, business bosses, family friends like John and Jan Phillips, families like the Kamslers, Chapmans

Who would have thought that he'd have a career that had him hob knobbing with Bill and Hilary Clinton, Queen Elizabeth, Prince Charles and Diana, the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, the President of the People's Republic of China, Dan Quayle the US Vice President and many others?

Who would have thought that he'd end up being a giant in local government in Queensland recognised and respected for his almost four decades of helping to shape and grow the Cairns region, put it on the map nationally?

Prior generations and Tom's early life in the rural community of Deeral, with schooling at Babinda gave him the foundations and values that allowed him to live his colourful life. It's all about community. His great grandfather - a pioneer in this region and member of the first Board that began local government in Cairns 126 years ago in 1885 – started the tradition of community service that has been passed down to successive generations of Pynes and Tom was very proud of that.

Tom was always actively involved in sports learning how to be tough and strong when he was on his own in the boxing ring, and also how to give and take and work in a team when he was playing tennis or team sports.

By the time he was elected as a Mulgrave Shire Councillor in 1961 he had married his loyal wife Marion, moved to Edmonton, and daughter Joann – now serving the public in her position as the regional TAFE director – was a baby.

Tom went on to have another son – our much-loved Councillor Rob - and contest 12 elections, the majority of them seeing him elected unopposed; a remarkable achievement and one not matched by many.

He achieved these election successes because he was widely regarded as:

- someone who could get things done;
- a good bloke who would listen to you;
- someone who didn't take himself too seriously, who always had a smile on his face and loved a laugh and a joke;
- a self-made man who wasn't concerned that he'd had to leave school early; didn't let that stand in his way;
- a councillor who would ask for the advice of engineers, accountants and town planners – and take the bits of advice he wanted;
- a networker before the term was invented who got to know people at all levels of government and wasn't afraid to pick up the phone
- a visionary who planned for the future and, *“Wanted to make Cairns the finest place to live in the Southern Hemisphere”*
- a strategist whose successive councils acquired land across the Shire - from Babinda to Smithfield – and later sold it to developers to help fund the sporting and recreational facilities needed by a growing population
- someone who knew how important those green hills around Cairns were and moved to protect them; who helped to smooth the way for the world heritage listing of the Wet Tropics – very contentious in the 1980's
- a tourist promoter who helped to market and promote the region and grow its economy
- a collaborator who got behind Mayor Ron Davis and the other regional leaders and visionaries who drove the creation of the Cairns International airport
- a supporter of events and festivals that helped to both connect communities and attract visitors

- a grass roots politician who had his head around local issues and had the connections to get the funding and make things happen on the ground
- a strong Labor man who rejected party politics in council and worked even-handedly with all sides of politics

Tom knew that you couldn't please everyone but he was very clear about doing the right things. He said he *"slept well every night knowing that everything he did was for the greater good."*

He was as comfortable in moving in the halls of power as he was slopping around in his colourful shirts and sandals – or later on his Crocs – shopping in Edmonton.

"I would not have changed a single moment for quids," he said.

Tom, we're glad you lived the life you did and had the influence that has helped to shape this region for the better and for the future. You were both an ordinary man **and** a remarkable man . . . an **inspiration**.

Tom, the Cairns region salutes you.