Alice and the recession. By ERWIN CHLANDA.

Alice Springs has a better than average chance to weather the economic storm sweeping the world, says Steve Shearer, vice-chairman of the Chamber of Commerce. Stressing that he is expressing his own opinions, not the chamber’s, he says the large number of public servants here, with their secure income, and increased government projects, mostly for Aborigines, are good news. He says bush housing will get $4.5b from Canberra over the next three to four years, with work expected to get under way next month. It is still unclear which construction companies and sub-contractors will be engaged but “locals must all be able to tender”, he says. The Alice Springs News revealed last year (April 17, 2008) that only two communities in Central Australia, out of a total of 16 throughout the Territory, will be benefitting from a $420m program to build 1000 new houses for Aborigines. That means on average, The Centre will get just one-eighth of the five year scheme funded mainly by Canberra, known as Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP). And only 22 communities in The Centre will benefit from an additional $124m for housing upgrades in 57 communities. These are issues which, no doubt, the chamber executive will be putting its mind to at a meeting Mr Shearer says will be held soon. He says the Federal intervention will continue to pump money into the local economy. Also, the recession will create a buyer’s market, with suppliers lifting their game and lowering their prices, in a bid to retain customers. Mr Shearer says he recently bought furniture, “locally, of course”, and got a good bargain. He says Alice Springs’ fame can be a handicap: while its law and order problems are by no means unique, The Alice receives “exceptional scrutiny” because of its status as a national icon. Its reputation also obliges it to be “bright and presentable”, says Mr Shearer. “We can’t let the grass grow on the roadside because it rained a lot. “We need to do what needs to be done.” He says the current busy mining exploration activity in The Centre is foreshadowing major commercial opportunities which “could make the town and its economy prosper. “Some ventures already have money allocated,” says Mr Shearer. New mines, including uranium, should go ahead, provided proper environmental safeguards are in place, especially with respect to the water supply. Although some mining staff will “fly in and fly out”, if goods and services are available here at reasonable conditions, they will be used by miners and exploration companies, rather than “packing up a container and sending it to Alice”. This ranges from machinery hire to buying swags and catering. Other clear opportunities are boosting horticulture: “There are already several success stories within cooee of Alice Springs,” he says. Mr Shearer came to The Alice during the boom of the mid-eighties, when hotels were built and the tourism and hospitality industries were in their heyday. He worked in catering and tour businesses, became a member, for several years, of community organisations including the OLSH parent body and Tourism Central Australia’s forerunner, CATIA, and eight years ago took over the management of the local Thrifty car rental franchise. He became a member of the chamber executive two years ago. He and his wife, Gayle, have three young children.
Tourism in trouble? By BEVERLEY JOHNSON.

Visitor numbers are down in Alice.
The slowdown began before the on-going global financial crisis but that is likely to contribute to further decreases. Lasseters hotel has experienced a drop of around 20% in January in group visitors from America and Germany. However, overall the hotel's occupancy levels are up against previous years. “The global financial crisis may be one of the factors to influence” the drop in January this year when compared with January 2008, says manager Michael Jones. January and February are typically the “tougher” months. The whole Lasseters complex, the largest private employer in Alice Springs, has to “closely manage” its staffing levels, which fall from 300 in peak months to around 230 in January. But the hot period “is not as bad as it used to be”, says Mr Jones. Lasseters relies heavily on tourists, but even more so on Alice Springs locals. Without local custom, the casino, restaurant and hotel might as well “close their doors,” says Mr Jones. “Once locals come back from their holidays and get into the swing of things, business is usually fine.” There were 12% fewer visitors at the MacDonnell Range Holiday Park in December compared to the same month the year before, says manager Brendan Heenan. Numbers continued to be down throughout January. However, there were a significantly larger number of child guests during this time. “It’s a sign of the times,” says Mr Heenan. “At this stage in the year, it’s like looking into a crystal ball, no one knows what the future holds.” When the caravan trade shows begin later in the month, he hopes to get a clearer indication of what is happening in the tourism market. Lower petrol prices are a positive, with more people hopefully encouraged to self-drive to the Centre. And as interest rates come down “now may be the time to invest in infrastructure, especially in tourism”, says Mr Heenan. “We’ll just keep doing what we’re doing, advertising in magazines, on the web, and rely on the Tourism Commission and Tourism Central Australia.” Rex Neindorf, owner of Rex’s Reptile Park, says the park has seen a steady decline in visitor numbers since 2006. “I expect the next 12 months to be harsh, especially up till the end of this financial year,” says Mr Neindorf. Numbers have dropped 10% from December 2006 to December 2008; and almost 8% for January 2009 compared to January 2007. Profits are also down. “We still have our heads above water but our feet are doing overtime.” Mr Neindorf will be attending caravan and camping shows this year to help increase the park’s domestic share. The park will also be undergoing major building and renovation work this year in an attempt to drum up business. Peter Grigg is general-manager of Tourism Central Australia (TCA), the industry advocacy body representing some 300 members and operating the Tourist Information Centre. Numbers through the door there dropped from 120,000 in 2007 to 118,000 last year. Mr Grigg says TCA figures suggest that motel accommodation sales are up. However, tourist attractions are “probably suffering”. Overall in the sector “revenue is up”, he says. He is upbeat about the future: “We have been through the collapse of Ansett, we have been through 9/11, we will get through this.” Uluru and Kata Tjuta National Park monitors its visitors by the entry tickets sold. They dropped from 349,172 in 2005 to 314,126 in 2008. However, Wattarka National Park, home to the Kings Canyon attraction, is seen to be doing well, with 215,229 visitors in 2008. This is only 40,000 fewer than visitors to Litchfield, a high tourist destination. Some confidence in the sector is drawn from the extra 400 passengers per week coming into Alice Springs on the budget airline Tiger and when the carrier starts its Alice-Adelaide route this is predicted to bring in another 600 visitors a week. TCA spends between $460,000 and $500,000 per year on marketing. At any one time the organisation is working on 15 to 20 projects aimed at bringing visitors to Alice Springs and the surrounding area.
Mr Grigg says more attention needs to be paid to educating those who sell Central Australian products to tourists. “Agents need to start educating people more about all the things to do within the Centre. “If we can get the message through that people need to be spending more time here, it will be better,” he says. “Visitors, Friends and Relations” of people living in the Centre are also going to be targeted in a new marketing strategy. Packages with good deals and incentives have had positive results in the past. “Bundling” attractions together encourages tourists to “get out there and experience more”.

Concerns over sacred Todd trees after ‘silt’ is removed. By ERWIN CHLANDA.

The Town Council says some scouring of tree roots in the Todd River was inevitable in the recent heavy rains. But Aboriginal identity Russell Bray says there is no scouring north of the Stott Terrace causeway, where no earthworks were done, while there is significant damage south of the causeway, where several hundred tonnes of sand were removed by the Alice Town Council.

Mr Bray, a member of a prominent Eastern Arrernte family in Alice Springs, and frequently outspoken on Aboriginal issues, says some trees have fallen over, and it seems inevitable more will be lost.

He says businesses and individuals have been made to pay heavy fines for inflicting even minor damage to sacred trees elsewhere, but it seems no-one is being held accountable for the extensive damage to trees between the causeway and The Gap.

Meanwhile Greg Buxton, the council’s Director of Technical Services, says he will seek a report from council staff about any differences in the river’s condition north and south of the causeway, and make a comment on this aspect next week.

Andrew Allan, of the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (AAPA), says he understands the council “is planning some additional work there to repair erosion caused by recent flows.

“This will be done under an existing AAPA Certificate.

“The river rechannelling works were carried out under several Authority Certificates issued by AAPA, as was the more recent work immediately south of the Wills Terrace causeway.”

Mr Buxton says the works “removed silt build-up around the Wills Terrace area.

“There was over 220 tons of silt and man made contaminants such as pipes, concrete and steel which had been discarded.

“This rubbish littered the immediate area downstream from the Wills Terrace Causeway.”

Mr Buxton says anthropologists from AAPA, along with local custodians, “conducted many site visits, and placed comprehensive requirements on works and highlighted sacred trees from the sacred tree register.

“Two of the major trees cited have had extensive erosion protection applied in the form of geofabric and Reno mattresses to protect against erosion.

“The works conducted widened the existing channel, which spread the volume and speed of the water over a wider area.

“Scouring is a natural occurrence in any river during unusual flows.

“We have had some reasonable flows of late (including the September storms and three November flows), which has not been seen for many years.

“The frequency of late will naturally cause above average scouring throughout the whole length of the Todd and Charles River system.”

[A version of this report first appeared in the Alice News Online edition on January 13.]

Super season. By ERWIN CHLANDA.

“How could I leave The Centre in one of the best two or three seasons of my life?” That was the answer of eminent botanist Peter Latz, 67, when asked whether he had gone away on holidays over Christmas and New Year.

The Central Australian born author of major books about bush tucker and the significance of fire to local vegetation says: “The timing of the rainfall this season was just perfect for keeping things growing.
"We went from being very dry to green as a bean."
Mr Latz says on the 10 hectare block on which he lives, in the Ilparpa Valley south of town, 20 new species of plants have turned up that he hasn’t seen there before.
“I discovered I’ve got seven different bushy tails, Ptilotuses, and I only knew of three on this spot before. The timing of the rain means there is a wide diversity of plants coming up.
“The creeks and rivers are all abuzz with the sound of budgies nesting, because they know there’s going to be this massive amount of feed.
“They are probably going to have two lots of young this year.”
The good rains’ downside is that buffel grass is proliferating, and growing much faster than local species. This, says Mr Latz, raises the spectre of massive wild fires, similar to 1975, when there were “the worst bush fires probably ever” in The Centre.
“December rain was followed by dry thunderstorms in January and February – we had half of Central Australia burned.”
Mr Latz has cleared buffel from his block, and has warned many times that the foreign grass will destroy much of The Centre’s flora.
“We could end up with our creeks full of stunted mallees instead of our large river redgums,” says Mr Latz.
“The big trees will vanish in fires, re-shoot from the base but be burned again before they can grow to maturity.
“The tourism industry would lose one of its great attractions.”
In Roe Creek buffel is man high.
But the long campaign to declare buffel a noxious weed has little chance, says Mr Latz, because “the pastoral lobby is so strong and they consider it the best thing since sliced bread”.
But it’s not all bad news on the buffel front.
Mr Latz says he’s been monitoring the plant in the Simpson’s Gap National Park for 30 years.
The former cattle station was a “totally flogged piece of country”.
But buffel there seems to have reached its peak.
“There is less buffel on that block now than 10 years ago, although there is still lots of it.
“Buffel needs a lot of phosphorus.”
Mr Latz says the nutrient seems to have been depleted, and buffel is now growing less vigorously in the park.
Will it be receding or remaining at its peak?
“That’s the big question”, says Mr Latz.

The Alice goes all out to help sick boy and family. By BEVERLEY JOHNSON.

The generosity of people in Alice has made six year old Shane Healy’s wish come true: locals raised $22,500 following appeals in the Alice News and other media to send the little boy, who suffers from a rare muscle disorder, to Camp Capacity in Adelaide.
Shane’s sisters Courtney, 14, and Kylie, 10, got to go with him while his parents, Alison and Steve, got a much-needed break.
For Shane swimming was the definite highlight of the camp, held each year by the Muscular Dystrophy Association in Adelaide.
He also enjoyed playing laser guns and football in an electric wheelchair, not to mention visiting a strawberry farm.
He’s not a big fan of strawberries, but his bag of vinegar chips went down well!
Kylie enjoyed swimming and loved meeting new people and getting a ride on a Harley.
Big sister Courtney liked the carers at the camp being in their twenties.
“It was easy to relate to them,” she says.
“Shane is like any other six year old,” says mum and full time carer, Alison.
“If you didn’t know something was wrong with him, you wouldn’t even know he suffers from muscular dystrophy.”
Sadly though, Shane is a very sick little boy, likely be in a wheelchair full time by age 10 and facing a shortened life span. At present there is no cure for muscular dystrophy.
“It’s Shane’s smiling face that helps us get through each day,” says Alison.
“It’s the hand we’ve been dealt. Some days get me down, some days all I want to do is cry.”
Dad, Steve, says he is certainly managing much better than in the beginning: “Over time it gets easier.”
With the children at Camp Capacity, Alison and Steve managed to escape to Kangaroo Island. “We have plenty of friends who always offer to help out but we don’t like lumbering the kids on other people,” says Steve.

“He’s our son, he’s our responsibility.”

Donations flooded in soon after the Alice News made the first appeal last August: “We received money in the post, from 8HA phone ins, Tony Wright hosted the 8HA auction and Slow Coach Karaoke did a raffle night at the Gillen Club,” says Steve.

And Shane, his mother and sisters were all given free flights to Adelaide by Coca Cola, arranged via the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

The family will put the money not used for Camp Capacity towards getting other things needed to increase Shane’s quality of life.

“After all, that’s what it is all about,” says Steve.

Eventually they will need to buy another car to accommodate a larger wheelchair.

Shane is already having trouble getting in and out of the back door at home, so the next project is to make the house and garden wheelchair-accessible.

And later they will have to renovate the bathroom to allow for Shane’s condition.

Shane was first diagnosed with Duchenne, a strain of muscular dystrophy, three years ago. The little boy understands that he is sick and his muscles are weak but is unaware of the full implications of his disease.

“Shane gets frustrated at times because his body won’t do the same things the kids at school and his sisters do,” says Alison.

He often suffers from wobbly legs and severe cramps.

Part of his treatment involves physiotherapy, but it is hard to get appointments in Alice Springs.

“There are not enough physios in town,” says Alison.

Before his visit to Adelaide, Shane had not seen a specialist for 12 months. There are no specialists here to deal with his condition.

According to the Muscular Dystrophy Association, the disease affects around one in 1000 people. That equates to roughly 1500 South Australians. Alison and Steve have been told that there are some 200 cases in Central Australia and that Shane is the only person with Duchenne in Alice Springs.

So what are they thinking about the future?

“He is dependent on us, but he is not a drain on us yet,” say the Healys.

“We try not to think too far ahead.

“You take every day as it comes. You learn to adapt. Shane’s illness hasn’t changed overnight, it’s been a gradual process.”

The support of people in town has really helped.

“The response was overwhelming,” they say.

“We never expected Alice Springs to have such a large supporting community.”

Centrecorp probe to continue. By ERWIN CHLANDA.

Federal Shadow Attorney General George Brandis will demand answers in this month’s Senate Estimates hearings about the shadowy Aboriginal investment company, Centrecorp, from David Ross, director of the Central Land Council (CLC).

The CLC is the majority shareholder in Centrecorp, which has interests in assets worth an estimated $100m.

Mr Ross declined to reply to some questions from Senator Brandis about the company during the hearings last October.

Mr Ross was required to give answers by December 12 to questions he had taken on notice, but failed to do so. (See the archive section of the Alice Springs News Online edition, Oct 30, Nov 6 and Dec 11, 2008).

Mr Ross claimed – and so has Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin for some time – that the CLC and Centrecorp are not “related entities”.

But Sen Brandis has said they clearly are, by virtue of the CLC’s controlling shareholding.

A spokesman for Sen Brandis said in January he does “not accept” that the CLC does not have control over Centrecorp, and Sen Brandis will insist on replies during the hearings between February 9 and 12.
Last year Sen Brandis asked Mr Ross about the sources of Centrecorp’s funds (believed to include mining royalties and charitable donations); who controls the money; about Centrecorp’s charter and any distributions to Aboriginal people. Prominent Aborigines in Central Australia have been asking questions for several years about the money in which they say they have an interest, but the funds finished up in the Pty Ltd company, run with a minimum of disclosure. The Alice Springs News understands if Mr Ross doesn’t answer the questions put to him next week he may be in contempt of the Senate, may face legal action and Ms Macklin may be required to give the answers. The CLC is an agency of the Federal Government and answerable to Ms Macklin via her department. She has repeatedly sidestepped questions from the Alice News.

The News put the following issues to her on December 21 but we received no reply:-
• Mr Ross is the director of the Central Land Council.
• The CLC is an agency of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.
• Ms Macklin is the Minister responsible for that department.
• Her agency is the majority shareholder in a private company with assets estimated at $100m.
• One of her servants, Mr Ross, sits on 15-odd company boards associated with Centercorp.
• Her agency and her servant administer these assets in a clandestine manner.
• The moral owners of those assets are some of the nation’s most disadvantaged people – Aborigines in Central Australia.
• Ms Macklin is charged with improving the lot of these very people.
• She asserts, without giving any further details, that the CLC – her agency – and Centrecorp are not related entities at law.
• Senators Nigel Scullion (NT) and Brandis, questioning Mr Ross in the October Senate Estimates hearings, challenged Ms Macklin’s assertion.
• Her agency, the CLC, according to the Land Rights Act (NT) which governs its operations, must not do anything that exposes it to “financial liability or enable it to receive financial benefit”.
• Most reasonable people would take the view that being the majority shareholder of a $100m operation would make liability or benefit a strong possibility in such a situation.
• Centrecorp won’t answer questions from the Alice News, but a reliable source says the assets will now be vested in a trust, with the same publicly unaccountable controllers deciding who gets what share of the assets and when.

Centrecorp has since announced on its website that its “vision” is “to make a beneficial and ongoing difference to the lives of Aboriginal people in Central Australia” and that it is in the process of setting up the Centrecorp Foundation whose structure and operations “are expected to be” explained in early 2009.

[A version of this report appeared in the Alice News Online on January 13.]

Local builders in the race. By KIERAN FINNANE.

The main local building companies, such as Sitzlers and Probuild, are “very much in the race” for the $13m Aquatic Centre Stage 2 tender, says Town Council Director of Technical Services, Greg Buxton.
The tender, being advertised nationally because this is “a leading edge project”, does not close until March 10. While Territory companies are not experienced in the construction of aquatic centres – Alice’s being the Territory’s first – with the right site foreman they would be capable of building one, says Mr Buxton.

Sitzlers is building the Darwin wave pool and could use that team if they won the tender, he suggests. Probuild built, for instance, the new swimming pool at Yuendumu and won the tender for Stage 1 of the Alice Aquatic Centre, he points out.
Council policy gives a 10% allowance to a local company tender to support local employment, all other things being equal.
“There’s no reason why Stage 2 shouldn’t be won by a local builder providing they have the right tender on the table,” says Mr Buxton.

Tiger not yet ‘locked in’. By ERWIN CHLANDA.
Flights between Alice Springs and Adelaide by Tiger Airways, due to start on March 3, appear not yet to be “locked in”, according to a company spokesman. The airline is taking bookings but the conditions stipulate: “At any time after a booking has been made we may change our schedules and / or cancel, terminate, divert, postpone, reschedule or delay any flight where we reasonably consider this to be justified by circumstances beyond our control or for reasons of safety or commercial reasons.”

When Tiger introduced its Alice to Melbourne service, originally scheduled for late 2007, it had to be delayed until early 2008 because of difficulties with ground handling equipment and staff in Alice Springs.

The News asked Mildy Raveane, head of ground services and security for Tiger, and a former Alice Springs identity, on January 29: “Can you please let me know how the plans for the flights between Adelaide and Alice starting March are progressing?”

Mr Raveane replied on February 2: “Once locked in I will advise.”

Home. COMMENT by ERWIN CHLANDA.

When I turn right at Port Augusta and point our Troopie towards Alice after a summer in the Big Smoke, I feel a door is slamming shut behind me.

It’s a sensation that is getting more anxious the longer I live in The Centre, 35 years now.

Heading north, my mind dwells on the dinners and talks with rellies and friends, the ocean surf, the magic expanse of blue water, the buzz of Sydney, the stimulation of Canberra.

In Adelaide, kids play in the lively square from which Glenelg’s jetty juts into the ocean, squirts of water shooting out of the footprint making them squeal with delight on the hot day.

Canberra has wide, tree lined boulevards flanked by flower beds and lush lawns – why can’t we have some of this in Alice?

Isn’t our ground water level too high? Is it lack of water or lack of will that so much of our town is so barren?

It’s a pampered city, that national capital of ours.

Just 15 minutes unhassled drive and you can have a picnic on the banks of a water hole, on lush grass by a stand of trees, not a soul in sight except your friends.

Then you turn 90 degrees and there’s the top of Australia’s Parliament House, and you turn a bit further and there’s the National Museum.

On the far side of Lake Burleigh Griffin is the National Gallery with samples of this country’s and the world’s great art.

And it’s there for all the people – in Canberra – free of charge, in big parks, and linked by bicycle tracks that will get you from a Toulouse-Lautrec poster, and a Rodin in the sculpture garden, to any of half a dozen village squares, suburban hubs where you have bars, coffee shops and restaurants from all corners of the world, and very reasonable prices.

As an energetic participant in Europe’s ‘68 generation, a whiskey or three with kids from the Australian National University becomes proof for me – and don’t we need it from time to time – that the art of fiery debate is alive and well and yes, we can fix all that’s wrong with the world, by tomorrow, no later.

As we’re heading north I get in the habit again of raising my hand in greeting to oncoming drivers, and enjoy their response.

We’re the people of the Outback, we’re saying to each other.

And that has its share of trouble, as the occasional check on the web has shown during our trip:-

January 5: Police are investigating damage to 10 vehicles at the Alice Springs Town Council compound at the weekend ... all vehicles in the yard had windows smashed.

January 22: Three people will appear in court after allegedly stealing more than $1000 worth of alcohol from an Alice Springs club yesterday ... the building was unlawfully entered four times during the course of the night.

January 23: The vehicle travelled through several streets before re-entering the North Stuart Highway on the wrong side of the road, colliding with an oncoming vehicle ... The three males were thrown from the vehicle upon impact. We’re driving in silence, dealing with the year ahead – a task now right upon us.

We’ve put up towels on the left-hand windows of the Troopie to keep out the blazing sun.

As it sets it’s time to look for a camp.

About 100 kms north of Port Augusta we turn off the highway onto a dirt track, leading us to deep red sand dunes and
a forest of umbrella shaped Myall trees.
Venus, the evening star, is above the big one in front of us, as we’re having a drink.
The afterglow of the desert sunset is unhurriedly providing its spectacle in the west.
The place is pristine, quiet, just the occasional low rumble of a road train on the Stuart Highway.
Now we’re beginning to be glad to have left behind the traffic madness of Sydney, the crowded life of the suburbs, the
apparent lifelessness of the country towns along the Murrumbidgee.
The evening cools. The flies go to bed.
As we lie in the swag there is no moon contesting the brightness of the stars, which fill the black sky and seem close
enough to touch.
That door at Port Augusta wasn’t slamming shut: it was opening up to us for another year in The Centre, with all its
glory and all its heartache.
It’s January 25.
“Happy new year,” my wife says to me.

PHOTOS (from top): Water feature in Glenelg; Rodin in Canberra; Myalls north of Pt Augusta.

Dam’s the dirty word. By KIERAN FINNANE.

Mayor Damien Ryan says flood mitigation works in town should focus as a matter of priority on the channel of the
river, deepening it by removing sand.
The Taffy Pick crossing (casino causeway) should also be redesigned or replaced by a bridge as, during a river flow, it
causes water to back up and flood into the Gap area.
He is not opposed to a “mitigation wall” but neither will he at present lead a debate on the subject, as there are other
works that need to be done first “to get the river discharging through the town more quickly”.
He prefers to avoid the word “dam” for its association with a permanent or semi-permanent body of water or
recreational lake, which he does not see as appropriate for the Todd River: “There are lots of other locations outside of
Alice Springs that may be appropriate for a lake,” he says.
In the lead-up to last year’s mayoral election Mr Ryan responded to the Alice Springs News’s proposition that one or
more recreation lakes be built within a 100km radius of Alice Springs: “Having lived in Alice Springs all my life I
have always thought a lake would be fantastic, but the town council is not in a position to undertake such a
development.
“Our council should be lobbying both Federal and NT Governments to identify a suitable site that would facilitate a
flood mitigation dam, provide recreation facilities and water conservation while recognising indigenous cultural sites.”
(see our web archive, February 7, 2008)
The Alice News also asked Mr Ryan about effective flood mitigation that would reliably save the town from
catastrophic loss of life and damage resulting from storms that are increasingly likely to occur because of climate
change.
He said: “I agree that there should be a flood mitigation program in place.
“As discussed [above], a dam to help mitigate a 1 in 100 year flood would meet a number of criteria including
recreation and water conservation. We’re not going to get two dams.”
His position now sounds more like Greens Alderman Jane Clark’s response to the same proposition: “Firstly, I
advocate for removal of the casino causeway which has caused a back up of flood waters time and time again.
Secondly, we need to understand the river and manage it much better.”
This is in conflict with the most authoritative examination of the subject, the then Power and Water Authority’s 1990
Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on an Alice Springs Flood Mitigation Dam.
It outlined a range of possible flood mitigation measures to cope with minor floods, but concluded only one measure,
the Junction Waterhole dam, would be capable of protecting the town from a 1 in 100 year flood.
This dam would also mitigate the peaks of all floods, including the probable maximum flood (PMF), the largest flood
considered possible and would offer “little impedance to the seasonal freshes [flows] which are a feature of ‘The
Alice’”, according to the EIS.
At a time when the infrastructure in cities around the world is buckling under the impacts of severe weather, a feature
of climate change, when is Alice Springs going to tackle our lack of preparedness to deal with a major flood?
The average TER scores of Year 12 students in 2008 across Alice’s three senior high schools were down compared to the previous year’s results. St Philip’s College claimed the top average among the three, with 71.5, a slight decrease from 72.8 in 2007. Centralian Senior Secondary College’s average of 65 in 2008 dropped from 70.2 in 2007. OLSH College’s average of 61.64 was down from 66.23 in 2006 and 72.55 in 2005 (OLSH did not provide a TER average to the Alice News in 2007).

TER stands for Territory Entrance Ranking, a scoring system used across Australia to determine whether Year 12 students can be admitted to the university courses of their choice. Not all Year 12 students aim for a TER, a ranking distinct from the award of the NT Certificate of Education (NTCE). Alice’s top student in 2008, Edward Tikoft from St Philip’s, was also the Territory’s best, with a TER of 99.70. He achieved perfect scores in Physics, Physical Education and Psychology and 19/20 in English Studies and Mathematical Studies.

Two more students from St Philip’s, Luke Smyth and Ethan Barden, joined him in the Territory’s Top 20, with 98.85 and 98.70 respectively.

At Centralian Misha Wakerman gained a TER of 99.45, which also put him in the Top 20. He completed six subjects, attaining a score of 18 or better in all of them, all in the one school year. He earned perfect scores in Mathematical Studies and Legal Studies.

At OLSH Meg Black and Bianca Geppa scored the highest TERs, each with 83.55.

At St Philip’s 92% of their 62 eligible students gained their NTCE.

At OLSH 95% of 43 students were awarded the NTCE.

At Centralian it was 92% of 99 students.

Centralian also had 22 out of 22 Indigenous students receive their NTCE, with Matt Porter the highest achiever among them.

At St Philip’s one of the two Indigenous students who gained their TER and NTCE in 2008 has been accepted at Flinders University to study Medical Science and then Medicine.

At OLSH, Indigenous student Simona Marty scored 81.85 and five Indigenous students received the NTCE. Across the Territory there has been a 170% increase in the number of Indigenous students completing their NTCE since 2003.

2008 also saw a record number of Territory students awarded the NTCE, 1013, up from 803 in 2003.

Flickerfest. Just like a reel to reel revolution it comes around. Over 1300 submissions whittled down to 84 screenings. And filed into three catagories: international, best of Australian shorts and celebrity shorts.

Alice Springs was lucky enough to view the international selection, screened at Araluen’s circus lawns and amphitheatre.

That’s a lot of windows into the worlds and minds of some of our planet’s up and coming filmmakers.

The nationwide travelling film festival is a much welcomed tidal change, as we enter the low tide point of Alice’s ‘ebb and flow’ cultural life style.

Attendance at this event should be mandatory. You need this treat to a selection of short movies that are like a wrecking ball of ideas and new direction techniques. Even the most subtle of performances and simplest of short film concepts, a vacant intensity, can leave a resonating indention in the thoughts and feelings of the audience no matter who they are or where they come from ...

WELCOME TO THE INTERMISSION ... PLEASE READ ANOTHER PART OF THE PAPER, THEN RETURN PROMPTLY TO THIS REVIEW ...

The festival’s organisers and directors take time out of their whirlwind tour to experience what our town has to offer. Returning the favour is rewarding and assures that these events, which rely on attendance will continue in the future, providing release from an often harsh and testing time of the year.

2009 is shaping to be an interesting one, pop culturally. New directors and coordinators are already inbound.
location ideas are in a groovy blueprint stage, musicians are flying south for the summer, idealists are hatching fresh eggs and, chasing the tail of Flickerfest, is the Sydney Travelling Film Festival.

**ADAM'S APPLE: 2009 doom & gloom? Not in upbeat Alice!**

I have been told by more than a few readers that Adam’s Apple is quite a good read in certain situations. In typical Alice Springs fashion one reader informed me that he reads my work while in the “throne room”.

“Mate,” he said, “mate, I read you every Friday morning.”

“Well I hope you like it.”

“Every Friday on the loo. You really give me the sh…”

So with that anecdote in mind, welcome to another year of Adam’s Apple. I trust you’ll be as moved by my column in 2009 as Mr Friday Morning was in 2008.

I like the ability we have to take an arbitrary date like January 1, a mark in time of our own creation and treat it as a fresh piece of white paper, a new start.

It is safe to say that this year has had a fairly inauspicious start. Not for me personally but for the world in general. 2009 didn't get that traditional treatment. From the get go, the naysayers and the financial and political experts fronted the camera with furrowed brow.

Despite the elation surrounding the election of the new American president, the news seems to be decidedly doomier and gloomier.

From the global financial meltdown to the Gaza conflict to record temperatures to the state of the Australian cricket team, the grey clouds seem to be swarming over humanity.

This is a tough time to be an Australian. There are noticeable chinks in the Aussie armour of “she’ll be right” and “no worries”.

Have you noticed? The nation built on eternal optimism – the notion that no matter what, be it flood or drought or tragedy, it will all be OK with a bit of hard work – now seems to be a bit annoyed by it all.

I hate to say it, but I’ve noticed that we are getting a bit whingey.

I went home to Sydney for Christmas, and those who in trips past have displayed all the Aussie traits I have come to expect, have suddenly developed a decidedly acute case of “bitchy spinster syndrome”.

They are annoyed by the traffic. They are annoyed by the price of things and the pace of things.

They are annoyed that their State Government seems capable of getting roads right, getting education right and getting health right, but not all at the same time. They are annoyed by hoons and bogan and rude sales stuff and they are annoyed that they can’t get their kids into the right day care centre.

They are annoyed that they have to work 65 hours a week so they can afford the plasma tele and the mid year trip to Dunk island.

But most of all, my friends, the people of my generation, are annoyed that they allowed it all to happen without so much as a whimper of protest.

When I was at university, we all promised ourselves, promised the world, that things would be different. We all saw the bruises on the baby boomers from where the world had kicked the idealism out of them and we swore we wouldn’t let that happen.

But now in our thirties, for many, life isn’t successful without a $60,000 car and stock options. Now a $60,000 car and stock options are nice but these people, my closest friends through my twenties have sacrificed a happy life for a successful one.

And now they are annoyed.

Perhaps they should move to Alice Springs for a bit. When we don’t like what’s going on, we don’t get annoyed, we get pissed off!

We wrap ourselves in bandages and make the Chief Minister cry on the right and on the left we jump fences and yell, “Don’t tell me I can’t walk here”. We make noise. We don’t just bitch about it at dinner parties.

It is impossible to live in Alice Springs and not be an optimist. God knows there’s enough to get you down. But each resident of the town knows that things can get better, so they bloody well should. Even if Darwin, Canberra and my mates in Sydney don’t.
LETTERS: Were fake rocks damaged by vandals?

Sir,— Your article of December 4, 2008 titled “The Centre’s beautiful sandstone … look again” is factually wrong, unbalanced and misguided in its criticism.
In fact, the rocks on the Discovery Walkway have been stained with a red oxide and are not peeling or suffering wear and tear, as your report suggests.
Rather they have been damaged by vandalism, with other rocks having clearly been smashed against them. An inspection of the area would also confirm that signs have been damaged by graffiti and there has been extensive littering, but that was not reported.
A considerable amount of money and time was invested to provide a pleasant and insightful walk into the Alice Springs town centre that creates a positive impression for visitors arriving by train. Whilst the Discovery Walkway has been well received by travellers, unfortunately there appear to be members of the local community who show little regard for the image of Alice Springs.
Your report sought to ridicule this project. We suggest your attention be turned to the perpetrators of these acts of vandalism and littering. Great Southern Rail and Tourism NT invest considerably in attracting tourists to Alice Springs, and this tourism brings significant economic and social benefits to the region.
As the voice of the community, rather than throwing metaphorical rocks at our efforts, your newspaper could play a positive role by encouraging more responsible community behaviour.
We challenge you to print this letter, and to commence a campaign to build community commitment to presenting a positive image of Alice Springs by showing the appropriate pride and respect for civic improvements.
Tony Braxton-Smith
CEO, Great Southern Rail
ED – The Alice News in its report accurately published GSR’s response which made no mention of the technique used to stain the rocks.
Asserting there is a difference between “staining” and “painting” is splitting hairs.
The deterioration of the colour applied to the rocks is extensive and is not obviously due to vandalism.
Further, Mr Braxton-Smith, via a spokesperson, made no mention of vandalism in his response, which referred only to working within a budget and to satisfaction with the results.
In his letter he does not respond to the central point of the story he is taking issue with: why was far more attractive and authentic local sandstone not used?
The Alice Springs News extensively covers efforts to make Alice Springs more attractive.
We have reported in the past (March 6, 2008) on littering and evidence of illegal drinking on the walkway from the station.

KMart wall was family effort

Sir,— News travels slowly to the West. Along with Christmas Greetings I was informed that the KMart Wall was being demolished.
I was stunned – why? The forces of nature proved to be too much.
That wall mural of Heavitree Gap was built as an artistic feature to hide a great blank wall.
How many people get the opportunity to contribute something to the town in which they live and raise their family?
It was my husband, John, who wanted to make his contribution, and all his family helped with that wall-mural.
Each one of us helped to cut, bolster and prepare the stone according to the architect’s vision.
Blood, sweat and tears were suffered to achieve the result. Everyone who was involved put in their best effort.
When the wall-mural was completed it could be seen very clearly and definitely was a “thing of beauty – a joy forever”.
Passengers on The Ghan could see it as they approached from the Alice Springs Rail Station and then as the train rounded the bend the actual Heavitree Gap could be seen ahead. But that view was destroyed when buildings were erected on the land west of the wall.
John left this earthly existence on 27 January 2008.
His eldest son Tim, is probably the only one who knows as much about the wall-mural as John did. Every-one of John’s children can give you a very descriptive story!
Some artists leave their work on a canvas and that is stored in a controlled atmosphere for protection, with the idea of
taking it into the future so that many more people can enjoy that work of art. The wall-mural was different – a work of art created to hide a wall that would have been an eyesore without it. The total beauty of that wall became hidden and how many people have missed the joy of seeing the approach of the wall as they sat in the train and then rounded the bend to actually move through the real Gap?
YES, I would like to see the wall-mural restored or relocated, but if its life of 24 years is over, so be it. However, let the “Story of the KMart wall-mural” be written and recorded in the annals of history. Who is the Recorder of the History of the Alice?
Janet Newland
Bentley, WA

Unpaid rent

Sir,— The failure of Government to crack-down on unpaid public housing rentals is costing Territorians millions of dollars every year. Data contained in the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement report shows that as of the 30th of June last year, public housing tenants owed $2.604m in rental arrears. This was much more than in larger jurisdictions such as Queensland, and points to an area of Government neglect. It’s unfair on the thousands of Territorians waiting for public housing that they should be kept in the queue, when there are tenants who are getting away without paying. Other aspects of the report are also disturbing. The turnaround time between a public housing dwelling being vacated and re-let again is 68 days – almost three times the national average. The report shows that 92 public dwellings – 1.7% of existing stock – are uninhabitable, much higher than the national average of 0.7%. The occupancy rate of Territory public housing is 95.4%, considerably lower than the national average of 98%. As well, 2.3% of Territory houses are over-crowded – and 421 dwellings are described as moderately over-crowded. The Territory Government appears to have taken its eye off the ball when it comes to public housing. In addition to selling off existing stock to private concerns, it has failed to regenerate public housing stock.
Kezia Purick
Shadow Housing Minister

Hot and dry

Sir,— I liked the article on climate change and water use (see Alice News web archive, December 11, 2008). Here in Temuco, Chile climate has never been like in Alice Springs, but it is very important to learn from your experience, because every year we have colder winters and hotter summers and dry. Especially in summer, [days] more frequently exceed 35 degrees Celsius, and in rural areas, where large numbers of people belonging to the Mapuche people, the Aboriginal people of Chile, water is increasingly scarce. [This is] mainly due to intensive forestry (pine and eucalyptus plantations, which consume lots of water), which prevents them from cultivating their vegetables properly and watering their animals. Greetings from across the Pacific Ocean.
Jarim José Reinaldo Silva Troppa
Temuco, Chile

Alice meltdown

Sir,— After doing a lot of research into Alice Springs last year, we decided to test the water and see if we could get a work sponsorship as we are from the UK. Silly you may think as we have never been to Australia but there alot of people that have to do it this way. People thought I was mad wanting to move to a place like Alice Springs which I know is in the middle of nowhere. This didnt bother me and my OH as we have only ever relied on each other. I must say I have been reading the local paper and it seems to me that Alice Springs has got worse and worse throughout the year and your news seem to pinpoint unrest with the first inhabitants of your country, its Indigenous people. There will be unrest if they are not treated as equals. They should have the same rights as everybody else as this is
their land.
In most cultures you give them the respect they want and they will show it you back.
I think they need to get out and take a good look around them instead of being confined to their offices and their houses. Go take a look at the real world, open your eyes.
And as for our dream of working and living in Alice Springs, well at this moment in time I ask you this, would you want to move your family over there at the moment? I bet not.
If you want Alice Springs to grow and prosper then something really needs to be done.
Susan Jeffery
United Kingdom

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