Ernie says goodbye after 35 years

INFRASTRUCTURE executive, engineer, project manager and strategic planner, Ernie Wanka is among those visionary public servants who has literally built the Northern Territory into a modern, dynamic region.

Ernie recently retired from his long-held position as executive director for the Network Division – recently renamed the Transport Infrastructure Planning Division at the Department of Transport. Over the course of his long career in the NTPS, Ernie Wanka has been a driving force in the development and delivery of infrastructure improvement programs, particularly road construction and maintenance programs. He has been instrumental in establishing and delivering major strategic road projects throughout the urban, rural and remote road networks in the Territory.

Ernie has been a director on the board of the Northern Territory Rugby League. This is a fitting appointment given Ernie has been a dedicated administrator and supporter of the sport for decades and played reserve grade for the Parramatta Eels.

Ernie began his career in the NT Public Service as a young engineer in May 1979 with the Public Works Division of the Department of Transport and Works. His arrival coincided with the Northern Territory’s move to self-government and the need to create the infrastructure for a population that would inevitably increase as the Territory continued to develop.

His pragmatic approach, combined with respect for indigenous issues and an ever present sense of humour enabled him to succeed in often difficult times.

Ernie’s achievements are considerable, from the small road and infrastructure projects of his early years in Alice Springs to his executive, design and management roles in Darwin.

Blessed with the ability for far-sighted thinking, a capacity for planning and the personal skills and motivation to develop and work effectively, Ernie has been a dedicated and driven professional who has developed the knowledge and skills to become a leader in his field.

Amid his many recent achievements was the introduction of the Early Contractor Involvement Model for the $10 million Tiger Brennan Drive Extension project, the first time this model has been used in the Territory. The model means that contractors are brought into the construction process at an early stage of the planning, saving time and money.

Another major contribution has been his successful negotiations with both the Northern and Central Land Councils regarding access and management of roads in sensitive areas.

His counter disaster management skills were deployed during the Alice Springs flood emergency of the early 1990s, the Adelaide River Bridge collapse of mid 1990s and the Katherine Flood of 1998, where he managed relief and rehabilitation efforts in an exemplary manner. Ernie’s impact on the Territory will be long lasting. It is fair to say that every one of his 35 plus years of unbroken service has been filled with the kind of hard work that leads to successful outcomes.

In some cases, perhaps, the final result has not always been as expected given the tough conditions in the Territory that often work against easy achievement. Nevertheless, Ernie has always persevered with a combination of good humour, the utmost professionalism and a relaxed way of dealing with people.

Department of Transport's Inga Davis is the first accredited female dragon boat coach in the Northern Territory

Inga becomes the Territory’s first female dragon boat coach

DURING the day, Inga Davis is the Department of Transport’s Director of the Office of the Chief Executive, but after hours she is a dragon boat paddler and now the first accredited female dragon boat coach in the Northern Territory.

Inga, who is a two-time member of the Australian Dragon Boat Team, and now coach and paddler at the Darwin Waterfront Warriors (DWW) Paddling Club, says it’s very difficult for people to gain the formal coaching qualifications in the Territory, as the coaching courses and assessors are all based down south.

Inga is incredibly proud to become the Territory’s first qualified female coach in the sport.

“Coaching is a real privilege. Getting to teach people a new skill and seeing their passion for the sport I love is something really special,” she said.

A major back injury took Davis out of the sport for nine months. However it was that time away from training and competition that introduced her to coaching.

In a short space of time as coach, Inga’s team has achieved remarkable success.

At the Australian Championships in Perth in April this year the DWW Women’s Team finished a respectable fourth and seventh in the 50km and 200km events, respectively.

This was outstanding given that some of the paddlers had only come into the sport two months before the Australian Championships, and were competing against the strongest national teams with years of training and high level competitions under their belts.

The team’s performance in Perth has qualified them for the World Club Crew Championships, which are being held in Adelaide in April next year. Here the women will compete against the top clubs in the world.

The women have set up a Facebook page, #warriorbabes to allow family, friends and supporters to track their amazing journey.

Going the extra mile for the Territory

INSET: Tourism NT employees Chris Frankenfeld and Ian Crawshaw with the Google Trekker camera at East Point ABOVE: Lindsey Dixon with the Google camera at Uluru

TOURISMNT employees Lindsey Dixon, Chris Frankenfeld, Shane Smith and Ian Crawshaw have recently gone the extra mile for the Northern Territory Government.

They have walked hundreds of kilometres far and wide across the Northern Territory as part of Tourism NT’s recent partnership with Google Trekker.

The partnership saw Tourism NT loan Google’s special hi-tech Trekker camera over a period of 12 weeks to map more than 20 spectacular Territory landmarks.

Using the website’s Google Maps Street View Technology, the camera’s 15 lenses took 360 degree photos every three seconds in remote locations only accessible by foot like Uluru, Ubirr lookout in Kakadu, Gunlom Falls, The Rim Walk at Watarrka National Park, the Larapinta Trail and Litchfield Park’s Wangi Falls.

Trekker camera later this year.

Department of Infrastructure chief executive Dave McHugh with Ernie Wanka at his farewell in 1999.

Ernie was the first female dragon boat coach in the Northern Territory.

During his fellowship, Yolonda applied to the Endeavour Research Fellowship for Indigenous Australians.

Yolonda was fortunate enough to be awarded a fellowship in December 2014.

The fellowship provides the opportunity for postgraduate students to undertake short-term research or to complete a PhD in any field overseas. Canada is Yolonda’s chosen host country as Australia and Canada share a similar history of indigenous peoples.

The research in Canada will provide an opportunity to examine contemporary evidence-based practice models of assessing indigenous people in the social justice system in relation to social and emotional wellbeing.

Yolonda is planning to undertake her fellowship this month.

Canadian Fellowship will broaden Yolonda’s research career

YOLONDA ADAMS commenced employment with the Department of Children and Families in August 2014 as the manager for in-care support with the Out-Of-Home Care Division.

She is completing her doctoral dissertation with Griffith University after being awarded a PhD scholarship.

With extraordinary encouragement and support of the Griffith University School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Yolonda applied to the Endeavour Research Fellowship for Indigenous Australians.

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