1000 trucks make Alice roar to life. By ERWIN CHLANDA.

“You meet all the mates, old mates you drove with. We all get together,” says Bob Whitehouse, of Geelong.

“And it’s a good place.”

The “it” is the National Transport Hall of Fame in Alice Springs.

And Bob is the kind of bloke you could meet over a beer and steak sandwich lunch at one of the several outdoor eating places of the sprawling complex, with all things road transport and endless topics for conversation for the 5000 people who were there for the 2010 reunion.

There is a small reunion every year and a big one every five.

This year’s was huge: The Hall’s Liz Martin, an organizing wizard, says “we stopped counting at 6000” and chances are 8000 people had come to town for the event.

There was a tent city at the Hall itself, caravan parks and hotels were booked out, Blatherskite Park was chockers, dozens of caravans and mobile homes were parked at the Racecourse, and many in private backyards.

“Just as well the grey nomads came in their self-contained rigs,” says Liz.

She and her team fed 3200 people on Saturday night, including 1400 at the Hall under the stars, 200 at the RSL, 500 each at Ooraminna and the Quarry with Tailormade Tours; 100 each at the Steakhouse and Bo’s.

The reunion culminated in a parade through Alice of 750 registered trucks – and quite a few not registered ones – with half the town or more lining the Stuart Highway between the Truckstop and the Hall.

And there were lots of yarns.

Bob, now retired, was a truckie almost all of his working life, mostly as a driver, but he owned two trucks “years ago”.

What’s his favourite truck?

“The 1959 Mack out the back,” chimes in Lenny Meostead, munching a steak sandwich.

“I’m not a Mack man, mate,” says Bob.

“I realize that but I thought you might like that one,” says Lenny.

“Yep, the 59 Mack out the back, that’ll do,” Bob agrees, “it’s come up well.”

Lenny is from Melbourne. It’s his third reunion in Alice.

“First time old Vern over there was inducted.

“In 2008 I was inducted. And this year I came up for Bobby to be inducted into the Wall of Fame.”

And apart from that, why did he come?

He agrees it’s the biggest thing in the nation for truck fanatics.

“My missus doesn’t like it. She stayed in town. Too much grog and swearing.

“It’s been a good one.”

Apart from the 59 Mack (“it’s a nice looking truck, actually”) he likes Wayne Smith’s B-Model “in the back paddock, out in the mud”, the Old Dog, a B 61 Mack.

When it comes to trucking royalty Lindsay Johannsen is Prince Charles.

His father, Kurt, was a road transport legend, widely credited with the invention of the self-tracking road train, and opening up The Centre with contraptions he built or modified.

Needless to say his behemoth “Bertha” – a 1939 Diamond T – was a treasured entry in the parade with Kurt’s Dodge Coronet perched on the back.

It was surely one of the earliest alternate energy vehicles, with the option of powering the conventional internal combustion engine with gas produced in a wood burner fed with timber picked up along the way.
Lindsay was a much photographed man until he ran out of diesel abeam 8HA, about two klicks short of The Hall. He has a perfectly coherent explanation for this.
The Hall people put some fuel into the tanks – but not enough.
“You put in 100 litres and you wouldn’t know it’s there,” he says.
The tanks were built by Kurt.
He used, on each side, two 60 gallon American fuel drums welded together – that’s a total of 240 gallons or about 1000 litres.
The problem in the parade was solved quickly by hitching Bertha to a four-wheel-drive and finishing the trip on tow.
On the other end of history was Steve May, driving a just released K200 model Kenworth, the second truck at the head of the parade, part of the 2011 model range unveiled in The Alice.
It’s a cab-over model, engineered especially for the double trailer combination, says Steve.
The cheapest Kenworth now costs $160,000 and the dearest, $800,000.
It is used in mines pulling a string of trailers.
Steve is the National Fleet Manager of Kenworth which has a significant commitment to the Road Transport Hall of Fame.
The weekend saw the opening of a $300,000 extension to the Kenworth “shed” built at a cost of $1.3m in 2005.
It now holds 19 trucks worth around $2m.
The Kenworth display was the idea of the company’s managing director Andrew Wright, inducted into the Wall in 2005, who was about to retire.
The dealer group and the management of Kenworth got the funds together.
Steve says Alice’s Hall of Fame is the best place for “collecting our history” – and for being a spectacular tribute to trucking in Oz generally.
“The industry got behind it and it made sense to be here,” says Steve.
“No other place in Australia has this type of facility to collect the history of the road transport industry, for sure.”
What next?
“I think there is an opportunity for some of the other manufacturers to do something similar to Kenworth, to get involved,” says Steve.
His firm has been the number one producer of large prime movers in Australia for 10 to 15 years, he says.
Volvo are number two but Kenworth is outselling Volvo two to one.
He says: “It’s an Australian truck, engineered and manufactured in Australia, for Australian conditions.”
Frank Latorre drove to Alice from Shepparton East in a 1965 S21 Foden twin steer with an LX150 Gardner motor and Road Ranger gearbox.
He burned 600 liters of diesel in his 2600 kms journey – a respectable 23 liters per 100 kms.
The Pommy truck is a picture, lovingly restored by Frank who’d been using it carting for a quarry.
Meanwhile a plaque provided by Heroes Under the Sun Inc to honor emergency workers was unveiled at the reunion.
The organizations chairman, Murray Stewart, says the plaque, mounted on local sandstone in the shape of Australia, was funded from donations and proceeds from ‘70s dance parties.

**Camps grog ban to go. By KIERAN FINNANE.**

The ban on alcohol in town camps, widely flouted, will be phased out in favour of alcohol management plans formulated for each camp or clusters of camps.
First in line for plans will be Mt Nancy and Palmers camps on Basso Road and Larapinta Valley camp.
Staff from Licensing, Regulation and Alcohol Strategy in the Department of Justice have begun work with Tangentyere Council on the development of the plans.
Mt Nancy resident Eileen Hoosan, wife of former president of Tangentyere Council, Geoff Shaw, and mother of the current one, Walter, welcomes the move.
She says the blanket ban on alcohol imposed by the Federal Government in the wake of the Intervention drove the problem behind closed doors, where it could not be managed by the community.
Drinking has been going on inside homes in front of small children, the very ones the government was trying to protect, says Mrs Hoosan, a non-drinker.
The ban on grog on Aboriginal land and community living areas including town camps came into effect on September 15, 2007, together with other measures, including one targeting grog purchases of more than $100, also recently abandoned.

The measures were an attempt to stem the “rivers of grog” that were “destroying Aboriginal communities and putting children at risk”, according to their architect, then Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough, who forced the NT Government’s hand to declare the camps “dry”.

The Future Directions discussion paper on the NT Emergency Response, of May last year, recognised the failures (“challenges”) of the bans and foreshadowed their modification, including allowing community-developed alcohol management plans.

The bans were widely disregarded despite periodic enforcement, when camps were raided and grog seized.

“From an enforcement perspective total prohibition is not working,” says Superintendent Sean Parnell of the Alice Springs Police.

“We’ll support any measures that assist people in the responsible use of alcohol.
“A lot of things have been tried in the past and the problems remain.
“Alcohol management plans involve the people affected in developing a solution and that’s important.”

Mrs Hoosan favours the community being able to identify and monitor problem drinkers or households and, if necessary, being able to call on night patrol to intervene.

“The problems don’t start from nine to five while public servants are working” she says.
“They start after hours.”

She says if there was a sign up in front of problem households saying “no alcohol here”, people like herself would be able to say, “You respect that sign or we’ll ring up night patrol or the police for you”.

Real Estate Institute silent on role of Framptons boss as probe by govt. board continues. By ERWIN CHLANDA.

The Real Estate Institute of Northern Territory Inc (REINT) has failed to respond to three enquiries from the Alice Springs News about whether David Forrest has been stood aside as the organization’s southern region representative.

Mr Forrest is a principal of Framptons First National Real Estate which is the subject of an enquiry by the NT Government’s Agents Licensing Board.

The probes follow the collapse of Carey Builders, causing losses estimated in the millions to several home buyers in Alice Springs.

Framptons had close links with the failed company, promoting its services and offering performance and completion guarantees, according to documents provided to the Alice News by the home buyers.

The REINT says on its website that it is “a cohesive representative voice for the Real Estate Industry in the Northern Territory”.

It says it is the peak body representing the Real Estate profession across the Northern Territory.
It claims to be “a politically non-aligned organisation that provides research and well-informed advice to the government, opposition, professional members of the real estate sector, media and the public on a range of issues affecting the property market.

“The REINT also provides a comprehensive representative voice for the Real Estate profession in the Northern Territory when it comes to lobbying Government on legislative issues and regulatory matters,” says the website.

The REINT is linked with the Real Estate Institute of Australia whose website says it seeks “to promote a high standard of ethical practice by REI members and their employees in their dealings with the public, other REI members and all other real estate practitioners.”

Framptons, after initially providing information, have told the Alice News they will not comment further on matters relating to Carey Builders and their responsibilities towards their clients.

Tough talker on Islam set to test freedom of speech. By ERWIN CHLANDA.

The head of prison education in Alice Springs, who has published attacks on Islam, says he is set to test freedom of
Robin Henry said in a blog: “Given that Islamic law, values and culture are not compatible with Australian law, values and culture, it’s destructive to permit muslims to immigrate to Australia.”
And: “We don’t want any more Islamic trouble in Australia than we have had already.”
A work colleague of Mr Henry’s, John Davis, who says he is a Muslim, has contacted the Alice Springs News and Chief Minister Paul Henderson.
Mr Davis said: “I was very sad to have an anti-muslim blog brought to my attention. These things are to be expected in any society but I was shocked to see that it is written by a senior NT public servant.”
A spokesman for Mr Henderson says: “Once these allegations were brought to our attention, they were referred to the Chief Executive of the Department of Chief Minister for investigation.
“As these matters are currently under investigation, it would be inappropriate to comment any further.”
Mr Henry rejects claims that he made the comments as a public servant, and says he has a right to express his views in public so long as they are not defamatory.
He says it’s “poor” of Mr Davis to allege the comments were made “as part of my job”.
Mr Henry said in one blog: “Muslim immigration should be banned in Australia.
“There is evidence worldwide that when the percentage of muslims in a country is above about 10%, they begin to agitate for Shar’ia and other concessions not available to others in the community.
“Australia should learn from the mistakes of Belgium, France, Germany, the UK, Canada, and the USA and ban muslim immigration absolutely, immediately.
“This is not a sign that we (Australians) do not like muslims.
“I have numerous friends who are muslims. It is that we do not accept Islam.
“Wherever in the world there is trouble, Islam is at its centre.
“There are dozens of Islamic Utopias to which muslims can immigrate eg, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Saudia Arabia or some of the more moderate and sensible Middle Eastern countries.
“We don’t need them in Australia.”
Mr Henry spent several years working in the Middle East.

Nuisance rains are a worry for fire fighters. By KIERAN FINNANE.

The normal window of opportunity presented by winter for prescribed burning in The Centre has been limited by “on again, off again” rains.
In this regard the rain has been “a constant source of annoyance” since the Finke Race weekend, says Rod Cantlay, Senior Fire Control Officer (South) for Bushfires NT.
Long range forecasts lead him to fully expect more rain coming into Spring: “The vegetation will continue to grow and we’ll just have to be opportunistic about burning.”
He says there has been no opportunity to do the large scale burning they would have liked.
Limited burns have been done by hand and with aircraft, including by the Parks & Wildlife Service and Aboriginal ranger units.
Even on fine days there have been only two to three hours of worthwhile burning when the vegetation and soils have sufficiently dried off and there’s been a bit of wind to allow the fire to carry.
Still, the growth is not as prolific as that around in 2000-01 when The Centre experienced major fires, says Mr Cantlay.
“We’re not expecting fires of anywhere near that magnitude.
“Some of that fuel was 30 years old.
“Our premise is that we need two years following above average rainfall before we’ll get a big fire season. (See www.alicespringsnews.com.au/1710.html.)
“And so far, if last year was a drought, we’ve only had one.
“Certain areas as you travel through them look as though they will burn – the grass has hayed off on top, but if you look underneath it’s green and if you dig down, the soil is still very moist.
“We will continue to do prescribed burns into September but we have to be philosophical about it as we can only do
what Nature will allow.”
There have been successful burns to the north, in spinifex country around Lake Surprise in the Willowra area, in the south-east Tanami and around Tennant Creek.
Fuel loads along the roadsides, especially leading into Alice Springs, are high and will continue to increase due to the capacity of buffel grass to respond to rain, says Mr Cantlay.
“Although its current greeness is restricting the opportunity to burn, we are expecting fires in the near future.
“We urge people to be careful with fire and not to light up the road verges, especially when the warmer weather arrives and the grasses dry out and become flammable.
“Smoke across the road doesn’t necessarily mean that traffic will take the hint and slow down!”

Good school attendance is getting results. By KIERAN FINNANE.

If a measure of success in education is achieving the national benchmarks, then the children attending the Irrkerlantye Indigenous Unit at Bradshaw Primary School are experiencing success.
In the Year 5 class of 2009, eight out of nine students were at or above the national benchmarks in numeracy; seven out of nine were at or above the benchmarks in spelling and writing.
The numbers weren't as good for reading, with only two at or above the benchmark.
In the Year 3 class of five students, all achieved the national benchmark in numeracy; three were at or above it in spelling and two in writing. Again reading was a weak point, with none of the students reaching the benchmark.
However, the school is confident of improvement, says Acting Principal Brenda Jolley, with strong attendance building across the year levels.
The average attendance for the unit, grouped in four classes, is 82%, with some classes achieving well beyond that. An attendance rate of 80% is considered necessary for learning to progress. Attendance for the whole school is 86%.
In the unit attendance was 54% four years ago, when the children first transferred to the mainstream school from the Irrkerlantye Learning Centre on South Terrace.
The learning centre, operating out of old Santa Teresa mission premises, was focussed around a number of Eastern Arrernte families, had an intergenerational approach to learning, and was supported by a patchwork of funding arrangements.
It was closed, to considerable opposition, at the end of 2005 by then Education Minister Syd Stirling, citing poor quality infrastructure and facilities and poor learning outcomes as the reason.
The creation of dedicated units to receive the students in 2006 at Bradshaw Primary School and the then Alice Springs High School (now Centralian Middle School) was initially seen as a transitional measure to help prepare the students to enter mainstream classes.
Four years later the unit at Bradshaw still exists and in fact has grown. It started with 28 students, there are 56 at present and enrollments have been as high as 65. (Students from the unit who go on to enroll at Centralian Middle School are absorbed into mainstream classes.)
The core group are the children of the Eastern Arrernte families associated with the learning centre, but there are students from other language groups as well, some Warlpiri, some Pitjantjatjara.
Enrollment in the unit is based on the needs of each student, says Ms Jolley. Having English as a second language is one of the factors; another is the level of difficulty a student might face in regularly attending school without the support of the program.
While all the students in the Irrkerlantye unit are Aboriginal, not all Aboriginal students at Bradshaw are in the unit; indeed, half the students across the whole school (total enrollment, 297) are Aboriginal.

Since 2006, two students from the Irrkerlantye unit have moved fully into the mainstream.
"We thought they were ready and would benefit and the move was supported by their families," says Ms Jolley.
Many of the families, however, want the students to stay together.
The unit has worked to develop strong relationships with the families and involve them in school life. They are often in the classrooms and there's a family day once a term. At the last one, around 100 family members came.
These days are an opportunity to give families a lot of information on the importance of children coming to school, says Ms Jolley.
They are shown graphs tracking student attendance and progress and pointing to room for improvement.
They are also shown students' work: some students may read aloud and there are video clips of them working in the classrooms.
There's discussion around the importance of a good night's sleep for the children's ability to learn and about possible social impacts on children's emotional well-being.
Other organisations as well as the school are involved. "The feedback we get is very good," says Ms Jolley.

Despite clear family support for the unit, bussing the students to school remains a key to getting them there. Two busses, with a driver and another staff member, set out at 7.30am, one doing a run to Amoonguna, some 16 kms by road from town, and the other a town run.

Apart from getting the children on the bus – and sometimes having to find them, as some children are not always at the same house – the runs give the staff daily contact with the families and the opportunity to find out if a student is sick or absent for some other reason and whether the family might need help from another service.

Other supports also boost attendance, says Ms Jolley. Uniforms are compulsory now in all NT Government schools and if families can't provide them, the school will and will also launder them if necessary.

"The idea is to set the children up for success. "When they go into the yard they are dressed just like everyone else," says Ms Jolley.

Initially most of the students in the unit were leaving their uniforms at school for washing, but now a lot more families are taking care of that themselves.

Meals are part of the school day: there's a snack on the bus in the morning, breakfast when they arrive and lunch at midday. Social support, through counselling or links to other services, is available, as it is across the school, but Holyoake and Grog Mob are both proactive in the unit, conducting sand play sessions which help children articulate things that might be worrying them.

"Basically it's about providing a strong supportive environment where children will feel safe and be happy to come to school," says Ms Jolley.

But perhaps most importantly, a lot of the success of the unit is being driven by excellent teaching and support staff as well as the motivation the students experience as a result of their own achievements, she says.

The coordinator, Claire Hermawan, and the senior class teacher, Tony Crowe, both have strong backgrounds in Indigenous education and both joined the unit shortly after it began. As well as what they do in the classroom, they do a lot after hours, linking the students with activities such as sport – "above and beyond the call of duty", says Ms Jolley.

There are four teachers in the unit, one of them Indigenous; two assistant teachers, both Indigenous and both formerly working at the Irrkerlantye Learning Centre; four tutors, one of them Indigenous; a student support coordinator and a student support officer.

This is a more intensive staff to student ratio than in the rest of the school, but necessary to respond to the needs of these students, says Ms Jolley, and made possible by government funding earmarked for students with special needs.

The school is pleased with the students' progress, not only in attendance, literacy and numeracy but in "social efficacy and behaviour" – they're increasingly able to hold conversations, mix, join in games, work together in groups, listen to the teachers and follow instructions, and willing to engage.

Problems are no more intractable with this group than in the general school setting, says Ms Jolley, and the approach is the same: find the reason for the problem and work on it.

"We don't give up on anybody and no issue is too big," she says.

While the Irrkerlantye unit has a distinct historical context, all government schools in Alice have strategies to help Aboriginal students and their families access mainstream education, says Ms Jolley.

In other schools the students might move more quickly into the mainstream. At Bradshaw even though most of the Irrkerlantye students are staying together, they have experiences with the rest of the school – in electives, through a buddy class system, at assembly and in the library, on sports days and at events like Book Week.

The unit will continue for the foreseeable future, says Ms Jolley, while the needs of the students remain high.

**Now they read fluently**

I walk into the senior class during spelling.

"Spell 'helicopters','" says Mr Crowe.

He breaks the word into syllables: hel-i-cop-ter-s.

The students spell each one with raucous enthusiasm and then join them up to spell the whole word without hesitation.

The words "marine, rescue, appears, believe, tragedy" all get the same treatment.

They come from the section of the book the class is reading, Blueback by Tim Winton.

These are Year Five and Six students; Blueback is a Year Seven text and it's about a boy living by the sea and big beautiful fish that he meets – a setting remote from the one that the students live in.

A little later in the lesson, Mr Crowe asks two students to read aloud from the book.

Siobhan Turner reads with fluency the section they've been working on.
She's an ambitious student, determined to progress to Year 12. She'll follow her older sister, Ursula, to Wiltja School in Adelaide, part of Woodville High where Aboriginal students attend both Wiltja and mainstream classes.

Mr Crow then asks Ringo Drover to read, from the same book but a passage they are yet to study in depth. Ringo hesitates over a couple of longer words but works them out by breaking them up and finishes the passage.

This boy defies the odds to come to school every day, says Mr Crowe. "He'd have an attendance rate of about 99%. He walks to school himself if he has to."

Ringo was struggling with reading but made a breakthrough about a year ago – "something clicked" and he hasn't looked back.

Both students are great role models for their peers, says Mr Crowe.

He uses, as do all the teachers in the unit, the Accelerated Literacy approach to teaching reading and writing. Importantly it uses "age appropriate texts" so that you don't get students in upper primary still working on picture books. But it has a very structured and explicit approach to teaching the texts, involving a lot of repetition, so that students achieve complete competency in reading and understanding each text, section by section, before they move onto the next.

A structured and explicit approach is also used for conveying expectations about behaviour, says Ms Jolley. In a "pre-flight check" students are prepared in advance for situations they are going into, boundaries are made very clear, there's follow-up when they return, with regular feedback and praise.

Across the school Arrernte is taught for one hour a week; the Irrkerlantye students also only do an hour, though naturally most of them can work at a higher level in this subject.

There's some cultural maintenance through the school's arts program, with some family members who are practising artists involved, and links with the Catholic Church, at the families' wishes, continue.

Bush trips were a feature in the early days of the program and while they haven't happened recently, there's an intention to get them going again.

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Natural born story teller. By KIERAN FINNANE.

Two families gathered around Liz Martin OAM for the launch of her memoir, My Territory, My Life, My Story, last Friday.

There was her blood family and friends so close she calls them “Aunty”, and her “Hall of Fame family”. The latter no doubt has its inner circles but in all must number in the hundreds, if not thousands.

It certainly guaranteed a long line of people queuing to buy the book and have it signed by the author who must be seen as something of a hero for the road transport industry.

Liz said humbly that she’d written the memoir not because it was her story but because of “some of the legends” she’d been fortunate enough to meet.

But you only have to dip into it to realise that the scope of the book goes beyond this: here’s a natural story-teller who’s led a richly varied life, both in the Top End and The Centre, has an eye for detail and character, a strong and heart-felt sense of her times and can bring it all to life on the page.

Hopefully the print run of 3000, produced in a rush for the truckies reunion, will sell out fast and be followed by a second, more carefully edited edition. This story-telling warrants the wider audience that a Rolls Royce editing job would bring. – Kieran Finnane

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Feeding the multitudes. By KIERAN FINNANE.

How do you put dinner on the table for 1000 people?

It’s not so hard after you’ve done a dinner for 2000, says Peter Collins.

That’s how many he and business partner, as well as wife, Julie fed at the last big truckies reunion back in 2005.

Saturday’s dinner was under the stars in a week that had been dogged by rain and cloud.

Last Friday as Peter and his team began setting up, he was unfazed. She’ll be right. And as it turned out she was: the night was cool, a little breezy but clear.

He and Julie, both originally from England, have run Sadadeen Party Hire and Catering in Alice since 1998.
Planning for Saturday’s dinner started in 2005 – “in that Liz wanted to know if we’d be available”.

There’s no doubt about it, Liz Martin, the indefatigable CEO of the National Road Transport Hall of Fame, thinks big but she also plans well in advance and picks her people well.

Julie and Peter had started catering for the masses on Thursday: they put on two breakfasts, three lunches, and provided finger food for over 1000 guests at the races.

For the sit-down dinner they began more detailed planning about a year ago: Julie, who’s in charge of the food, worked out the menu. Roast Lamb, Beef Stroganoff, Butter Chicken, Vegetarian Lasagne, boiled chateau potatoes, mixed vegetables, salads, bread rolls, and a cake selection for dessert.

Then they went to their suppliers to make sure they could get what they needed and put the meat supply – 150 kilos of lamb, 50 kilos of chicken, 70 kilos of beef – out to tender. Peter is also a chef, but these days works on the logistical side of the business – the hiring of everything you need to put on events like this.

They were already well-equipped but knew that they’d need new coldrooms, and while they were at it, obtained some for Liz as well.

About a month ago the work began in earnest.

They advertised for staff, some of whom will stay on with the company until after this year’s Masters Games.

They also flew in an experienced chef from Melbourne to lend Julie a hand.

On the day setting up the tables began at 1pm; it took the next six hours. Volunteers lent a hand – the Scouts, for whom it was a fundraiser, and Liz’s loyal band.

The serving staff arrived at 6pm. Many of them are graduates of hospitality courses at St Philip’s and have worked for Peter and Julie before, including their daughters Rebecca and Natalie.

They worked two buffets, six girls on each.

There was no need for a dry run.

The key is to keep each person’s role simple, says Peter.

He explained to them their task, then all they had to do is repeat it 500 times. With a smile.

“People will remember the service as much as the food,” he says.

If people want to know what is in the dish, he wants his staff to be able to explain it.

If they want to ask a question about anything, “enjoy that question and enjoy answering”, he tells them.

Enjoyment’s not hard at the truckies event: “It’s like a great big birthday party, people are buzzing, everyone feels part of it”, says Peter.

A staff member was at either end of the seating area. They gradually worked their way through the tables, allocating a couple at a time to each buffet.

Peter was like the ringmaster, standing in the middle, ushering people forward, making sure the whole operation kept moving forward smoothly.

Most of the food had been cooked off-site, with potatoes the exception. On site all that remained to do was to thoroughly heat the dishes through and add garnishes.

Huge pots were set over gas rings from 3pm and as they were done the food was transferred to hotboxes and bain-maries.

This is the only way to operate, catering for so many people and within the timeframe allowed, says Peter.

Meanwhile, there’d been the little matter of Kenworth’s cocktail party for 1000 to attend to, starting at 5pm.

“No problem,” says Peter. In fact, it’s better for people to arrive at the buffet having already had a little something to eat and in a good mood.

When it was all over Peter and his three assistants worked on cleaning up and packing away.

That kept them going to about 4am.

“It was really quite enjoyable,” says Peter. “I’d worked all along to a deadline and it was satisfying to get there.”

NANCARROW ARROW: Crook as a woofer.

It’s official, folks, the world is a horrible nasty place. Full of misery and woe, my days are dark and bleak.

What is the cause of such angst you may wonder?

I’m sick. Not proper sick where you can garner sympathy and chocolate, but pussy sick. I have a cold and I’m not happy.
As usual one family member or friend gets it and shares it around the rest of us. The bug undergoes whatever transformation it does in the body and re-emerges like some dreadful butterfly, slightly mutated and able to re-infect everyone a second time.
Like everything in the Territory, we do sick bigger and better than everyone else. Some of the things we grow here are bigger and badder than the Ebola thing (not really but I’m on a roll, yeah?).
I have heard rumour that rather than dissecting aliens, refuelling submarines or operating radomes, the space basers actually cook up new diseases and release them upon us.
I personally don’t think that’s true – from what I understand they do a lot of gardening and cleaning. At least that is the answer I get when I ask base folk what they do out there, they are all gardeners and cleaners.
They must have the best tended gardens and cleanest radomes anywhere.
I wonder where they keep the people who do the spying and directing of killer remote control airplanes? Too scary to walk the streets, I guess. I digress. Where was I? Ah yes, being sick.
I come from the era when if one neighbourhood kid got sick, your mum would take you around and have them cough in your face so you would catch it too.
That’s how I got chicken pox – I find this a little hard to believe now I’m actually writing it – but mother took me to my little friend down the road, who was as poxy as all get out and made me play with him for a good hour or so.
It totally wrecked the kid, he just wanted to ooze quietly in his bed, but it meant two days later that I was poxy too – mission accomplished.
My getting sick heralded a change in the household dynamic. Soon as my dad found out I was crook, he pissed off to his mate’s house to get away. He had managed to avoid some of the more serious bugs as a child and was taking no chances.
Some doctor had told him stories about how if he caught the mumps, his bollocks would swell to the size of coconuts and go black, rendering him sterile. At least that’s the line he fed the old lady.
Personally I think he went to Sammy’s (bachelor, no kids) place for some carousing and general ratbaggery. My ma pointed out that I had the chicken pox and not the mumps, but the old man was having none of it and came back about a week later looking a bit like the cat after we gave him too many worming tablets – thin and washed out.
This was repeated several times – kid sick, Shaun deliberately exposed, father over back fence and away.
The time I got the measles was the most memorable, I felt like rubbish for a couple of days and woke up to find myself covered in bright red spots, like someone had gone to town on my face with a red crayon.
This happened again several years later, except the face painting was done with black texta and I was missing an eyebrow as well.
The payback for that was that a certain Queenslander had his toenails painted bright pink while he was passed out. He went to the mechanics the next morning and only noticed the results when he was talking macho diesel stuff.
It’s very hard to hide your toes when you’re wearing thongs, you can only cover one foot at a time. But that dear reader, is another story …

LETTERS: We have all heard of the ‘do gooders’ – now what about the "do badders"?

Sir – I was ashamed to learn from a recent national TV program that there are hotels in our town that open ‘back door’ bars 10am till 2pm on weekdays to cater for chronic drinkers! I didn’t know that until I saw the ‘Lateline’ report on ABC TV on August 18. The program by reporter Katrina Bolton can be accessed on the ABC’s website.
These bars shut at 2pm. When the bottle shops open! Well spotted Sherlock, what a co-incidence.
I am disgusted this happens in our town, a town with notorious grog problems and associated violence and health issues.
Until now I believed the chronic drunks could not get alcohol until mid-afternoon – I thought that was why we have the 2pm opening for the bottle shops.
How silly was I. But it was not just me, lots of locals whose opinion I respect were surprised too.
I am disgusted at the actions of these hotels.
Shut the bars at 2pm, move the drinkers out, and then no care or responsibility once the people have bought their packaged booze from the bottle shops.
Let the police and the council and the ambulances and the hospitals and the courts and the jails take over … let the
taxpayer pick up the bill, while the hoteliers pick up the profits. ‘Do gooders’ is a pejorative term bandied around by some local letter writers, but by crikey, I reckon ‘do badders’ deserves a run here.

What an object lesson on the limits of the free market and the problem of externalities.

I was initially angry and disappointed that our NT Government allows this. This is a key function of government, to ameliorate market failures.

So what is the NT Government thinking? What message do they think they are sending out?

This undermines their credibility in so many areas.

What is the point of long term, generational programs when they allow this to happen? Fix it.

And they will… said Chief Minister Paul Henderson on Monday: “These types of … bars … have no place in the Northern Territory” (ABC News, August 30).

If the Government follows through with this in a meaningful way it will be another step in the long haul to improving the quality of life for many people in our town. If so, it should be applauded.

Ian Sharp
Alice Springs

Out of control

Sir – Threats by the Chief Minister to close bars in the town shows that the Government’s efforts to curb alcohol consumption are spiralling out of control.

The Chief Minister told media on Monday: “These types of animal bars were closed down in Darwin many years ago... people on licensed premises who seek to target a particular clientele only to tip them out on the street when the bottle shops are open their time is coming and I’ve asked Delia to deal with it.”

Despite the Chief Minister’s tough talk, he fails to show how he will stop habitual drinkers obtaining alcohol.

If the Labor Government closes down these so-called ‘animal bars’, there are other bars in the town that also serve alcohol.

Targeting the bar operators misses the point.

They’re operating inside the law and if there are breaches, it’s the role of the Licensing Commission to enforce that law.

What the Labor Government is doing is transferring the problem from one place to another.

The suggestion that hotel owners are targeting a particular clientele and tipping them out on the street when the bottle shops open is offensive and unfair.

The drinkers leave the bar of their own free will to access the bottleshops – which under the Labor Government’s regulations don’t open until 2pm.

The Government’s insistence that targeting the supply of alcohol will somehow stop the flow of grog across the Territory is nonsensical.

The Country Liberals support taking a harder line against problem drunks and improving rehabilitation services – an area the Labor Party has neglected.

Matt Conlan
Shadow Minister for Alcohol Policy

Who was feeding the media on Leo Abbott?

Shot in the foot?

Sir – Did the CLP shoot themselves in the foot in the Federal election?

Or was it someone else?

From the news, their candidate Leo Abbott texted his ex a while ago. When that story broke, there was hell to pay.

Calls for his dis-endorsement mixed with pledges of support, and all right in the middle of what turned out to be a close contest.

Even with a fractured campaign, the CLP cut into the ALP’s margin in Lingiari.

It makes you wonder how much further they might have cut had this story not been tossed to the media.

Like the leaks that so destabilised Julia Gillard’s campaign, it raises the question of where it came from.

Hal Duell
An Aboriginal party?

Sir – Professor Rolf Gerritsen (Alice News, August 26) commented on shifts in the NT voting patterns. He suggests “a shift in the Aboriginal vote (from Labor), increased volatility in the Aboriginal electorate or the emergence of an Aboriginal political party”.

Last week during the hung election we saw Ken Lechleitner as an Independent diplomatically, courteously, nudging thinking toward an Independent Aboriginal party – his platform based on the 1999 Kalkaringi CANCA meetings. Many NT voters probably had no knowledge of the history of the Kalkaringi combined Aboriginal nations efforts at constitutional reform that led to Lechleitner’s stand.

Leo Abbot, Barbara Shaw and Warren Williams may remember this even though pragmatically for this election they were allied with CLP and the Greens who might be picking up a mood – or might be exploiting sympathies.

But maybe locally independent thinking is shifting the balance and challenging the way Labor listens to our reliable local Warren Snowdon.

Gerritsen could be right – a shift is in the wind. This politicised Indigenous pattern coming out in the NT, whatever it is, needs careful local analysis. Is it real grassroots or is it big party spin?

Maybe most of us really are sick of the way the two party adversarial system is stuffing us up in the NT. Maybe a serious independent Aboriginal party is a pipe dream.

Maybe it is the only anchor in a time of deluge when neither the Left nor the Right can hold this part of the country honest. I, for one, would like to hear what Lechleitner, Abbott, Shaw and Williams really think about what it takes to ensure good governance of this bit of the territory.

Craig San Roque
Alice springs

Alcohol merry-go-round

Sir – Howard Davies (Alice News, August 26) hits the nail on the head when he suggests that the “right to drink” argument needs to be re-evaluated in light of the obvious “human and genocidal costs” to our community.

After some 26 years living in this town, I too have seen little more than a tinkering around the edges of the alcohol problem and have come to believe that no solution can be found without a change in the way that we, as a community, actually think about alcohol.

A good start would be to see alcohol for what it is: a drug.

Then, perhaps, we may better accept the notion of restricting its supply to anyone who demonstrates an inability to handle it and provide rehabilitation support to reduce alcohol dependancy, along with targeted education programs beginning, perhaps, in our schools. Imagine the outcomes of such a change in social attitude.

Without the increased pressures resulting from our town’s “alcohol problem”, we may just find that we do have enough policemen to keep our streets and properties safe as well as enough doctors and nurses to cater to our town’s health needs.

We may also bring about a reduction in family violence and the carnage on our roads, as well as developing a more socially harmonious Alice.

True, it isn’t as simple as all that and the solution requires a multi-pronged, integrated and co-ordinated strategy but, while we cling to a “right to drink” mentality, we will forever remain on our alcohol abuse merry-go-round.

Domenico Pecorari
Alice Springs.