

NEWCOMERS ATTRACTED TO LIFESTYLE

NEW arrivals who have turned Cairns into Queensland's top regional growth hotspot say they are drawn by a better lifestyle, jobs and sunshine.

Among them are Neil and Christine Pettersen, who have been here three weeks and bought a home at Trinity Beach. They are no strangers to Cairns, having holidayed regularly in the Far North for the past 20 years.

This year, they decided to take the plunge and combine an improved lifestyle with a new job by moving permanently to the Far North from Brisbane.

"We know the place well," Mr Pettersen said.

"My wife got transferred but we would have come anyhow.

"We moved here because there are not too many people."

The couple, aged in their mid-40s, wanted to move to a green area with good rainfall and where the population had space to grow.

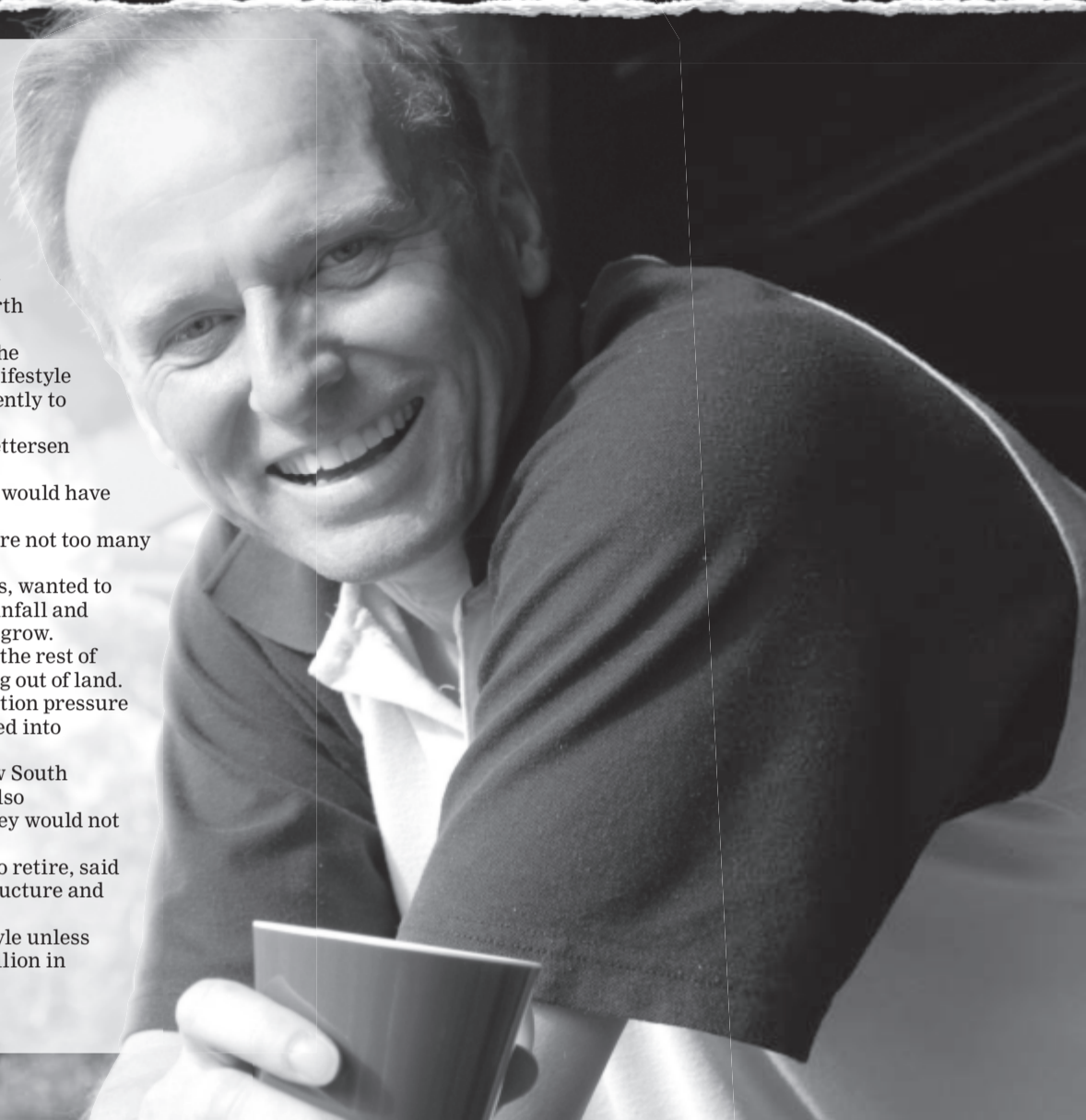
Mr Pettersen said Brisbane and the rest of southeast Queensland was running out of land. Water was an issue and the population pressure meant blocks were being subdivided into smaller and smaller lots.

They had looked around the New South Wales coast north of Sydney and also Melbourne but quickly realised they would not get as much for their money.

Mr Pettersen, who has decided to retire, said Cairns has also improved infrastructure and life quality with better roads.

"You can't buy this sort of lifestyle unless you want to spend two or three million in Melbourne," he said.

"And we are big on gardening."



Settling in: Neil Pettersen is happy with his new lifestyle at Trinity Beach after moving to Cairns three weeks ago from Brisbane.

Picture: VERONICA SAGREDO

City is largest growth area outside southeast

CAIRNS has become Queensland's largest population growth area outside the southeast corner with a population exceeding 136,000, the latest population figures show.

In five years between June 2001 and June 2006, the Cairns population increased by almost 19,000 to more than 136,000, a 15 per cent increase with an annual average growth rate of 3 per cent, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics figures released last week.

The city's growth rate was beaten only by the big growth nucleus of five centres in the southeast region: the Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Pine

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Rivers, Caboolture and Brisbane.

Cairns in 10 years went from 12th position to sixth becoming the regional population growth hotspot.

Between 2001 and 2006, Townsville's population grew by almost 10,000 or 10.5 per cent to 102,000 and Mackay by 14,000 people to more than 90,000, a 17.5 per cent increase.

The figures build on the 2006 Census results by including estimates for people overseas or who were missed in the count.

For the previous five years, be-

tween 1996 and 2001, Cairns growth was at 5.5 per cent and Townsville 6 per cent.

A bureau spokesman said it would not have finalised its June 2006 figures until a reconstitution of figures is completed by August 2008.

Jobs for young people, lifestyle and a seachange for middle-aged couples are two factors behind the big surge in Cairns's population.

Property industry insiders attribute the growth to the strong Cairns economy and business confidence.

Rick Carr, research director with Herron Todd White told *The Cairns*

Post: "Young singles and married couples are moving here drawn by work, and middle-aged couples who are not ready to retire are coming for a seachange."

Mr Carr said the population jump was not unexpected because many industry people believed the 2006 population census figures for Cairns had not been high enough.

He said the bureau found an extra 3700 people in its research who had not been included in the 2006 Census figures.

"It shows the population estimates had been undershooting," he said.

Steam ahead at uni

SPORT and Exercise Science students will be working up a head of steam when classes resume at James Cook University today.

They will be introduced to the newly installed climate chamber.

The \$40,000 chamber can be chilled to 1C or heated to a cosy 50C with added humidity as an optional extra.

"The chamber will help the students understand the impact of temperature and humidity on the physiological responses to exercise," JCU's Dr Glen Deakin said.

"It's vital that our students understand how to exercise safely and effectively in the tropics."

The public can experience the climate chamber first hand, along with JCU's new Strength Training and Rehabilitation Laboratory, when the university opens its doors next weekend.

From 10am to 2.30pm on Sunday the Smithfield campus Open Day will include displays, talks by local experts, Great Moments in Science with Dr Karl Kruszelnicki and a performance by Christine Anu.

Water to stay at top quality

THE quality of Cairns's drinking water is already high but a new policy will ensure the condition is maintained to Australian standards.

Cairns Water Committee has approved the Cairns Water Drinking Water Quality Policy, which addresses management, analysis and requirements components in the preparation and treatment of consumable water.

"It's not that we don't already do it, we certainly do, we are just putting in a system," Cairns Water general manager Bruce Gardiner said.

"This policy sets the basis for the rest of the system."

Cairns Water says the plan will "enhance Cairns Water's ability to deliver water that consistently meets the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines in the long term".

Long wet and cold snap make for tinderbox conditions

PREPARING FOR BUSHFIRES

- Remove weeds and mow grass around sheds, fences and gates
- Clear overhanging branches from the roof
- Clean gutters and buy gutter plugs
- Check water systems, pumps and generators are working
- Create a buffer zone of at least 40m around your house
- Keep hoses ready to use
- Have a battery-powered radio ready to listen to bushfire updates
- Organise protective clothing (wool or cotton) including gloves, safety glasses, work boots and a broad-rimmed hat.

(SOURCE: QUEENSLAND FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE)

A BUSY bushfire season is looming after cold snaps have created tinderbox conditions and an extended wet season hampered efforts to burn off forest debris.

A risk assessment prepared by the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service has revealed an increase in dry vegetation around Cairns, the Tableland and Cape York.

The report cited the long wet season, which made it difficult

for crews to conduct hazard reduction burns, as one of the main reasons.

The Far North's Assistant Commissioner, Mark Roche, said the cold snap also contributed to the bushfire threat.

"There's also the frost that we've had on the Tableland," Mr Roche said. "It's really starting to dry out up there."

"We've had a few (bushfires) up on the Tableland but we've hit them nice and early."

Rural fire training and support officer Brett Weston said the climate in the next month would be telling. He said a long bushfire season was forecast.

Mr Roche urged residents to prepare their properties and not to get complacent because of recent showers.

►► For information about Queensland Fire and Rescue's Bushfire Prepared Communities program, call your nearest fire station or visit www.fire.qld.gov.au or www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au



Hot forecast: Firefighter Brett Weston checks the dry foliage in the bush.