

busybits

If you've got any gossip, email dicksonr@tcp.newsltd.com.au

Birthday on the streets

CHARLIE McKillop made her first big foray into the election ring, with a round of doorknocking on her 33rd birthday. The Leichhardt Liberal candidate spent eight hours being offered beers and a friendly chat by voters on April 14 as she pounded the pavement to drum up support for her federal election campaign. "I think I must be the only 33-year-old in history to celebrate a birthday like that," she said.

Easy street for lawyers

THINGS must be really pretty good if you're a Cairns lawyer these days. One legal eagle knocked back taking on a new no-win, no-fee client last week even though the lawyer said winning the case on a motor vehicle accident injury claim would be a piece of cake. If the case was going to be so easy, why the rejection, the client asked. The solicitor replied: "Well, I would probably only get about \$30,000 out of it as my share of the winnings."

Problems hit old home front

NEW Advance Cairns boss Bruce McConaghy is struggling to find a home in Cairns as he moves from his southern Queensland digs to take up his new role. But he has a bigger problem down south after learning a mini-tornado had just ripped through his property while he was in Cairns to look for a new abode and accept his new position. Trees are down everywhere and the removalists cannot get in. To top that off, a neighbour rang to say he had a full-sized gum tree in his swimming pool. Bruce was just relieved he had left his beloved pooches safely in a kennel. As for the tornado, *Busy* reckons it was simply an entree to his life in the Far North.

myview

with Rick Carr



Waterways lead travellers north



Cool waters beckon: The region's abundant water supply is fast becoming a reason for people to make the move north.

WE have had the sea change and the tree change, now it looks like the new demographic driver of population movement around Australia might be the water change.

Normally, the Cairns property market quietens as population growth and buying activity recede during the summer months. This year, it didn't happen.

Real estate agents continued to experience a steady stream of new arrivals to Cairns seeking properties to either buy or rent. The buoyant economy, plentiful availability of jobs and the appealing lifestyle are still the primary drivers for people moving to Cairns.

However, for many people, disenchantment with the lifestyle-affecting water restrictions in drought-ravaged southern Australia were a big influence in their decision to relocate to Cairns.

Water is very much a positive for

Cairns compared with their homes in southern Australia, where the water situation is going to get a lot worse and a lot more expensive before it gets better.

People like the ability to wash their cars and enjoy not having to shower standing over a plastic bucket.

Even though we perceive the Cairns residential market to be at or near the peak of the property cycle, the market is continuing to power on, driven by buoyancy in the economy, high population growth and very low rental vacancy rates.

House prices in Cairns have continued to rise during the past three months, with the median house price reaching a preliminary \$339,000 in February 2007. This represents a 12 per cent price rise during the past 12 months.

Apartment prices are also on an upward path, with the preliminary median price for an established unit

reaching \$201,000 in February, 2007. This represents a 16 per cent price rise during the past year.

However, the real heat is being felt in the vacant land market. The median price of a new residential allotment has jumped by 39 per cent during the past year, to reach a preliminary \$141,000 in February 2007.

Rental markets are faring little better, with the trend vacancy rate for rental premises at a record low 1.7 per cent in March 2007. Houses to rent were in noticeably short supply, with a vacancy rate of just 1.4 per cent, while rental units were sitting at 2 per cent vacancy.

Coupled with the shortfall in new housing construction, population growth pressures are expected to maintain the heat on the rental and purchase markets throughout 2007.

» Rick Carr is research director at Cairns property valuers Herron Todd White

Brief case

BUSINESS WEEK SAYS

We need to save our resource

SO, water, or the lack of it in the south, has become a major selling point in attracting people to the Far North.

While it is all well and good to extol the virtues of our most abundant resource, it is easy to forget that our current supply is only due to a couple of decent cyclones and a heavy monsoon.

Behana Creek and Copperlode Dam are currently in good shape but they are limited in their capacity.

As a precaution, Cairns City Council has us on permanent water restrictions for it will only take a "dry wet" for those sources to begin to dry up.

One suggested course of action is to top up on water from the Barron River, which is released from Tinaroo Dam on the Tableland. However, that supply is also a finite resource.

It was not that long ago that Tinaroo was down to about a quarter of its capacity and you could not swim in it, let alone contemplate drinking it without some serious treatment to combat the blue-green algae.

How quickly we forget that our own supply can quickly dwindle even though we are in the middle of the Wet Tropics.

But there is no point putting our head into a dry riverbed as development is going to occur irrespective of water supply.

Our population growth took off well before the southern drought so, with even more people arriving saying they are sick and tired of high-level water restrictions, we must push forward for a new dam, and the government must build it soon. If we don't get a new dam, it will only be a matter of time before Darwin becomes the new Cairns.

7PM TILL LATE

CHARITY NIGHT SATURDAY 28 APRIL



FEATURING

BIG JIM SANDERS SMALL BAGGAGE & GUEST APPEARANCES

Come and join us for good times and local entertainment as we raise funds for Camp Quality.

• MUSIC • DANCING • PRIZES • FOOD • & MUCH MORE ON THE NIGHT

A NIGHT NOT TO BE MISSED



GOLD COIN ENTRY

KANGAROO FOOTBALL AND SPORTING CLUB • IRENE STREET • CAIRNS