

BALANCE

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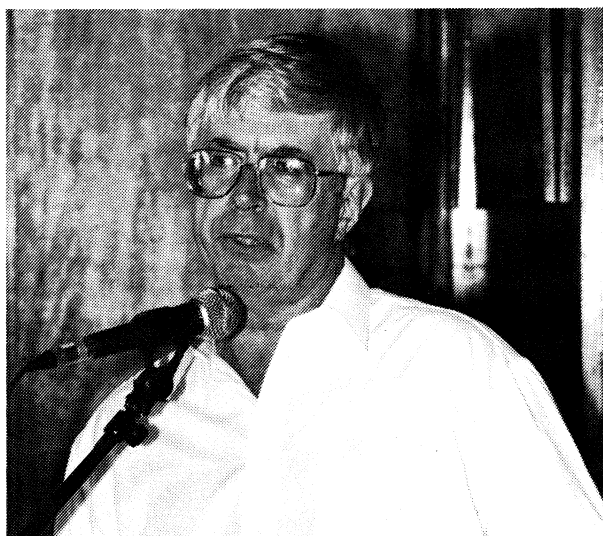
TALKS AND WALKS ARE MAIN THRUST OF LAW WEEK ACTION

More than 300 Territorians have taken advantage of the various activities available during Law Week (May 21-27).

The Law Society's Territory-wide toll-free Law Line was again the cornerstone of the program. Three lines were opened for two hours from Monday through to Friday, with 14 volunteer practitioners taking 167 calls over the entire week. Questions were many and varied, but among the most popular topics were family law, property matters, negligence, tenancy matters, personal injury cases, small claims matters, debt issues, neighbourhood disputes and wills. More than half the callers were female and around 60 per cent of callers required further assistance — legal or administrative. Each query took an average of seven minutes to be answered.

Darwinites also put their feet into action for Law Walks, reappearing for the first time since 1993. Berrimah Police Centre, Darwin Prison, the Legislative Assembly and the Supreme Court all opened their doors to give the public a rare insight into the workings of our legal system. While both Darwin Prison and Berrimah Police Centre enjoyed a wide age range of visitors, interestingly, the majority of visitors to the Police Centre were female. Meanwhile, staff at the Legislative Assembly reported an even mix of men and women on its tours but noted that most of its visitors were in the 50-plus age bracket. Both Darwin Prison and the Supreme Court staff had a high percentage of tourists among their groups, eager to take advantage of the opportunity to view some of Darwin's most famous landmarks.

Forty Darwin practitioners took time out mid-week for this year's Law Week Luncheon at Raymond's Restaurant. They were enthusiastic both about the delicious three-course menu and the comments of guest speaker Frank Jones SM, who travelled from Victoria for the occasion. Later in the week Mr Jones moved on to Alice Springs for the annual repast, which was held at Ristorante Puccini. He spoke about the marked differences in the operational styles of various Chief Justices and Queen's Counsels he



Guest speaker Frank Jones SM addresses the Law Week Luncheon in Darwin.

had served under and the evolving role and format of judgments during his many years as a Registrar of the High Court. His talks were interspersed with a variety of humorous anecdotes and glimpses of the human elements of High Court judges.

Law Week was once again sponsored chiefly by The Law Society of the Northern Territory Public Purposes Trust and Qantas Australian Airlines, while Minet Professional Services, Jeany's Liquor Stores and Body Basics offered further invaluable support. Lucky Kevin Stephens of Ward Keller walked away with the major Qantas prize of two return adult tickets to Cairns. Regular Knife and Fork patron Brian Cassells was delighted when he scored Minet's prize of dinner for two at one of his favourite venues. Other winners included President Terry Gardner (toiletries courtesy of Body Basics), Bill Raby (Brown Brothers gift pack of wine courtesy of Jeany's Liquor Stores) plus David Anderson and Tom Galloway (Minet umbrellas).

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Law Line — a great success

Law Week has now reached a very successful conclusion, with Law Line once again being the service most used by the public.

I wish to thank all those people who made Law Week such a success.

There are too many for me to name here but they know who they are and should be very pleased with the role they played in improving the public image of the profession.

Law Line was so popular (more than 160 calls were received) that perhaps the profession should consider providing such a service on a monthly basis.

I am aware that other larger law societies provide a permanent legal advice bureau.

Although I do not believe this is necessary in the Northern Territory at the moment, a law line on a monthly basis would be a step in the right direction.

On 18 May the Prime Minister launched the Justice Statement — a copy of the Statement is available at the office of the Society for those who wish to read it.

In their letter forwarding a copy of the statement to me, Michael Lavarch and Duncan Kerr say that the Federal Government has listened to the community's concerns about the justice system and, through the Justice Statement, will deliver real access to justice for all Australians.

The sentiments expressed are to be applauded and I wish the issuing of such a statement would magically fix the faults of the justice system.

Unfortunately, there is no quick-fix solution for the justice system and any improvement will only arise due to a considerable amount of hard work — and to some extent, sacrifices — by the legal pro-

fession over a longer period.

As mentioned in my column in the April edition of *Balance*, national professional indemnity insurance cover is one of the main stumbling blocks in the way of a truly national practising certificate.

Due to the greatly differing claims history in the various states it is impossible to establish a standard Australian premium and, therefore, it may be necessary for practitioners who intend practising outside their home state or territory to obtain top-up cover.

This would defeat the idea of all practitioners being able to practise nationally upon being issued a practising cer-

tificate in their home state. A working party has been established by the Law Council of Australia to investigate the cost of top-up cover to, say, \$1.5 million (including costs) on the basis that all practitioners would pay a small increase in premiums to obtain national cover.

I also mentioned in my last column that the Society was seeking members for a Legal Practitioners Act Advisory Committee.

It is disappointing to note there has been no response and I trust this situation will be remedied in time for me to mention the volunteer practitioners in the June edition of *Balance*.

TALKS, WALKS MAIN THRUST OF ACTION

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The Law Society once again promoted a breakfast seminar organised by Jim Moore (Barr Moore and Co.) in his role as Chairman of the Red Cross International Humanitarian Law (IHL) Committee.

"The Red Cross at Work in Israel and the Occupied and Autonomous Territories" featured National IHL Co-ordinator Anna Segall as its keynote speaker and attracted almost 50 people, including many practitioners.

Another noteworthy participant in Law Week was Radio Rentals, which played the videotapes "As You Grow Older" and "Divorce and Family Law" in its stores at Casuarina Shopping Square and the Smith Street Mall.

Radio Rentals staff were enormously helpful in handing out brochures and referring interested passers-by to the Law Line number throughout the week.

Balance would also like to acknowledge all those practitioners who gave their time to Law Line this year, particularly Erin Padarin (Philip and Mitaros) for organising members of the NT Young Lawyers Association into a Law Line roster.

Other volunteers were: Matthew Hooper (Ward Keller); Duncan McConnel (Morgan Buckley); Alan Woodcock (Mildrens); Carmen Hodges (Ward Keller); Samantha Miles (Philip & Mitaros); Cris Cureton (Philip & Mitaros); Bryan Elliott (Cridlands); Sue Porter (De Silva Hebron); Kevin Stephens (Ward Keller); Mark Neeley (Cridlands); Tom Walker (Mildrens); Chris Fanning (Cridlands); Dirk De Zwart (Philip & Mitaros); and Janelle Martin (Police Prosecutions).

The Law Society also appreciates the efforts of John Stirk in playing host to Mr Jones during his visit to Alice Springs.