

LINES IN THE SAND

At the last Law Society Annual General Meeting, Katrina Budrikis was elected as the Alice Springs Representative and Domenic Conidi as the Alternate Representative. This is the first of a regular monthly column the Alice Springs representatives will contribute to Balance.

Over the coming year we hope to raise the profile of Alice Springs lawyers and provide an effective voice for the profession and Alice Springs issues. Obviously we encourage, in fact insist, that practitioners in Alice contribute ideas and material that will give this column a Central Australian character. We encourage practitioners to contact us directly with issues or concerns that we can take to Law Society meetings held on the last Thursday of each month.

We will also endeavour to have corresponding events between Alice Springs and Darwin. CLE programs will be a priority. If there is interest from practitioners, we will look into the viability of video link ups for programs conducted in Darwin where the same seminar will not be possible in Alice Springs. On the social front, we propose to have a Law Society dinner either in late November or early December for the Alice Springs profession and any lawyers in Darwin who may want to wander down. Dinner will of course be free for any Darwinian (or is it Darwinite?) intrepid enough to do so. It will be worth the trip.....we promise!

A feature of this column will be profiles of

people and organisations who contribute to the law and community in general. This month we begin with two organisations. The first is the Central Australian Youth Justice Coalition (CAYJ), formed in 1997. CAYJ is concerned with youth justice issues and strives for progressive law reform. Members include the clergy, lawyers, youth workers, health professionals and educators.

The fight against mandatory sentencing has been a priority for CAYJ. The first big campaign was the "Three Days of Action" in November 1997. People from all over Australia travelled to Alice Springs to support the fight against mandatory sentencing through demonstrations, petitions, street theatre and many other means over an intensive period. The campaign received the express support of the Federal ALP and the Australian Democrats.

Since then CAYJ has become a respected voice in the mandatory sentencing debate on the national stage. Earlier this year, CAYJ sent several members to Canberra to discuss mandatory sentencing with Members of Parliament. Margo Kingston, a senior political commentator, described the delegation as "the most impressive human rights campaigning in Canberra during the Howard Government".

Recently CAYJ seized the opportunity provided by the Olympic torch passing through Alice Springs to once again highlight the injustice caused by the draconian mandatory sentencing laws. The message to the nation was clear. There are "no gold medals for justice in the Northern Territory".

The second organisation under the spotlight is the Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit which has recently been established. Whilst it is auspiced by Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service (CAALAS), it operates as a separate legal unit and is located at 18 Leichhardt Terrace (previously occupied by Dittons). The Service will be staffed from 12th October 2000 and will open to the public in November. The staff will be a senior solicitor (Ariel Couchman), two community legal workers and an administrative worker.

The unit is one of about 12 units around Australia that has been recently funded by ATSIC in recognition of the obstacles faced by indigenous women and children experiencing family violence to accessing legal advice and representation. The unit will provide legal education and support to indigenous community initiatives to reduce family violence. It will also provide legal advice and representation on associated areas such as discrimination and compensation claims for victims.

The Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit will target four communities as well as the Alice Springs township. The unit will attend bush courts at Ntaria, Yuendumu, Papunya and Tennant Creek. In town the unit will compliment the work of the Domestic Violence Legal Service.

The implementation of the NT Government's initiative to introduce diversionary programs for juvenile offenders is gaining momentum in Alice Springs. Sergeant Steven Sims, who will co-ordinate the program in the Centre, advises that the diversion protocols are in place and whilst the service agreements are still being consolidated, the program is fully operational.

The profession in Alice Springs welcomes our new magistrate, Mr. Michael Ward. Mr. Ward brings to the job over twenty years experience as a magistrate in the Territory, ACT and South Australia. He took up his position on 9 October 2000. His last stint as a magistrate in Darwin was cut short by an inhospitable wind back in the mid 70's. We hope that he finds Alice Springs a little more temperate and wish him well in his position.

Other Items of Note:

The Alice Springs Representative was invited to the opening of a lookout post in the West MacDonnell Ranges. The Neil Hargrave Lookout is about 100 km west of Alice Springs. Regrettably, due to pre-existing engagements, the Law Society was not represented at this event.

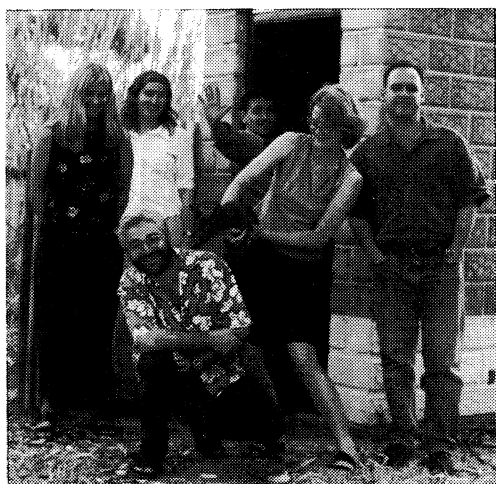
Contact details:

Katrina Budrikis:

Phone: (08) 8953 2242 Fax: (08) 8953 2159
email: k.budrikis@bigpond.com

Domenic Conidi

Phone: (08) 89 522 933 Fax (08) 8953 0784
email: domenic.conidi@caalas.com.au



Domenic Conidi and Katrina Budrikis, are the Law Society representatives in Alice Springs.