

CELEBRATING progress in WA

It is important to take time to reflect on the inspirational role models in the Aboriginal business community.

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While we have a long way to go to overcome the challenges and hardship that past poor policies and social bigotry have created for our first people, we should take the time to celebrate the achievements that have been made in Western Australia and in its business community, along the way.

Given that reforms to laws and policies which enabled the platform for change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples only came in the late 1960s, we must celebrate the impact our Aboriginal political and business leaders are making, the emergence of the Aboriginal Business sector and the growth in number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people in training and employment.

More Western Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are completing year 12 than ever before, a trend that is expected to continue into the future.

Today's figures show that 638 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are in the process of completing their apprenticeship in WA, almost double the figure recorded in 2004. There are another 1294 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people currently undertaking traineeships, up 30 per cent on 2004 figures.

While participation rates have remained stagnant, total employment figures have shown a trend upwards in WA between 2006 and 2011, according to a Council of Australian Governments report.

It is difficult to determine just how many Aboriginal businesses are operating in Western Australia, however, the Aboriginal

Business Directory, which is compiled by the Small Business Development Centre and supported by CCI, currently has 285 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses listed for promotion.

These positive trends indicate that we are working towards building a strong economy that is improving living standards for our whole community. However, we have much more work to do to achieve independence and equal opportunity for all in WA. This can't be done without leaders, and role models driving change.

We must continue to recognise and celebrate the inspirational and impressive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people leading the way. We must also embrace and celebrate current business leaders, politicians and employers that continue to pave the way for equality, independence and success.

Taking time out to appreciate the hard work and achievement of the Aboriginal business community, uncovers many accomplishments that often get overlooked. By acknowledging and recognizing these achievements, we inspire youth, aspiring business leaders and entrepreneurs, while working towards overcoming the challenges that we still face in ensuring all people within our community have the same opportunities, rights and responsibilities.

CCI is a supporter of equality, reconciliation and working with the Western Australian business community to encourage training, employment and business growth. ■

DID YOU KNOW?

- ▶ Back in 1953, Graham 'Polly' Farmer started his elite football career with East Perth Football Club and by 1971 he was the first Australian footballer to receive a Queen's honour when he was named a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE).
- ▶ In 1968, Philip Ugle, a former WA farmhand became the first Aboriginal person to work at Parliament House.
- ▶ Also that year, Western Australian woman, Marjory Scott became the first Aboriginal person in Australia to apply for her full pilot license.
- ▶ In 1990, Ernie Dingo, a local Mullewa boy, was made a member of the Order of Australia, in recognition of his service to the performing arts.
- ▶ In 2010, Noongar man Ken Wyatt became the first Aboriginal person elected into the Federal Lower House of Parliament.

These are just a smattering of inspirational people that have led the way through adversity.

We also have many inspirational role models within the WA business and the community today.

- ▶ Joanne Pellow, a proud Noongar woman, founded Ochre Personnel, the first business in Australia to specialise in the recruitment of Indigenous people to Australia's mining industry.
- ▶ Bruce Thomas, a traditional Mangala man, is the chair of the Board of Directors of Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre. This Centre aims to ensure that young people remain strong in retaining their Aboriginal language, culture and history, ensuring cultural continuity.
- ▶ Professor Colleen Hayward AM, is a senior Noongar woman, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Equity and Indigenous at Edith Cowan University and Head of Kurongkurl Katitjin, ECU's Centre for Indigenous Education and Research. In June 2012, Colleen was appointed a member of the Order of Australia for service to tertiary education through administrative and research roles, to the advancement of the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- ▶ Gordon Cole is an award winning Noongar businessman, and is known for his leadership and contribution to Western Australia's Aboriginal Community. He is the Managing Director of G Cole Consulting, CEO of Cole Workwear, Principal Partner of Global Professional Services International and Director of ICRG Maarli Pty Ltd.