

The letter that could have

Darling would give job his full-time attention

By LISA CARTY

Alex Darling looked right at home in the hot seat yesterday.

The Wollongong councillor who is the only declared candidate for the September 14 lord mayoral by-election yesterday promised to treat the position as a full-time job.

As Deputy Lord Mayor Cr Darling assumed the functions of lord mayor after a disgraced George Harrison went bankrupt on Thursday.

The 68-year-old retired businessman said local government was his passion and he would bring experience and stability to the lord mayor's role.

His \$25,000 tilt at the top job would be a precursor to next year's full council election where he said he would contest the lord mayoralty

whether or not he won the upcoming by-election.

Cr Darling served on Shoalhaven Council between 1983 and 1987, and was the mayor for a short time after the death of the incumbent.

He was elected to Wollongong City Council in 1987, did not stand at the 1991 election, and was re-elected in 1995 and 1999.

He became Deputy Lord Mayor last year.

Yesterday he sang the praises of the council and its workers, saying Mr Harrison's departure had ended a difficult era.

"You will see a change of attitude in this building. I can even feeling it this morning," he said.

"People are smiling. They're happy. They're all talking. (Before Mr Harrison's resignation) the staff did know what was going to happen next.

"There was always uncertainty about what was going to be said and what was going to happen.

"We just need some positive stuff."

If he won the by-election the council would be the happiest place to work in Wollongong by the time of the September 2003 election, he said.

Cr Darling said he had already made a point of thanking council's outdoor staff for their efforts.

The city was like a pigsty when the sun went down but by sun up it was squeaky clean, he said.

"That's done by people, dedicated people. They try hard.

"We have a very successful organisation with a very good person at the top in Rod Oxley.

"We're financially sound - we're looking good.

"The people of Wollongong should say thank goodness we've got a good stable council."

Meantime, left-wing councillor Vicky King announced last night that she would seek pre-selection to run for lord mayor.

"I have consulted my family, friends and I think I would disappoint a lot of people if I didn't stand," she said.

"I have the talent and ability and I have the runs on the board."



VIEW FROM THE TOP: Wollongong's Deputy Lord Mayor Alex Darling contemplates life in the lord mayor's office. Picture: KIRK GILMOUR

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saved George Harrison's job



This is the text of the June 22 1990 letter from Wollongong legal firm Maguire and McInerney to George Harrison on behalf of Delcie Schipp

Dear Sir
Re: AMOUNT OWING TO DELCIE JOAN SCHIPP

We have been consulted by the abovenamed in respect of the sum of \$20,000 owing by you by Mrs Schipp.
We are instructed that this represents part of the proceeds of sale of the property at 16 Mary Street, Thirroul, and that upon completion you have failed to account to our client for her share in the nett profits.
We are further instructed that our client has at no stage agreed to lend the money either to yourself or Mr DR Cameron.
When a previous request for payment of the money due to her was made, you presented an Acknowledgement of Debt dated 12th July 1989 which included an undertaking to repay same within two years from the 1st July, 1989.
A further statement contained in the Acknowledgement is that the loan is to be interest-free and for a period of two years.
We are instructed to advise that our client never agreed to lend the money to you in an (sic) form and now requires payment of same.
In the event that the amount due to our client is not received within ten (10) days of the date of this letter, proceedings for recovery will be commenced without notifying you further.
As this will involve you in additional costs and expense, we suggest the matter be given your urgent attention.

Schipp asked for \$20,000, the mayor chose bankruptcy

By LISA CARTY

This is the 1990 letter that shows the blind determination of George Harrison.

He could have settled his part of the Delcie Schipp case for \$20,000 - instead, he chose to destroy his own life and take Mrs Schipp with him.

The letter asks for payment within 10 days and warns that recovery proceedings follow if the demand is not met.

"As this will involve you in additional costs and expense, we suggest the matter be given your urgent attention," it says.

On Thursday night, as the former lord mayor marked his departure from public life with dinner with family and friends at Thirroul's Frati restaurant, Mrs Schipp was left to contemplate her bleak future.

A property development partnership which began in early 1988 united, divided, then ruined two very different people.

What sounded like a good deal ended in disaster when Mrs Schipp accused Mr Harrison and a third partner, then-Wollongong real estate agent Don Cameron, of keeping money that belonged to her.

She asked them each for \$20,000 but they refused to pay.

Instead, both men have gone bankrupt. Mr Cameron's marriage ended, Mr Harrison lost his legal practice, was forced to resign from the Labor Party, and this week resigned as the city's lord mayor.

Mrs Schipp is in a similarly precarious financial position.

The dispute which Mr Harrison could have settle for \$20,000 has cost him millions of dollars.

His debt to Mrs Schipp alone stands at about \$1.2 million.

In 1998, after a long trial, the Supreme Court ordered him to pay her about \$700,000 compensation, including her legal costs and interest.

Yesterday Mrs Schipp said she found the situation utterly amazing.

"I can't believe what they did to me," she said.



MR HARRISON

"I can't believe people like that can practically destroy another person.

"It's amazing that people who had a very high standing in the community can do this ... destroy other people's lives.

"I was unlucky. I was very, very unlucky.

"He (Mr Harrison) is a rotten bastard and a thief, an absolute thief."

The writing was on the wall for Mr Harrison the moment Justice Cliff Einstein of the Supreme Court's equity division labelled him a liar in 1998.

Despite that, less than a year later the Labor Party endorsed him as its candidate for the Wollongong lord mayoralty.

Justice Einstein said Mr Harrison and Mr Cameron had exploited Mrs Schipp's ignorance and "held her to ransom" over two property deals.

Mrs Schipp did not know that the main reason the men pressured her to prematurely sell the first property was that Mr Harrison had escalating financial difficulties centring on a \$1.5 million offshore loan, Justice Einstein said.

Later they manipulated her into investing in a second development, the construction of commercial offices in Kembla St, Wollongong.

Mr Harrison and Mr Cameron had taken "unfair and unconscionable advantage" of her weaknesses and had dominated her throughout the course of their business association in the late 1980s, Justice Einstein said.

He said Mr Harrison was an "unsatisfactory and unreliable" witness who sometimes "fabricated" his evidence.

The full bench of the Court of Appeal agreed, finding in Mrs Schipp's favour.

Then, just last month, the same court threw out Mr Harrison's bid for a fresh trial on the basis that he had uncovered new evidence.

The court said that evidence was not new at all.

On Thursday, the day before Mrs Schipp's bankruptcy proceedings against him were due back in court, Mr Harrison voluntarily became a bankrupt.

That automatically put him out of the city's top job. A by-election will be held on September 14.

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