TRANSCRIPT of Paul Everingham Profile Segments

01 Paul Everingham on: The Need for a University

When I first went to Alice Springs obviously I saw that there weren't any really tertiary facilities. I mean it was pretty obvious to someone like a lawyer that the Territory's tertiary facilities were scant but obviously it started to impact more on me as my children grew and as the people I mixed with, their children were growing, and we were talking to other people who were having to send, in some cases their children to boarding school, in other cases their children to university and some people were upping stakes and taking the whole family. Going to Sydney or whatever because the kids had reached university stage or the eldest child had reached university stage. And the whole thing about self-government was to try and stabilise the territory's population which up till then had been really a rotating population of public servants and others, you know bank people and the like, who came for three years and then shook the dust of the territory from their heels. It was just a staging post on their way to something better was how they saw it.

02 Paul Everingham on: The idea of starting a university

There wasn't any suggestion that there be a university until we, in the Northern Territory Government raised it as a topic. At that time, that is, by the time of self-government, there was a community College in Darwin, I'm not sure if it had an outlier in Alice Springs - it eventually did I think. But I think most people thought 'well we've got a community college that's the best we can hope for'.

But I had, in some strange way, seen something in a magazine, like National Geographic, an old photograph of some town in Nebraska, or one of those mid-west American frontier states in the 1860s which actually was a photograph of a University. And it was one of the first things that the pioneers of the West of the United States thought of doing - obviously it was a lot simpler to start a University back in the 1860s because you probably just needed a couple of Latin and Greek books and things like that. But, you know, it struck me that if the American pioneers could do it, we should be doing something about it. And the other things was that the longer we left it the longer it would take and in fact people might come to accept that the Community College is good enough and we'll just keep sending our kids that are going to uni for the, you know, sort of higher degrees, we'll just keep sending them South or we'll go south. So you know, it was a principle really of Self-Government that we had do something about it.

So I convinced, and I think, I don't want to take the credit, but I think it was I who convinced by cabinet colleagues that we better harness ourselves to the plow of getting a Northern Territory university, and our way of going about it was to approach the Federal Government through the Education Minister, who I think was John Carrick in those days, through the Prime Minister, and of course money's always tight, it doesn't matter when it is, so there weren't too many roars of applause from Canberra at the thought of funding a Northern Territory university.

There were people who accused us of, you know, wanting, you know, castles in Spain, but it was an absolute necessity and the thing is, the longer you left it, you know if you said we'll
make do with the Community College, we wont do anything about the University, all that time is slipping away, years and years. And you know, you had to do it, you had to do it.

I suppose because we were the first government we had the feeling that there were things that we had to do. i mean we got together a lot of young men at the time - all poor old buggers now - who wanted to change things in the Northern Territory.

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We wanted to change things. We had young families. we wanted to make it a place where people wanted to live and so all of these things seemed obvious to us and quite clearly they weren't obvious to everybody. But if you wanted to live in the Territory, bring up your family in the Territory you wanted the normal social furniture and a university is part of the normal social furniture of any community.

03 Paul Everingham on: Rupert Murdoch as Chancellor

So I thought, 'well what can we do? '. And the fact was that Rupert Murdoch owned the Territory News - still does - and owned the Centralian Advocate. At that stage he was becoming well known nationally and on the International stage. So I managed to get hold of Rupert. Sat down with him, and I convinced him that he should lend himself to the cause by becoming the Chancellor of the Northern Territory university Planning Committee.

04 Paul Everingham on: Darwin Community College vs. The University

Gradually it began to take shape. Mind you, this was over the opposition, not open opposition, but I don't think the Community College really liked the idea because they could see themselves being supplanted.

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So I think that the people who worked at the Community College were probably briefing our political opposition because there were many speeches made in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly by members of the opposition - who i wont name - i could - i still remember - who were very much opposed to the formation of the University and for the retention of the Community College.

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The University was one of our policy platforms as was getting construction of the Alice to Darwin rail link, both of those were major policy platforms. So yes, we'd been given a mandate by the people of the Northern Territory to go after it and we weren't going to be diverted by in effect really, the insecure staff of the Community College operating through their parliamentary stooges.

05 Paul Everingham on: The role of the NT Government in getting a University

Without self government it never would have happened because it was really the Northern territory Government which pushed for the Northern Territory University and we were just
lucky to be able to hitch our chariot to a couple of famous people who gave us a leg up along the way.

06 Paul Everingham on: The role of the Commonwealth Government in getting a University

You don't go out and say to the Commonwealth 'hey you give us half and we'll pay the other half.' When you're the Northern Territory you go out and say to the Commonwealth 'You give it all to us please, because you left us like this'. we could say that then you see - it was 1978.

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We had very regular contact with Malcolm Fraser but it wasn't only the University we were asking for a whole lot of things, but Malcolm Fraser, you know I got along with him pretty well in those days. Haven't seen him for years, only hear about him in the paper now but, I took him fishing, did things like that, you know in the same way that you try to cultivate someone like Murdoch so he will help you, I tried to cultivate Malcolm Fraser, and I think we did a reasonable job between the lot of us in the cabinet.

07 Paul Everingham on: the Alaskan model of a University

Alaska and the territory are virtually the same except they've got ice and snow and we've got heat and desert sort of stuff. So, we've got the same challenges. We went to Alaska because we'd heard about the Alaskan model . The Territory had a number of towns: Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Darwin, Nhulunbuy and we wanted to try to spread the thing as much as we could if that was at all possible. And all the time I was talking to people like the Vice-Chancellor's committee of the Australian Universities as well. You know, I don't mean to be offensive but they were terribly snobby about, well what I considered snobby, about their idea of a university. i mean their idea of a university was ivy covered towers, the gleaming spires of Oxford sort of approach. And we were trying to get something that would really meet the needs of the Northern Territory with its small, widely spread population.

08 Paul Everingham on : His claim in 1980 that there would be a University in 18 months.

Well I might have been over confident but it wasn't any good saying it's going to take 7 or 8 years because that would have allowed the public servants to slip it out to 18 years.

09 Paul Everingham : reflections

I don't know what I imagined when i was sort of fighting for the university . To me it wasn't bricks and mortar, it was ideas and giving young people a chance to achieve qualifications in their own home community.

If you tried to mention everybody, there'd be a list of credits that went rolling on for a long time. But you know the University was really the product of the efforts of many many people . But it's now become almost a city in its own right last time I visited.