

Women on top in Cairns

CAIRNS has stepped into Queensland's history books – and possibly Australia's – with news that a troika of women will now hold the top three jobs at Cairns Regional Council.

Trouble-shooting CEO and general manager Lyn Russell – currently in charge at Wagga Wagga City Council in New South Wales – will form a historic threesome at the helm of Cairns Regional Council with Mayor Val Schier and Deputy Mayor Margaret Cochrane.

"It's unprecedented as far as I'm aware in Queensland," said Local Government Association of Queensland executive director Greg Hallam.

"We've had some good examples previously of a mayor and CEO being both women, but none in recent times in a big, significant council. One example is Dr Jane Lomax-Smith, the Lord Mayor of Adelaide City Council, and former Adelaide chief executive Jude Munro, who is now CEO of Brisbane City Council.

"Another recent example is Sarina Shire Council prior to amalgamation, whose mayor and CEO were both women."

Cairns Regional Council voted unanimously to give its top job to Ms Russell after more than 40 applicants from Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and United States were whittled down to a shortlist of six and then two "preferred" candidates. She has previously worked

● ROZ PULLEY

at Brisbane City Council and was Thuringowa City CEO from 1998-2008 before losing her job in last year's amalgamation.

Her skills in workplace reform, human resources and leadership development have been recognised with a number of awards – most notably the titles of Telstra Queensland and Australian Business Woman of the Year in 1996.

Ms Russell was also named Local Government Managers Association of Queensland Manager of the Year in 2001 and was last month awarded the Local Government Managers Australia NSW Professional Manager of the Year.

Cr Schier said all councillors felt Ms Russell "was the outstanding applicant".

"We had a very high calibre applicant pool ... and Lyn was the person who was the most meritorious because of her skills and her experience.

"I think it will be a fresh start for council. I think Lyn will bring new ideas. She was renowned in Thuringowa for the way she operated, particularly in the way she engaged with the community, so we're really looking forward to the enthusiasm and the passion and the skills she does bring."

Cr Schier said it would be unusual to have a woman mayor and CEO. "I don't know that there are that many women



LEADING ROLE: Lyn Russell was last week named Cairns Regional Council's new chief executive officer.

CEOs, as indeed there aren't that many women as mayors. I think there are only 11 of us out of the 73 in Queensland.

"But in the end it's nothing to do with gender. It's about competence and ... being able to do the job of managing a \$330m

business with 1400 staff."

Ms Russell – who replaces former CEO Noel Briggs – will take up her new job on November 16, with acting CEO Peter Tabulo returning to his role of general manager of planning and environment.

Som on mission

■ From Page 1

SOM went from domestic servitude to child labourer on construction sites before securing work in trekking, where he became fluent in English, Japanese and saved the lives of an Australian man and a British woman.

"A high altitude attack can happen in a second – anytime for anybody. You have to use high altitude first aid and carry them down as fast as you can to low altitudes to get oxygen."

One grateful client helped sponsor him to Australia, where he has continued his education, gained his citizenship and secured work as an interpreter and teacher aide.

Som is now keen to spread the word about his charity endeavours through speaking opportunities at schools, businesses, workplaces and service clubs like Rotary and Lions.

"I want to talk to people and tell them what can be achieved with \$10. It can make people's lives different over there. Every cent can buy a pencil. Every 5 cents can buy an exercise book, every \$1 can buy a whole set of pens and pencils," Som said.

"I'm also looking for people to come with me to Nepal in December and see the work that has been happening. I'm planning to finish inside the building of the orphans' house and four of the classrooms and buy resources like desks, benches, a blackboard and whiteboard."

"I would like people to spend time with the students and teach English if they have time. That's what I'm looking for.

"If they want to do other activities in Nepal, there are so many things to do and see there – climbing, trekking, jungle safaris. You can see tigers, elephants, rhinoceros, red pandas."

● For more details, contact Som Tamang at Friends of Himalayan Children on 0439 782 563, write to PO Box 5213, Cairns, 4870, or email friendsofhimalayan@gmail.com. Annual membership to FHC is also available for \$10.



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