



Kerry Vincent MLC

Legislative Council

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Electorate: Prosser

Mr PRESIDENT - I remind members that during the member's speech we listen in silence and the only interjection should be in line with the contribution from the member.

I call on the honourable member for Prosser.

[11.56 a.m.]

Mr VINCENT (Prosser) - Thank you, Mr President. It is nice to be looking at you from a different angle.

I can honestly say that in 14 years of being mayor, I do not think anybody brought me a glass of water as I made a speech. The girls at the council used to bring a lot of other things to get me through. I thank all members for the vigorous debate this morning that has got through to close to 12 o'clock.

Thank you for the opportunity to review my journey to enter this time-honoured Chamber. I take this opportunity to inform fellow members what has influenced and driven me to enter this place.

For over 40 years I have watched, with interest, the Tasmanian parliament. To now be an elected member of the Legislative Council is an honour and a most humbling experience.

Back in the distant time of the 1980s, I used to subscribe to *Hansard* and spent most nights and many hours reading through the vigorous debates of the other place, and enjoyed discussing these debates with anybody who would listen. I ran out of friends very quickly.

Now, after four decades and approximately 13 past requests to run for politics in various forms, I am finally here to play my part.

Firstly, I need to thank the many people who gave me support and encouragement, not only in this election, but also during my 14 years on the Sorell Council. The efforts and commitment of so many people will never be forgotten by me.

Foremost in my mind is to say a huge thank you to my family and staff at Rural Solutions. For a business person to make the transition into the public arena, they must have the utmost faith in those who are left to run their operations and I have been fortunate to have had incredible support to make that transition.

My son, Brent, partner, Jan, and daughter, Danielle, have given me the confidence and support to follow my passion and visions for my communities. I am very proud to say that in 20 years of working with Brent, we have never argued or fought on what we

need to do or the direction the business had to go, although it is fair to say he might have told me where to go quietly behind my back, and I do not think it was to the Legislative Council.

In fact, it is more than just a rumour that my staff have continuously found countless community projects and missions to keep me busy and away from my businesses in recent years. I am proud to say that my granddaughters are now also playing a solid part in our family business after school, weekends and on school holidays. Although we do not have titles in our business, one is the CEO and the other one is the general manager, which gives you an idea of their influence on us.

Just like me, my extended family still feel uncomfortable looking at my mug shot on all the election material, but some of my grandchildren find it of great amusement to play spotto with 'Poppy Kez' and do not understand why all these signs appear and then disappear almost overnight. We have just had to tell them it is one of the great mysteries of local and state politics.

My staff at Rural Solutions have never complained as I continuously come and go, working on behalf of my community or spending hours pacing around our site with my phone glued to my ear. Over the years, they have handled queries, assertive and sometimes abusive residents with total professionalism. My appreciation to them cannot be overstated.

I consider myself extremely fortunate to have always enjoyed a solid level of community and business support since I first stood for council as mayor. I was humbled to receive similar support in running for this position across the Prosser region. To all the residents across the entire region, I say a huge thank you and I can assure you that I will be committed to being a conscientious, thoughtful and effective representative for you.

In such a short and sharp campaign it is difficult to be everywhere and I need to acknowledge the support and drive of the small but effective Liberal election team, headed by Peter Coulson. Their drive was impressive, especially straight after such a big effort with the state election.

There are so many supporters and volunteers behind every one of us as members who go largely unnoticed but who will always be appreciated and respected for their focus and efforts by us all. I am not sure what words I can say to thank Ms Jane Howlett, whose constant encouragement, pestering and badgering gave me the confidence to take on this role. I really appreciate the fact that Jane decided to move to the other place just to give me the opportunity to stand here today as a member of the upper House. I say thank you and I do appreciate your friendship and support. PS, thanks for the office too.

I also mention the support from all the members and our staff here at the Tasmanian parliament who have made this transition so much easier and more bearable. Regardless of age and experience, I still think this is a very daunting role to take on and thank you to everybody involved.

My journey started 63 years ago as the first of three sons and a daughter for mum and dad, Eric and Aileen Vincent. Dad was a very proud young man from the thriving

metropolis of Mathinna where cows just wandered up and down the main street. I think they call them mobile lawn mowers today. Mum was an attractive young girl from Fingal. Many people laugh when you say you come from Mathinna, but it is the ex-home of Eric Reece and that was something Dad was always very proud of.

Many school holidays were spent holidaying and running amok on the uncle's farm, and although we do not have any family left in Mathinna, we still call it our hometown with pride.

Mum and Dad were professional corner store operators, founding members, for anybody in the room old enough to remember, of the Four Square corner store group. Dad was fond of his grey dust coat and was the classic corner grocer who had a joke and a laugh with all the regulars and would carry out their boxes of groceries and put them in their car and even run it home for them if they needed it.

This is something we still do today in our rural supply business. Old habits stay strong and do not go away. Dad always said, trust everyone, treat everyone the same way you would like to be treated yourself and you cannot go wrong. I believe, and have always found this to be very accurate.

Dad, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, worked for Golden Fleece Petroleum for several years and I can only just remember going to work with him on the weekends and being terrified by the big German shepherd guard dogs they used back then. I do not have many regrets in life, but one is that I did not keep all that Golden Fleece memorabilia gear because it is worth a fortune now.

When I was starting primary school we moved back into the corner store grocery trade at Latrobe and Mum and Dad were in their element, working long hours but doing what they loved. Our house was connected to the shop and my bedroom backed onto that. Many a time I would wake up and hear noises coming from the shop, get up and want to know where my porridge was and think it was time to go to school only to find out it was 2 or 3 a.m. and Mum and Dad were still working in the shop.

A normal day started before 6 a.m. and just kept going and this is very much my work ethic today. If you are awake, you need to be working or at least doing something positive and constructive.

Back then, bread was wrapped every morning in sheets of tissue paper. Lollies were in bulk boxes loose, no plastic at all. They were six for a cent, from memory, and you picked them up with your bare hands and put them into a little paper bag and for 20 cents you had enough to rot your teeth for a week.

Sliced meat was handled the same and guess what? No-one died of shop germs, or at least no-one I know of.

I stacked return soft drink bottles and weighed up bags of spuds, carrots, pollard and wheat after school. We all played our part in making the business work.

I was a scrawny kid. Yes, I know that is hard to believe now, but it was true. I was doing okay at school but should have done better, so I better say sorry, Mum. I loved sport - basketball, football, cricket, athletics and then in later life, rowing.

If you were not stacking shelves or scrummaging for cordial bottles to make some extra cash - and yes, we did have a container deposit scheme back in the 1960s and 1970s and very modern back then we were; probably, we ought to have a go at it again - you were playing sport, fishing or getting into mischief. We climbed trees, we fell out of trees, we hurt ourselves, but we always recovered.

We built some amazingly dangerous billy carts. We crashed, we took plenty of skin off. We walked and biked everywhere. We built bonfires and blew things, like letter boxes, to pieces with an arsenal of firecrackers back in those days that was more impressive than many nations' military capabilities today. If anybody can remember the threepenny bangers, they were very similar to a stick of gelignite.

Even better, Latrobe had Darrel Baldock back from St Kilda, fresh from that amazing premiership win. I still love seeing Collingwood lose, especially by one point. Darrel took Latrobe to six grand finals in a row, winning the first four, and it felt like everyone in the town went to the footy every Saturday.

Latrobe was a buzzing and electric little town then and it was an awesome place to grow up during my early years.

High school was spent at Devonport High School. More sport, another corner store, more work before school and the member for Mersey's mother was actually my PE teacher at high school. I just ran into her again recently and she reminded me.

Devonport was also a great place to grow up. Everything you needed was within walking or cycling distance. Mum and Dad were too busy to run us anywhere unless it was very wet.

Dad for several years now had as a sideline being the local coroner and this brought a different dynamic to our home; every death, every car accident, every suicide. And yes, there were heaps back then too; every child drowning and there were heaps of them as well. Dad seemed to take all these cases very personally. He always showed compassion, empathy and a caring nature to all the families and friends and the police he was involved with.

Our family had tried to carry these same qualities with us through our own lives and I became very aware at a very young age how fragile life can be and how important it is to make every moment count.

Holidays for me were visiting various uncles' farms at Mathinna, Barton and Danbury Park. I always enjoyed the school holidays trips as they were the only real holidays we had.

The only days we had together as a family away from the shop were Good Friday and Christmas Day and I knew how demanding it was to run a family business, so we cherished these days. All of us did not see it as an issue because we did not know anything different. We had a loving, caring family that worked hard and what else did we really need? My father was, and my mother still is, two of the most genuine and caring people I have ever been associated with.

As high school was coming to an end, I had always had an interest in building things, not just huge bonfires and billycarts. I received an apprenticeship with T.G. Matthews and just loved working as a construction carpenter, working all over the north-west and west coast on numerous jobs including schools, warehouses, regional water scheme projects, subdivisions, motel complexes and even a couple of community swimming pools, which I have learned not be associated with these days.

I somehow survived my apprenticeship. Apprenticeships back then were a lot harder and tougher than they are today. I started work as a leading hand and junior foreman, but work proved very fickle and spasmodic. I spent four years working an extra job on night patrols for Wormald Security. This opened my eyes to the after-dark life of many, and the shady things that go on while most sleep. It also taught me how far you can push yourself without proper sleep. The body always tells you when it has gone far enough. But I forgot to listen. But this is what I had to do to get a start in life.

Married life came my way and we were building our first home bit by bit. Money was tight, so we did what we had to. We only spent each month what we could afford to and what we had in the bank. We scrounged material wherever and whatever we could find. Birthday and Christmas presents were things that we needed for the house - hot water cylinders, toilet cisterns, power tools and timber beams, to name a few. But we used to get in the spirit, and wrap some of them and present them to us just to say we were giving one another something.

I drew the plans myself - footing plans and engineering plans. I built it with the help of friends and is still a beautiful 18 square home today, built for the princely sum of \$34,000, and that was land included. Those were the days. No red tape or over-the-top expensive experts to be seen back then. Common sense ruled, and I loved it. The first house took me four years to build, bit by bit. During this time we lost our first child two hours before his birth. Devastating to say the least, and frustrating because it took us six months to come up with a name for him - Scott Adrian. But life goes on and miracles do happen. Twelve months to the day later, Brent Phillip Vincent was born. And yes, it had taken us another six months to get another decent name, and we did not even know it was a boy until he popped out.

Life was good again, and with Brent in our lives, building the house, and helping a couple of mates build theirs as well, we just did not stop. Danielle came along two years later and I was the proudest dad around. I had moved out of construction work and taken a job in the food service industry. My new boss said to me during the interview, 'Your mum and dad were good people and workers in their shop and always paid on time, so if you are as good as them, you can start next week'. I did not have a resume back then. I was that keen to impress him that I was as good as Mum and Dad, I showed up the next day and did three days for nothing.

Working for North-West Frozen Foods, now PFD, was made for me. I loved the industry. I loved the variety of customers - everything from a school canteen to a takeaway to larger outlets, outlets like the casinos. I became very accustomed to working in the freezer at -20° and I figured if I ran and worked hard enough, I did not get too cold; although that used to last about two hours. It was interesting, as I started to become a rep, that they made me the state rep for Robert Timms coffee, even though I have only ever tried to drink coffee four times in my life and failed on each attempt.

But I could sell it. I repped the west coast and the north-west coast, and over my time before getting into management I covered nearly every town and food outlet in Tasmania.

My rise through the company from storeman, to driver, to representative, to manager of the Launceston branch, was assured. In Launceston, we took over the old Peters Ice Cream site in Talbot Road and redeveloped it into, at the time, the most modern food distribution site in Tasmania. I was in my element again, managing a major building redevelopment, growing a food distribution business into the largest in the state. However, long hours, big responsibility and a nonstop industry took its toll on my young family.

I soon found myself a single father with Brent and Danielle both at primary school. I had 50 per cent custody, but for the first three years enjoyed their time about 80 per cent of the time. I was lucky that Mum had taught me to cook, iron, sew - even to knit, though I only ever managed scarves - and clean.

I was on the go 16 to 18 hours a day, but work was fantastic, allowing me to have the family at work before and after school. Staff became their surrogate carers, which was pretty handy because I could not manage Danielle's tight curly hair at the time. The office girls used to come in early in the morning just to do her hair and fight over who was going to do it.

We made it work. It was not easy; plenty of hurdles, plenty of tears, but we made it work.

We were now called All Foods and the Launceston branch had grown from 24 to 72. Burnout was sitting on my shoulder every day and starting to weigh pretty heavy, but I never lost sight of the fact it was not 72 employees I had, it was 72 families. I always tried to treat them as family.

The business was controlling all aspects of my life, and something needed to change. On the evening of my 40th birthday, that something appeared before me and a new relationship moved along quite quickly and a new direction and business venture was formed.

Jan number one - you will understand the 'number one' in a minute - was just buying her parents' businesses, Loone's Rural Service at Westbury and Chudleigh and I was out of control with enthusiasm to redevelop and grow the business. We needed a house for a larger family - now six - so a new home was designed and away we went. Déjà vu: you better believe it.

I think this is what you call history repeating itself. I had not taken proper holidays for years, but now with four children we started to have at least two weeks away each year. But I had to take work with me and pump the phone most days just to stay in touch. Phone in one hand, cold drink in the other. Just had to do that to look relaxed.

We expanded our network to include a small business with potential at Sorell. It only had two staff, and the new store required me to spend three to four days a week in

the south of the state. Yes, history was repeating itself, but I was just happy growing the family business.

Money has never been my driving force. Achieving what I focus on has and always will be. I could see what I wanted and knew where I wanted to get to, and that vision drove and motivated me.

Another two stores were planned and, to be fair, that was probably the straw that broke the camel's back. I found myself single again after five years and ended up buying the Sorell store from the family business and down to Sorell I moved.

The year 2006 started as a very sad year but ended with great enthusiasm, vision and passion to rebuild my life again. Moving to Sorell was the best business and life decision I have ever made, although I did not know it at the time.

No money and feeling vulnerable, everything that I had went into the purchase of the new store, a store called Rural Solutions Tasmania. I did not have collateral to borrow for the stock or for a house. My brother, Nigel, and his beautiful family put me up in their caravan and even mortgaged their house, to give me enough money for stock and a float in the till on the first day. Their love and support got me through some pretty tough times. I would run to the bank every morning to ensure I could pay the bills as they came in, and Brent and I have been very proud that we have never paid a bill late.

I moved out of the caravan and into a 40-foot shipping container. Luxury to say the least. It was obviously very small, compact and simple, but when I locked myself in there each night, all I had to do was concentrate on my business. It kept my focus.

Business was growing at 30 per cent per annum and it was crippling to keep up with that growth. We grew to seven staff and Brent moved down to join me in the business. This growth was absorbing everything we could make and do, but I was in heaven again.

Brent was starting a family, so I decided to stay in the container for a few more years. It was more important for his family to feel secure. I scraped together a deposit for one block of land and then another block of land for myself. Then we started to build a house for him and his family. I felt very proud to have my son working alongside me in my own family business, building his home as well as building a family legacy.

In 2009, I started to build my own home, stretching myself mentally, physically and definitely financially. What else did I have to do? I did not know anything different. After six years of living in my homely container, I moved into my new house. I did not know what to do with all that space, but it felt fantastic.

Business was still growing. We had taken on agencies - Polaris, Stihl, Honda and Cub Cadet. I am extremely proud that our little family rural business, in little old sunny Sorell, is able to attract, secure and succeed with four international companies, which are all leaders in their fields. We have now grown to 14 staff.

I was enjoying being involved with Rotary, and was secretary for two years and then president. I have always believed that as a member of a service club like Apex,

Lions and Rotary, it is possible to do your bit and be involved in positive change in your community, your state, nationally and even internationally. You can do your little bit to change the world if you really want to.

It was a good year, 2012. I had a new home, I met this beautiful lady called - surprise, surprise - Jan number two. Even my dear mum thought that history might be raising its head again.

Since moving to Sorell, I have had a little voice in my head which kept telling me to get involved in the local community. My first thought was to see if Bendigo Community Bank would be interested in establishing in Sorell. I did not know many people, but thought it would work well and after having been scarred by the big four banks when trying to restart my business, I thought a new bank might stir up the market a bit.

In 2008, the newly formed Sorell Business Association helped me put a steering committee together and after some amazing work, from an amazing group of supporters, we opened our branch in Sorell. Over the last 13 years we have continued to grow and put local wealth back into the local community.

I am very proud of our community bank and what it has done for our region and municipality, and we have put well over \$500,000 back into our local community. The work and friendship of Janice McConnon, Rick Burch and Anthony Davis has seen our community bank continue to grow and will continue for many more years to come. I will be stepping down as chair next week and that will be like cutting off an arm.

In 2009, after some nudging and support, I decided to have a go at running for council. A very nervous, small but effective campaign saw me elected and three years later, was somewhat pushed into standing for mayor.

In November 2012 I was elected as the new mayor. My theory was simple; I had written down a list of community projects that everyone talked about, wanted and had not followed up or had not been able to get funding for, plus added a heap of my own. My plan was simple - just get them done.

I can report with pride with the support of the government and the management of council during the last 12 years, we have not missed one single project on that list of well over 50 projects, plus a fair few more along the way.

Councillors gave me full support and away we went, except for one issue that got in the way in January 2013. We saw bushfires dominate the news, decimating lives, families and, to say the least, turned our region on its head.

I could talk for a very long time about this recovery project, the issues, problems, people's lives and amazing resilience I saw, but I will not, other than to say with the incredible support of the then premier, Lara Giddings, and the dedicated team from the community and government, we did our best to assist the affected communities. I think we did all right.

During and since that point in time, I have been involved with each disaster, both floods and fires here in Tassie, as well as advising nine disasters on the mainland as well. That is something that is very special and close to my heart these days.

I could not discuss my time at council without thanking the support from my previous deputy mayor, Brett MacDonald, who always had my back and he still does. He knows when I need a drink and a quiet chat.

The dedication of general manager, Robert Higgins, and his managers, Jess Hiuchen and Russell Fox, who worked with me to develop Sorell Council and it is one of the most effective and sustainable councils in the state; all off a very limited rate base.

We did not always agree, but we always supported one another for the benefit of the community.

I also thank Sonia and Stacey, two of the ladies I work with in the community department, who every Christmas and Easter dressed me up as Bugs Bunny or the Naughty Elf or Santa Claus to do various videos. I do apologise, but there is still video evidence of those occasions.

I would also like to acknowledge the huge commitment, guidance and assistance of so many of the past and present members of the Hodgman, Gutwein and Rockliff governments; the departmental staff who have been on my direct dial list for the last decade and for almost always taking my calls. All of what I have achieved as mayor would not have been possible without these relationships, partnerships and guidance.

Especially, I would like to note Stu Hollingsworth, who now is with Jobs Tasmania; and Matt Healey, who moves around various departments, but after the Dunalley bushfires, used to call him my patron saint. Both these people within this government have had their steady hand of influence on my shoulder for many years.

There has been the most amazing honour to be part of bringing to Sorell so many much-needed projects like the school rebuild, new police station, the South East Stadium, highways, bypasses, countless subdivisions and associated works. However, the one that I am so proud of and filled with privilege to be part of is the Employment and Training hub.

This concept of linking local businesses' requirements to local labour, young and maturing to target training and then strengthen local families and community by developing was developed out of my employment and training frustrations as a manager, experienced over 30 years.

To see the project now accepted and replicated around the state, as well as supported nationally and now being picked up overseas, gives me unexplainable pride. The dedication from Andrew Hyde and his staff at best has been inspirational in following my dream of changing the way we look at employer, employee and training requirements.

The fact we have merged economic advice for young and emerging businesses into the training requirement has created the system which has produced unprecedented support and success for all parts of the region. It shows us what can be achieved from good local people with passion and vision for their community.

This is a subject I can talk at length on, but not today, other than to say the member for Huon a few weeks ago, in this very Chamber, said he wanted to see solutions. I can strongly say I have had the opportunity to assess many issues and have been successful in developing many solutions. With this new role I hope to continue.

Although I have moved away from my position as mayor, I do not feel I have left the community. The entire south-east and Prosser region has always been part of my business and local government area, so my feelings are I have just stepped up to take on an even bigger and broader role on behalf of my communities.

Over the last 16 years, I have served on the board of the South Eastern Community Care, caring for and helping aged and NDIS clients enjoy their lives in their own home and community. Last September, we merged with District Nursing, forming a solid Tasmanian aged care provider with over 350 staff. I cannot even start to explain how awesome it has been to be associated with this business and the industry.

In concluding, I now need to acknowledge that Jan number two - from this day on, there will be no number two - number one - has made historic and enormous efforts to bring balance to my life.

Sort of.

Sometimes.

Okay, she tries.

Grandchildren have now taken over our lives with amazing vigour, but even this pleasure of life has caused me some serious issues. I have always been extremely special to my mother, being her first born, or so I thought. In recent years, I have fallen down the list of favourites to be somewhere behind Jan and all of Mum's three great and nine great grandchildren. I can live with that most of the time, because it has shown me just how special this lady called Jan is and how much love she has brought to our family.

Jan did not hesitate in giving me full support to take on this new role, even though many said I was foolish and should be winding down for retirement, telling me to leave it to somebody else. Jan said, 'if you want to do it, and you always have, just do it with all the passion that you apply to everything else in life.' That is what I plan to do.

I can say with the utmost confidence I am excited to be starting a new stage of my life in this place and will continue to focus on being a positive influence to my family, my community and Tasmania.

Thank you, Mr President.

Members - Hear, hear.