

THE WEEKLY TIMES - 125 YEARS OLD

The editor of the Weekly Times, Nick Trompf, looks at a 1994 anniversary.

Australia's oldest and biggest-selling rural newspaper is celebrating a significant milestone in 1994.

The Weekly Times reaches its 125th anniversary, a worthy achievement for any newspaper but a remarkable one for a publication which has been so reliant on the fickle fortunes of agriculture for much of its existence.

The paper was first published on 11 September 1869 by a group of Melbourne businessmen who owned the now-defunct Daily Telegraph.

The businessmen wanted The Weekly Times to be a journal of political and social news and criticisms. "Independence, thorough, fearless, enlightened and incorrupt, is, so far as journalism is concerned, a virtue in itself..." the first editorial decreed.

Six years later The Weekly Times merged with two rural publications, The Economist and The Town and Country.

Then in May 1892 the Daily Telegraph company sold its buildings and mastheads to the Herald group, which has published The Weekly Times continuously since.

In its 125 years, The Weekly Times has successfully juggled a unique mix of news, information and entertainment to service largely readers beyond the metropolitan areas and major country centres (although it has significant sales in these places).

Today it retains its mantle as the most popular rural newspaper (easily) with the latest audited circulation 86,093 copies per week.

To celebrate the 125th anniversary, the paper has planned a year of festivities. Within its pages will be a series of special 125th anniversary features on major industries as well as regional towns and cities.

There will be nostalgic promotions and giveaways, including commemorative



posters and a restored FJ ute.

The paper is producing a commemorative book and has a bumper anniversary edition planned for September.

It is also taking a special display to the country to remind all of the heritage of Australian agriculture and its importance in our history.

It promises to be a year to remember.

THE HUMAN TISSUE ACT & ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR JOURNALISTS

Organ donation and transplantation was a topic frequently covered by the press during 1993. The Australian Coordinating Committee on Organ Registries and Donation (ACCORD) monitored over 400 features on the issue between January and December, and new developments in the field should see journalists maintaining their interest well into the future.

ACCORD commends the interest shown by journalists in the issue. Indeed, journalists, and the positive human interest angles they adopt, can receive much credit for the recent increase in Australia's organ donation rate. Nevertheless, there exist several legal aspects which journalists, editors and media proprietors should be aware.

The Human Tissue Act of 1983 was not only formulated to protect the organ donor, their family and the

medical profession by establishing regulations on organ donation procedure, but formulated to protect the transplant recipient through laws relating to confidentiality and disclosure of information.

Section 37 of this act has been formulated largely to protect the confidentiality of organ donor families and recipients. This means that information which may link the donor and the recipient must not be disclosed, and any disclosure of this type of information may result in a breach of the Human Tissue Act.

This sort of identifying information includes the date of the death of the organ donor or the date a recipient has received their transplant. These dates cannot be published as, by releasing this information, it is possible for individuals to trace a connection between a donor and a recipient, thereby leaving the organ donor or recipient open to coercion or bribery. Although

the Human Tissue Act in Australia prevents such connections being made, individuals from other countries without similar laws are not so protected and may suffer many inappropriate intrusions on their confidentiality.

Instead of publishing dates, it is possible to print the month or season an organ donation or transplant occurred. As many organ donations and transplants occur each month, and many are across state boundaries, it is extremely difficult to trace a connection between individuals. This method is the only safe way of ensuring the Human Tissue Act is followed, while still allocating an approximate time to the story.

Any other details on the Human Tissue Act and its ramification for journalists, editors or media proprietors is available from ACCORD on 02 391 9186.