



Paul Harris Recognition – Noel O'Brien

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Gerald and Lucille O'Brien, Noel's siblings - Mary, Gerald, John, Anne, Matthew, Lucille and Kathleen all went to St Therese's primary school in Essendon with the exception of Mary who passed away as a baby from influenza, then Noel went on to St Monica's and then to St Bernard's for his secondary education.

Noel met Carmel Pound from Essendon at a young age and decided very early that he would marry her; however he would have to wait his time. He did and at 21 he and Carmel were married, and after living in Sapphire St Essendon for a short time, moved to their current home in McCracken St Essendon some 50 years ago and as in the true O'Brien tradition started a big family. Noel and Carmel have 7 children, Peter, Brendan, Damien, Maria, Paul, Patrick and Timothy. All went to St Therese's, St Monica's and St Bernard's with the exception of Maria who went to St Columba's for her secondary education after primary school at St Therese's.

Growing up through the depression years, Noel and his family saw plenty of hardship and through this brought out unbelievable entrepreneurial skills that have been with Noel all his life. As young boys Noel and his brothers' started selling Snowballs and Peanuts at the Essendon Airport to help put food on the table at home. This grew rapidly to the idea that they could do the same thing at the Essendon football ground. Little did they know that when they jumped the fence and started selling their goods where it would lead them.

Noel and his brother Jack formed a formidable Partnership that lasted over 40 years, becoming the largest outdoor Catering Company in Australia. At one stage they were the Caterers for all the VFL grounds and many of the horse racing/trotting tracks, catering for the Royal Agricultural Shows in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide as well as many regional shows. They were the caterers at the Victorian Arts Centre and Leonda, to name but a few.

Jack retired in about 1979 and Noel, with the help of his son's Peter and Brendan, went onto to expand the business nationally. They bought an existing company in New South Wales and expanded the operation in Sydney winning contracts at the SCG, White City and many other venues.

During this period of rapid expansion, Spotless Cleaning Company bought Nationwide Catering in an attempt to get a foothold in the outdoor catering business, forming the Spotless Group, eventually they also acquired O'Brien Catering. Noel then became a Director and major shareholder of the Spotless Group for more than 10 years. Noel continues to be a Director of the company that his sons own and operate, Redrock Leisure P/L which has over 30 Hotels and catering business' throughout Australia, which includes the very successful and unique Colonial Tramcar Restaurant.

Noel and Carmel and his children have been very generous Philanthropists during their family and business life, they have supported many charities both in Australia and throughout the developing world. Noel has always been committed to giving to others in need and his key towards generosity is in his ability to enable people to do more for others. He is the originator of making an offer and encouraging people to use the offer to a greater advantage and thereby raising more for the particular cause.

Noel has a deep commitment to the Developing world and this has led him to travel throughout India, working with groups helping to build hospitals, travelled on the back of a motorbike through Cambodia as part of a group helping to remove the landmines, as well as helping people in Peru to name a few and he has had amongst others, a real passion for the past 10 years to the plight of the people in East Africa.

Noel has been on countless Boards and Committees throughout his career, many for business but far more for charitable causes. There would be few octogenarians who still have as much passion, acumen, and involvement in business and charities, as well as the commitment to care for Carmel, whom he nursed at home until recently.