

The Canberra Times

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COMPETITION DETAILS - PAGE 5



BROWNLOW WINNER



JIMMY BARTEL - PAGE 24

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2007

FROCKS & FLESH

RED CARPET FASHION - PAGE 6



Mystery bid for Wright home

EXCLUSIVE

By Rosslyn Beeby
Science and Environment Reporter



PLEA: ANU vice-chancellor Ian Chubb wants poet Judith Wright's legacy to be saved.

A Canberra businessman, environmentalist and philanthropist is negotiating to buy poet Judith Wright's bushland home near Braidwood from the ACT office of the Duke of Edinburgh Award, and wants it to be used for ecological research and as a writer's retreat.

The mystery buyer - believed to have long-standing family connections in the Braidwood area - has contacted the Award and the property's previous owners, the Australian National University, to discuss the purchase.

Chief executive of the ACT Award Mark Baker said he would meet the prospective buyer today to discuss conditions of sale and was hopeful an announcement concerning the future of the property, known as Edge, could be made later this week.

Mr Baker said preliminary discussions with the prospective buyer indicated he "wished wholeheartedly to respect the heritage values of the property".

If the sale went ahead, the buyer had expressed an intention to work closely with the ANU and local writers' groups to ensure the property was used for the purposes originally stipulated by Wright, he said.

The 41.4ha bush property, with solar-powered cottages designed to Wright's specifications, was initially bequeathed by the poet to the ANU for ecological research in 1984, but in 1999 the university told Wright and her daughter, Meredith McKinney, it had no further use for it.

The ANU gifted the property to the Award for \$1, under the condition it agree to not subdivide, transfer or sell the land until 2014, "unless such subdivision, transfer

or sale becomes necessary for the Award's purposes".

The Award - a global organisation which promotes youth leadership - also agreed to respect the original spirit and purpose of Wright's bequest.

The property has been listed for auction with a Braidwood real estate agent, but ANU vice-chancellor Professor Ian Chubb has formally asked the Award to reconsider its decision to sell the property and to work with the university to develop a shared-use arrangement to ensure Wright's legacy is protected.

"ANU has strengthened its focus on environmental research with the new Fenner School of Environment and Society and is prepared to work with the Duke of Edinburgh Award to structure a program consistent with the original intentions of Judith Wright," Professor Chubb said.

If that was not acceptable, the ANU was prepared to accept the property back from the Award on the same terms that it was originally on-gifted by the university before Wright's death in 2000.

"It would be a great pity for Judith Wright's legacy to be lost. She was a significant Australian, and the university agreed in 1999 to transfer Edge to the Award after proposals made by the Award satisfied ANU, and more importantly, Judith Wright, that the property would continue to be used in a manner sympathetic to her wishes."

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Canberra surgeons on cutting edge



WIDE AWAKE: Canberra Hospital neurosurgeon Vini Khurana performs brain surgery on Waramanga resident John James, who is fully conscious. Picture: Canberra Hospital

By Danielle Cronin
Health Reporter

It ranks among patients' worst fears but John James "wasn't worried" as he lay awake and unable to move while doctors performed groundbreaking surgery on his brain.

The 78-year-old retired bus driver had complete confidence in the Canberra Hospital team who saved his life by performing the delicate procedure described as a world first.

Mr James was suffering from a venous aneurysm - a large blister on a major vein in the brain behind his right eye - that was threatening to rupture and was causing vision loss. The Waramanga resident was awake as a medical team operated on his brain through a hole in his forehead.

"I couldn't move. It was the hardest part. I was pinned [down] and I could only see bits because I couldn't move my head at all," Mr James said.

"Everybody looked after me. I was answering questions... yes or no. I couldn't move my head so I moved my lips."

The medical team - made up of three neurosurgeons, one plastic surgeon, two anaesthetists and four nurses - took about six hours to perform the surgery on April 26.

Mr James was conscious for about 4½ hours during the critical points in the procedure.

SUCCESS: John James, 78, with surgeon Vini Khurana. Mr James said he made a "beautiful recovery" after the operation and was home within days.



One of the neurosurgeons, Vini Khurana, said the operation was unique because the team used high-tech equipment, employed the keyhole approach and ensured the patient was awake.

"As far as I'm aware reading the literature, this kind of thing done as a package has never been done before," he said.

Mr James, who celebrated his 78th birthday earlier this month, was experiencing blackouts and vision problems before he went to the doctor.

Dr Khurana said Mr James received a "questionable diagnosis" - that he had a brain tumour.

It was later discovered that Mr James had an aneurysm and required urgent surgery because the blister-like growth was "very prone

to haemorrhage" which could prove fatal.

Dr Khurana wanted the patient to stay awake to make sure that his eyesight was not damaged during the operation.

"We wanted to be sure in disconnecting this high-flow structure, we didn't in anyway impair his vision and so during this procedure he was awake, comfortable, talking," he said.

The team rehearsed using virtual-reality software before it tackled the actual operation.

The surgeons made a 1.5cm incision in the patient's forehead and cut-off blood flow to the aneurysm, which was 13mm high with a 1mm thick wall.

"The technology we used was quite extraordinary," Dr Khurana

said. "During the procedure through my left eyepiece in the operating microscope, I could see anatomy that I was operating on and through the right eyepiece, I could see the radiology.

"In other words, it's like GPS navigation you use in the car being injected into... your sunglasses as you drive."

Mr James - a father of two with three grandchildren and three great grandchildren - said he made a "beautiful recovery" after the surgery and was discharged from hospital within a few days.

"I had to sit for an hour to make sure everything was all right," he said.

"I just came back to normal after that."

Dr Khurana said Mr James had a follow-up scan six weeks after leaving hospital and there was no sign of the aneurysm.

"The bonus was that his vision improved tremendously after surgery as well, to the point where he hardly wears glasses any more," Dr Khurana said.

Since then, Canberra Hospital surgeons had performed a similar operation on a woman who needed a brain bypass to restore blood flow.

In a few days, a young boy would remain conscious as surgeons removed an extensive tumour in a "very high price real estate in the brain".

Senator sorry for pension remarks

By Emma Macdonald

ACT Liberal senator Gary Humphries has made a public apology for suggesting it was "a good thing" some pensioners had lived through difficult times, such as the Depression World War II, as it prepared them for life on the pension.

Senator Humphries, who is heading a Senate inquiry into cost-of-living pressures for older people, told ABC radio in Brisbane at the weekend that he could not survive on the single aged pension of \$268.85 a week.

"I mean, the rising living standards and expectations of Australians certainly would make that very hard for many of us to do," he said.

"I suppose you might almost say



OFFENCE: ACT Liberal senator Gary Humphries.

it's a good thing that many older Australians have lived through harder times and are used to the kinds of conditions that some of them now face."

But the comments drew an angry protest from seniors groups, with the National Seniors Association describing them as "grossly unacceptable".

Senator Humphries wrote a letter to Queensland paper, *The Courier Mail*, in which he said, "I intended to express empathy with the many on pensions who today face serious financial pressures; what I said however has been fairly criticised for its insensitivity. All the members of the Senate committee inquiry... keenly appreciate how difficult life is for many on the pension, and the words I used ought not to have suggested otherwise."

"I apologise to any who took offence at them."

Senator Humphries said yesterday the comments had come at the end of a very busy week in Parliament.

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Summer storms to hit capital

By Sonya Neufeld

Canberrans can expect an increasing number of violent storms - believed to be the result of climate change - this summer and are being urged to be prepared.

Up to 100 severe storms, which could include driving hail, cause flash flooding and have enough force to lift roofs, are expected to hit NSW and the ACT between October and March.

The ACT Government, along with the NRMA and the ACT State Emergency Service, launched yesterday a \$55,000 campaign called StormSafe to warn of the potentially destructive weather.

The news comes after Canberra was battered by three freak storms in December and February, leaving insurers with an estimated \$15 million bill.

A severe hailstorm brought Canberra's city centre to a standstill in February, with the Canberra Centre among the worst-affected buildings.

The storm's fury saw roofs collapse and several government and public buildings flooded.

But the NRMA said the worst



ICED UP: Hail drifts at the Australian National University last February.

storm hit on December 31, resulting in more than \$7 million in claims.

NRMA Insurance ACT operations manager Stephen Beatty said homes were far more likely to be damaged by storms than by fire or burglary.

"While we always tell our kids not to play with matches and are happy enough to habitually lock our doors when we leave home, we are not as attuned as a community to trying to prevent storm damage to our prop-

erty," he said. "But a significant proportion of storm damage caused by water entry or damage from debris can be avoided."

He said the most common type of claims following a storm were water intrusion and hail damage.

Bureau of Meteorology NSW regional director Barry Hanstrum said "super-cell" thunderstorms were the biggest threat.

He warned that they were

longer lived than typical storms but also highly localised, with an impact zone spanning as little as 10km.

"We see about 100 severe thunderstorms each summer, and a small proportion of those have the potential to be very devastating," he said.

Commander with the Woden SES unit Gordon McAlpine said the most important thing residents could do to prepare for the impending storms was to clean out their gutters "well in advance".

"We go to homes after these storms, the gutters are blocked and the water is running back inside the house, so we have to go up there and clean out the gutters," Mr McAlpine said.

"But people would save themselves a significant amount of money and repair if they cleaned them out before the storms hit, which would ensure their homes stayed a lot drier inside and were far less damaged."

He said the ACT SES received about 1500 calls for assistance every year, with most between September and February.

Continued Page 2

WEATHER

CANBERRA: Fine, sunny, 20

Chance of rain: 5%

Winds: W-NW, 20-30km/h

UV index: 6 (high)

Outlook: Fine

Yesterday: 2-22

Last year: 3-22

SYDNEY: Fine, mostly sunny, 23

MELBOURNE: Fine, 22

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