



Talk of the North

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Weighty issues may be heavy on your mind

It is hush-hush, but the 'freedom' docs are here

EXPECT to see a seismic change out there in general practitioner land when giant medical centre operator Independent Practitioner Network (IPN) opens its doors here in Townsville.

The group is in the process of looking for a site and right now the likeliest location is the former Freedom store in the Hyde Park Centre in Woolcock Street.

Freedom has done what just about every other big retailer in the city has done and relocated to Domain.

The owners of the Hyde Park Centre, a group of Mackay businessmen, feel that a large medical centre will be a good fit in that it will draw a lot of customers to the centre.

It's all hush-hush, secret squirrel business at this stage, but what I could glean yesterday was that the centre, when it opens, will accommodate 18 or more doctors.

Under the IPN structure the doctors all work for themselves and pay a fee to IPN which provides the office space, reception staff and nurses.

Patients select the doctor they want to see, and the doctors as a result build their individual businesses on their own ability to attract patients. On its website IPN bills itself as Australia's largest operator of medical practices.

Rub salt in wounds

THERE are rumblings among the party faithful over the inclusion of

the four alleged 'independents' in Mayor Tony Mooney's team for the March local government amalgamation election.

Grassroots members are sour that the four 'independents' – Chesney, Moyle, Keune and Jimmieson – were parachuted into Team Mooney despite the fact there had been 13 nominations from ALP members for the 12 elected council positions.

When the new council sits there will be 12 councillors plus the mayor.

One irate Laborite grumbled down the phone yesterday that the 12 elected positions could have all been filled by bona fide party members instead of ring-ins like Sandra Chesney and David Moyle who are there to boost Team Mooney's vote in Thuringowa.

Rubbing salt into the wound is the fact no plebiscite was held to elect candidates which meant the party's hoi polloi was excluded from the selection process.

They ain't happy and some of the stalwarts are threatening to make themselves unavailable when it comes to handing out how-to-vote cards and doing letter box drops.

Super-size muffin

BOWEN Mayor Mike Brunker's weight loss program code-named Project Fighting Weight hit a hitch recently when the big fella encountered a super-sized muffin during a tour of Abbot Point.

Cr Brunker joked late last year that he was on a mission to lose 64 kg – a feat which would see him

drop from 120 kg to his 'fighting weight' of 56 kg. No mean feat.

But, as you can see from the photo, the muffin came off second best in the first round.

Prep year debacle

THIS whole Queensland preparatory year thing is starting to take on the look of a regurgitated dog's breakfast.

A mate of mine who lives on a remote station was planning on sending his young daughter to board on a weekly basis in his nearest town so that she could attend prep year at the local school.

The plan suffered a set back when it was discovered that as prep year is not compulsory he would have to pay full fees.

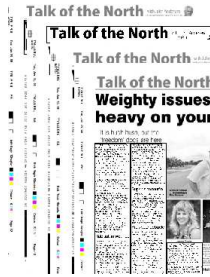
There are no subsidies whatsoever and the cost was just too burdensome.

As he has two children already boarding in the town on a weekly basis, it was a golden opportunity to acclimatise the youngest to school life and to allow her the opportunity of starting Year One in 2009 on a sound footing.

Now, it's not going to happen. A teacher friend told me over the holiday break that educators are worried that prep year is going to create split classes, especially in Year One.

The reasoning is that so many of the Year One kids who have done prep year will be streets ahead of those who haven't.

It will mean that teachers will



have one group of students in the same class advanced in numeracy and literacy and one group that is just starting to try and come to grips with it all.

It's not just a problem for city kids whose parents choose not to send them to prep. For bush kids who can't attend prep year it just seems downright unfair.

Holiday highlight

NO, retired Townsville property agent turned wannabe Tiger

Woods, David Chippendale, and his travel agent wife Maria were not on a tight budget when they holidayed in India over the festive period.

The pair, who have no trouble adjusting to the creature comforts of five-star travel, were forced to spend one night sleeping on the floor of a railway station in Mumbai after they missed a connection. The night, spent trying to catch 40 winks among the teeming hordes in Mumbai Central, was one of the highlights of their trip.



WEIGHTY ISSUE
 . . . Bowen Mayor
 Mike Brunker



Joanne Keune



NOT A CASE OF TIGHT BUDGET . . .
 Maria and David Chippendale spent the night at an Indian rail station