

How Bundaberg changed from being big 'over-grown mess'

By DENNIS NEVILLE

The introduction of the Victoria lawnmower to Bundaberg was one of the greatest things in the city, according to the Bundaberg City Council's Chief Health Surveyor, Mr Les Black.

Mr Black is in his 42nd year with the council and was recently congratulated on his years of service by the chairman of the council's health and General Purposes Committee, Ald Jeff Boreham, at a council meeting.

"The motor mower was one of the greatest things to happen to Bundaberg. A small thing that revolutionised the look of the city," Mr Black said.

"It changed the city from the overgrown mess into a place of neat and tidy gardens, overnight.

"At that time the council did the grass cutting in Bundaberg and on January the first, each year, the grass would be cut with horse-drawn drays with side cutters from George Street to Quay Street and from the Kennedy Bridge to the railway line. We didn't have the equipment to extend the service," he said.

Mr Black was born in Melbourne and completed his High School education in Bundaberg when his family moved here.

In 1942 a young Les Black joined the Australian Navy and spent three years on a Corvette in the Pacific region. In fact the Corvette was built in Maryborough, he said.

In 1946, after his discharge, Mr Black joined the Bundaberg City Council as a trainee health inspector. He did his practical training at the Health Department and the theory by correspondence.

The Health Department at that time was located where the barber shop is in the Civic Arcade. The main city dump was located in a creek bed near where the main dump is now.

A small town dump was located where Stewart's sheds are in Targo Street. At that time everybody burnt rubbish in their backyards.

"In those days there was not the amount of packaging. Packaging made a huge difference, increasing the amount to be removed."

The night soil man was also a big part of the Bundaberg health services in those days but the council terminated the contract and took it over in 1963 at the same time as it took responsibility for the removal of garbage.

The city was on a reticulated supply and only one-third of Bundaberg homes were on sewerage, now 16,500 homes are connected.

Mr Black said it was a pretty smooth transaction.

He said that also at that time Moreton Bay Figs were a big part of Bundaberg streets with Woongarra Street the prime example.

Mr Black said that although the trees looked good they proved a problem with kerbing and channelling, sewerage and the blockage of drains.

"The council had to remove the big old trees and plant more appropriate ones, eventually.

"Another big thing in Bundaberg was the removal of all post awnings outside businesses. It was a big programme needing a lot of persuasion and education. The post awnings were replaced with cantilevered awnings," he said.

"I remember that all street litter was picked up with a horse and dray, now we operate a street cleaning machine and we have a regular clean up programme.

"That programme started 25 years ago and reached a peak in the late 70s. Now a lot of people take their own rubbish to the tip," Mr Black said.

"Another big thing in Bundaberg was the introduction of the wheelie bin. The average person no longer needs to go to the dump.

"When I came into the Health Department there were two health surveyors, now there are four. Local government has expanded in all areas.

"Immunisation was also a big thing with first the Salk vaccine which involved four injections for polio immunisation and later the Sabin vaccine which is given orally," he said.

"I haven't heard of a polio case in Bundaberg for years."

Mr Black said another small thing that changed the appearance of the city was the use of pastel paints.

"Where before we had used bright colours or just not bothered the pastels virtually took over and everyone was painting. It was the trendy thing to do then," he said.

The housing boom at Walkervale is another fond memory for Mr Black.

"I remember when that area was all under water because there was no drainage. Now it has a fantastic drainage system.

"Fred Buss was the Mayor when I started with the council and he was followed by Cliff Nielsen whom many regarded as a conservative. In his young days he was very progressive and pushed hard for the Norville Drainage Scheme," Mr Black said.

He said that Allan Stewart came in as Mayor at a time when the council was shifting to a more businesslike approach.

"The council has not changed much over the years I have been with it. At least not the massive changes such as in the Maryborough City Council."

Mr Black will finish with the council in July 1989.



• Bundaberg City Council's Chief Health Surveyor, Mr Les Black, with a wheelie bin.