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OUR KOKODA CHALLENGE

I have rarely over the past 15 years shared personal experiences via the newsletter but for a number of reasons I thought it appropriate in relation to our recent trek of Kokoda. The track has become something of a pilgrimage for a growing number of Australians. As fate would have it the timing of our trip was quite incredible. We had just commenced the trek when that tragic air crash



occurred, taking 13 lives. Thank you to the people who enquired about our wellbeing. In December I told you about the loss last year, of our 19 year old son Elliot, to Motor Neurone Disease. The 'Kokoda Challenge' was under the auspices of the MND Association and aside from providing a memorable experience, was also a chance to raise funds for a disease that is incurable and claims one Australian every week. To that end I wanted to publicly thank the Burton family of Maitland Toyota, for their incredibly generous support. We also received donations from NIB and many wonderful individuals. The result between the 11 of us, who took up the challenge, was almost \$30000 above the costs associated with the trek.

We heard news of the crash the day after, via satellite radio. We stopped and prayed for those who perished; thereafter we were regularly reminded by helicopters passing overhead and while we realised such a tragic loss of life would cause headlines back home, we were oblivious to the extent of attention and concern it generated. We flew out from Kokoda nine days later, having by then passed four or five groups beginning their treks. One group included a fellow from Newcastle whose first news, after an update on the crash, was that Brian Smith (Knights Coach) had been sacked.

Kokoda is very tough physically and challenging mentally but that is why most people do it; along with the chance to pay tribute to the men who suffered unbelievable hardship in 1942, as they battled the terrain and Japanese. No tents or sleeping bags, living off (if lucky) bully beef & biscuits, little or no sleep and falling to malaria, dysentery and dehydration... while being shot at. It is almost impossible to contemplate but being there made it more real for us. We had a fabulous group led by an ex army Colonel who gave us daily briefings on the events on each part of the track. We were fortunate enough to meet two of the few remaining 'fuzzy wuzzy angels' (local villagers), who played a critical part as carriers for our diggers.

People who have experienced personal tragedy deal with it in different ways. We chose to honour Elliot's courage in the face of death, by undertaking the Challenge, in a place where bravery and death were constants

67 years ago. It seemed a fitting tribute given his 21st birthday occurred when we were on the track. Tragedy can be soul destroying and loss can be isolating but it also allows others to demonstrate the best in human nature, through compassion and kindness.

The Kokoda Track is awesome; stunning, serene but unforgiving. The villages are a welcome respite with warm smiles from the locals and beautiful children who capture your heart. We were well prepared because of fantastic help from others who'd done it before, so if you're thinking of doing it... and I am no expert by any means but happy to assist and answer any questions where possible. Besides it's a good chance for me to reminisce.

Regards,
Leah



P.S. A few months ago we had our third approach in as many years from a provider of discount property management services, to see if we wished to buy their business. In this case it is less than a year since they began comprehensive television and radio advertising, touting their discount services and apparent property management expertise. Again we declined, which saw them taken into the fold of a local real estate group. The business name remains but they are now an adjunct to a sales agency. This action answers any question as to how they might have sustained adequate service to owners and where the real priorities lay. I am in no way being smug but long term clients will know that one of my great concerns has been the devaluing of property management services and general misrepresentation by discount service providers, particularly when they claim to be 'specialists' providing equivalent services. We know they can't and don't. Most owners are savvy enough to work it out but it amazes me how many still get roped in or don't appreciate the risk.

INSULATION REBATE

– UP FROM \$1000 TO \$1600 & LJPM WILL ASSIST

The insulation assistance from the Federal Government has been increased for rental properties from \$1000 to \$1600, effective from 1st September. If you haven't yet taken the opportunity to access the assistance then the increase makes it more attractive and perhaps we can assist you. Having looked at it we feel it is a good opportunity for property owners but we realise for one reason or another many have not investigated the possibility or feel they don't have the time to sort through installers to arrange it. So having been approached by a number of installers in recent months, we decided to become a point of contact for you; we have established preferred suppliers who provide certain guarantees. We feel insulating may create some advantage for owners when it comes to securing tenants in the future. At worst it means not being disadvantaged and given the level of incentive offered by the Government, it makes sense. If you want to find out more you can use the website or 1800 number below. If it's something you want to take up, just contact your Property Manager and they will arrange the installer, who will facilitate everything from there. We will receive a fee from the installer to cover our costs but this will be covered by the fees they receive; you will receive a quote and it seems the \$1600 covers the vast majority of rental properties.

Some key information for you:

- The \$1,600 insulation assistance is an alternative to the \$1,600 solar hot water rebate; you cannot access both for the same property.
- The assistance is paid directly to the insulation installer, on behalf of the owner.
- The scheme runs until 31st December 2011 OR until funds have been fully allocated.
- If you have already commenced a project there are transition rules that you need to check.
- Find out more by calling 1800 808 571 or at www.environment.gov.au/energyefficiency
- If you wish to use LJPM's installers contact your Property Manager.

ACTUALLY THIS REALLY DOESN'T SURPRISE US...

Is it any wonder the industry struggles to shake off its negative image. This is an unedited copy of an email sent 22nd July to Commercial Property Manager Cassandra Fenwick, from her sister, who was renting a \$500 a week property in Sydney.

I wanted to tell you a funny story about our real estate, XXX.

I rang yesterday to tell her that we will not be renewing the lease and we will be vacating on the 5th September. That was all fine... We want to pay the rent for August and the 5 days in September on the 1st August so it's all done and dusted and I asked her to send me the amount through... she emailed me the formula to work it out myself...

BUT when I was on the phone she said that she would be really grateful if I could put together some fliers and drop them around the area advertising the villa for rent and if there were any real estate websites that I was using to search for a new place, could I also put an ad for this place on there. She said that if I found her a tenant for the property that she would pay me \$100 for my services!!!

How funny is that? I could not believe it! They are so dodgy. Anyway, thought I would tell you because I thought it was hilarious. Are they even allowed to ask to do that?!!!

ON THE OTHER HAND...

These are not our words and they reflect just one of the things that set us apart and truthfully, owners just don't get to see behind the scenes. Alana is one of our Leasing Consultants (with LJPM for over 12 years and formerly a Senior Property Manager) with over 20 years experience. We'll let the emails speak for themselves.

Saturday 1 August 2009 – 12.32pm

Hi Nick

Just wanted to check if you & your family are still looking for a rental property, I was still holding your application details and just wanted to see where you were at.

Regards, Alana

Sunday 2 August 2009 – 8.31am

Hi Alana,

Thanks for your thoughts, we finally signed a lease last week for a home up in Merewether and are moving in this weekend. It wasn't our ideal choice and more a matter of necessity due to the market not availing us a home with all our important requirements, but it is good and we will make it work nicely. The process to sign a lease with XXX for 10 days was frustrating and their communication non-existent; it was not a pleasant process.

I have thought of writing a review and send to all the agents in the area that we dealt with during our interstate move, from start to end. Maybe rate them in a list in terms of overall experience, No guesses for us who is at the bottom and who is at the top, dealing with you and Leah Jay was a pleasure so many thanks for showing us there are people and businesses in the area who are interested in more than just sealing a deal and numbers!

Cheers, Nick

Congratulations and good luck Rebecca

It was only in March that we introduced Rebecca as one of our 'quiet achievers', claiming that her relatively calm exterior hid a strong resolve and professional pride. Well to lend weight to that claim is the news that Rebecca has been selected as a finalist in this year's 'REI NSW Awards for Excellence'. It's quite an achievement to be a finalist and we're hoping it goes one step further when the awards are announced mid October.



Bec

Vicki

After working at a few local agencies, Vicki took up a Property Manager's role at East Maitland in July last year. Already something of an expert on properties on the western side of Maitland, Vicki has taken responsibility for the recently acquired portfolio centred on Aberglasslyn. Outside of work, it's outside at every opportunity for Vicki, with walking, camping and gardening the preferred pastimes.



Vicky

Toree

One of our Property Managers at Hamilton, Toree joined us in January 2008. With five years experience, Toree has had her share of the bizarre including what has been dubbed the 'turtle fire'. (We'll share this story next issue.) Respite for Toree comes via her passion for photography, adventure activities and travel, most recently five weeks in the States (New York being the pick for Toree).



Toree

SNIPPETS

ADVERTISING CHARGES – The overall cost of advertising for owners has gradually reduced with the need for regular newspaper ads declining. In most cases now properties are let using our website (over 300 visits a day) and Domain. Of course there is a cost to maintaining and using these but for owners this has been contained to a one off charge of \$55 when a property becomes vacant, which covers all web advertising and generally represents far better value.

LANDLORD NIGHTMARE 1 – In Pakenham Victoria an owner evicted a tenant for non payment of rent and found they left a few tyres behind...more than 500 of them, enough to fill two ten tonne trucks! And supposedly an inspection of the property had been carried out six months before. Not surprising that there were also two truck loads of other rubbish and substantial damage to the inside of the property.

LANDLORD NIGHTMARE 2 – Meanwhile in Mt Druitt NSW, an owner discovers after tenants vacate that they had an alternate, seemingly more purposeful, use for the kitchen cupboards while they resided there. They were ideal as a ferret run; warm in winter and they confined the smell of the 15 to 20 that were kept in there. Seems the taste of the cupboards was to the ferrets' liking also as they near chewed them to pieces.

SWINGING IN THE BREEZE – Strata owners may already be aware that the NSW Government is considering changes to strata laws in relation to tenants' washing. Currently, people in apartments are prevented from hanging their washing on a balcony when it is visible to the public, unless 75% of owners vote to allow it. Under the suggested law change, the reverse would apply i.e. 75% of owners will have to vote to disallow it.

WATER RATES NOTICES – PLEASE We find the need occasionally to remind owners to send in water rates notices. We've had a few recently where on checking we've found water usage not charged; notices had not been received. And it's usually easier to get the money earlier from the tenant rather than chasing back payments; and if it happens to go to tribunal there's a good chance you won't get it.

WELL IT LOOKS THE SAME! Property Manager Sam arrived one morning to an urgent email from a tenant, extremely anxious after a visit from a plumber who had identified a "large amount of cyanide on/in the pipes". This caused great distress to the tenant who had been experiencing very uncomfortable physical symptoms, which the Doctor thought might be thyroid related and "cyanide has been known to cause thyroid problems" wrote the tenant. Imagine the relief for Sam when we had the pipe issue correctly diagnosed as rust not cyanide!

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK The crew at Warners Bay turned from Property Managers to 'paramedics'; they were taken aback by cries from next door when a woman fell down a flight of 16 stairs and sustained gaping wounds. With first aid kit in hand, Brooke, Ashlee and Keryn attended, applying pressure to the wounds and comforting the unfortunate woman until the ambulance arrived 25 minutes later. An extremely grateful lady visited recently to say thanks and show the scars. She was very fortunate.

PLEASE NOTE: As at September 2009, this Newsletter is intended as general news and not advice, as each individual's situation will vary depending on specific circumstances relating to that individual. You should seek professional advice as it relates to your own circumstances.

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