

# Home operation grows into empire

## Entrepreneur named Canberra Businesswoman of the Year

By Rebecca Thistleton

RUTH Bayley exudes a bubbly, infectious energy.

It's that energy which propelled her business from its beginnings in her spare bedroom to a 13-staff organisation bursting out of its Woden office.

Canberra's Chamber of Women in Business has crowned Ruth Bayley as the 2008 Canberra businesswoman of the year.

Ms Bayley, owner of training company Bayley and Associates was also shortlisted for the recent ACT Training Excellence Awards.

So how did Ms Bayley end up a businesswoman?

"By accident," she said.

"I was a senior public servant, working long hours and I had young children and I was frustrated at the lack of focus on customer service.

"In my job I saw a market for contract training and started off on my own, working job by job.

"Between 1996 and 2000 was the main growth period, we became a registered training organisation.

The business now has 13 employees, with a full time equivalent of nine staff.

"I believe you need to take on good people as you find them, coming from personal experience I know there are plenty of people willing to put in the work but couldn't work full time."

Leaving the public service and beginning a business from home was a gamble which paid off, and now Ms Bayley is truly satisfied in her working life.

"I like the challenge and being strategic, pulling the levers and implementing the strategies.

"I've come to appreciate being an employer, I have given people jobs and I feel proud of that.

"I love solving problems for clients, when they come to us we either have a solution or we can tell them how to

find it." Bayley and Associates has now progressed beyond Ms Bayley's expectations and she has been searching for new office space for the past 12 months.

"We're growing out of this office, we moved in in 2000 with three people. It's difficult to find somewhere to move to."

Despite the difficulty of finding office space, Ms Bayley said she couldn't consider relocating.

"Canberra is the best place in the world," she exclaimed. She and her husband were once both in the Air Force and were posted all over Australia. They came to Canberra 17 years ago.

"We love it, it's small enough and it's big enough, Canberra is such a great place to raise a family."

With so many private companies and government departments in Canberra, many of which need tailored training, Bayley and Associates has thrived.

Ms Bayley said the business was expanding and competitive because it was "small and nimble," able to cater training programs for each client in a way larger institutions could not.

"The larger institutions tell you the day, the time and what you'll be studying. We work with the clients around what they need taught, and we go to them at the times when they can fit us in.

"We only train in what we're experts in, every single person who trains has hands-on experience and is a qualified trainer. It's a competitive advantage for us to be able to tell someone you have felt their pain and dealt with a similar problem and are in a position to be able to help them work through it."

Ms Bayley emphasised her business was a family basis - her husband, Kerry, looks after their IT systems. Their daughter, Sally, is studying at the ANU and maintains the student



Canberra's businesswoman of the year Ruth Bayley of Bayley and Associates with daughter Sally Bayley.

records for her mother. Sixteen-year-old Dereck is in Year 11 and works there casually.

"We've had a father and daughter team working here and two married couples, some businesses don't like to employ family members but I've found it to be a good thing."

"This all would have been impossible without Kerry, my darling husband. He knew it was important to me to do this. The first couple of years were hard, really hard. If we had a client call and ask for someone to be on a plane to Darwin the next day, we'd do it, we put in the yards."

As a lot of working mothers would agree, Ms Bayley said working during

her children's primary school years was the most difficult time, but as they grew older, running a business and a family became easier.

Other stresses have included last year's change of government, being responsible for staff and the nature of the business cycle, which she has learnt to use to her advantage.

"No one wants training in January, and the bulk of school holidays fall in January, which has benefited staff who can spend a lot of time home with their kids.

"May and June are always busy and now it's absolutely crazy, the adjustment period after last year's election is well and truly over, things are getting

back to normal." Ms Bayley has found the Chamber of Women in Business to be a support, and was once a young businesswoman looking for guidance from her experienced peers. Now well established, she is able to offer her own perspectives and experiences to younger members.

"There are a lot of young women starting businesses, it's great. Being in business can be isolating and you don't know if what you're actually doing is good or not. The group lets you speak to other people who have been there, done that.

"I was just so flattered and excited they named me businesswoman of the year."

## Two new plaques unveiled at AWM

TWO commemorative plaques honouring soldiers of the Second World War and the Vietnam War were unveiled at the Australian War Memorial last week.

In a morning ceremony that attracted more than 100 guests, a plaque was unveiled to recognise the sub-units of the Royal Australian Corps of Signals in Vietnam, 1965-1972.

Following the deployment of the first signaller in 1962, more than 7,500 members of the Royal Australian Corps of Signals served in the Vietnam war.

Seven died of illness or injury.

Lieutenant Colonel Peter Murray, retired, of the Officer Commanding 547 Signals Troop gave the commemorative address.

The afternoon plaque unveiling was in memory of the Fairmile ships and harbour defence motor launches of the Second World War.

The Fairmiles, known by numbers rather than a name, played a diverse role across the Pacific Ocean.

A moving address from Greg Percival, president of the Fairmile Association, was delivered to an audience of more than 60 people in the sunny

western courtyard of the War Memorial.

Mr Percival was a wireless telegraphist on the ML801 for three years during the war.

He spoke of the brotherhood of men who lived in cramped conditions for several years aboard Fairmile ships.

"There is a strong, warm bond between us, and a brotherhood of understanding which, as time goes by, only gets stronger," he said.

Mr Percival said it was a dream of the association to one day have history books compiled by members in a classroom of every Australian school, informing students of the war in the Australia and New Guinea area, as well as the conditions for those who lived on the Fairmile boats.

"I lived in one of the Fairmiles for three years, I can say confidently it had no structural faults."

Australian War Memorial director Steve Gower said the attendees could leave the ceremony knowing they had been remembered, and had a place to bring their families to show the plaque as a source of inspiration for future generations.



World War II veteran Greg Percival reminisces of his time living aboard a Fairmile for three years at the Australian War Memorial last week.



Emeritus Professor Eric Daniels and Geoff Waugh unveil the commemorative Fairmile plaque in front of veterans at the ceremony.

## Government considers lifting the leaving age

CANBERRANS are encouraged to comment on a discussion paper released by the ACT Government outlining proposals for raising the school leaving age in the ACT, currently set at 15 years. The *Pathways to the future* paper examines young people's participation in their education.

"The school leaving age was last raised in 1943 when ACT schools were part of the NSW system," Minister for Education Andrew Barr said.

"Our society, economy and schools have changed dramatically since then.

"Some research suggests that early school leavers are more likely to become long-term unemployed adults and to earn less when they are employed.

"At almost 90 per cent, the ACT already has the highest Year 10 to 12 retention rates in the country. However there is a group of students who leave school without going on to further education or training and we need to continue to work to ensure these students can go on to satisfying careers and to ensure ACT businesses have access to the skilled people they will need to continue to succeed."

To see the discussion paper and make your comments, visit the ACT Department of Education and Training website at [www.det.act.gov.au](http://www.det.act.gov.au).

The consultation period closes on 31 October 2008.