Isabella’s Story

It is sad that it often takes a tragedy to prompt an industry to adopt safer practices; even sadder when it involves the death of a child. Whilst this is a Queensland case, it is equally relevant to property managers throughout Australia. The maintenance of property requires a set process no matter where you are located.

The tragedy unfolded in May 2010, at a young family’s rented home in Yeppoon, Queensland. Proud new father, Adam Deifenbach, was holding his 7 week old baby girl, Isabella, when he noticed a piece of rotting wood on the verandah and called his wife out to see it. He touched it lightly with his foot and, while his horrified wife watched on, his foot went straight through the rotten board. Adam was thrown forward, letting go of baby Isabella who landed on the tiled ground beneath the verandah. Isabella died from head injuries on route to Rockhampton hospital.

Prior to the incident, Isabella’s parents made numerous complaints to the property manager about the rotting verandah, and inspections had been carried out by three different tradespeople. While each inspection revealed that the verandah had substantial termite damage that needed to be repaired, the property manager did not read the reports but instead forwarded them on to the landlord. But, because of miscommunications and a lack of guidelines on how to deal with the complaint, it was not fixed in time to prevent Isabella’s death.

Isabella’s death was the subject of a Coronial Inquest late last year, with the Coroner recommending an overhaul of the rental industry. The Coroner stated the following in her recommendations:

"[I recommend] that the Office of Fair Trading and relevant residential rental industry stakeholders... review the current property management training program with a view to incorporating a component that provides property managers with an appropriate level of guidance about how to conduct a satisfactory inspection of decks, verandas and stairs for property management purposes."
She also recommended mandatory inspections, by independent builders, of verandas and balconies more than 10 years old in rental properties, and that all Queensland real estate agents be required to complete mandatory Continued Professional Development (CPD) courses.

The Coroner’s comments are particularly salient in light of the Australian Government’s plans to scrap Continued Professional Development and lower entry qualifications for the real estate industry under a new National Licensing Scheme. This horrific incident has made abundantly clear the need for higher professional standards in our industry.

The Coroner’s recommendations have not yet been implemented through any legislative change. Nevertheless, we believe that Isabella’s story puts every property professional under an obligation to do all they can to ensure the safety of the tenants in the rental properties that they manage. When asked to comment on the Isabella Diefenbach inquest, the Real Estate Institute of Queensland provided the following guidelines for best practice which can and should be applied Australia wide:

- Property managers should carefully read reports to determine whether any defects in the property have been identified and whether any repair works or maintenance are recommended;
- Property managers should forward reports to the Landlord highlighting any relevant repair and maintenance issues identified and seek the Landlord’s written instructions in relation to those issues;
- In circumstances where reports identify serious repair and maintenance issues which pose an immediate risk to Tenants and visitors, property managers should seek urgent instructions from the Landlord to enable them to arrange for the necessary repairs and maintenance as soon as possible; and
- Property managers should implement a diary or reminder system for following up instructions from the Landlord for all outstanding repair or maintenance issues. All follow up attempts and communication with the Landlord in relation to such matters should be recorded in writing and retained on file.

Landlords are sometimes reluctant to spend money on repairs, as they are making a financial decision in relation to their ‘return on investment’ for their investment property. Some of these reluctant landlords may well benefit from reading Isabella’s story.

Housenet—Strata Managers have you seen the new Housenet Strata Community?

By seeking to implement these guidelines in your own agency, we can all play a role in ensuring that Isabella’s legacy is one of positive change for the real estate Industry.

‘Til next time,
Wishing you every success in your business ventures,
Rosy Sullivan
Director / College Principal

From our office………

Congratulations to Fearnie Fisher our Licensing Manager, who last week passed the ten year milestone of working in our business. She is now deliberating on how to spend her long service leave – with Capri (Italy), Samoa or Canada currently as the forerunners.

We also welcome a new staff member, Imogen Kemp who is a first year university student and will be assisting us on a part-time basis, with the production of materials for our students.

ACoP Staff Profiles commence with this edition. Our first profile is our College Principal, Rosy. Read about Rosy on page 4.

New Strata Guide —“Strata Stress Be Gone”

Traineeships
Start the new year by having your staff trained in business, finance and property.
You may be eligible for $4000 in government funding
Contact Stephanie for details.
Staff Profiles

Rosy Sullivan

Director and College Principal

If you have met Rosy then you have experienced her sense of humour together with her caring nature. Once you have joined the student family of the Australian College of Professionals, Rosy takes a keen interest in both your education and career advancement. If you haven't personally met Rosy, then you will definitely have seen her name and signature at the end of your academic transcripts and certificates.

Rosy is the Director of the company and has held the position of College Principal since the College was first established in December 2003. As the Principal, Rosy is responsible for the overall operation and management of the College and is proud to have established and developed such a forward-thinking organisation that offers an extensive range of qualification-based training courses in the property, finance and business sectors.

From the writing of the training materials, to conducting training, and all the compliance matters in between, Rosy spends her days increasing the professionalism of the College and ensuring positive outcomes for all students. As a Member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and a long-term member of the Australian Institute of Training and Development, Rosy ensures that she maintains a current knowledge and understanding of current practices in the training and development industry.

Rosy has an extensive and highly regarded professional background in the provision of high quality education and training in the vocational education sector. She holds a doctoral degree in education, which was based on the historical study of competency-based education in a vocational environment and its value to workers from both a practical outcomes level and an educational outcomes level. She also has university honours degrees in both Education and Psychology.

For the first sixteen years of her working life, Rosy was employed as a Government official and specialised in the area of government policy and training in the health and welfare sectors. She also had senior management experience whilst working in the community welfare sector. Her experience in developing operational systems and training programs is extensive and spans from 1987 to the present. Rosy has been active in the property industry since 1999, when she worked with a franchise company in the development of an innovative system of service provision and was also involved in the day-to-day training of employees in the listing, selling and management of property. This experience included being involved as an active agent in the sales and property management process.

Rosy has been conducting adult education and training over the past twenty five years, during which time she has become one of the most recognised and respected figures in adult education in her selected fields.

Whether you are contacting Rosy for career advice, checking on the legislative impact of your daily activities, or being chased by Rosy to support one of her many charity functions, you will always find someone who is willing to listen to your issues and support you to make the right decisions. Rosy actively participates in a number of charity-based boards of management, where she shares her skills and knowledge for the advancement of community-based projects in the private welfare sector.

When moving the College from its Castle Hill administration office in June 2012, Rosy and her husband John brought with them a team of loyal and talented staff that have been working with the College for many years. Stay tuned as we introduce the remainder of the team over the coming months.

Qualifications:

PhD (Education), Bachelor of Arts - Psychology and Education (Hons.), Diploma of Education, Diploma of Training and Assessment, Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, Licensed Real Estate Agent, Licensed Strata Managing Agent, Accredited Auctioneer, Justice of the Peace.

Next Time: John Sullivan — Finance Director