

# Honouring Anton Hermann



We remember Anton Hermann, Director of Pro Bono and Community Investment at MinterEllison, who passed away in July 2019.

Anton joined MinterEllison in 1990 and after a journey into the political world as Chief of Staff to the Minister for Environment & Conservation, the Hon Mark Birrell in the Jeff Kennett Government, as well as roles in the not-for-profit sector, Anton returned home in 2004 as the firm's first National Pro Bono & Community Investment Director. In that role, Anton developed MinterEllison's programs around the theme of breaking cycles of disadvantage and led the way as a forerunner in the Australian pro bono legal community.

Some of Anton's closest colleagues at MinterEllison share their fondest memories of him:

**Keith Rovers** (*Pro Bono & Community Investment Partner*)

"Anton was a source of wise counsel and always had an eye for the long-term success of the program and its strategic place as part of core business and purpose at MinterEllison.

It's so terribly sad that at this point in the journey he has left us, but we won't lose sight of his important role in getting us to where we are - and paying tribute to his legacy by continuing to do the great work that we do.

Anton touched and influenced many people across the firm, the legal and not-for-profit sectors and the broader community and his ability to bring people on the journey is a testament to Anton's leadership ability, building teams seeking to give back and contribute their skills, passion and energy to meaningful causes.

I will always remember a gentle and humble human who always had a great sense of calmness about him but was still highly focussed and passionate about our professional duty to provide support to our fellow man.

Anton was integral to setting the foundation of our Pro Bono & Community Investment program and - as is evidenced by the outpouring of thoughts and comments from the Pro Bono community - he has been a pillar of that community in Australia.

We are extremely proud to have had Anton as our leader for the best part of 15 years and we should celebrate that contribution and the good work and institutional relationships he helped build. His legacy will be for MinterEllison to continue to build on the secure foundations he has laid.

Anton's achievements in this role were many, but perhaps the most enduring legacy is what he taught us all about the way to approach this most important area of our work."

### **Prani West** *(Senior Associate)*

"Anton was the epitome of the quiet achiever. He went about his work - it is not putting it too highly to say it was his mission - with a calm, pragmatic and unflagging determination. Anton never sought applause or recognition for the things he did, he was dedicated to making a difference in the lives of the disenfranchised and their successes were his reward. Among his more recent achievements was the successful relocation of a group of residents from a condemned rooming house - he led a team of lawyers who negotiated to have these individuals, who were otherwise facing eviction into homelessness, re-housed.

He can be credited with encouraging hundreds of lawyers to join MinterEllison's National Homeless Law and Community Investment programs, thanks to his persuasive and passionate presentations to each year's crop of new graduates. I had the

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*L-R Noelia Boscana, Mitzi Gilligan, Anton Hermann*

pleasure of doing these with him in what became a regular and enjoyable 'tag team' event. Each time he communicated with enthusiasm and passion the myriad of ways in which new lawyers could 'give back' - be it through running homeless law files, assisting with advice to charitable enterprises, generating proposals for law reform and social change through the 'Big Ideas for Australia' program which he co-ordinated at Minters, or by volunteering to run, swim, climb or cycle to raise money for a good cause.

Anton's passion for shaping policy extended not only to matters of great relevance within Melbourne and Victoria (for example, advocating for the abolition of public space offences relating to poverty and homelessness - the so-called 'move along' laws) but also to international considerations. Anton took an active role in providing the Australian Human Rights Commission with comparative research findings on the international protocol against torture, and in the preparation of a report for a test case in the UK Supreme

Court on the role of medical experts in asylum seeker cases. He sought and welcomed the involvement of passionate junior lawyers within the firm in these projects.

Anton always made time to listen to and counsel lawyers who came to him for advice or even just a confidential and reassuring chat. His empathy and quiet good humour meant that those who dealt with him, both inside and outside the firm, always felt that they had been truly heard."

### **Jane Salvesson** *(Special Counsel)*

"In my interactions with Anton, his strongest attribute was the ability to remain calm in difficult situations - there have been times when we were instructed by very complex clients with challenging antisocial behaviours. This was also tough on many younger lawyers representing them. In a few cases, we needed to cease acting for some clients, but he did so only when he had explored all of the available options, worked with the case lawyers to ensure they were

okay with our decision and he had found the client other legal representation.

In about 2007, we commenced a clinic providing legal advice to people attending a Koori drug and alcohol rehabilitation program in Thornbury through the Darebin Community Legal Centre. Anton did not restrict himself to the clinic, but he also worked with the local Koori community to assist them with governance of their local board. He also supported and mentored the lawyers at Darebin providing legal services for many marginalised individuals."

### **Robert Reed** *(Special Counsel)*

"I had the privilege of working alongside Anton in the Community Investment & Pro Bono Program from when he re-joined the firm at the time of the program's early development. Right from the start, Anton demonstrated a passion to make a difference and to do it properly. In the first few years, he was prepared to relocate himself and his family to Sydney from Melbourne for the good of the program and used Sydney as the initial base to develop what became a vibrant and effective suite of community engagement opportunities across the firm. His approach to this and everything he did afterwards was inspirational. The sign of a true leader, his preference was always to consult (internally and externally), listen, mediate where necessary and let others shine. I recall participating in many national focus group meetings orchestrated by Anton to develop things like pro bono strategies, the workplace giving program and the school partnering program. Anton always made sure that everyone was heard and that, as much as possible, everyone's contribution would be incorporated into the end product.

Managing a program that incorporates pro bono legal work alongside various other forms of community engagement initiatives requires someone who is able to communicate effectively across a broad range of issues, people and sectors.

## **"Anton demonstrated a passion to make a difference and to do it properly"**

Anton was such an important part of my working life. I appreciated the confidence he had in me to manage the Brisbane Community Investment Program. I appreciated him including me in national pro bono coordinator meetings and working with him on national projects, sometimes pushing me out of my comfort zone. I appreciated him always being the first to promote the work and achievements of others – but never his own. Mostly, I appreciated his loyal support and wise counsel – always available to listen and find a solution to anything from the most complex pro bono conundrum to the seemingly minor personal issue.

Last Friday we said farewell to our latest group of Glenala State High School scholarship students as they completed their final week of work experience with us. They reflected on their time here and the positive impact which it has had on their lives – the extent of which, they said, we probably would not even realise. I reflected how proud Anton would have been to hear that given his passion for the school partnering program and I wondered how many more people who are out there have been positively impacted, directly or indirectly, by Anton's work without us even realising."

### **Noelia Boscana** *(Partner)*

"Anton has been my pro bono confidante for over 15 years. Whenever we were faced with a difficult situation on a pro bono matter, we would pick up the phone to Anton and he would always find a way through the issues with his compassionate, calm and pragmatic nature. I learnt so much from seeing his interactions with our vulnerable clients who were

I admired and respected Anton's ability to do this – and he could do this so well because of his entirely positive, self-effacing and genuine approach.

struggling with drug or alcohol issues, homelessness and/or mental health issues – he always showed our clients respect and treated them with dignity. Anton was also our go to for urgent Homeless Law matters or to attend the clinic when no-one could go. He would always make the time and interview clients or get on his feet and represent them at VCAT with very little notice.

Anton was so great at forming strong and personal relationships with the organisations that we worked with, such as Ozanam House (homeless refuge) and Justice Connect. He was widely respected for not only his work but the way he carried himself and his personal values.

## **"...he always showed our clients respect and treated them with dignity"**

An example of Anton's desire to recognise others and not himself (as mentioned below) is when he created an award for 10 years' pro bono service to Homeless Law to recognise my work. He presented the award to me as a surprise during one of our Homeless Law team meetings.

Anton inspired many graduates and vacation clerks to do pro bono. At his last speech to the vacation clerks in early July, he spoke about the professional responsibility that we have as lawyers to do pro bono and to use the skills we have as lawyers to help others in our community that cannot help themselves. He said pro bono gives you a sense of purpose and also helps you grow professionally and as a person."

*Many thanks to Dusan Stevic, Pro Bono, National Advisor, King & Wood Mallesons for helping the Centre to arrange this tribute. ■*