

Santo's passion puts end to chamber's darkest days

By Darryl Whitecross

MOST people will know Santo Santoro as a passionate man. It comes with the heritage: Italian men, by definition, are passionate.

His political career on a state and federal level bears testament to that passion to bring about change and improvement from a high position.

His passion is no more evident than in the promotion of his beloved homeland, Italy, and how that can come about through the Italian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Queensland.

"It's a chamber that has a great amount of character and possibility and potential but it needs a lot of support," Mr Santoro said.

Cicilian born Santo Santoro took over the ICCI at probably its lowest point when it was on shaky financial ground.

He was a board member when it became "painfully obvious" that something needed to be done to turn around the fortunes of the chamber or watch it collapse and die. He was not about to allow that to happen.

Since June last year, when he was elected president of the organisation, he has set about leaving no stone unturned in a quest to restore the

organisation to "the premier chamber of commerce in Queensland".

Subsequently, he was unanimously elected as president and Favio Orlando the vice-president.

Since then, he has become focussed – passionate – on putting in place an innovative plan, supported by a revamped administrative structure, to restore confidence in the chamber by significantly enhancing the benefits and services it provides.

The plan also sees the chamber embracing the electronic era and moving to "a paperless office" at its headquarters inside the historic Yungaba at Kangaroo Point and a significant revamp of the ICCI's website at www.icci.com.au

Despite the long stare into the future, the chamber's roots are not being forgotten completely.

Mr Santoro said the views, support and experience of "elder statesmen" of the chamber and the Italian community across Queensland were invaluable and were being sought to help restore the financial well-being of the chamber.

He said the chamber's message to its supporters and sponsors was a positive and optimistic one: "We are



Italian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Queensland president Santo Santoro (left), chamber treasurer Peter Costello, Brisbane's Lord Mayor Campbell Newman and Vice Consul of Italy Antonio Colicchia at the chamber's February networking lunch.

telling them of our strong desire to work closely and happily with them in the future.

"Their response has been - without exception - equally warm, positive and helpful," he said.

Organising corporate lunches is part of the board's new membership drive. Some of the Italian community's highest profile business people and dignitaries are invited to the lunches along with people from a non-Italian background or business.

His catchcry has become: "If you are not Italian at least feel Italian and give us a go."

Mr Santoro said he had been pleasantly surprised by the re-emergence of the chamber and the support it was receiving from all points of the political, business and community compass with membership continuing to grow.

"We are a fun organisation," he said. "We are serious people wanting to promote serious business initiatives but we also want to have fun while we're doing it."

Mr Santoro said the new-look ICCI was the opportunity for the Italian community in Queensland to unite.

He said that wherever one looked around the world – not just in Brisbane or around Queensland – where Italians had emigrated, it is "a terribly divided community".

"The Sardinians have their club. The Sicilians have their club. The Calabrese have their club. The Abruzzi have their club. Every region of Italy which sent really hard working honourable people to do their work across the world all have their own club. We really should be just one

club," Mr Santoro said.

"One of the things we're trying to do is the promote relationships between the various Italian entities and clubs here in Queensland," he said.

Mr Santoro said heading up the chamber was demanding: "There's a very strong demand of my time but for me I regard it as a pleasure and a privilege and I am very pleased to be putting back into the Italian chamber something in return for the

happy public life that I've enjoyed."

Becoming involved in as many high-profile events, such as the Lord Mayor's annual multicultural

ball, Italian Week functions and Italian National Day, is part of Mr Santoro's strategy to raise awareness of the chamber and its activities. Last month, Lord Mayor Campbell Newman was the guest at one of the chamber's corporate networking lunches and \$2800 was raised for the Premiers Flood Disaster Relief Appeal.

As part of the Sistema Italia project, the ICCI hosted Italy's Ambassador to Australia, Gian Ludovico de Martino di Montegiordano, the Italian Trade Commissioner, consuls from each state, the presidents and secretary generals for all of the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Australia and the Italian Institute of Culture.

The chamber's next corporate networking lunch is to be held on Monday, March 21. The guest speaker is to be former Queensland premier Peter Beattie. For further information on attending the lunch, telephone 3392 2499 or email info@icci.com.au

Luscious Gardens & Gorgeous Landscapes



Greg Nicholson

New Farm based licensed landscape contractor, Greg Nicholson, and his highly skilled tradesmen will create a garden you will just love spending time in. No job is too small and they specialise in all aspects of landscape construction and decking. The result can be luscious gardens and gorgeous landscapes.

PHONE 0418 427 472 FOR A QUOTE

Greg and his team are the Preferred Brisbane installers of Villastone products. Villastone have a distinctive retaining wall system as well as pavers and garden edging. Featured is the Villastone Easy Edge which is a cost effective simple way to tidy up the garden and give your outdoor living an individual look.

- Easy to create straight walls, curves corners and steps
- Strong & Versatile
- Low Maintenance and durable long term solution
- Suitable for any landscape solution



Enhance your outdoor living