

Lawyer's glittering career

By Cam Lucadou-Wells

After 46 years in commercial law, Gerard Kennedy has a diverse portfolio of achievement and surprising plans for post-retirement.

A Special Counsel with Dandenong-based firm Macpherson Kelley, the affable Mr Kennedy has forged a mighty record of published international articles, blue-chip clients and many friends along the way.

He plans to continue sitting on boards, hunting environmental pests such as feral deer and exotic sea urchins, and keeping up with a rowdy pack of eight young grandsons.

Mr Kennedy followed two famous uncles into law – one of them was Brendan Murphy QC, the other was former Victoria Police detective Brian 'Skull' Murphy.

"We'd say (Brian) would catch them and the other brother would get them out."

Since being admitted to the Bar in 1975, Mr Kennedy befriended and learnt much from many of his clients.

"You have to be embedded with them. They go through high times and low times – and they look to you when things are a little unstable."

Such as timber millers who suffer due to foreign companies buying up domestic pine plantations and exporting the timber.

As a result, building supplies for trellises and walls are becoming more scarce and costly, Mr Kennedy says.

"The timber millers say 'batten down the hatches'. When the domestic building industry slumps, there's a recession ahead for Victoria."



Gerard Kennedy retires as Special Counsel at Dandenong law firm Macpherson Kelley. 243819
Picture: GARY SISSONS

Other clients in the building and development industry are bracing themselves, he says.

During his international career, he's learnt that legal technicalities are a small part of his role.

The main part is "uncommon sense" learnt on the job and absorbed like "blotting paper" from his array of influential clients.

Among his most exciting forays was travel-

ling to post-war Vietnam for a Masters thesis on the country's new foreign investment law.

It was in the late 1980's during the country's 'doi moi' restoration period. A time when Vietnam was lifting martial law and seeking to modernize its trade.

When he landed, the airport runway was lined with Russian fighter planes, there were machine guns out and hotels still coated in black-out paint.

"That set the scene," he says drolly.

During his visit, he saw countless tops of rice hats as people bowed to him. He figured it was because his last name was shared by the famous US president JFK.

Monash University considered his thesis topic too broad, comparing Russia, China and Vietnam's foreign investment laws too broad.

But Mr Kennedy forged a formidable knowledge on foreign investment law in Asia.

Another career highlight was devising a form document for Muslim homebuyers to avoid unfairly paying 'double stamp duty'.

Thinking laterally, Mr Kennedy devised a lease in which the bank took a "spiritual interest" in the property.

It was enshrined in Victorian law, and soon adopted overseas.

Raised in Chilton, he likes to keep "grounded" – not to have "silver spoons in our mouth" and to treat each client equally and with respect.

As a mentor to young lawyers, he gets a kick out of the 'lightglobe moments' when they discover the inner "intelligence that hasn't been

tested at school".

Also there's the 'bushie' in him that inspires his hunting for feral deer.

Apart from providing a delicious feed of venison, deer is culled because of its rampant destruction of bushland and farms across Australia.

During Covid lockdowns, deer thrived as shooters were unable to hunt due to travel restrictions, Mr Kennedy says.

As a passionate environmentalist, he also dives in Port Phillip to eradicate thousands of exotic pest sea urchins.

Even in winter, he gears up in a six-millimetre abalone-diver suit to do his environmental cleanse.

As he breaks open the urchin shells, he's surrounded by schools of leatherjackets, banjo sharks, crabs and other aquatic species who feed on his catch.

"It's a thing of beauty."

At last count, he'd destroyed 84,000 urchins. He says he'll keep doing it until "they beat me or I beat them".

In retirement, Mr Kennedy looks forward to joining company boards – which requires him to keep up with the latest in corporate law and risk management.

And also keeping up with his lively pack of eight grandsons between two and 10 years old. When together the boys are like the "Et-tamogah Pub", he says.

He brings them around a camp fire in the bush – and it's a "personal joy and love you can't get anywhere else at any other time".