Cr Jenny Hill, Mayor of the City of Townsville

I was very proud to be elected as Townsville's first female mayor for the first time in 2012 with a vision to see Townsville recognised not only as the capital of North Queensland, but as the leading city of northern Australia.

Moving to Townsville in the early 1980s, I could not have imagined myself in the position as Mayor of a burgeoning city of almost 200,000.

But I never doubted it was possible.

When my husband and I first moved to Townsville in 1982, we found a promising city yet to find its place in modern Australia.

The region had obvious lifestyle drawcards – enviable weather and a tropical lifestyle. Our port, a cornerstone of the city’s growth since settlement in the late 1800s was also posting small yet steady annual growth.

James Cook University had recently opened, offering a boost in Townsville’s bid for recognition but it was our status as a garrison city for which we were best known.

In fact, the army was the reason my husband and I moved. His posting to the then 2/4 RAR Battalion brought us out of Melbourne to Townsville. Not only did we stay in Townsville, but so did many of his army mates from that era.

It used to take me an hour and a half to get to work every morning in Melbourne but now, with a science degree and various employers – less than 20 minutes from my front door.

I joined the Army Reserve in 1982, Royal Corps of Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (RAEME) in order to train in vehicle repair, but by 1986 I undertook training as an officer. The Army Reserve pushed me to do things I would never have done otherwise.

I was live firing M60’s, driving four-wheel drives out bush, and learning bush skills.

The majority of my senior instructors were ex Vietnam Veterans who taught me how to attack the enemy, set up defensive positions, “strategic retreats”, and many other skills, always pushing us to a new level.

In the early 90’s, I undertook further study and completed a Masters of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, by course, working through James Cook University. While completing subjects such as Immunology, Biostatics, and Epidemiology, I also completed subjects in Health Management, Economics and Accounting.

Science taught me attention to detail – one mistake could cost someone dearly. It also gave me the discipline of long hours and an understanding of service to the community.

By this time, I was well entrenched in Townsville and ran for the ALP in the seat of Burdekin, which takes in parts of southern Townsville, in 1992. At that time, politics wasn’t on my radar but I was certainly politically aware from an early age, particularly in the 1970s when Gough Whitlam became a hero in our family by calling a halt to conscription.

My parents were immigrants from Malta who arrived in Australia as part of the post war migration in the mid-fifties. They were strongly opposed to my eldest brother’s possible conscription for Vietnam. I will always remember how keen my parents were to vote in the 1972 election and the realisation of the profound impact political policy and leadership can have on the lives of so many.

The seat was a safe seat for the sitting Member and Government Minister Mark Stoneman. I wasn’t
expected to do that well but I pulled it back to about 2 per cent. When you are not expected to win, you can have fun campaigning.

And in between all of this we became parents twice, and my husband had taken a job that sent him all over the North to work, he was drive in, drive out!

In 1997 I was first elected to the former Townsville City Council. It had been a decade of great change for our city with major infrastructure injecting unprecedented confidence in the North Queensland region, prompting record investment and growth.

Projects including the Townsville Entertainment and Convention Centre in 1993, prompting the establishment of a national basketball side and a stadium for the North Queensland Cowboys, built in 1995 from the bones of a trotting track, had further defined our city’s future.

Townsville is, and has always been, a city shaped from the collaborative efforts of local champions, working in close partnership across government and industry and proved how transformative such local leadership could be.

It contributed directly to Townsville’s prosperity and to our capacity to generate jobs and wealth and it changed the everyday quality of life enjoyed by Townsville’s residents and families.

The redevelopment of The Strand in 1999 is case in point. The $35 million redevelopment, including jetty, recreational parks and gardens, pathways, restaurants, cafes and pools was jointly funded with all three levels of government and has been credited as Townsville’s premier example of public infrastructure.

As a member of the steering committee for this project, I am proud to say The Strand has become an icon for our city and also proved what could be achieved when public and private enterprise combine, creating both economic and social capital, shaping the sustainability of Townsville’s development and rewarding of our lifestyle.

Our credentials as a strategic centre for defence, trade and government administration were growing as was our population.

Also on the up were interests in manufacturing and minerals processing, housing and construction, transport, sustainable and renewable energy, and education and research.

Major events such as V8 Supercars and the Australian Festival of Chamber Music highlighted the diversity of our people and the type of events they support. Strand Ephemera would showcase the visual arts along the waterfront, and the development of Jezzine Barracks would showcase our Indigenous and Military heritage.

The secret was out. More and more people were discovering Townsville with its great parks, beaches, services and modern infrastructure you’d expect in a major city.

Our diverse economy with interests in defence, education, government, heavy industry, and business and commercial operations set us up as a city of opportunity.

Likewise, the city’s increasing national sporting and cultural profile was also playing a leading role in the city’s development and modern identity.

In the past few years, our focus has been on the revival of the city centre with a goal to radically boost the number of people who choose to live and work in our CBD.

Development has included a mix of commercial and residential with great effect but we still have much to go.

The Waterfront development, which will see the redevelopment of 97.2 hectares of mostly vacant land into a variety of open spaces, entertainment areas and commercial and residential developments similar in feel to Brisbane’s Southbank is one project that will help relaunch and redefine our CBD.

To include a new 25,000-seat stadium that will get underway this year, The Waterfront is a cataclysmic project that will echo the ongoing benefits of The Strand redevelopment almost 20 years ago.

If public infrastructure is a legacy of a council then the cooperation of public and private enterprise is at its heart.

Successful public infrastructure brings about community pride and identity, creating experiences and opportunities that may not have previously existed.

In Townsville’s case, it has contributed directly to Townsville’s prosperity and to our capacity to generate jobs and wealth.
It has changed the everyday quality of life enjoyed by Townsville’s residents and families. Being elected Mayor of Townsville for a second consecutive term last year was a great honour and I’m determined to work hard on behalf of the community to secure the city’s future.

In closing, I look forward to sharing the best of Townsville with members of the Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia Queensland in October when Townsville hosts the annual State Conference.

Townsville City Council is proud to support this very important gathering.

The importance of recognising women in engineering

Seren McKenzie
IPWEAQ Vice President

#BeBoldForChange. That’s the theme of this year’s International Women’s Day. I must admit, I wasn’t sure how to be #BeBoldForChange, so I had to do some research on the IWD website to understand the theme. And I was surprised by the figures quoted—did you know, the World Economic Forum predicts the gender gap won’t close entirely until 2186? It’s a long time away from now but when you think about it, it’s not really that surprising taken into a global context.

Then I took a look at the numbers of women in engineering in Australia—something a bit closer to home and more relevant to us in the public works engineering sector. A number of sources confirmed that women account for less than 13% of the engineering workforce. This did surprise me as I thought we had a lot of younger females coming into the sector.

A colleague of mine had moved out of local government into consulting for a period and upon her recent return to a council position, once again found herself being the only woman at various meetings she attended. While I certainly do understand this being the only female manager at my council (and often, only one or one of a few females at engineering workshops or training), I do enjoy a great deal of support from my colleagues and I’m not therefore treated any differently to my male counterparts.

The number of university graduates in the engineering field remains low at about 17% nationally. Our universities are beginning to recognise this and are working hard to encourage females into engineering courses. The University of Queensland reported at the end of 2016 that their recent graduation class included a record high of 26% women. The University of NSW has also introduced a program featuring female engineers at work in an attempt to help change the way women perceive engineering.

And therein lies the problem. The perception of what engineers do means that people expect an engineer to be male. Sorry guys, but that is the common perception that female engineers...