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# Bad year but FNQ's open for business

In a tough year, Cairns farewelled some well-known businesses in 2020 but BRONWYN FARR found the outlook is vibrant with new businesses also opening.

CHALLENGING business conditions as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and national decisions by retailers resulted in the end of some wellknown and loved stores in 2020, but Cairns also welcomed an array of exciting new businesses, from five-star hotels to boutique and niche solo operations.



## ROCKMANS

Rockmans on the corner of Lake and Shields streets in the Cairns CBD shut its doors in January after operating from the site for many years.

A company spokeswoman labelled the closure of the women's fashion store a regrettable "business decision".

## CRUST PIZZA

The departures from Shields St continued with Crust Pizzas closing after more than two years.

Crust Pizzas general manager, Steve Hardie, said the business had been struggling.

He said council's efforts to bring music and markets into the area had brought traffic to the CBD on Sundays, but didn't convert to customers.

## JEANSWEST

Jeanswest at Smithfield and Cairns Central closed when the fashion empire folded in January, with 37 stores closing nationwide amid intense competition in the clothing retail sector. KPMG was appointed as voluntary administrators – and the good news is Jeanswest is still open at Stockland.

KPMG's James Stewart said the decision to restructure the business was difficult but necessary and that it offered the best chance of attracting a new owner.

## LDI CONSTRUCTIONS

LDI Constructions sent shockwaves through the industry as it surrendered to mounting debt and signalled it would wind up in October, with the civil construction company owing creditors more than \$2m.

Among its largest debts, LDI owed one earthworks company \$730,554.17 and a concrete supplier \$518,133.

ASIC documents obtained by the Cairns Post revealed the company had paid creditors up until August 2020 but in September owed creditors \$1,458,641.83, and the following month a further \$691,374.09. The papers were filed on November 2.

#### HARRIS SCARFE

Department store Harris Scarfe was placed into receivership in December, closing its doors at six Queensland locations including at Stockland in Earlville.

Receiver and Deloitte restructuring services partner Vaughan Strawbridge said 44 stores would remain in the portfolio to be offered for sale.

He said about 88 full-time, 128 part-time and 224 casual positions were affected.

"We have continued to trade the business since our appointment, and this has been well supported by loyal employees and customers, so this has been a difficult decision, but one necessary to position the Harris Scarfe business for a successful sale and continued operation," Mr Strawbridge said.

#### COLETTE

Popular women's handbag and jewellery retailer Colette was placed in voluntary administration in late January, with the store at DFO and the Cairns Central store subsequently closing.

Colette by Colette Hayman, which sold handbags, jewellery and accessories, operated 140 stores across Australia and New Zealand, including two in the Far North, at Cairns Central and DFO Cairns.

Deloitte restructuring services partner Vaughan Strawbridge said Colette by Colette Hayman had been affected by the weak retail environment.

#### INTIME SURFWEAR

InTime Surf and Street Wear was a fixture in the Cairns CBD for more than two decades, most recently in Shields St, but closed its doors in April.

Owner Anita Gardiner struggled to keep the store afloat since well before the virus crisis, saying hawkers attached to neighbouring backpacker travel businesses had deterred foot traffic.

#### HOGS BREATH

In April, Cairns dining institution Hogs Breath on Spence St closed after 28 years, falling victim to the coronavirus shutdown which halved business overnight.

"On election day ( March 28) we closed after lunch," franchisee Claudine Coupe said.

#### TALK TO THE MAC

Grafton Street's Apple specialists Talk to the Mac filed for voluntary liquidation through ASIC in mid-November, with the proudly independent and locally owned business closing its doors after 20 years.

The Apple specialists filed for voluntary liquidation through ASIC on November 16. Talk to The Mac stood apart from Apple Store closures when the COVID-19 pandemic escalated in March.

#### EVERT OPALS

After 30 years on Abbott St, Evert Opals closed its doors in November but owner Joe Mohun, whose father and brother were both opal miners, intends to focus on his store at Port Douglas and another on the corner of Abbott and Spence streets.

He was forced to shut the doors to the Abbott St outlet due to the dramatic drop in foot traffic from COVID-19 border closures and decimation of international travel.

#### NEWSXPRESS

NewsXpress in Orchid Plaza closed after deciding not to renew its lease. It relocated most of its stock to its existing Reservoir Road business.

Meanwhile, Lotto, Australia Post and newspapers will be sold at Alive Pharmacy, across the hall.

No jobs were lost in the move.

#### LAKE STREET CAFE GALLERY

The popular Cairns CBD cafe closed after the pandemic resulted in dramatically dwindling income, but owner Marcia Walsh shifted focus to her guidance counselling business Ms Negotiator.

She bought 92 Lake Street Cafe Gallery in September 2019 and managed to triple its income before the pandemic hit in March. Derived from her former financial planning practice, Ms Negotiator focuses on mentoring people.

#### CRYSTALBROOK FLYNN

Flynn, the third new hotel from Crystalbrook Collection to open in Cairns, welcomed guests for the first time on November 10.

Delayed from its original opening of March due to the onset of COVID-19, the arrival of Flynn completed the picture for Crystalbrook in Cairns, following the arrival of Riley in late 2018 and Bailey a year later.

The five-star Flynn has 311 rooms, many overlooking the Coral Sea, with guest facilities including a glass-bottomed swimming pool and 24-hour fitness centre.

#### CAIRNS CENTRAL BONANZA

The \$60m Cairns Central development has brought in several new retail stores including the Beauty Emporium and Benefit Beauty Brow Bar as a one-stop shop for beauty.

The Beauty Emporium features a range of products not previously available in Cairns, including Ere Perez, Kissed Earth by Rachael Finch, AHC Beauty, Hunter Lab, Sand & Sky and Inika.

The recently opened new food hall has Rise & Bake, Hong Kong Street, Hero Sushi, fresh food grocer Excel Fresh, Asian grocer Hanaromart, and Priceline, with a new Woolworths scheduled to open in early 2021.

Cairns Central centre manager Kristy Lee Jackson said there was growing interest in the new precinct.

"We have had some great feedback and the retailers are really excited," she said.

#### OLIVE TREE FINE FOODS

Cairns brothers Caleb and Eli Daly prove age is no barrier by buying their own business at the ages of just 21 and 19.

They were working at a local coffee shop together and saving for a house deposit when the opportunity to buy a business arose.

Their store, Olive Tree Fine Foods, is at Rusty's Markets in Cairns and sells gourmet delicatessen foods, local and organic products, and barista-made coffee.

#### GENERATION COFFEE AND JUICE BAR

Generation Coffee and Juice Bar may appear to be the new kid on the block on the Cairns cafe scene, but you might see some familiar faces behind the counter.

Stella Adams-Jones and Sharon Murphy have been the women behind the popular Coffee Can at suburban Redlynch for years.

But when they outgrew their Michaelangelo Drive premises, they spotted an opportunity when a new commercial site was completed, just off the Redlynch Intake Rd.

Ms Adams-Jones said business was booming.

#### JAYLA AND JAXON

Emily Griffen saw a need in the market for sun-safe swimwear for kids and decided to launch her own brand, Jayla and Jaxon.

She has now released four swimwear pieces made from high-quality UPF50+ fabrics, which are available online and at Splish Splash Port Douglas.

Each design is created from Ms Griffen's original artwork, inspired by the ocean and tropical life.

#### FALAFELICIOUS CAFE

Falafelicious Cafe relocated from Kuranda to Cairns as sales dropped during a tough year.

Rather than closing his doors, cafe owner and operator Or Ben Ezra, a self-proclaimed "falafelologist", has decided to relocate to Smithfield Shopping Centre.

Mr Ben Ezra said he was also doing his bit to support local by sourcing his produce, meat and other items from businesses in the area.

#### WHOLE BUBS

Independently owned and operated Whole Bubs, launched by owners James Chang and Rita Lee, opened in July, offering quality but reasonably priced baby products.

In 2018 the neighbouring Toys R Us and Babies R Us shut up shop.

#### MELON FIESTA

Business owner Chase Hansen was inspired by his french bulldog, Fiesta, to launch a quirky new venture in Cairns.

He opened a shop near the Night Markets on Abbott St featuring a menu full of North Queensland watermelons and locally made ice cream.

He said the idea to create

the business, Melon Fiesta, came from his beloved pup who went crazy for the fruit.

"Ever since she was a puppy she was just crazy over watermelon," he said.

#### CAFE CHINA

Cafe China announced its new location at 79 Mulgrave Rd in September.

Owner Harry Sou opted not to renew its lease at the Reef Hotel Casino because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A second Cafe China outlet is expected to open at Cairns Airport in 2021.

#### BURGER URGE

The popular eatery at Smithfield shopping centre, voted by Cairns Post readers as one of the Far North's best burger venues, opened a second restaurant at Stockland Cairns in Earlville.

Franchisees Pat and Tom Whyte said community support had enabled them to expand.

#### VT ESPRESSO

Desktop publisher Tommy Insixiengmay decided on a life change when he was laid off from his job and embarked on a pastry chef apprenticeship before discovering coffee.

After being stood down from his barista position at Cairns Airport due to coronavirus, he discovered an ideal position for his own cafe at the Cairns Night Markets.

#### THE OAKS CAIRNS HOTEL

A new \$12m, 76-room hotel development including a rooftop restaurant and bar opened on a prime corner of the Cairns CBD when The Oaks Cairns Hotel development was completed.

Three levels were added to the building, on the corner of the Cairns Esplanade and Shields St.

The hotel joins the existing Oaks Port Douglas Resort, and forms part of a 28-hotel chain across Queensland.

#### TACO BELL

Taco Bell will open its first restaurant in Cairns in early 2021 at the Westcourt DFO shopping centre, next to Hungry Jack's.

There will be room for 60 diners inside, with another 20 seats in an outdoor dining area.

The Mexican food franchise, owned by Collins Foods Limited, is building the store as part of its plan to open 50 Taco Bells in Australia by 2021.



DFO's addition of the fast food giant follows a multimillion-dollar redevelopment of the centre by owners Sentinel Property Group, which has included a new outdoor dining and playground area.

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