

## STEELERS ANNUAL REPORT 2016/2017 YEAR

I present my Steelers chairman's annual report to members for 2016/17 and am pleased to say as we enter 2018 the club is back on a more even keel after a tumultuous year. The board appointed a new general manager at the end of July, registered club patronage is pleasing, and all is in readiness for the new rugby league season on all levels after the successful mid-February Wigan-Hull Super League clash promotion in Wollongong, the first time such a game has been played outside Europe.

I was pleased to welcome to the Steelers at the end of July a new general manager in Sharon Arrow who has done a fine job since her arrival, after operations manager Luke Barker selflessly stepped into that role for the first half of the year. Sharon brings to the club a background as the former general manager of hospitality and sporting services at the Sydney Cricket Ground and Allianz Stadium where she managed relationships with bodies such as the Sydney City Roosters, the Swans, Cricket Australia, the Australian Rugby Union, Sydney FC and the like. She has hit the ground running in Wollongong, among other things initiating the conversion of the Steelers carpark into an outdoor food and hospitality venue coinciding with the Elton John concert at WIN Stadium, the successful Wigan-Hull promotion last month, new licensed club offerings and club relationships generally. We are pleased to have her here and I wish her well

On a sad note, as I write this report, the Illawarra region and rugby league generally has lost a true "Immortal" with the passing of Graeme "Changa" Langlands MBE on 20 January. Chang was a Wollongong product recruited by St George in 1963 during the club's golden era when he featured in four Dragons premiership-winning sides, being the club's top first-grade pointscorer in 10 seasons between 1963 and 1975. In an illustrious career he represented Combined NSW High Schools, Illawarra, Country Firsts, played 33 games for NSW over 14 seasons, and represented Australia in 34 Test appearances. Vale Chang.

I must acknowledge early in this report the decision by Steelers life member Bob Millward OAM to retire from the St George Illawarra Dragons board at the end of October. Bob was among those instrumental in achieving the St George-Illawarra joint venture after the ravages of the Super League experiment made it financially

impossible for the Steelers to continue alone. He had served on the joint venture board as a Steelers representative director from day one, around two decades. I thank Bob for his great contribution, which continues as a Steelers club director today. The Steelers board has appointed director John Brannon to fill the Dragons board vacancy (See below).

At the same time, as I write this report the Executive Director of the St George Illawarra Dragons, Peter Doust, announced his decision to retire from the position at the end of the 2018 rugby league season. Peter has been at the Dragons' helm also for close on two decades, and I join the wider game fraternity in acknowledging his service and wishing him well.

Sharon Arrow's appointment to the Steelers followed the board's termination of former general manager Scott Miles after discovery of an anomaly in the company's annual accounts during an audit conducted by KPMG in January 2017.

Following discovery of the anomaly and initial inquiries, Mr Miles was immediately suspended and later terminated upon receipt of legal advice. The anomaly resulted in the club's commissioning of a detailed independent forensic financial investigation which was completed in May. As I reported to last year's deferred AGM on 30 June, the club's audited financial statements for that year noted that this independent forensic investigation identified that a total of \$1,046,383 in company funds had allegedly been misappropriated over a number of years.

As I also reported to that meeting, the club's insurer, Chubb, accepted claim liability under the company's Employee Theft Policy and has reimbursed the company to the extent of its policy cover, being \$502,389. In this regard, I again thank John Saunders and his team from Warren Saunders Insurance Brokers for their diligence. Other civil action currently is afoot to recover funds over and above the insured amount, although this year's financial report has not included any recoverable amount in terms of income or receivable. Further, as a result of this matter the club also has continued to incur additional costs in a number of areas and these also are being pursued. At the same time, the Steelers board has introduced a number of additional policies to further strengthen security over club funds and assets.

Police interviewed and charged Mr Miles in regard to this matter. He pleaded guilty when appearing before Wollongong Court and on 11 December was sentenced to a term of imprisonment of four years with two years non-parole.

Upon revelation of this issue, the club also contracted Mr Robert Brennan of RT Hospitality Solutions and Mr Steve Muter, the former CEO of the Campbelltown Catholic Club, to offer various advice and club operational assistance for which I thank them.

I again place on record my thanks to those who have stood by the club and offered it encouragement and support during this trying time, not least our friends at WIN Corporation and St George Leagues Club, our valued employees and members, our auditors and legal advisors.

On the financial front, the licensed club operations show a net trading surplus of \$216,054. Included in this surplus is a total of \$104,305 in expenditure identified as being misappropriated by the former general manager, Scott Miles. Also, the company received entitlements of its insurance recovery claim related to the fraud. The total settlement received was \$502,389 being the maximum coverage under the company's employee theft policy. These proceeds have been classified as other income in the 2017 financial year.

On the rugby league front, the Bulldogs were flies in the ointment for both the St George Illawarra Dragons NRL side and Illawarra's NSW First Division team as the 2017 season reached the pointy end. The Bulldogs, out of top eight contention, nevertheless put an end to the Dragons' hopes of progressing into the playoffs with a 26-20 victory in the last game, while the blue-and-whites did the same to Illawarra's hopes of making it back-to-back Intrust Super premierships with a 32-14 win in the quarter-final. The Dragons Under 20 Holden Cup team did well to make the final four before losing to Manly.

Congratulations to skipper Gareth Widdop for taking out the 2017 St George Illawarra Dragons Player of the Year Medal. Gareth also was chosen as the Rugby League Players Association five-eighth of the year. Paul Vaughan was acknowledged as the 2017 Red V Members Player of the Year and also received the Geoff Selby Memorial Trophy, while Cameron McInnes was awarded the Dragons Immortals Trophy for commitment and dedication in all aspects of rugby league. Joel Thompson won the Mark Coyne Trophy for career development, with

the backrower excelling in studies for a Diploma of Leadership and Management at the University of Wollongong while undertaking work experience in the juvenile justice system. Backrower Jackson Ford won the Paul McGregor Trophy as Under 20 Player of the Year, while Luciano Leilua won the Illawarra Player of the Year and Jack Payne received the Illawarra Coach's Award.

I am pleased to see Paul McGregor contracted to coach the Dragons for the next two seasons and wish him, all players and staff the very best, as well as thanking all of our Illawarra team, on and off the field, for giving their best this season and keeping the flag flying into 2018.

It was a big year for Collegians in the 2017 Hardware Man Illawarra Rugby League competition. The Collie Dogs overcame minor premiers Dapto 22-14 to take out the first grade premiership, while also defeating Bosco Engadine 22-16 to win the Under 18 title, and missing the treble by one point in a 17-16 Second Grade loss to Thirroul. As well, Collies collected the Print Media club championship trophy, and dead-heated with Dapto for the Bob Lowrie Trophy for the club scoring the most tries during the season (80 each).

In other grades, Windang defeated Avondale 20-0 in the Illawarra Shield, Corrimal Cougars defeated Berkeley 24-0 to take the Inspirations Paint women's league title, while Batemans Bay defeated Berkeley 30-20 to win the women's Under 18s. The Cougars later went on to defeat Queanbeyan Blues 36-0 in the CRL Women's Challenge Cup and then head to Canada for two games leading into the World Cup in Australia later in the year.

Well done to Steelers employee Georgie Brooker who finished the season as the competition's second highest pointscorer with 58 points and second highest try scorer with 10 touchdowns, as well as being named her club's best and fairest of the season. The women's competitions certainly have resonated along the Illawarra and South Coast this year and I have no doubt they will only go from strength to strength.

In other awards, Helensburgh's Wayne Bremner was named the Paul McGregor Medal Player of the Year as well as taking the Frank Smith Trophy for best back. The Hardware Man Illawarra Shield Player of the Year was Joel Hanson, while Josh Honan of Dapto took the Alex Jack Memorial Trophy for Under 18 Player of the Year and Tammy Fletcher of Corrimal was named the Women's League's best

player. Dapto's Josh Bryant and Rob Buaserau shared the Jack Royall Trophy for highest try scorer with 16 each, while Thirroul's Joel Johnson took the George Grofus trophy for best forward.

The Paul McGregor Medal presentation night at The Grange Golf Club included two other special recognitions. The season marked a record 10 grand finals controlled by referee Marcus Jennett over 16 years (2002, 2005-8, 2012-14, 2016-17). The previous record had stood for 75 of the Illawarra District competition's 100-plus years. The year also was marked by Andrew Riolo refereeing 400 first grade games, another great achievement. Congratulations to both Marcus and Andrew.

In South Coast Group 7, the Jamberoo Superroos downed the Kiama Knights 18-14 in a game for the ages before a pleasing crowd at the Collegians Sports Centre, Figtree. It was Jamberoo's first top-grade title in 43 years, while Kiama were appearing in their first top-grade grand final appearance since 1990. In Reserve grade, Kiama defeated Gerringong 20-4, Milton-Ulladulla edged out Warilla Lake South 28-24 in Under 18s, Mt Warrigal defeated Sussex Inlet 20-18 in Third grade, and Kiama defeated Milton Ulladulla 20-16 in the women's league. This most successful grand final day again underlined what an asset the Collegians club has provided to the wider rugby league and sporting fraternity in development of this first-class facility.

It's worth noting that the two Group 7 first grade grand final coaches, Jono Dallas (Jamberoo) and Matt O'Brien (Kiama) have been appointed as co-coaches of the 2018 Illawarra SG Ball Under 18 team for the NSW junior representative series. This underlines the growing relationship between Illawarra and South Coast Group 7, a real positive for our game.

Off the field, at the Steelers deferred 2016/17 annual general meeting in June retired Steelers and Dragons stalwart Neil Lovett received Steelers Life Membership. Neil had been an institution at the Steelers and Dragons for 31 years, playing a particularly significant role in managing out junior reps and NSW first grade teams and his recognition is well deserved.

Many thanks to all who contributed to the Illawarra season's competitions on all levels, among them Illawarra Division chairman Ian Neill, manager Chris Bannerman, junior administrator Steve Nielsen and Stacy Drury as well as the

dedicated board of management and judiciary members. Thanks also to our valued sponsors on The Hardware Man, Carlton & United Breweries, Bendigo Bank, Inspirations Paint and Cleary Bros.

Once again, I also extend particular thanks to the Gordon family and WIN Corporation whose support over many years, emphasised again this year, has enabled the Steelers to continue supporting our game at all levels and the local community at large. Thanks also to our St George District RLFC and Leagues Club friends and my Steelers board colleagues, noting the retirement of long-serving director John Thirlwell and appointment of John Brannon to fill the casual vacancy. John was elected unopposed to the board in December, at the same time as Bob Millward OAM, Sean O'Connor and Col Markham were re-elected unopposed.

As well as Graeme Langlands, during the year the Illawarra rugby league fraternity lost a number of other great supporters, among them Jean McGregor, Tommy Rawnsley, Sharon Young, Dennis Murada, George Evans, Mike Andrews, Ron Rowles, Rikki Organ, Ruth Clark, Doug Canty and Edith and Des Meyer.

I wish all associated with the Steelers a great 2018, free of serious injury on the field and free of drama off it.

PETER NEWELL OAM

Chairman IDRLFC