

## FOCUS



BRENDAN DONOHOE

## BRUMBY'S WEST SIDE STORY IS TYRED

**J**OHN Brumby took a call on Wednesday afternoon that all politicians dread. It was South Pacific Tyres calling to say the company was closing its factory.

No talks, no begging for funds, just closing it and axing almost 600 jobs. It was a double blow for the Premier, whose Broadmeadows electorate borders the Somerton plant on Hume Highway.

It was an embarrassment for a government that's been banging on so much about the western suburbs that it didn't see the closure coming in the north.

For three weeks, government MPs have queued in Parliament to ask ministers soft, self-serving questions about Labor's commitment to the people of Kororoit — who voted in yesterday's by-election caused by the resignation of former police minister Andre Haermeyer.

Not one question was about the by-election being an unnecessary cost to taxpayers because of Mr Haermeyer's self-centred decision to turn his back on the west and try to earn more in the private sector.

The questions were all about Labor's commitment to western suburbs schools, transport, health and law and order.

The Labor mantra was that the Liberals — *Melway* in hand — had just discovered the west, even though Labor pushed out its candidate, Marlene Kairouz, in from Northcote and the Liberal candidate, Jenny Matic, actually lives near the electorate.

While the major parties were fighting out the by-election, South Pacific Tyres was quietly closing.

Mr Brumby looked genuinely disappointed when told.

His recent talks with Toyota president Katsuaki Watanabe helped clinch the deal to build Australia's first hybrid car at Altona.

Mr Watanabe will arrive in Melbourne on Tuesday to visit the Altona plant and have lunch at the Victorian Government's Sir Redmond Barry Room high above the Pens end of Collins St.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd will also be at that lunch.

He met the Toyota chief in Japan three weeks ago and forked out \$35 million to kick-start the hybrid.

Mr Brumby and Mr Rudd have developed a firm relationship, deciding to pour \$70 million in cash and land to support Toyota building the hybrid in Melbourne.

That deal was discussed over a number of telephone calls and even at the Boxing Day Test at the MCG.

On Wednesday night, the Prime Minister and state Premiers will gather in Sydney for a Council of Australian Governments meeting and perhaps dinner at the rugby league State of Origin decider.

It's a pity South Pacific Tyres didn't approach both politicians in recent weeks.

Both were facing by-elections, Rudd in the National Party stronghold of Gippsland.

They would have been all ears, especially when it comes to automobile-related manufacturing and maintaining jobs.

It's strange Industry Minister Theo Theoharides, when asked about South Pacific Tyres in Upper House question time, said he was aware of the company's problem for the past two or three months.

If that was the case, yelled the Opposition MPs, why wasn't something done about it?

Labor MPs are told when they ask questions in parliament to end most of them with the line that Victoria is "the best place to live, work and raise a family."

Occasionally they throw in the word "invest". Lately the line has been changed to the western suburbs being the best place to live, work and raise a family.

But it's bloody hard to do all that when you come from the northern suburbs and you don't have a job.

**BRENDAN DONOHOE** is state political reporter for Seven News

At 13 Keran Wicks was pumping petrol and checking oil and tyres for \$32 a week. Now, at 48, she runs a multi-million dollar business. She tells CATHERINE LAMBERT the secret of her success

**K**ERAN Wicks believes anyone can turn a business that began from a car boot into a multi-million dollar empire.

It just takes a good eye for opportunity and a decisive mind.

It may also take a good dose of modesty because, in fact, Ms Wicks is an inspiring and highly accomplished woman who has beaten the odds and endured hardship to make it to the top of her field.

She is not a survivor because she never sees herself as a victim.

She doesn't even see herself as being special. In her eyes, she is just a practical and commonsense woman who is proud to be an opportunist.

"I suppose I've done OK," Ms Wicks says.

"I've never been motivated to prove anyone wrong. I have just done my job as I needed to and good things have come out of it."

Melbourne-born Ms Wicks is the only woman in the world who runs her own movie rental company.

She began her business, Network Video, by selling videos from the boot of her car 23 years ago and has built it into the second biggest movie rental company in Australia.

"I never set out to be anything because I've never been ambitious," Ms Wicks says.

"I simply had to work and I believe what I've achieved is just a combination of hard work and good luck, but mainly hard work. I also know that money is not a measurement of success."

"The true measure of success is feeling like you have accomplished something, looking back at the business and being proud, not necessarily of what it delivers to me, but of how the people who have worked with me have developed."

Ms Wicks, 48, left home at 13. She doesn't talk about the circumstances, fearing it may upset her mother, but only says she had no other option.

She soon realised that she would have to work and lied about her age to pump petrol.

When she was 15 she again bluffed her way into a retail job and managed a boutique, where she stayed until her early 20s. Her rise became more serious when she was then employed as state manager for a sheepskin retail outlet.

They had one store when she started and two years later they had 30. She broke all sales records, oversaw shop fittings and staffing and turned one shop into a retail chain.

"They rewarded me by sacking me when they found out I was pregnant," she says.

"It was in the days when there was no such thing as unfair dismissal and mine was to be the first case to go before the Equal Opportunity Board on the grounds of discrimination, but they settled out of court. I got the equivalent of a week's wage."

Enraged but not beaten, she focused on having her first son and got another job, where she again started at the bottom, working part-time in a video rental store.



Picture: ALEX COPPEL

She quickly felt an affinity for the business and saw a new market so she started selling second-hand videos to rental stores from the boot of her car.

In 1991 Ms Wicks opened her own retail outlet in Kew, Little Monster, named after her son Paul, who is now 23.

Following form, she increased the store's annual takings from \$80,000 to \$700,000 in two years.

"Problems and crises lead to opportunity," she says.

beating myself up when I read other people's books on how they became successful, but then I threw them away and decided to trust my own instinct," she says.

"It's a matter of being decisive and intuitive. Indecision is crippling."

"It's better to make the wrong decision because you can always go back and fix it — just don't be afraid to admit it's been the wrong decision. The consequences of a wrong decision are never as bad as you think."

"A lot of business people look too far ahead. Building a business is about taking one step at a time and having small goals."

"I never thought I would be the second largest group in Australia. I thought about having 12, then 50, then 100 stores and here I am years later with 350."

She still relates to that 13-year-old girl who left home and pumped petrol.

That may be why she has begun a new campaign, the Cans4Films Festival, where people can rent a DVD free at all Network Video stores in exchange for a can of food to be donated to Foodbank to help feed the hungry.

"I guess it's my way of giving something back."

Ms Wicks is clearly not interested in bragging about her success, but she is openly proud of her business and particularly about

being a successful woman in a predominantly male industry.

She has lost track of how many times she has been in meetings where men looked eyes on her chest or when they addressed her male general manager, believing him to be the decision-maker.

If she is invited to play golf, she accepts only if they join her on a shoe-shopping expedition.

"It's not that it was hard because I was a woman — it just added another dimension to it. I've been underestimated a lot in business, but it's been to my benefit."

"Honestly, I can tell a dirty joke with the best of them, but I won't drink with them."

She has raised her sons — Paul has a brother, Christopher, 17 — mostly on her own and she hopes they have a respect for women and a strong work ethic.

She started boxing lessons eight years ago to tone up and maintain some authority in the home. She encourages her sons to tell her everything.

Being without a partner is not a regret, though she admits she would like to be spoilt at times and watch her favourite movies — *9 Weeks* and *Dead Poets Society* — with someone.

"Being spoilt comes with obligations, though, and it's actually good to get to a place in your life where you totally rely on yourself," she says.

**I have just done my job ... and good things have come out of it**

But there were limitations in the independent video business and she wanted to form a group that would have as much buying power with the film companies as her competitors.

Network Video was established and it now has more than 350 member stores across Australia and has a 15-18 per cent share of the \$1 billion movie rental industry.

"I used to spend a lot of time