



## *Don leaves Casino at top of its game*



**By DAVID BRASCH**

**IT** would be easy to mark the retirement of Don Waldron as secretary-manager at the Casino club as “the end of a reign”.

But after 44 years with the club, Don Waldron deserves much more than that.

Don Waldron **IS** the Casino Greyhound Club. He has been from the day in 1960 when he came to work there ... as starter, tote operator, kennel attendant, payroll boss, barman, you name it.

The fact he was one of only four from the greyhound industry to receive an Australian Sports Medal from the NSW State Government during the 2000 Olympic Games, received an industry acknowledgement award in 1999 and has been given life membership of the NSW Country Clubs Association is testament to just what impact he has had in this industry.

He’s been secretary at Casino since 1964 when offered the position by the then committee. Don knew everything about the club’s operation by then, so who better to get the job. Casino club, according to president Ray Van Eede, has \$160,000 in reserves and has never been in a better financial position with the greyhound racing industry in the northern rivers thriving.

And Don Waldron has presided over and guided that boom.

“Three things have lifted our industry in the Casino area,” Waldron told *The Journal* on the eve of his retirement.

“The introduction of the Gabba was the biggest bonus for the northern rivers club because it gave our owners

and trainers somewhere to race for major prizemoney,” he said. “Before that all our best dogs naturally went to Sydney.”

Waldron says the introduction of the TAB provided much more finance for country race clubs, and finally the fact Casino became a TAB club meant much.

“Prior to that we had been able to pick up a TAB slot only when the TAB needed us to,” he said. “But in 1991 when we became a full TAB club with 40 meetings a year on Friday afternoons was the bonus we needed.”

But it hasn’t all been plain sailing.

Don remembers vividly he and wife June preparing racebooks until all hours of the morning to have them ready for a race meeting ... just one aspect of the job. Don worked at McDonalds Pharmacy for 50 years, taking on the Casino club duties part-time but relying on June to do much of the work as well.

“June would take nominations over our home phone, then answer all the calls for fields, box draw etc until we finally got things like fax machines, answering machines etc,” he said.

June also worked for 25 years in the canteen at the track until retiring from that job in 2000.

Don retired from the pharmacy in 1991 and took over the reins full-time at Casino club soon after.

In 1989 he had a triple heart by-pass and by 2003 lined up again for the same operation. Both times he was off work for only three weeks.

For the past 40 years he has been in charge of ear-branding and marking up of greyhounds in the northern rivers and plans to continue with that.

He says Casino is the hub of the greyhound racing industry on the northern rivers.

“About 60 percent of trainers live in the Casino area, 20 are at Grafton, about 15 around Tweed and five percent at Lismore,” he said. “And the numbers are climbing all the time at Casino.

“I am marking up about 800 pups a year and this is a steady rise all the time. There are more litters being bred here now than ever.”

He says one of the biggest problems with the industry in recent times was the grading policy implemented five years ago. “It didn’t work,” he said. “But a new policy is set to come in and that will make a big difference.

“It will stop the fact that all races on NSW tracks are either maidens or fifth grades. It will give more opportunities for the better dogs to race constantly.”

Waldron has never owned a greyhound of his own but did buy a pup for his wife June to race many years ago. “It raced as Dusky Flame and Bill Reynolds trained her to win a few races including a heat of the Country Championship,” said Don. “June bred with her and one of the pups was Waldo’s Flame who won five at the Gabba and was famous there for his stumpy tail.”

He rates Pretty Short the best greyhound he has seen race.

Don says the changes at Casino club have been vast and he proudly boasts the club has the best kennel block in the state. “We have done a lot of work on this track in the years and it is paying off now,” he said.

Like all club officials though he sees problems increasing over public liability insurance and workers compensation payments, small race clubs facing difficulty keeping up with their responsibilities.

His saddest time in the industry came three years ago when “32 concerned members of the club” moved to oust him from the position. “They claimed I was not accountable enough,” he said. “The Board came north to check things out and cleared me over any allegations. I was very disappointed anyone would question by honesty and integrity.”

He had planned to retire about then, but continue until now because of it. “I dug my heels in,” he said.

Don plans to get his fishing line out, continue the ear-branding and marking up, and “look after my wife for a change”.

Bruce McKnight has accepted the position to replace Waldron, Bruce coming over from Tweed Heads.

Don says he will be around the tracks for a while yet ... Casino is glad he’s been around all this time.