



Speech by
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

Hansard Tuesday, 9 March 2010

MERLO, DR B

Mr PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (12.34 am): On behalf of the Babinda community and the many others whose lives he touched, I wish to place on the record my appreciation for the long and great contribution made by Dr Brian Merlo, who passed away on 1 March 2010 after a brave battle with illness. I thank the family for entrusting me with this task.

The second of three children, Brian Leo Merlo was born on 15 March 1947 and grew up in Surrey Hills in Victoria. Whilst at school, he suffered an injury and spent a long period in hospital. However, it was the treatment and care he received during this time that was the catalyst for his desire to become a doctor.

Brian studied at Monash University, which at that time was known as 'the farm'. With his degree and training in hand, he left the cold of Victoria for the warmth of Queensland. It was as medical superintendent of Babinda Hospital and through his surgery that Dr Merlo made his mark.

Brian Merlo was the quintessential country doctor. A dedicated medical professional, he thrived on the essential role he played in the community. He believed strongly in bulk-billing in order that no person would be denied the medical treatment that they needed.

He never allowed the sleepless nights, a seven-day working week or his own pain to interfere with the care he provided. I am told that on at least one occasion, after a long day seeing all of his patients, he needed to call an ambulance for himself. The long hours at the surgery, however, did yield other results. It was at his surgery that he met his beloved Delia, the person who brought peace and happiness into his life. It took many years for Brian to convince Delia to marry him, but when she did it truly was the best day of his life.

A devoted family man, Brian raised seven children in Babinda: Deanna, Clinton, Alissa, Warren, Kirstyn, Harry and Greg. He provided them with well-considered advice and instilled in them his strong work ethic and community spirit. He was a proud and contributing member of the Babinda Lions Club, Babinda Bowling Club, Babinda Boxing Club and the local branch of the Bendigo Bank.

While none of his children followed in his footsteps professionally, Brian encouraged them to follow their dreams and reminded them that education was the means by which they could achieve their goals. Brian would stay up all hours with his children but would always be up at 6 am for his rounds. On Sundays he was able to sleep in until 7 am and catch at least a little bit of Macca on the ABC.

I was truly humbled last Friday when I attended Brian's church service. It was literally standing room only and only the hardest person would not have been moved by the guard of honour formed by the dedicated medical and nursing staff of Babinda Hospital. It is difficult to do justice to the legacy of Brian Merlo in such a short amount of time, but perhaps his contribution can be best summed up this way.

Dr Merlo essentially did the job we now ask three people to do and he did it for more than three decades. This is testament to his work ethic and his dedication to the Babinda community. Devoted husband and father, loving son, supportive brother, doting grandfather and a true local hero, Dr Brian Merlo, long-serving and long-suffering, is no longer on call. Finally, he can have his Sunday sleep-in. Our thoughts are with Delia and her entire family at this difficult time.