




Speech By
Samuel O'Connor

MEMBER FOR BONNEY

Record of Proceedings, 6 March 2024

ADJOURNMENT

Edwards, Mr T

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (7.01 pm): On 16 February my grandfather—my Papa—Tom Edwards passed away peacefully in his sleep. I rise to honour him tonight not just because of his role in my very existence and his impact on my life and my values but because he was an extraordinary Queenslander who made an enormous contribution to the Ipswich community he loved so very much. Papa was a sparky turned salesman who sacrificed so much to give opportunities to everyone in our family. His life was about service—to his customers and to his community. He left school at 15 to become an apprentice electrician at his dad's business, RT Edwards. Roy, my great-grandfather, had started what became our family business for 77 years after he lost his job at the North Ipswich Railway Workshops during the Great Depression. He borrowed a few pounds off his aunty and he rode his bike door to door doing electrical repairs until he saved up enough money to set up a small shop.

At just 19 years of age, Tom was handed the reins. Through determination, aspiration and hard work, he grew RT Edwards from a small shop on East Street into a retail icon, employing 350 Queenslanders across 21 stores. He was at the forefront of electrical innovation—from connecting communities to power for the very first time to the introduction of TV, the age of the iPod and online sales. Everyone in our family grew up around that business and we learned so much from watching how he operated. I loved visiting the shop from as soon as I could walk. I learned so much following him around the sales floor and seeing how warm and genuine he was with everyone he met, and that was his secret—people. He made everyone feel valued, especially his staff.

Papa could never sit still and constantly kept himself busy. For over 25 years he served as chair of Retravision Queensland. He was a life member of the Ipswich Show Society, a member of the Rotary Club of Ipswich for over 55 years, a member of the St Andrew's Hospital board and a life member of the Electrical Contractors Association of Australia and served in so many other voluntary roles.

Papa was proud of Ipswich. He advocated passionately for the city to have a dedicated radio station and was a driving force behind bringing a university campus to Ipswich. Faith was central to his world view. He dedicated countless hours to the Raceview Congregational Church as a life deacon and in many other roles. Fittingly, we celebrated Papa's beautiful life a couple of weeks ago in that very church, across the road from the old Queenslander he grew up in. Papa was a true gentleman and a devoted husband for 64 years to my grandmother Ivy. Vale, Thomas Haddon Edwards—Papa. On behalf of my family, thank you for everything.