

The men who led the charge

From humble beginnings, TVW7 was founded on vision and strong sentiment. But it was hard work and innovation that ensured the success of 'the people's channel'.



Right: James E. Macartney

Far right top: Brian Treasure, left, and Sir James Cruthers

Far right: Max Bostock

It resulted in one of the most fundamental social changes to happen to WA but the genesis of TVW can be traced to a single contact between the then managing editor of WA Newspapers Ltd, James E. Macartney, and one of his senior executives, Jim, now Sir James, Cruthers.

"He called me," Sir James remembered, "and said that the board of the newspaper had decided to apply for Perth's first TV licence. He'd made a booking for me to fly to Melbourne to try to find out everything I could about television and then to prepare the application."

Mr Macartney, Sir James and the late Brian Treasure — the former clerk and then sales representative at WA Newspapers who became sales manager, production and program manager and later joint managing director with Sir James — were the three dominating forces in launching TV in Perth.

Mr Macartney's edict was the first that Sir James had heard of any plan involving television and he got no further briefing until the licence was granted eight months later. Then Mr Macartney told him that he wanted the station on air "a year from now".

That would have been, as it happened, on October 13 but even Mr Macartney wasn't brave enough to tempt the fates by going to air for the first time on the thirteenth, so he granted an extra time for Sir James to prepare for the big event.

"One of the board members was very superstitious," Sir James recalled. "He just wouldn't accept starting on the 13th."

The station had nothing — no building, no staff, no programs, no agreements to buy programs from other broadcasters. Initially, its home was in the bowels of the old Newspaper House in St Georges Terrace. It was, without doubt, a humble beginning.

"In those days we needed line of sight to the transmitter," Sir James said. "We looked around and found that Tuart Hill was about the right location for a station. It was on a hill and looked directly to Bickley, where the transmitter would be built. There wasn't much at Tuart Hill back then. There was only one road there, I think."

The other thing Mr Macartney said to Sir James was that he wanted the station to have a strong community base, to be a people's channel. The enduring element of that sentiment is Telethon, which Sir James and other executives adapted from an American fundraising principle. Sir James went to the US to see how theirs worked — and found other things, too.

He was quoted in *The West* the day the station opened that he'd been astonished at just how many television sets there were in that country: "They were in every room in hotels, in bars and in clubs. Many homes now have two, one for the adults, one for the children."

"I did not see it but was told that even American Indians living in reserves had sets in their wigwams — and they say one of the strangest sights is a wigwam with an antenna." He promised, 50 years ago, that commercial television would