



Drawing inspiration

Winning a challenge to create a character for young viewers was just a part of an illustrious career.

It is a matter of folklore at Channel 7 that Fat Cat earned his creators \$100. That was the prize paid to Greg Byrne and his wife, Judith, as winners of a challenge by general manager Jim Cruthers to come up with a new children's character.

As Mr Byrne remembers it, the challenge was issued in an executive meeting, largely because of some misbehaviour by Taffy the Lion, and the Byrnes were in need of a \$100.

"I went home and told Judith that I thought I had the character but I couldn't draw it. The next day I took her drawing of the Fat Cat character to (production manager) Max Bostock." And so Fat Cat began his long and illustrious career with TVW.

But Greg Byrne's contribution to TVW went far beyond Fat Cat. He joined TVW in 1960 at the age of 22 as one of two local sales representatives employed to develop the local market and sell television advertising to local clients, and from that experience is well qualified to point out the financial difficulties the station had in its early days. There just were not enough advertisers in the much-smaller city.

"Programs were made to run for 48 minutes in the hour," he remembers. "Sometimes we just

didn't have enough — that's when we'd fill up the time with a goldfish swimming round in a bowl.

"One Saturday night, there were just five paid ads."

In 1972 he became group general sales manager for TVW 7, SAS10, 6IX and Group Color and was managing director of TVW Enterprises from 1988 to 1992.

His 42-year employment covers the Cruthers, Bell and Qintex periods.

It was an illustrious career, which saw him front and centre of many of WA's more memorable moments — including the Meckering earthquake.

"A new master control desk had just been installed which was supposed to automate the station to a degree," he recalled.

"It was continually giving problems and become known as FRED." As in (possibly) Flaming Ridiculous Electronic Device.

"In those days, the station was broadcasting from 11am and on October 14, just as the master control operator pressed the button to put the station to air the whole building started to shake, walls shuddered, floors heaved.

"The operator thought FRED had gone berserk and was tearing the building apart. He fled."

Presumably to return later, looking sheepish. **7**



Above: Rick Ardon, Geof Parry, Susannah Carr, Basil Zempilas and Alison Fan celebrate the end of an era when Jeff Newman retired earlier this year.

Left: Greg Byrne.

Right: Ray Wardrop.