

# Better Business

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THERE'S a moving story about local radio stations 4MK AM and Zinc FM on Page 17. After 41 years of operating from 85 Sydney St, the teams have packed up and moved to new studios up the road at 37 Sydney St.

Tony Laurent gave up the wild waves for life in the coastal centre of Airlie Beach

## Award for an adventurer

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ADVENTURER and record-breaking sailor Tony Laurent made the decision to move to a land-based business during a rough day on the high seas about 18 years ago.

"One day I was going round Cape Horn, and I decided I never wanted to see another grey sea or grey sky again," Mr Laurent said.

"We were undertaking another record-breaking event, which nearly killed me, by the way."

Changing tack at that stage led to he and wife Lolita standing on a stage in Brisbane last week to receive a 2012 Telstra Queensland Business Award.

**“We ended up developing the first-ever website in the Whitsundays.”**

— Tony Laurent

The couple, who operate Airliebeach.com in the tourist strip's main street, were recognised for operating the best small business in the state and were presented with the MYOB Small Business Award.

In his acceptance speech, Mr Laurent said he ran the business "on instinct", and those instincts were honed while racing catamarans around the world.

"I was a wool classer, then a wool buyer, then a futures trader on the stockmarket in Sydney when I discovered



**SUCCESS:** An Airlie Beach business won the Telstra Queensland Small Business Award last week. At the presentation is MYOB enterprise division national manager Gary Katzeff, with Lolita and Tony Laurent, who operate airliebeach.com. PHOTO: CONTRIBUTED

sailing," Mr Laurent said.

"I hadn't even seen the sea until I was 16, but I took to it and was told I'd probably win a national championship if I got some more experience," Mr Laurent said.

"So one day I threw my tie in a bin in the Sydney CBD, and I went travelling the world, racing boats everywhere."

"I went at it pretty gung-ho. It was the adventure I loved, but I decided I was much more in touch with the land, and we decided to come back to Queensland."

He told his French-born

wife Lolita, as they were driving up the east coast of Australia, to tell him where she wanted to live, and he would work out how to establish a business there.

"We came over that hill; we call it fall-in-love-with-Airlie hill, and that was the spot, and there has not been one day I have regretted it," he said.

Though he said they "didn't have a clue" about operating a small business, they decided to apply the energy and principles of racing catamarans to their endeavour.

"We ended up developing

the first-ever website in the Whitsundays; it cost you nothing to do it, and we had a feeling back in those days that the internet was going to change a lot of things, so we registered [airliebeach.com](http://airliebeach.com)," he said.

"We love the technology but I've never forgotten the fact that you have to mix that with the old traditional customer service."

"It's the interpersonal relationships we have with our customers that matter."

"And the most important thing for us is they leave the region with a smile."

### TONY LAURENT'S BUSINESS TIPS

- **His business:** [airliebeach.com](http://airliebeach.com)
- **First job:** wool classer
- Employ the basic principles of:
  - Consistency
  - Decency
  - Respect
  - Good sportsmanship
  - Make sure you can hold your head high
  - Go to bed with a clear conscience

## Horses teach businessman a lesson in honesty

TONY Laurent surprised one of the Telstra judges during their visit to assess his business in the lead-up to the state awards.

"I had been talking about basic principles for operating a business, and she asked me 'now where did you learn all this'," Mr Laurent said.

"I said horses."

"Breeding, training and competing with Arabian endurance horses is my zen, my religion."

"Think about this. You can't lie to a horse. You have to be authentic and

you have to be able to deliver, because they are far more sensitive than people."

"She sought me out at the awards and said my win was a vindication of those basic principles."

Two other things impressed the judges.

One was the Laurents' ability to embrace new technology – they have recently launched smart phone app [airliebeachwhitsundaysguide](http://airliebeachwhitsundaysguide).

The other thing that set the Laurents apart is Tony's latest project,

1800miners.com.

"I'm trying to develop a safe place, a comfortable place through a website with lots of communication for miners."

"It will provide information on recruitment, sports, ways to stay healthy, or keep in touch with their family."

"I don't want this to be about what I call the 'men in white coats', or experts."

"It's about the men themselves and I want to do it in consultation with

miners."

Mr Laurent said he had lived with mining teams in different locations around the world.

"I know how important it is to maintain contact and have the support of family when working in isolated conditions," he said.

Mr Laurent will be attending QME next week, and he would love to hear from anyone who has ideas or suggestions for his website.

Phone 1800miners, or email [tl@airliebeach.com](mailto:tl@airliebeach.com) to get in touch.



TRUTH: Tony Laurent, with Prince.

### IN BRIEF

#### Disaster seminar

A DISASTER and emergency management seminar will be held at St Patrick's hall in River St on Wednesday next week. It's being conducted by Mackay's David Ayles, who has a background in rescue and security operations.

He will present his plan for improved responses in emergency situations, and the 90-minute seminar will be held at 3.30pm. Tickets are \$16.50, and if you'd like to know more, email [crralliance@live.com](mailto:crralliance@live.com) or phone Mr Ayles on 0428 028 023.

#### Make cupcakes

INTERESTED in making cupcakes? If you'd like a few tips on how to decorate cupcakes register online.

A class will be held by Angel Foods Mackay. To show your interest, search Angel Foods Mackay on Facebook.

#### Mining strain

QUEENSLAND Resource Council chief executive Michael Roche said higher taxes, unnecessary and poorly designed regulation and falling productivity have been identified as placing strain on current and proposed projects in the mining sector.

He said a report by Port Jackson Partners also called out increasing labour, energy and transport costs, the high Australian dollar, lower commodity prices, and lower commodity grades as affecting the competitiveness of projects.

"However, on the upside, the mood of the industry is more upbeat with the Newman government getting on with the job of restoring investment confidence in the sector," Mr Roche said.