



PERFECT TERRITORY TEAM

PHOTO: GLENN CAMPBELL

David De Silva has put together an office that is a bit like Darwin itself: incredibly diverse.

He looks for many qualities when taking on new people at his thriving law firm: a good breadth of knowledge, a willingness to learn more, attention to detail, integrity, a strong work ethic and passion for the profession.

That has led to a staff of hardworking lawyers and office staff who hail from around the world.

“Diversity is a massive strength,” says David, who has been a director of De Silva Hebron since 1994. “In many ways, our office reflects the wider Darwin community. While our preference is to recruit locals, the reality is that many people come to the NT from various parts of Australia and, indeed, the rest of the world.”

Like all Northern Territory businesses, recruiting and then retaining good staff is a never-ending challenge.

But De Silva Hebron has built up an excellent and interesting team.

“I’m immensely proud of the whole team,” says David, who is of Indian, Portuguese and Irish heritage. “I admire how hard and well they work.”

Many of the staff were born in the NT or have lived here for many years.

Darwin-born Alana Cox, whose mother, Honor La’Porte, was a teacher at St Marys Primary School for 40 years, comes from an Indian background.

She has worked for the firm for 12 years and specialises in property law.

Alana sat for her law degree at Charles Darwin University.

Melissa Yates comes from a Hungarian, Chinese and Italian family and went to school in Darwin before moving to Brisbane to finish her education.

But the Territory was in her blood and

she returned five years ago to work for De Silva Hebron.

Melissa has a master’s degree in wills and probate law but works across many areas of law with construction law featuring along with wills and probate.

Peter Orr, a senior practitioner from Victoria, has an Irish background. He has also been at De Silva Hebron for five years.

He works extensively in employment and personal injury law, but like most of the De Silva Hebron lawyers, also works across many areas, including criminal law.

Maker Mayek, who has been with the firm for 18 months, was born in South Sudan.

He is a general practitioner with a focus on crime and personal injury law.

Andrew Giles has a special connection to David – his father Richard gave David his first job in the Territory.

David says: “He’s a chip off the old block,

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which is great for us as Giles name is synonymous with excellence in law.” Andrew has been at De Silva Hebron for three years and specialises in commercial law, focusing on the sale of businesses, liquor licensing matters and leasing.

Katherine-born Charmaine Lentija, who has worked at the firm since January, is of Filipino heritage. She was schooled in the NT and completed her studies at the University of Adelaide, from where David also graduated.

She is working as a graduate clerk and is well on her way to her goal to be a commercial lawyer.

Leanne Kerr is an Irish-trained lawyer who was working behind the bar at Shenannigans in Darwin when she was recommended to David by its owner, Justin Coleman.

“Justin recognised Leanne’s abilities and strongly endorsed her. He has not been proven wrong, Leanne has worked hard and, hopefully, will be admitted to practise within the next 12 months.”

De Silva Hebron also has a skilled para-legal team.

“A legal firm cannot operate effectively and efficiently without everyone working together as a team,” says David.

Gina McDermott, who worked at her mother’s law firm in England from the age of 16, has been with the firm since 2010, leaving briefly to travel. She has worked across all sides of the legal practice and is supporting the litigation lawyers.

Reanna Gant, who is of Filipino heritage, works with the commercial team, as does Mia Chamberlain, another Darwin local

who has been with De Silva Hebron for three years, leaving temporarily to start a family.

Both of them are raising young children, as are Alana Cox and Jenna De Silva.

David says: “I genuinely admire the members of De Silva Hebron who are juggling the raising of children with the demands of working in a legal office. It’s not easy.”

The office management/accounts team is made up of David’s wife Wendy McQuillan, who is from an Irish-Scottish background, and their daughter Jenna, who is the office manager.

The newest member of the team is German-born receptionist Nora Krengel, who had been travelling for several years after working as a lawyer in Germany. She brings with her experience and a calm head.

“It’s hard to get good staff but I’ve been fortunate to build up a great team,” says David. “Many have been here for years.”

“And the fact that they come from all different places makes for an interesting mix. We’re a happy melting pot – like Darwin.”

He is proud that many De Silva Hebron lawyers have gone on to work or become leaders in local and national firms, as well as acting as general counsel in major corporations, or to work as barristers locally and interstate.

“That’s a tribute to the good training they get here,” David says.

“Our people are given a lot of responsibility. They are mentored and overseen by more senior staff, but they get experience that they wouldn’t get elsewhere.

“We’ve got an open-door policy – you can always discuss work with more experienced colleagues.

“That’s how you do a good job: attention to detail and never being afraid to ask questions.

“And it helps us fulfil our charter – to achieve the best possible outcome for clients at the best possible price.”

De Silva Hebron is a general practice specialising in the commercial sector.

It has built up a solid reputation in all areas of litigation, including company and contractual disputes, construction law, bankruptcy and insolvency, partnership disputes, debt collection, professional negligence claims, work health/medical negligence and other personal injury claims.

The commercial department offers a broad range of legal services, ranging from the sale and purchase of businesses, finance and partnerships agreements, liquor licensing, trusts, wills and estates.

The lawyers obviously have to handle whatever work comes in, but they are allowed to follow their special interests in law.

“I let them develop professionally and look into the areas they want to work in after ensuring existing clients needs are met,” says David. **TQ**

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