



TWENTY YEARS ON, MEMORIES OF THE FIRE REMAIN

A 'senseless act'. Those are the words used 20 years ago to describe a fire that closed the then Dubbo City Council offices for several days, disrupted works, displaced staff and effectively closed the doors of the Civic Administration Building for close to two years.

On April 15, 2003 the Civic Administration Building was the target of vandalism when thieves broke into the building and set numerous fires.

Up to 70 council employees were relocated to the old Dubbo High School site, including current Senior Building and Development Controller Alan Stanger.

Likening it to the pandemic lockdown only a few years ago, Mr Stanger said he recalled listening to the radio that morning with the announcer saying he had driven past the Council building and there was smoke pouring out of it.

"I could not believe what I was hearing," Mr Stanger said.

Laptops, iPads or remote access weren't in use back then, with Mr Stanger saying they had to work out how to carry on and carry out daily inspections without access to files or electronics.

"We were working out of our cars trying to keep the building industry going with inspections, without having access to the office. It was very similar to the pandemic lockdown, but this one was instantaneous."

Like the pandemic lockdown Mr Stanger said he was amazed at the ability of IT services to relocate the staff to the old high school building under very intense working conditions.

"My new office in the old high school building was a class room just off the main hall that is now the museum space. The front counter was a make shift counter at the southern end of this hall facing southward.

"Most memorable for me was how hot it was in summer and there was a cold water drinking dispenser that people were constantly filling plastic cups from. The bin for the cups was near my desk and it was constantly overflowing with disused cups,"

This was Mr Stanger's inspiration for making the lion fish sculpture that currently features in the council administration building. He used cups collected from the bin to highlight the wastage.

"The fire, as devastating and disruptive as it was, showed me how important it was to be resilient and how to quickly adapt to situations as they change and most importantly how you can get through these types of events by working as a team," Mr Stanger said.

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