SHINE

ART ON THE NORTH COAST

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The North Coast of NSW is a fast growing, diverse and increasingly sophisticated part of Australia.

With its much envied lifestyle, expanding businesses and eclectic mix of talented people, it is home to inspiring stories about communities, businesses and people who shine at what they do.

Shine is a new publication designed to capture some of those stories, and to share the privilege we feel in North Coast TAFE to be part of them.

In this first edition, we celebrate the North Coast’s contribution to the nation’s much-touted infrastructure economy and explore what the simple phrase ‘upgrading the Pacific Highway’ actually represents to our region and our state. We tell the story of the Pacific Highway upgrade through the eyes of a civil construction apprentice and uncover an Australian innovation in civil construction training.

We also shine a light on the thriving creative hubs on the North Coast and showcase the extraordinary talents and successes of local artists and designers. TAFE NSW has worked with generation after generation of creative Australians, and, as you’ll see, that heritage is alive in the North Coast of NSW.

And talking about best-kept secrets, the learning and career experiences of two Aboriginal people on the North Coast provide a unique insight into how North Coast TAFE’s Aboriginal Learning Circle is the quiet revolution for engagement with education and training among Aboriginal communities in our region.

We hope you enjoy reading this first edition of Shine - please let us know your thoughts and feedback by email to: shinemagazine@tafensw.edu.au

Elizabeth McGregor
Institute Director
TAFE NSW North Coast Institute
ART ON THE NORTH COAST

Byron Bay artist’s record setting journey inspired by nature

North Coast’s natural beauty inspires thriving creative hubs

Local artist takes flight
The majestic mountains and pristine lochs of subarctic Scotland and the subtropical rainforest and waterfalls of the Byron Bay hinterland may at first appear to have little in common. But for internationally-acclaimed artist and creative director Leif Podhajsky a fascination with the wild has taken him from the NSW North Coast, where he grew up, to Scotland where his latest collaboration is making headlines.

In October, one of the world’s most prestigious whiskey makers, Ballantine’s, announced a collaboration with the London-based designer to create three limited edition gift packs ahead of Christmas 2015.

Born and bred in Byron Bay and returning regularly to reacquaint himself with the local landscape he loves so much, Leif similarly immersed himself in the breathtaking Scottish wilderness where the images for the project started to form organically.

The gorgeous, kaleidoscopic designs mimic the fire and water used in the whisky making process and provide an abstract interpretation of Scotland’s stunning natural landscapes.

Leif says studying graphic design at Kingscliff TAFE had been the ideal training ground to send him on his artistic journey, exploring themes of connectedness, the relevance of nature and the psychedelic experience.

“It really set the foundation in my career as an artist and creative director, not only in the technical know-how but also from an ideas perspective,” Leif says.

“My work is inspired by nature and being able to surround myself in the natural environment of the Kingscliff area really helped me form a unique view on where I wanted to take my practice.”

Graduating from North Coast TAFE in 2006 and after a stint as a graphic designer, Leif quit his day job to launch his creative career internationally.

His distinctive, sonically-inspired designs and haunting photography quickly became sought after by brands, record labels and musicians including Nike, Sony Music, Wired Magazine, Warner Records, Of Monsters and Men, Tame Impala, Foals, the Vines, Kelis and Bonobo.

The success of the musicians he collaborated with saw the CDs his artwork adorned held up by iconic US talk show hosts such as David Letterman and Ellen DeGeneres.

Leif has also been featured in Huffington Post, Harper’s Bazaar and Marie Claire and has had acclaimed exhibitions in Sydney, Melbourne, Berlin, Paris and London.

“North Coast TAFE really was the perfect place to study, especially in the creative industries,” Leif says.

“The staff have such a wealth of knowledge in varying backgrounds and a passion and openness to share and help their students.

“I’m actually still friends with nearly all my teachers to this day.”

97%* of North Coast TAFE students were satisfied with the quality of their trainers, support and assessment in 2015.
Searching for the ‘sublime’ could be the mantra of many of the artists who are drawn to the north coast of NSW.

The spectacular coastal stretch from the Great Lakes to the Queensland border and its scenic hinterland and rural areas have always been a lure for artists, designers, musicians, film makers and photographers.

Many are enticed by the natural beauty and laid back, alternative lifestyles of the small towns and villages and stay to become part of their supportive and creative communities.

“They have become stimulating, creative hubs of art and culture and have a youthful vibe which attracts major music festivals like Splendour in the Grass and the Byron Bay Blues Festival,” artist Sandra Guy says. The alternative and sustainable lifestyle draws creative people to the area.

“It took some time but Sandra, who is also Head Teacher of Information Technology and Creative Industries at North Coast TAFE, eventually found the ‘sublime’ she was searching for.

With her artwork principally being inspired by the wild, vast, awe inspiring natural landscapes which embodied the 19th century Romantic movement, the US-born, Sydney-raised painter at first struggled to find inspiration in the rural surroundings when she moved to the Northern Rivers region eight years ago.

The working farms, grazing cattle and bitumen roads she found during her forays into the countryside held little interest or power.

But like so many of the talented artists who have made the north coast home, Sandra eventually found what she was looking for in the disparate, overlapping landscapes and eclectic lifestyles of the region.

“Our teachers are practising artists who are very prominent in their individual fields like painters Wendy Stokes and Hobie Porter, Rochelle Summerfield who creates unique and quirky collages, ceramic artist Catherine Lane and David Roussell, a hand blown glass artist,” Sandra says.

“We have also produced a lot of outstanding students including artists Kasane Low, papermaker Heather Matthew and London-based graphic designer Leif Podhajsky.

“Several have moved interstate and overseas to pursue highly successful careers.”

Sandra recently showcased her journey through the complexities of the region’s landscapes in a collection of oil paintings in her latest exhibition, ‘Two-thirds Sky: Searching for the Sublime in the Northern Rivers’.

Her paintings, featuring prominent road signs coupled with two-thirds ‘sublime’ sky, hint at the often prickly juxtaposition of the natural and rural environment typical of the area and reflects the environmental tensions of land use versus land preservation.

The sky, ominous and dominant above a landscape jolted by humans, can be seen as a warning of mankind’s complacency about their surroundings.

“How I view the landscape of the Northern Rivers is a very personal experience,” Sandra says. “My depiction of the landscape is not necessarily a typical or comfortable one.

“Through my work I hope to elicit a response generating the recognition of a ‘sublime’ moment experienced, and an appreciation for the beauty or picturesque nature of the Northern Rivers landscapes, but also the promotion of thought about further impact to this environment.

“Ultimately these works reflect the search for a fusion of contemporary experience with Romantic notions.”

Sandra’s exhibition was held at the Tweed Regional Gallery, which is also home to the new Margaret Olley Art Centre (MOAC), a gloriously chaotic recreation of her Sydney home described by her friends as ‘sublimely cluttered’.

The permanent tribute to the Lismore-born Olley has propelled the regional gallery into the national spotlight and created a mini tourism boom all of its own. Busloads of art enthusiasts have been making a pilgrimage to the $4 million centre since it opened in March 2014.

In its first 12 months, the MOAC attracted more than 135,000 visitors, doubling the gallery’s annual attendance figures.

“The Margaret Olley Art Centre and permanent exhibition has become an enormous drawcard that has boosted numbers at galleries in the area and provided additional patronage for local artists,” Sandra says.

“There are several galleries from the Byron Shire to the Gold Coast and many of the art lovers who go to the Olley exhibition are also visiting those other attractions.”

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 Searching for the ‘sublime’ could be the mantra of many of the artists who are drawn to the north coast of NSW. The spectacular coastal stretch from the Great Lakes to the Queensland border and its scenic hinterland and rural areas have always been a lure for artists, designers, musicians, film makers and photographers. Many are enticed by the natural beauty and laid back, alternative lifestyles of the small towns and villages and stay to become part of their supportive and creative communities. “They have become stimulating, creative hubs of art and culture and have a youthful vibe which attracts major music festivals like Splendour in the Grass and the Byron Bay Blues Festival,” artist Sandra Guy says. The alternative and sustainable lifestyle draws creative people to the area. “It took some time but Sandra, who is also Head Teacher of Information Technology and Creative Industries at North Coast TAFE, eventually found the ‘sublime’ she was searching for. With her artwork principally being inspired by the wild, vast, awe inspiring natural landscapes which embodied the 19th century Romantic movement, the US-born, Sydney-raised painter at first struggled to find inspiration in the rural surroundings when she moved to the Northern Rivers region eight years ago. The working farms, grazing cattle and bitumen roads she found during her forays into the countryside held little interest or power. But like so many of the talented artists who have made the north coast home, Sandra eventually found what she was looking for in the disparate, overlapping landscapes and eclectic lifestyles of the region. “Our teachers are practising artists who are very prominent in their individual fields like painters Wendy Stokes and Hobie Porter, Rochelle Summerfield who creates unique and quirky collages, ceramic artist Catherine Lane and David Roussell, a hand blown glass artist,” Sandra says. “We have also produced a lot of outstanding students including artists Kasane Low, papermaker Heather Matthew and London-based graphic designer Leif Podhajsky. Several have moved interstate and overseas to pursue highly successful careers.” Sandra recently showcased her journey through the complexities of the region’s landscapes in a collection of oil paintings in her latest exhibition, ‘Two-thirds Sky: Searching for the Sublime in the Northern Rivers’. Her paintings, featuring prominent road signs coupled with two-thirds ‘sublime’ sky, hint at the often prickly juxtaposition of the natural and rural environment typical of the area and reflects the environmental tensions of land use versus land preservation. The sky, ominous and dominant above a landscape jolted by humans, can be seen as a warning of mankind’s complacency about their surroundings. “How I view the landscape of the Northern Rivers is a very personal experience,” Sandra says. “My depiction of the landscape is not necessarily a typical or comfortable one. “Through my work I hope to elicit a response generating the recognition of a ‘sublime’ moment experienced, and an appreciation for the beauty or picturesque nature of the Northern Rivers landscapes, but also the promotion of thought about further impact to this environment. “Ultimately these works reflect the search for a fusion of contemporary experience with Romantic notions.” Sandra’s exhibition was held at the Tweed Regional Gallery, which is also home to the new Margaret Olley Art Centre (MOAC), a gloriously chaotic recreation of her Sydney home described by her friends as ‘sublimely cluttered’. The permanent tribute to the Lismore-born Olley has propelled the regional gallery into the national spotlight and created a mini tourism boom all of its own. Busloads of art enthusiasts have been making a pilgrimage to the $4 million centre since it opened in March 2014. In its first 12 months, the MOAC attracted more than 135,000 visitors, doubling the gallery’s annual attendance figures. “The Margaret Olley Art Centre and permanent exhibition has become an enormous drawcard that has boosted numbers at galleries in the area and provided additional patronage for local artists,” Sandra says. “There are several galleries from the Byron Shire to the Gold Coast and many of the art lovers who go to the Olley exhibition are also visiting those other attractions.”
Perched high upon a handrail overlooking Bondi Beach, the effigies of 22 mutton birds were supposed to weather dramatically to represent the sad plight of the pollution-threatened bird.

But what Coffs Harbour-based sculptor Jeremy Sheehan, and his 100-strong team of local and international collaborators, did not foresee was the compassion of the half a million visitors to the annual Sculpture by the Sea exhibition.

“People adopted the birds and turned up each day to see how they had weathered,” says the North Coast TAFE Visual Arts teacher.

“They looked after the birds, making sure they were okay and propping them up if they fell.

“It was incredible. It really restored our faith in humanity.

“The breakthrough of the work was supposed to be a metaphor for the destruction of these birds by marine pollution so, if anything, they probably lasted too well.”

The Trans Migration installation in the 2015 Sculpture by the Sea exhibition had originated from a classroom discussion a year earlier.

A group of Mr Sheehan’s students at North Coast TAFE in Coffs Harbour wanted to bring attention to the thousands of mutton birds that had washed up on local beaches, killed by plastic waste ingested during their annual migration.

They modelled bird skeletons from plastic refuse, adorned them with steel wool and installed them at the base of nearby Muttonbird Island so they could degrade and reveal the plastic within.

The overwhelming local reaction to the Improbable Gluttony exhibition prompted Jeremy to start thinking about the migratory, rubbish-strewn path of the birds.

“We thought we needed to go further, that there was a lot more to this project,” Jeremy says.

“We made up a new lot of wire frames and sent them to 22 Pacific islands, including Vanuatu, the Cook Islands and Kiribati, where the mutton birds land during their migration.

“Artists from those islands were invited to create the body of the birds themselves using local materials meaningful to them.

“Some of the islands went to great lengths to ensure the birds were returned to us, passing them via boats to other islands and facing challenges to get them through immigration.

“The birds have so much spirit and each has a story behind them.

“The people who make them put so much work into them and, although they look incredibly fragile, they stood up to everything put at them from the very stormy weather to playful kids.”

NCI TAFE Creative Arts Head Teacher Phil Greed says the project was a wonderful illustration of the value of TAFE’s creative courses for the North Coast community.

“Art and creativity can be a catalyst for change; a very effective way of communicating a message to people. This project is a fine example of how you can do that,” Phil says.

“This is about the synergy of education, engagement with communities and bringing attention to environmental issues that are important.”

96% of North Coast TAFE students agreed that they had developed the skills and knowledge that they had expected from their training in 2015.
When Sally Avery happened to see a small ad in her local newspaper about scholarships for a nursing course, she had a hunch it could be the start of a rewarding new vocation. Although already working in hospitality, Sally, a member of Port Macquarie’s Biripi Aboriginal Community, envisaged a career that would allow her to help Aboriginal people, and inspire her own four children to reach their dreams.

“I think my kids motivated me to embark on a nursing career because I wanted better for them,” Sally says. “I wanted to get a good job and be able to provide for them. So I sat the test, took part in the interview process and was lucky enough to receive a position in the course.”

Sally, 28, was one of seven – out of 50 original applicants – granted a New South Wales Health funded scholarship to complete a Diploma of Nursing at North Coast TAFE’s Port Macquarie Campus. Although convinced she was on the right track after the first practical placement revealed the scope of enrolled nursing pathways, Sally knew she would need Herculean stamina to go the distance.

Juggling studies with three young children and pregnant with her fourth child, Sally was also holding down a hospitality job at the Panthers RSL Club and volunteering weekly at Birpai Aboriginal Land Council, imparting healthy life skills to the youth group. Just when it seemed like her schedule couldn’t get any busier, Sally’s partner, professional footballer Sam Wara, was lured to France for six months on a rugby union Super 14’s contract.

“Towards the end of the pregnancy I couldn’t sleep anyway and with Sam not being home I was quite lonely at night, so I just studied the night away,” laughs Sally. “My level of self-reliance and resilience was certainly tested, but it was empowering. You never know how much you can achieve until you really want something. It proves that we can all accomplish anything we wish.”

True to her word, Sally was the epitome of grace under pressure, caping off her hectic year of study with a swag of student awards and honours. The nursing graduate received the two top North Coast TAFE awards: Student of the Year and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year; as well as the North Coast TAFE Student Recognition Award in the Community Services and Health category. She was then named NSW Training Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year for the North Coast Region.

“I was overwhelmed. I didn’t really think that I deserved the awards,” Sally says. “It was a little bit humbling I think. I was happy enough just to get the scholarship in the first place, but choosing the nursing path has turned out to be such a big thing in my life.”

Now living in Wyong on the New South Wales Central Coast, Sally has a landed full time traineeship with Central Coast Local Health District employed as an Aboriginal mental health worker at Wyong Hospital. “I’m getting hands-on experience every day in mental health. We have a clinic as well as in-patient liaison with the Aboriginal mental health patients,” Sally explains.

In another learning milestone, Sally has completed the first year of a Bachelor of Health Science (Mental Health) through Charles Sturt University, thanks to a scholarship from her employer.

“I wouldn’t have ever been able to get to university with all the kids and everything if I hadn’t done that TAFE course.”

“I’m really loving it,” says Sally, of her new career. “Learning about mental health helps with every aspect of your life. This year, we’ve been learning about how different traumas can affect someone’s life over the long term, which is particularly relevant to Aboriginal people who still experience the effects of transgenerational trauma.”

Sally says her desire to make a difference in the community and inspire her children - aged 11, six, five and one – provide the impetus to keep going high. “I had my daughter when I was 16 and I was always told that I would never amount to anything, so it’s nice to have finally accomplished something in my life,” Sally says. “I’d like to think that I’ve showed my daughter that you can make something of yourself no matter what. She’s seen how much hard work I put in and all of the awards that resulted.”

Going forward, Sally has even bigger dreams...hoping to work in a remote Aboriginal community one day and, down the track, secure a leadership role to steer strategies that achieve positive wellbeing for Aboriginal people.

“...to provide for them. So I sat the test, wanted to get a good job and be able better for them,” Sally says. “I think my kids motivated me to embark on a nursing career because I wanted better for them.”
GET READY FOR THE INFRASTRUCTURE EXPLOSION

Building a legacy
Not your typical classroom
FEATURE STORY

Building a legacy

BY MATT MULLENS

When Brad Stokley looks up from his work on one of the country’s largest infrastructure projects in a century, the hair stands up on the back of his neck as he considers the legacy he is helping to create.

That’s when the North Coast TAFE graduate and worker on the Pacific Highway Upgrade thinks about telling his children and grandchildren how he helped build something great for Australia.

“When I come to work I look at something huge that used to be nothing and think ‘I helped build that,’” Brad, a Stuarts Point local says. “I worked on the whole southern section and my Mum and family are really proud because it is just so important for everyone around here. All the little towns around Macksville believe the program is an industry benchmark for training in the sector.”

But for Brad, the 25-year project to deliver a four-lane divided road from Hexham in NSW to the Queensland border will also have another long-lasting impact - an opportunity to set himself up for a career in civil construction.

Brad is one of the first graduates of an innovative training partnership between North Coast TAFE, labour hire company Skilled/Waycon and Lendlease training partnership, the classroom is a 23 kilometre section of the highway upgrade from Nambucca Heads to Urunga and the students are involved in completing earthworks, concreting and constructing bridges, culverts and drainage lines.

All this is possible because North Coast TAFE trainees are treated like Lendlease employees. They work onsite and TAFE brings the training to them.

On top of that, industry health and safety regulations are as stringent as those they train in-house.”

“These issues aren’t something that can be addressed in a typical classroom. Fortunately, under the TAFE, Skilled/Waycon and Lendlease training partnership, the classroom is a 23 kilometre section of the highway upgrade from Nambucca Heads to Urunga and the students are involved in completing earthworks, concreting and constructing bridges, culverts and drainage lines.

“All this is possible because North Coast TAFE trainees are treated like Lendlease employees. They work onsite and TAFE brings the training to them.”

Projects of this scale don’t come along too often,” Andy says. “Training organisations, governments and builders have an obligation to use them to provide long-lasting economic benefits locally and nationally; to think to the future and develop our national skills base as much as we can.

“Onsite training also provides the least disruption for Lendlease, with trainees being kept away from their jobs for a minimal amount of time. We have twelve students currently placed and we expect projects like this, people get to be part of something so much bigger than themselves.

“There is also the chance to lift structure and routine. And, with people recognise the importance of organisation, governments and communities. Jobs mean so much more than just employment. They provide a source of self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment. Jobs help young people recognise the importance of structure and routine. And, with projects like this, people get to be part of something so much bigger than themselves.”

By helping more people get their foot in the door of civil construction, we believe the program is an industry benchmark for training in the sector.”

With a Certificate III in Civil Construction in his pocket, Brad feels the same way about the opportunities the project has opened up, albeit on a more personal level. Having secured a full-time job with Lendlease, he is now looking to the next phase of his career - one that seemed out of reach just 18 months ago.

“I want to stay working for Lendlease for as long as I can. After the Upgrade is finished I will move on to work on other Lendlease projects. I also want to keep studying and building on what I have done so I can be a foreman one day.”
The Sydney Harbour Bridge. The Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Scheme. The Adelaide to Darwin Railway. These iconic nation-building projects helped define Australia. They represented our growing independence and industriousness and, in their time, each thrust our country onto the world stage.

The civil construction sector was the industry principally responsible for these towering achievements and it continues to play a similarly vital role today. It lays the foundations for our nation’s future by building roads, railways, airports, tunnels and dams. The industry also provides employment for more than 70,000 workers – around seven per cent of Australia’s building and construction workforce.

But for those wanting to be a part of it all, civil construction is a notoriously tough nut to crack.

As North Coast TAFE Resources and Infrastructure Program Manager Andy Irvine explains: “Civil construction sites are not your typical workplaces, even among construction sites.”

“For example, they are filled with unusual, often unique machinery and that requires on-site training to master. To make it even harder, employers are traditionally sceptical about off-site training because they don’t believe it provides the practical nous you get from learning on the job.”

So you’re left with an industry where skilled workers pretty much exclusively fill vacancies and newcomers face that incredibly frustrating and all too common problem: need experience to get a job; need a job to get experience.

So what do you do when there just aren’t enough spots to go round? “North Coast TAFE, in partnership with All Excavations training, created a discrete workplace, the Terranora Walls Road Quarry,” Andy says.

“It has access to all the plant machinery and tools found on civil construction projects, such as excavators, loaders, trucks and pumps. It’s also run by one of the most experienced, broadly-skilled and passionate set of trainers assembled on the East Coast.

“WHS standards are sky-high. There are steadfast knock-on and knock-off times, and trainees work as a team. It’s not a matter of finish your tasks and go home. The job’s not done until the last member of the crew is – just like real-life.”

Meanwhile, just next door is the largest roadworks project undertaken on the East Coast this century: the Pacific Highway upgrade. But, perhaps most importantly, trainees don’t leave with just a piece of paper. Just like a real job they walk away with the core skills, values, work ethic and team-focus found in a job-hardened civil construction worker. And a solid foot in the door of an industry that’s responsible for the nation’s infrastructure future.
To gain that year of work experience before starting university, gave me so much confidence and I was able to apply the practical skills I had learned. It really convinced me that this is the industry I want to join in the future."

Merinda’s successful TAFE journey reflects latest research showing that diploma graduates have the winning edge in a competitive employment market.

Around 85 per cent of students who complete a diploma are employed within six months of finishing their course, and are earning an average fulltime salary of $63,500, according to the 2014 Graduate Outcomes Survey by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research.

But it’s the diploma to degree pathway reaping rewards for students like Merinda, the vocational experience from TAFE providing the perfect foundation for higher degree studies.

“Turning a lifelong love of art into a career in graphic design.”

"The graphic design industry is competitive," Merinda explains.

"Hopefully by the end of next year when I’m going for jobs, it’s going to look a lot better to employers having both the degree and the portfolio that I’ve been building since I’ve been at TAFE.

“I’m really glad that I took this pathway with my studies.”

87%** of North Coast TAFE graduates were employed or in further study after their training in 2015.
TOURISM ON THE NORTH COAST

Is the North Coast ready for the boom in Chinese tourism?
Is the North Coast ready for the boom in Chinese tourism?

By Matt Mullen

The red dragon has landed. Drawn by the North Coast’s spectacular coastlines and lush river valley hinterlands; attracted by its vibrant wildlife and diverse fauna; and captivated by its sumptuous produce and laid-back lifestyle, the long-predicted boom in Chinese tourism has hit the region.

This boom in Chinese tourists is no accident. It didn’t happen overnight. The seeds were planted more than 15 years ago when, in 1999, Australia became one of the first Western countries to be granted Approved Destination Status by the Chinese Government. This gave Australia the official green light to attract Chinese tourists. And we’re not talking about a clumsy Big4, that is written entirely in Mandarin. Big4 Sunshine South West Rocks uses a website developed by its parent company, Big4, that is written entirely in Mandarin. And we’re not talking about a clumsy Google Translate patch-up job. A Chinese copywriter was contracted to develop text that specifically met the linguistic nuances of their target market.

As a member of the local South West Rocks Chamber of Commerce and the executive committee of the Macleay Valley Tourism Association, Tony says he’s also working to encourage other businesses to develop similar collateral.

“Competition for the Asian market is fundamental. If we don’t get on the bandwagon, we’re missing out on the world’s fastest growing tourism market,” Tony says. “The first tourists coming through now are the early adopters. It’s vital that – as a region – we impress them with our understanding of their culture so they go back home and talk about us. Things like language, social norms, respect and group hierarchies are important. This will help us develop a reputation as the go-to destination for their compatriots.”

These can really affect whether someone enjoys their holiday or not, so in tourism and hospitality-based industries it’s important that we research and profile markets extensively and undertake training that will help us become more capable of meeting their needs.

“The rise in the Asian market is fundamentally changing the tourism and hospitality industry and we’re seeing employers up and down the North Coast looking specifically for people who have the skills and expertise in these areas. But amidst all this change one thing remains the same. The underlying factor is really good old-fashioned customer service.”}

David O’Connell – CEO of the North Coast Destination Network – the region’s premier tourism body – it’s of the North Coast Destination Network, the region’s premier tourism body – it’s easy to understand why the region is perfectly placed – and paced – to meet this change in perspective, and duly responded by recently making Chinese tourists a key focus in their marketing campaigns.

But one of the biggest challenges in looking to capture this market of unprecedented promise is addressing the cultural divide. While Chinese tourists are looking for an authentic experience, they still want certain cultural practices of their own to be respected. Some of the region’s businesses are already on the front foot in this respect.

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This growing sensitivity to the Chinese way of life is also being reflected in regional training programs. Cameron says he has already taken part in workshops specifically designed to help businesses bridge the cultural gap between our two countries.

It is also apparent in the Vocational Education and Training sector, where cultural training has been absorbed into a range of programs, such as aviation, events management, hospitality, cookery and travel consultancy.

“From what I’ve seen, Chinese tourists want free, independent travel through natural environments. They’ve got enough cities at home. This gives our region a natural advantage.”

“So we can certainly give them a grass roots experience – that’s our bread and butter – but by educating ourselves about their cultural nuances, we can put little things in place, particularly in customer service areas, that will separate us from the competition.”

“The first tourists coming through now are the early adopters. It’s vital that – as a region – we impress them with our understanding of their culture so they go back home and talk about us. Things like language, social norms, respect and group hierarchies are important. This will help us develop a reputation as the go-to destination for their compatriots.”

It’s vital that as markets change, we adapt our skills and knowledge,” Gillian says. “Aspects such as religion, food and legal systems – visa regulations and passport requirements, for example – can vary vastly from country to country and particularly between the East and West.

“Competition for the Asian market is fundamental. If we don’t get on the bandwagon, we’re missing out on the world’s fastest growing tourism market,” Tony says. “The first tourists coming through now are the early adopters. It’s vital that – as a region – we impress them with our understanding of their culture so they go back home and talk about us. Things like language, social norms, respect and group hierarchies are important. This will help us develop a reputation as the go-to destination for their compatriots.”

This growing sensitivity to the Chinese way of life is also being reflected in regional training programs. Cameron says he has already taken part in workshops specifically designed to help businesses bridge the cultural gap between our two countries.

It is also apparent in the Vocational Education and Training sector, where cultural training has been absorbed into a range of programs, such as aviation, events management, hospitality, cookery and travel consultancy.

“We can get them down here, but there also has to be a significant amount of in-house collateral, which is what we are starting to develop,” Tony says.

“From what I’ve seen, Chinese tourists are becoming more adventurous, keen to travel further afield and take the road less travelled. According to Cameron Arnold – co-chair of the North Coast Destination Network, the region’s premier tourism body – it’s this change in preference from fast-paced urban to relaxed, regional Australia that is driving the influx of visitors from China, to the North Coast. Although, he says, they’re doing a pretty good job at driving themselves.

“From what I’ve seen, Chinese tourists stand out in their willingness to jump in a hire car or van with the whole family and see the real Australia,” Cameron says. “This is great for the North Coast, because we have the country’s best road trip – the 1,000km stretch between the Gold Coast and Sydney is a perfect fit.

“It’s an exciting time for the region, and we have the country’s best road trip – the 1,000km stretch between the Gold Coast and Sydney is a perfect fit. The North Coast Destination Network has recognised the region is perfectly placed – and paced – to meet this change in perspective, and duly responded by recently making Chinese tourists a key focus in their marketing campaigns.

But one of the biggest challenges in looking to capture this market of unprecedented promise is addressing the cultural divide. While Chinese tourists are looking for an authentic experience, they still want certain cultural practices of their own to be respected. Some of the region’s businesses are already on the front foot in this respect.

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Every school leaver deserves a future full of choices and opportunities, and for many Aboriginal people it’s important to have education options that affirm cultural values and perspectives. Culturally safe courses can be a valuable step towards employment opportunities.

Customised training and support options for Aboriginal people and communities is the key focus of a suite of services that embrace Aboriginal cultures, celebrate diversity and provide solutions for Aboriginal people, communities and employers.

Services known as Aboriginal Learning Circle - North Coast TAFE can be a springboard to success for many students, including 30 year old Paris Robinson of Tweed Heads.

Aboriginal education specialists work with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teaching teams to provide customised vocational education and training and workplace development that is culturally appropriate and above all supportive.

So when Paris completed a Certificate IV and Diploma in Community Services at North Coast TAFE, she relished the support she received from Aboriginal teachers on her learning journey.

“I hadn’t been to TAFE before and I really loved the experience,” Paris says. “The Indigenous staff members were great. You could always talk to them and relate to them, because being Indigenous themselves, they’re aware of certain things. You just find it much easier to express what’s going on and you know that they’ll do their best to help you.”

Paris revealed in her TAFE studies, her first practical placement with community services organisation New Horizons leaving no doubt she was on the right career path.

“My placement just cemented my passion for the field of community services,” Paris explains. “It convinced me that I wanted to help Indigenous people in their communities.”

After completing her certificate, Paris achieved distinctions in her diploma studies, and was ultimately rewarded with TAFE NSW’s Gili Award for Academic Excellence.

Since leaving TAFE, Paris has gone from strength to strength. She’s now employed as a trainee case manager with Tweed Shire Council’s Community Options Program (COPS) and is studying for a degree in social welfare. She was recently named Young Achiever of the Year at a NSW conference for Aboriginal People with another certificate that takes them nowhere.

“That’s the key to Aboriginal Learning Circle: training that leads to a definite outcome for Aboriginal people. That is either a job, another course or, in some cases, a community or cultural outcome,” explains. “It convinced me that I wanted to help Indigenous people in their communities.”

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Director of Aboriginal Learning Circle - North Coast TAFE, Heather McGregor says graduates like Paris Robinson epitomise the success of the Aboriginal Learning Circle - North Coast TAFE.

“It’s wonderful to see students like Paris achieving their goals,” Heather says. “Aboriginal Learning Circle is all about practical outcomes. The first thing we ask when designing any course is: who is it going to make a difference to and how?

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“That’s the key to Aboriginal Learning Circle: training that leads to a definite outcome for Aboriginal people. That is either a job, another course or, in some cases, a community or cultural outcome.”

Each course delivered through Aboriginal Learning Circle - North Coast TAFE is designed with Aboriginal students in mind.

We value having Aboriginal people involved in delivering our programs and including an Aboriginal perspective on subject matter.

“Anyone can make change; anyone can do one little thing to help one person. They say if you smile at one person, that smile is going to travel … I don’t think it’s too hard to help people and create change and it only takes one person to do that.”

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“So it’s not just about addressing disadvantage. It’s acknowledging that Aboriginal approaches to teaching and learning can be equally as important and effective as other methods.”

And at the end of the learning journey, staff proudly stand beside students and celebrate their achievements.

“We have graduations at the end of every program,” Heather explains. “You get a lot of hugs and emotion amongst students and their teachers. Real relationships are established that continue long after the course.”

Paris is one graduate who has become a shining role model to others in her community, her wisdom and contagious positivity inspiring everyone she meets.

“I’m inspired by just having a heartbeat,” Paris says.

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INSPIRED BY A MENTOR

CULINARY SUCCESS

Young chef tastes success after Masters Apprenticeship

Master stirs culinary passion in chefs of the future
Passionate about food and a stickler for perfection, newly-qualified chef Michelle Roderick is already showing her flair in the competitive hospitality world just a year after graduating from North Coast TAFE - Kingscliff Campus.

Michelle, 25, is a commis chef at the busy Twin Towns Clubs and Resorts at Tweed Heads, gaining invaluable experience in several of the club’s dining venues, and running the kitchen at the popular tapas bar, Horizons.

“I didn’t think that a year after my apprenticeship I’d be running one of the restaurants in Twin Towns,” Michelle says.

“Garry also encouraged me to go into competitions and go further than most students would. He just pushed me to go beyond the limits and to keep progressing. That’s what makes him an excellent teacher.”

With Garry’s encouragement, Michelle entered the annual Fonterra Proud to be a Chef Mentorship program in her final TAFE year, and was one of the 31 talented apprentice chefs from across Australia and New Zealand chosen to attend four days of master classes in Melbourne.

“Ongoing support after completing the course.”

Michelle has also excelled in the Nestlé Golden Chef’s Hat Awards, placing third in New South Wales in 2014 and second in Queensland in 2015.

Now living her dream as a qualified chef, Michelle is in no doubt North Coast TAFE gave her the skills she needed to make a successful entrée into the hospitality industry.

“I’d recommend the course to any students in the Tweed Valley and south of that area,” Michelle says.

“Ongoing support after completing the course.”

As for future goals, Michelle is completing a food and beverage management certificate in her spare time and aims to one day manage a restaurant or hotel venue.

“There are so many different paths you can take in hospitality from the starting point of being a chef. I want to climb the ranks by learning from my executive chef. I’m just letting it take me where it’s going to take me. I’m striving to get to the top but I don’t have a time limit on when I get there.”
After 30 years as a teacher, celebrated chef Garry Smith has produced an extraordinary culinary legacy, training generations of hospitality industry staff for careers in Melbourne, London and New South Wales.

“I don’t think there would be a restaurant in the north coast region that would not have one of my students employed in them,” Garry says.

“We’re now up to fourth and fifth generations, so I’m now teaching the apprentices employed by students I first taught 15 years ago.

“Some former students own their own restaurants; they’ve moved to Melbourne. I still keep in touch with them and meet them every so often.”

As commercial cookery teacher in Tourism, Hospitality and Events at North Coast TAFE: Kingscliff, Garry combines a love of teaching with years of industry experience including executive chef posts at top hotels in London, Scotland and Sydney.

Garry is also the current world champion salon culinaire Master Chef, a prestigious industry ranking conferred on chefs who have exceptional culinary arts knowledge.

With credentials like these, it is little wonder Garry’s students are rising to the top – the master chef teaching everything from knife technique, butchery skills and menu planning to desserts, sauces and pastries, and finessing crocodile and emu.

“Of course they also learn all of the theory as well: how to coach other cooks, culinary etiquette, codes of practice and how to manage staff.

“The hospitality industry is one of the largest employers on the New South Wales north coast, so we certainly feel like we are laying the foundation for the chefs of the future here at Kingscliff TAFE,” Garry says.

One of those rising chefs is apprentice Michelle Roderick, who impressed North Coast TAFE teachers with her potential as soon as she began her Certificate III in Commercial Cookery.

Michelle was just exemplary in the “kitchen,” Garry says.

“She’s one of the best chef students I’ve trained. She was polite, she was always on campus when required and she spent so much time trying to help other students as well.”

Garry says that whether students are training to be a baker or wine producer, they need nerves of steel to cope with the often pressure-cooker environment of a busy restaurant or café.

“Because hospitality is a demanding industry and the hours can be erratic, you need to have real discipline and commitment.

“We’ll always have cooks that can cook, but people who excel in hospitality really have to have a love of food and a love of the industry, and I saw all of that in Michelle.”

Garry says Michelle proved her all-round capabilities during a gruelling assessment project held at Kingscliff TAFE’s Caldera Restaurant.

“Michelle had to write and fully cost a three-course dinner menu and run the kitchen using other students as her brigade. We stood in the background,” he explains.

“She catered for 70 people that night, including her employers and Twin Towns colleagues.

“Michelle’s restaurant was extremely successful. She’s a very calm young lady. She didn’t get stressed or overawed by what was demanded of her, which is a good trait for a cook to have.”

Michelle is one of three students Garry has taught in recent years who have made the finals of the Fonterra Proud to be a Chef mentorship program, further cementing both his and Kingscliff TAFE’s reputation as a leader in hospitality training.

“Working in the hospitality industry needs real discipline and commitment.”

“Even though Michelle is now forging her own path, Garry still encourages his former protégé to enter master classes and other competitions to add new techniques to her resume.

“It’s very rewarding to see students like Michelle following their dreams after they’ve studied commercial cookery at North Coast TAFE,” Garry says.

“I can see Michelle definitely running her own establishment. I have absolute confidence: she has the common sense, she has ability, she has the drive – the world’s her oyster.”

NC TAFE has the widest range of subsidised courses in NSW with flexible delivery and supportive services offering more options.
“I would highly recommend the Certificate II, III and IV courses as well as the Diploma in Retail management course ... [to] develop the competencies needed to excel in the retail world.”

Thomas Flowers
Certificate IV and Diploma in Retail Management
BUSINESS CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Big thinking for small business
The laid back, small town lifestyle of the North Coast of NSW is about to face one of its biggest challenges yet – it’s about to boom.

It won’t be just any boom but a huge jobs boom with the population boom that naturally follows.

From sea and tree changers to financially-stretched Sydney-siders escaping the hyper-ridiculous housing market, the Grafton to Coffs Harbour region will need to find almost 10,000 skilled and unskilled workers over the next five years.

A Department of Employment report recently predicted job growth of 13.2 per cent for the region.

For the Richmond to Tweed area, one of the fastest growing regions in NSW, the forecast is for 6000 new jobs over the same five-year period.

Such rapid growth brings a number of challenges and opportunities for the ‘engine room’ of these regions - the small business sector.

Like much of regional NSW, small businesses on the North Coast employ the majority of locals.

But, also like much of regional NSW, they are faced with a skills shortage that will only be exasperated by jobs growth.

For Hastings Co-op CEO Allan Gordon, building a partnership with the local North Coast TAFE campuses around Port Macquarie has been critical to ensuring his highly valued staff can be retained and new staff trained.

Working together they have developed a range of innovative workplace training courses that cover everything from mystery shopping to how to respond during an armed robbery.

“We have had an association with TAFE going on 18 months and the intention from the outset was to provide a level of training to staff we’ve never had before,” Allan says.

“When we asked for an armed hold up course for our high risk service station and liquor staff, TAFE took it on, massaged it and got some great trainers in.

“The feedback from staff was so good we are now putting every one of our 270 staff members through this important safety course, from the casual check out operators to management.”

The Co-op, which will celebrate its 100th year in operation in 2016, has 13 businesses in the Hastings area covering supermarkets, bottle shops, service stations, bulk fuel, hardware, rural supplies, and department stores.

“TAFE has been very flexible, accommodating and cost effective, tailoring courses to our specific requirements,” Allan says.

“When we need to develop a new course, the response from TAFE is immediate.

“We get an instant return on our investment in training as you can see the changes very quickly in our staff.

“Recently we asked for a sales course but we didn’t want a theory course.

“We wanted a hands on, in-store training program for department store staff so they could enhance their customer service skills.

“That course will be ready for us early in the new year. That is how flexible TAFE has been for us.”

TAFE has also set up a Moodle – an online study platform – specifically for Hastings Co-op staff with core modules essential for the business.

“Staff are able to log on and run through the courses when it is convenient,” Allan says.

“TAFE has been very in tune with what we are trying to achieve and they understand that the more we can partner together the better outcome there is for both parties.”

For current North Coast TAFE student and salon owner Sandra Lane keeping up with the latest cutting-edge techniques and products and most up-to-date health and safety training is vital for her budding beauty therapy business.

A ‘mid-life crisis’ saw her toss in a full-time job in the medical sector after 25 years to find a new, more family-friendly career.

“It is the best thing I ever did,” Sandra says.

“I started a beauty therapy course and absolutely loved it so went on to do the Diploma in Salon Management.

“I’ve already started my own business while I am still studying, my income has doubled in the last year and I can fit my work around my family.

“It is the best thing I ever did,” Sandra says.

“I have got a salon at home and everything I learnt at TAFE, I implemented in my salon from council inspections, to best practice and the latest health and safety regulations.”

Carol Robinson, Sandra’s Head Teacher in the Business Faculty at the North Coast TAFE Kingscliff/Wollongbar Campus, says the Salon Management and other business courses focus on the unique conditions facing North Coast small business owners.

“Often they rely on the tourist market which brings different challenges such as staffing,” Carol says.

“We also focus heavily on marketing via social media which, for our hairdressing and beauty students, is very beneficial.

“We show them how to design flyers and advertising to use on Facebook and Instagram which is very successful for a lot of these types of businesses with very little outlay.

“Some business owners are sending all their staff to business courses like Salon Management and their businesses are growing from it.”

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Our north coast locations

- MURWILLUMBAH
- LISMORE
- CASINO
- BUNDELUNG
- YAEGL
- GRAFTON
- GUMBAYNGGIRR
- COFFS HARBOUR
- COFFS HARBOUR EDUCATION CAMPUS
- MACKSVILLE
- DUNGHUTTI
- KEMPSEY
- WAUCHOPE
- PORT MACQUARIE
- TAREE
- GREAT LAKES
- WORIMI
- BALLINA
- WOLLONGBAR

*Source: North Coast TAFE’s Learner Engagement Survey 2015.