Entry type: Person
Entry ID: IMP0215

Giese, Nancy

(1922 - 2012)

Born	19220131, Brisbane Queensland Australia
Died	20120508, Darwin Northern Territory Australia
Occupation	Community Leader, Educator

Summary

Dr Nancy (Nan) Giese was a pioneer of education and the visual and performing arts in the Northern Territory. She was strongly involved in planning and setting up the first tertiary institutions and for ten years was elected Chancellor of the Northern Territory University, now Charles Darwin University.

Details

Born in 1922 in Brisbane, Queensland, to Robert and Daisy Wilson, Nancy Giese was a champion of education and the arts and one of the Northern Territory's most important leaders. The extent of her contribution to community life is reflected in the numerous honours she received, culminating in her 2004 award of Doctor of Education, honoris causa, from the university she was instrumental in founding, and which she served as Chancellor for ten years. The citation described her as 'a true pioneer within our community, recognizing needs and then taking the lead in the creation of amenities and institutions to meet those needs.' Other awards include Officer of the Order of Australia in 1997, OBE in 1977, the Centenary Medal and the Administrator's Medal in 2003, and Tribute to Northern Territory Women in 2005.

Educated at Brisbane Girls' Grammar School and the University of Queensland, as a young teacher she joined the flying squad travelling around the state's schools promoting health and fitness. Her boss was Harry Giese, the first Queensland Director of Physical Education (1944-47), whom she married in 1946. Their dynamic partnership powered their years in Darwin from 1954, through pioneering initiatives in education and health.

Nan Giese saw immediately that families were leaving the Northern Territory, 'good citizens lost to a developing society that badly needed them', because their children could not matriculate. She lobbied tirelessly for full secondary education and for 'amenities that were the most modern in Australia when they were built', as Trevor Read, Principal of Darwin High School, noted. She became a key member of groups such as the Graduates' Association demanding tertiary education for Territory students as part of the full range of opportunities from pre-school to post-graduate research available to other Australians. In the late 1960s a Commonwealth government report looked to the successful American model of community colleges, and recommended an independent tertiary institution which could offer both higher education and technical courses. She was a member of the planning committee and later Chair of the Council of the Darwin Community College (DCC), the prototype community college in Australia. Its labs and trade workshops, classrooms, art studios, a library, a theatre and student accommodation, opened in 1974. At the end of that year, Cyclone Tracy swept them all away.

But this was just the beginning. Nan Giese and others persisted, and in January 1989 the Institute of Technology that succeeded the DCC amalgamated with the embryo University College to form the Northern Territory University, now Charles Darwin University. Bridging courses and scholarships for Indigenous people were set up and education for regional and remote areas became a priority.

From the 1960s, Nan Giese was on the founding committees and led arts organizations such as the Arts Council of the Northern Territory, the Darwin Performing Arts Centre Board and the Museums and Art Galleries Board of the Northern Territory. The Arts Council flew in international groups from the Baranggay Dance Troupe from the Philippines to the Polish Chamber Orchestra, and toured them throughout the Territory from Milingimbi to Alice Springs. The Performing Arts Centre and the waterside Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory opened just after Territory self-government. They are large and beautiful buildings and thriving community hubs. They enhance the modern city that has replaced the post-War frontier town of Darwin.

In all these initiatives 'there seems to be this one link, this thread right through from the beginning, the one person who's been a driving force through all those years when others have come and gone, either left Darwin or given up', said Nan's friend and fellow pioneer of Territory tertiary education, Joyce Cheong Chin.

Events

1971 - 1971
Appointed Member of the Order of the British Empire (Civil)

1997 - 1997
Appointed Officer of the Order of Australia (AO)

1977 - 1977
Appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire (Civil)

1922 - 1922
Born the daughter of R. Wilson

1976 - 1985
Chairman of the Darwin Community College Council

1993 - 2004
Chancellor of the Northern Territory University

1983 - 1985
Commissioner of the Northern Territory Vocational Training Commission

1969 - 1971
Committee member of the Darwin Community College

1989 - 1993
Deputy Chancellor of the Northern Territory University

1984 - 1993
Director of the Darwin Performing Arts Centre Board

2004 - 2004
Doctor of Education, honoris causa, Northern Territory University

1968 - 1983
Founding committee member of the Arts Council of the Northern Territory

1964 - 2000
Founding committee member of the Museums and Art Galleries Board, Northern Territory

1993 - 1993
Life member of Darwin Performing Arts Centre Board

1946 - 1946
Married Harry Christian Giese

1972 - 1976
Member of the Darwin Community College Interim Council

1969 - 1973
Member of the Darwin Hospital Advisory Board

1954 - 1954
Moved with family to Darwin, Northern Territory

2001 - 2001
Northern Territory Senior Australian of the Year

1972 - 1985
President of the Arts Council, Northern Territory

1970 - 1972
President of the National Council of Women, Northern Terrority

1938 - 1946
Teacher, Queensland Education Department

1975 - 1980
Vice-President of the Arts Council Australia; also served on Music Board

1968 - 1972
Vice-President of the North Australian Eisteddfod Council

Published resources

Resource Section
Nancy Giese, 2016,
http://hdl.handle.net/10070/218077

Edited Book
Who's Who in Australia 2002, Herd, Margaret, 2002

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition
Faith, Hope and Charity Australian Women and Imperial Honours: 1901-1989, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2003,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/honours/honours.html

The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia, Smart, Judith and Swain, Shurlee (eds.), 2014,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders

Archival resources

Arafura Research Archive, Charles Darwin University
Nancy (Nan) Giese Collection

National Library of Australia
Biographical cuttings on Nan Giese, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals

Author Details
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