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PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

MONDAY, 16 NOVEMBER 1981

OPENING OF NEW PREMISES FOR EASTERN SUBURBS NEWSPAPERS

It is a pleasure to be here today to open these new premises which are symbolic of the success of Eastern Suburbs Newspapers in the printing and publishing field.

This firm has been involved in newspapers and printing since the Hannan family took over the local Randwick newspaper in the 1930s and, in fact, Francis Hannan first started business in Randwick in 1887, so the origins of the progressive enterprise which is reflected by these splendid new premises can be traced back nearly a hundred years. Eastern Suburbs Newspapers as such was formed twenty years ago as a partnership with John Fairfax and Sons and the Australian Consolidated Press, but third generation Hannans remain at the helm of Eastern Suburbs Newspapers.

The kind of development which these new premises represent, where an old established firm searches out opportunities for modernisation and expansion, shows not only a well-informed confidence in the future of this industry, but also the kind of drive and initiative which the Government seeks to encourage. Without question, the centrepiece of these new premises is the new Harris M200 Press which has been installed, and which makes this company one of the most up-to-date printeries in Australia, and should provide a sound basis for future expansion of the firm's activities. This new press is capable of printing up to thirty thousand copies per hour in four colour high quality form and I am looking forward to pressing the button shortly to set it rolling.

The Press has been fully installed only in the last few weeks but I understand that the company has already received a number of new publication contracts, including many for monthly magazines. But for this new Press, some of these contracts would almost certainly have gone to overseas firms, and it is a matter for congratulation that publishing work which would have been commissioned outside Australia can now be carried on competitively in this country.

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I understand that Eastern Suburbs Newspapers now produces more than two hundred newspapers and magazines on behalf of a wide range of clients. In addition, this firm publishes five free weekly suburban newspapers on its own account, and with the recent launching of the Macquarie Courier, I understand that the total circulation of these five newspapers is well over 300,000. The introduction of the Macquarie Courier itself illustrates the company's willingness to move ahead, to perceive a need in the community and take action to meet it.

Eastern Suburbs newspapers has long recognised the niche in the newspaper world of the free suburban weekly in the large cities of Australia. Free suburban newspapers have their own distinctive objectives, in particular, to provide relevant local information to large suburban communities, and it is difficult to imagine that the needs which these newspapers meet could be satisfied in any other way. I believe that people need to recognise such newspapers, even though they are distributed free of charge, do not rely on advertising alone, because suburban weeklies which fail to provide interesting and relevant local news seldom manage to survive. By providing information about local events and services, such newspapers can also make a contribution to the development of that sense of local community which can so easily be absent in large cities, and such information can also enable significant numbers of people to discover for themselves opportunities and activities which they would not otherwise have realised were available.

I believe there is a good deal of evidence of a renewed sense of community in many of the suburbs of Australia's great metropolitan centres, a willingness to take part in community activities and to take pride in the community itself. Such renewal will give added strength, stability and confidence to our nation because there can be no substitute for an informed and interested community, and a community's political institutions tend to function more democratically and responsibly when there is a genuine sense of community identity. Suburban newspapers have the special responsibility of keeping the activities of local councils before the public mind.

I know that Eastern Suburbs Newspapers employs journalists specifically to cover discussions and decisions of the councils in the circulation areas of their papers. The activities of local government are seldom likely to be reported by the metropolitan dailies or through the electronic media, and yet the decisions of local councils often affect people in very immediate and significant ways. There is a very real challenge and responsibility for suburban weeklies in this connection, for local government affairs very often receive far less attention than they should.

The local community needs to know about the decisions that local authorities are taking, and there can be little doubt that a significant indicator of the success and calibre of suburban weeklies is the quality of their reporting of the affairs of local government as well as the wider interests which they reflect. It is no doubt with some regrets that you move a few kilometres down the road from your more familiar premises - but the challenges to keep performing a useful role in the community and to keep prospering in a highly competitive industry remain the same.

These new premises are an indication that this firm has met these challenges in the past, and they also hold out the promise of further success in the future. I wish Eastern Suburbs Newspapers every good fortune in their future enterprises, and have much pleasure in declaring these premises open.

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