

**30**  
**YEARS**  
1990-2020



# Celebrating 30 years of supporting the self storage industry

The 30th Anniversary of the Self Storage Association of Australasia (SSAA) in 2020 provided the perfect opportunity to pay tribute to our founders, life members and leaders for their invaluable contributions that have shaped both the self storage sector and the association.

Their foresight, innovative thinking and tireless efforts have ensured the SSAA has grown from strength to strength, into the peak body that represents the self storage industry across Australia and New Zealand.

Within these pages, we share the stories of just some of the incredible pioneers who have shaped the industry. Their dedication and unwavering pursuit of excellence in service of the self storage community is an inspiration to us all.

Thanks must go to SSAA's former CEO Susan Phillips and the 30th Anniversary Committee who spearheaded efforts to document the history of SSAA and interview industry leaders throughout 2020.

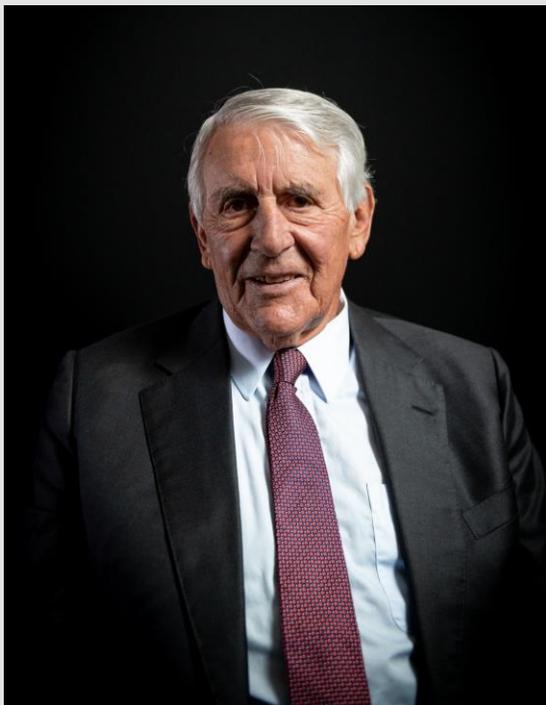
*Here are their stories.*

## **Makala Ffrench Castelli**

Chief Executive Officer | SSAA

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## Jim Miller | Foundation Member, Life Member

*Jim laid the foundations for the modern self storage industry and the association. His early insights and initiatives shaped the industry, and many of today's storage icons attribute their success to what they learned from Jim's leadership and entrepreneurial skill.*

In July 1975, Jim went to the USA with the goal of finding a novel cash flow real estate opportunity. While visiting his contact Lewis Tyra in Houston, Jim set eyes on an early drive-up style self storage development that he thought could work in Australia.

Back in Australia in 1976, he received approval to build a facility in St Leonards Sydney. He promptly booked a Yellow Pages advertisement. Unfortunately, he was "gazumped" on the purchase of the site, and it was too late to cancel the ad. So, he spent 12 months handling a landslide of enquiries for space he did not have.

Undaunted, Jim used this experience as market research and, satisfied that there was a significant demand for self storage, he went on to purchase another building – this time, a warehouse in Pymont, Sydney.

Although it took two years to accrue sufficient capital to fund the conversion of the warehouse into a three-storey storage facility, Jim's perseverance paid off. The site filled in six months and was sold to an investment company at a 15% yield.

### **Pioneering multi-level self storage**

Jim pioneered the concept of multi-level storage in Australasia. He developed an extant, multi-level warehouse property in Jones Street Ultimo, and a drive-up facility on the Princes Highway in Tempe. The success of these sites showed that both multi-level facilities and drive-up facilities had equal market acceptance. Interestingly, the latter site now houses one of the largest IKEA stores in Sydney.

In 1986, Millers Self Storage opened its eighth facility in Wentworthville. Jim ran a television campaign, and the results brought a wave of new enquiries. Television advertising remained a regular part of Jim's marketing strategy until the Millers properties were sold in 1998.

### **Establishing self storage facilities as institutional grade assets**

Jim pursued the goal of establishing self storage facilities as institutional grade assets and gaining the bank's acceptance of self storage as providing good lending security.

Meanwhile, Millers Self Storage expanded into Melbourne, Gold Coast and Brisbane, and Millers also took on the management of facilities owned by others. Jim's entrepreneurial spirit prevailed and, after visiting the USA several more times, he developed the concept of combining self storage with document and wine storage. By 1998, he was handling 1.5 million archive boxes and storing over 10,000 cases of wine.

After initially working with Macquarie Investment Trust, a venture capital financier, Jim looked to other forms of financing. Although Merrill Lynch prepared a prospectus for a public offering, Security Capital European Realty ultimately bought the business and associated property interests. The company was managed by R.A.D. Morton III for a short time, followed by a five-year period with Jim's son Angus Miller as CEO. In 2004, the portfolio was sold to a joint venture between Kennards and Valad Property Trust.

### **Organising the first meeting of the self storage association**

The first organized storage industry meetings were held in Jim's office in 1989, and the Self Storage Association was officially formed the following year.

Jim and other early industry participants had the forethought and wisdom to take a proactive approach to manage the industry. They successfully dealt with government regulators, unions and the public.

Early achievements included avoiding government regulations to impose stamp duty charges on storage agreements, countering union pressure to impose overtime rates for storage managers where flexible hours were worked, and establishing the SSAA's standard storage agreement.

These days, Jim's business journey is complete. He lives on his first-class cattle and sheep property, run by his son Bob, on the Murrumbidgee River at Jugiong. He's happy to be back in the country where he came from, and where he says, he belongs.



## Bob Marsh | Foundation Member, Life Member, President (1991–1993)

*A pioneer of the self storage industry in Australia, Bob produced the first industry newsletter. He is a Foundation Member of the SSAA and was the first President of the self storage association. He has been awarded Life Membership of the SSAA for his contributions to the industry.*

Like many people who started in the storage industry 30 years ago, Bob's first introduction to self storage happened on a trip to the USA. While filling his car up, he noticed a storage facility adjacent to the petrol station. What he wasn't aware of at the time was that this facility housed over 1000 units and was 90% full.

On his return to Australia, Bob couldn't stop thinking about the potential business opportunity that storage facilities represented and, drawing on his background in construction, he came up with a plan to build his own facility.

In 1987, Bob purchased two acres and built 32 units. They were all fully let within two weeks, and from then on, the buildings kept growing.

### **Collaborations in Caulfield**

There were a few other storage facilities in operation in Melbourne during this time. It wasn't long before Bob and the other five or six owners started getting together. They would meet every few months in Caulfield to see how things were going and chat about the industry.

### **The industry's first newsletter sparks collaboration**

Bob produced a monthly newsletter that he mailed to about twenty facility owners around Australia, including Jim Miller. Bob's newsletter created a growing awareness of how owners could work together for the common good.

### **The need for an Australian self storage association**

Before the SSAA was formed, there had been some liaison with the USA association as operators considered becoming a part of that organization. However, Australian operators soon realized the need for a uniquely Australian association that met Australian requirements. Notwithstanding this, the US contacts were valuable as they provided a level of awareness of what was needed as a basis for the Australian association.

Bob helped Jim Miller to gather facility owners from around Australia for the first-ever meeting of its kind. The meeting took place in Sydney, and from that meeting more than 30 years ago, the SSAA was established. Bob recalls how, in those days, everyone knew each other and shared information freely as there was no cross-pollination of territories or saturation.

### **Cutting bank fees for storage providers**

During Bob's time as President of the association, it came to his attention that bank fees on credit card payments for self storage were approximately 1% higher than those for any other industry. With the strength of the newly formed association behind him, Bob successfully lobbied the banks to get this fee removed, so that the storage industry was on par with other commercial industries.

### **Presidency ushers in a uniform lease agreement**

Under Bob's leadership, the association also ushered in a uniformed lease agreement that all facilities could use. This document was drawn up

by a solicitor to ensure the terms provided were fair to both the tenant and the operator.

### **Security systems – then and now**

An interesting anecdote from Bob's time as President involved a customer getting locked in a facility after hours. After his release, the customer approached the association for compensation. He never received any, but the incident prompted Bob and the SSAA to establish guidelines for facility owners, which included checking the facility prior to locking up for the night to ensure no one was left behind.

### **Fond memories**

Although Bob has been out of the industry for the past 20 years due to illness, he remembers his time fondly. In particular, he recalls attending the first two conventions that were held in Melbourne, and how he travelled around Australia looking at facilities who were eligible to win the Best Facility Awards.

Bob lives with his wife Sallie in a lovely retirement village in Vermont South Melbourne. He loves spending time with his extended family. He has a son who runs a storage facility as well as working in construction for people with disabilities.



## Liz Davies | Foundation Member, Life Member, President (1994–1995)

*One of the biggest achievements during Liz's time as President of the SSAA was the successful lobbying of the State Government to remove a tax that facility owners had to pay on stored goods in Perth.*

In 1989, when Jim Miller put out the call to storage facility owners around Australia to join him in discussing a structure and the benefits of having an association for the industry, Liz Davies owned a self storage facility in Alice Springs.

Although a lot of people were invited and had wanted to be there, an expensive and dramatic pilot's strike occurred, bringing the country to a standstill. In the end, only about 32 people were in attendance. The upside of this was that the smaller attendance made it easier to manage and make decisions.

The majority of people who attended had backgrounds in working or running other businesses, and a large percentage had previously travelled to the USA to see how storage businesses were run there. They were aware of how the US storage association worked and the potential pitfalls.

The goal of the inaugural meeting was to establish a self-regulated body, which would bypass any potential government intervention and keep away any cowboys. An initial code of ethics and conduct was established to ensure this. These discussions led to the association being formed in 1990.

### **Dedication & willingness to go the extra mile lead to growth**

Liz took on the role of President for two years (1994–1995), working with Don Seaton-Wilkinson, a former lobbyist and the first-ever employee of the SSAA. Their jobs were to spread the reach of the SSAA and to form subcommittees. Don rang every single person who owned a facility, and Liz

flew to each state to meet them and enlist more members.

The funds acquired from membership covered the costs of member's benefits, including legal documentation, legal challenges, ethical guidelines, and courses. The President was required to fly around the country and spend hours on administration – all in their own time and out of their own funds. It was a big undertaking and without Liz's passion and love for the industry, would have been quite impossible.

### **Presidency ushers in major milestones**

One of the biggest achievements during Liz's time was the successful lobbying of the State Government to remove a tax that facility owners had to pay on stored goods in Perth.

Other important milestones were the inclusion of New Zealand as part of the association and adding the word Australasia to the association name. Liz also helped to extend membership to those providing services to the storage industry and to define their roles within the association.

Despite the growing pains of the early days, everyone was willing to contribute and everyone helped each other for the good of the industry as a whole. This was the key to the association's success and this ethos of generosity and sharing has become a hallmark of the SSAA to this day. It is what makes the association strong and still viable after 30 years in existence.



## David Blackwell | Live Member, President (2003–2004), Service Member

*David is a former President of the SSAA. Amongst many contributions to the industry, he was instrumental in establishing valuation methodology that helped banks understand the true value of investing in the self storage industry. David recently retired from his role as Director of Urbis.*

David was the Director for Real Estate at Arthur Andersen when he first became involved in the self storage industry. It was the late 1980s when the firm's managing partner asked him to meet a man named Jim Miller. David was told to "go and see what we can do to help him."

At that time, Jim Miller sought funds that would allow him to further develop his self storage business concept. The problem in those days was that bank lenders in Australia had no idea how self storage worked and even less idea regarding how it should be valued. They just saw it as a significant risk and a bundle of short-term tenancies.

### **David's valuation methodology paves the way for future investors**

Over a couple of days, Jim patiently took David through the intricacies of his business model. From there, David carried out the financial analysis that Jim could (literally) take to the bank. David's work proved the strength of the self storage industry and established an appropriate valuation methodology that the banks would understand and accept. Thanks to this groundbreaking work, banks now view a self storage as a very favourable lending proposition.

In recognition of his in-depth understanding of the self-service industry, and his unique ability to perceive the needs of the industry without showing favour to any specific brands or ownerships, David was asked to join the SSAA Committee as a Service Member.

### **Presidency ushers in a full-time management structure and sees the CEO appointed**

After spending two years on the SSAA Committee, David was appointed President of the SSAA in 2003. His term as President was a formative time for the association and the industry generally.

In one of the most important initiatives of David's presidency, the SSAA executive transitioned from a part-time to a full-time management structure. With the assistance of other Board Members, David recruited a full-time CEO and appointed a highly capable and qualified staff.

Amongst the stand-out candidates was Rennie Schafer who went on to become an invaluable asset to the association. David had the great pleasure of working with Rennie in those early years to ensure the new executive team prioritized the education of self storage operators in industry best practices. These early initiatives brought stability and sustainability to the industry and ensured its success as a self-regulated industry, unhampered by government regulation.

### **Establishing valuation guidelines for self storage industry**

David continued to influence the property industry, and the broader finance industry, toward accepting self storage as a mature, well-managed investment class, writing letters and presenting at a range of conferences. He obtained approval from the Australian Property Institutes for the adoption of a set of valuation guidelines specific to self storage facilities. Additionally, he produced a series of research papers documenting industry trends and performance.

David acknowledges the role played by self storage operators in assisting and supporting him in these endeavours. Over the years, they have contributed to his knowledge and understanding of the self storage business, and he is ever grateful to them.

The industry has now moved to a position where self storage is considered a mature investment class. And, as we celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the SSAA, a growing number of overseas buyers have indicated their interest in National Storage Australia's only Self Storage Specific Trust. David sees this as the hallmark of a new chapter in the history and development of our industry.

### **Strong connections with industry leaders are vital in overcoming future challenges**

With changing markets and ownership structures, David anticipates that the SSAA will face new challenges and, to weather these, he believes the association must ensure that it stays relevant and remains the knowledge leader in the industry. To this end, it must foster and maintain strong connections with industry leaders.

That said, David remains optimistic about the future of self storage. He will continue to be engaged with the industry and will maintain an active role in the SSAA.

Since stepping aside from his role as Director of Urbis, David now has a bit more time to pursue his passion for fly fishing and spend quality time with his young grandchildren. He was awarded Life Membership of the SSAA in 2022.



## Jonathan Perrins | Life Member, President (2007–2009)

*Jonathan has been an industry leader, innovator, and strong advocate for the self storage industry for over 30 years. He has had roles as a builder, an owner-operator and as a specialist self storage funds manager.*

In the 1980s, Jonathan owned and operated a rolled-form steel production business in Brisbane and Tweed Heads. When his father mentioned that he wanted to build one of Brisbane's earliest self storage facilities in Virginia, Jon designed and fabricated the specific components required for its construction.

### **Steel Storage becomes a multinational operation**

In 1991–1992, Jon partnered with Brian Perry to establish Steel Storage. The company grew rapidly with a Steel Storage production facility opening in New Zealand within the first two years of operation.

Steel Storage soon became a multinational operation. The opening of Steel Storage UK in 1996 was followed by rapid expansion throughout Europe where Steel Storage became an industry leader in storage construction. In 2000, the company entered Singapore, supplying high-quality components to self storage facilities across Asia.

### **Driven by design**

Jonathan's innovative approach has set Steel Storage up as a design leader. The company constantly strives to push the boundaries and improve design standards and services in self storage construction.

The development of 3, 4 and 5-level construction techniques, use of high-speed lifts, use of humidity controlled self storage, and constant upgrades to partitioning and lock systems are just a few of the innovations that Jonathan and

his team have successfully implemented storage sites around the globe.

The well-designed, durable, and functional facilities that Steel Storage produces are proof of Jon's determination to provide high-standard facilities that will enhance long-term returns for self storage investors.

### **Expansion across the globe**

In 2007, Jonathan co-founded Crown Self Storage in the UK, and after building a solid business over three sites, he sold the facilities to interests associated with Babcock and Brown.

That same year, Jonathan purchased Extra Space Self Storage in Singapore, Malaysia and South Korea. The specific requirements of the storage market in Singapore included the implementation of air-conditioned self storage units in the market and the provision of wine storage. After five years of growth, the business was sold. Extra Space remains the largest Self Storage operator in South East Asia.

### **Prime Self Storage Fund established in Australia**

Jonathan established the Prime Self Storage Fund while developing facilities in Brisbane, Gold Coast and Melbourne with National Storage. Later, he and Robert Gregg formed Universal Self Storage Funds Management.

### **Access control innovation**

As an owner of PTI Australasia Pty Ltd for 28 years, Jon's passion for innovation led to advances in access control equipment and positioned the company as a leader in its field.

### **Overseeing the purchase of SSAA offices & introduction of the code of ethics**

Jonathan was Chairman of the SSAA when the Board made the decision to purchase the offices that are still used today. At the time, it was a big decision for the Board, and they received a lot of pushback over it, but time has revealed the wisdom of the decision.

Under Jonathan's leadership, the association also established a code of ethics, developed a strategic plan that opened up the Services Member position, and set up bigger trade shows.

In 1997, Jon founded the modern-day trade show in Europe and was involved in the establishment of The Self Storage Association of the UK and the Self Storage Association Asia.

### **Continuous innovation is key to future success**

Jonathan believes the industry must continue to innovate and raise the standard of storage facilities to ensure financial success.

Steel Storage was sold in early 2020 to Janus International. Jonathan still remains an active participant in the industry with roles as an investment advisor and funds manager.

He continues to pioneer new concepts in self storage with remotely-managed self storage facilities under the brand Swift Storage.



## John Eastwood | Foundation Member, Life Member, Board Member (1992–1995)

*Based in South Australia, the Eastwood family owns U-Store-It, which they believe was the second storage facility to open in Australia, just behind Jim Miller's in Sydney New South Wales. John worked with Jim Miller to establish the SSAA and was a Board Member from 1992–1995. He assisted with the SSAA financials for many years.*

John was one of the pioneers of the self storage industry in South Australia, opening up a facility after a due diligence trip to the USA. He took his business from strength to strength using innovative marketing ploys, including opening up a competing brand.

### **Storers unanimously agree to form an association**

At a time when the industry was still in its infancy, and just starting to gain momentum, the government announced plans for regulation of certain sectors, including the Waterside Workers Union.

Concerns that government regulation would spill over into the storage industry prompted Jim Miller to take preemptive measures. He invited John along with all the other storage facility owners across Australia to form an association that would allow them to become a self-regulated industry and not be regulated by the Federal Government.

With unanimous support from all the storage facility owners and no outside interference, the association took a proactive approach to regulation and continues to do so to this very day.

When the Board was first established, it brought together a group of people who were incredibly passionate about the industry, had impeccable foresight, and all had a vested interest in establishing a set of regulations. As a result, the Board was able to stay ahead by getting in first and self-regulating the aspects of the industry that the government might try to regulate.

### **Association aims and issues**

Initially formed for operators only, and not for those who provided goods or services relating to the industry, the SSAA was established with the following aims in mind:

1. Set up a legal framework to create the self storage association
2. Ensure there was a provision to accept more operators to become members
3. Endeavour to secure professional operators across each state or territory
4. Develop a solid document that would serve as a blueprint storage agreement
5. Be self-governed and become a self-regulated industry
6. Act as judge and jury for consumers who laid complaints against operators
7. Promote the industry in a progressive manner
8. Provide training and education for all members.

In the initial stages, a whole range of matters needed to be addressed, including the Warehouse and Leans Act, Height of Facilities, and OH&S. These and other matters were (and still are) dealt with in consultation with legal firms that also made excellent contributions to the association's industry contracts and guidelines for professional standards and conduct, including how to handle complaints, defaulters, and more.

One of the early issues that needed to be ironed out was the question of who should be included in association membership. Questions were raised regarding the standards to which facility owners should be held in order to become members. Should owners whose facilities were

not up to scratch be refused membership? Or should the association ensure that facilities were up to scratch? Would these people bring the association down, or should the association bring them up? In the end, these regulations kept the Australian market free from the "storage wars" that plagued the US self storage industry.

### **The ethos of openness & generous sharing continues to flourish despite a difficult birth**

As an additional directive, the SSAA aimed to provide a central hub where information and ideas could be exchanged to the benefit of all members and the industry as a whole.

At the time, this was a revolutionary concept and met with some resistance as owners didn't like to tell anyone else about any issues or learnings, preferring to keep their cards close to their chests. As a result, a rift opened up at initial association conventions with owners on one side and team members on the other, divided by their willingness to share information.

John's belief in this vision and the Board's perseverance paid off, however, and these days, the association is well-regarded for its ethos of sharing and exchanging information, despite the market being more competitive than ever.

In fact, over the years, the association has become the place to source information on the storage industry. It is well branded, well respected, and doesn't shy away from difficult situations. The foundations that were established all those years ago have held it in good stead and will do so well into the future.



## Lee Cameron | Foundation member, Board Member (2012–2014)

*Developer turned self storage operator, Lee was a founding member of the SSAA and served on the Board from 2012 to 2014.*

Lee discovered self storage in 1989, while working in property development. An application for the development of a storage facility came across his desk. This peaked Lee's attention.

The plan was to build up the facility and on-sell it, as most developers do. However, after operating the facility for a while, Lee realised that this was too good to give up. So, he partnered with fellow directors David Davies and Dick Jamieson to form U-Store Public Storage.

The company's first facility opened in 1990 on Creek Road in Cannon Hill Brisbane. It was built by Jon Perrins, and it was one of the first storage facilities to be built by Steel Storage.

The "ranch-style" facility over one level proved to be very successful and, following on from its success, a second facility was built at Capalaba in 1996. Another two were built shortly after at Browns Plains. All of these were sold to National Storage in 2007.

### **Technology is a key factor for business growth**

Getting the right technology to run his facilities was one of the biggest challenges Lee faced as his business grew. Initially, all of the accounting and bookkeeping were all done on paper, and Lee was keen to digitise these processes.

In the early 1990s however, there were very few digital database programs available. So, Lee and his team tried one from the USA. Unfortunately, it wasn't that successful, mainly due to support logistics.

In 1991, one of Lee's associates in New Zealand developed a bespoke program for the Cannon Hill site as a test, and Storman was born.

### **Learning the importance of site security**

In 2000, when they had just finished building the Browns Plains facility in Brisbane, Lee parked his car outside the building and ran in to drop off some office supplies before the facility opened.

Hearing an engine roar outside, Lee looked out the window, and to his amazement, he saw his red HSV taking off down the road at great speed – without him. He had left his keys in the car, and it took about three days to get the car back.

This incident prompted him to ensure his Browns Plains facilities were protected by the very latest security systems.

### **A foundation member of the SSAA**

Lee has been an active member of the SSAA for more than 30 years. The three entities he has been involved with over this period – Storage King Burpengary, BuildUp Property Group and Australian Mobile Storage – have all benefitted from this membership.

One of the most significant areas in which the SSAA has helped Lee is the provision of regularly updated procedure manuals.

Lee has attended several SSAA Conventions over the years that provided valuable opportunities to meet people in the industry, share in each other's successes, and discuss problems from all angles.

The SSAA Conventions also offer delegates the chance to make friends and connect with people in service industries. Lee finds these connections invaluable in the development and ongoing operations of his facilities. He believes that, without the SSAA, there would be limited access to these businesses and their expertise.

After more than 30 years in the self storage industry, Lee enjoys watching the next generation coming through the industry. He particularly enjoys seeing the legacy the original members of the SSAA are leaving as their children grow up and take over the family businesses.



## Dallas Dogger | Foundation Member, Life Member, Chairman of Centreforce Technology Group

*Dallas is Chairman of the Centreforce Technology Group. He represents SiteLink in the Southern Hemisphere and owns R6 Digital, Queensland's largest digital agency specialising in self storage marketing. He is a founding member of the SSAA, and Centreforce has been the recipient of two major industry awards.*

Dallas started his career in Canberra as a correspondent for Peter Isaacson, a business publisher. When Ian Oliver, owner of the accounting firm next door, and his mate Frank Timmer decided to build self storage units on a block of land in Queanbeyan, Dallas seized the opportunity to be a part of this exciting new venture. And so, the journey of a lifetime began.

The 12,000-square-metre Queanbeyan block fell away towards the Canberra-Sydney rail line. Luckily, one of the accountancy practice clients was able to supply fill from a major project in Canberra. This was used to level the ground, and the first 40 units were built.

Renting as fast as the roller doors were hung, the facility grew quickly. A second stage was constructed, and soon enough, the third stage was built. Ian, Frank, and Dallas worked all hours on equipment to get it all done.

When the Queanbeyan facility hit around 200 spaces, the team decided to manage the property themselves. They built an onsite office and residence and got cracking. Like many fledgling self storage owners, they were green and knew little about running a self storage facility. But, they were sure of one thing – they could run it better than the local real estate agent.

### **Leading the way in self storage software systems for the local industry**

From the outset, Dallas was convinced that IT would be an essential part of the development and growth of the industry. He has always been enthusiastic about adopting, implementing and honing available technology and software packages to streamline processes, improve efficiency, and increase profitability for facility owners.

As a result, he used innovative strategies to give his company an edge over its competitors. This included implementing one of the first self storage software packages, Mini Storage Plus (MSP) back when only a handful of people in the industry were using software to run their facilities.

Although using US software in the Australian market posed a challenge, Dallas and his team worked closely with the software creators Hi-Tech to refine the package to suit their needs. In the end, MSP helped them to streamline business processes and run more efficiently.

Over the years, Dallas's self storage company, like many others, trialled a number of different software packages, including MSP, PTI, and Storman. However, getting US software manufacturers to understand and make provision for the unique issues Australasian self storage facilities face has been difficult, to say the least.

In fact, developing and configuring self storage software that works in the Australian and New Zealand markets has proven to be the biggest challenge Dallas has faced in his career. And, he has fought long and continual battles on this front on behalf of self storage owners in our region.

Dallas was instrumental in selling Storman software to self storage owners from 2000. By 2007 however, he realised that working with a heavyweight US company was the only way to deliver a product that would work for customers over the longer term. By switching to SiteLink, he was able to leverage a US investment of millions of dollars that led to the development of a localised software solution.

Leveraging his passion for technology, innovation, and modernisation, Dallas positioned his self storage business as a market leader. And soon, the company was ready to expand to other sites, beginning with a block of land in Hume ACT. Ultimately, the business would cover four separate sites, which were later sold to National Storage in 2014.

Another crowning achievement in Dallas's career was the development of RapidStor – the first online move-in technology. This was all done in-house by his son and CEO of Centreforce Michael Dogger. The RapidStor development team has delivered thousands of contactless rentals using this remarkable software.

Dallas has two more sons, Brad and Curt, who hold senior positions in the Centreforce Technology Group. They share Dallas's passion for self storage and are working on a new generation of digital self storage products that promises even greater functionality and efficiency.

### **Foundation Member of the SSAA**

When Neville Kennard from Kennards reached out to Dallas 30 years ago, asking whether Capital Storage would be interested in developing a self storage association, he immediately agreed. Dallas and Ian, along with Jim Miller, Neville Kennard, and others, attended the first meeting of the SSAA in Ultimo and became founding members of the association.

Dallas is particularly proud of the SSAA Awards that Centreforce won for Service in Self Storage. He is honoured and grateful to be a Life Member of the SSAA. He continues to contribute to the self storage industry through private investment both locally and abroad.



## Richard Whalan | Foundation Member, Founder of Rent A Space

*Richard is one of the pioneers of the self storage industry in Australia. He opened Rent-a-Space's first facility in Padstow in 1979.*

Richard started in self storage by accident. An astute businessman, he owned and operated a dry cleaning business in the eastern suburbs of Sydney for ten years and had also been involved with establishing a company that manufactured pressure-sensitive adhesive tapes.

In the 1970s, Richard decided to sell the dry cleaning business and travel overseas with his family for six months. Towards the end of that time, he met up with a Californian dry cleaning friend who showed him through parts of northern California.

One day, they drove past a building with rows of orange roller doors. Richard had no idea what it was. When he asked his friend about it, he replied, "You don't know what self storage is?"

Apparently, the self storage industry was really starting to take off in the USA at the time. They drove into the facility, and the owners gladly opened up their books and showed them how the business worked.

### **Pioneering self storage in Sydney**

When Richard returned to Sydney, he purchased a parcel of land and constructed his first self storage facility. He admits to being slightly nervous and uncertain about how it would develop, but he needn't have worried – the site soon filled up.

Conditions on the original site were far from optimal. Exposure wasn't great with a limited traffic flow of only about 11000 vehicles. Plus, when it rained, the customers got bogged. They would have to push their vehicles out of the mud.

Despite these issues, demand for units continued to grow, and Richard felt this was the best market research he could hope for. So, he constructed a

second building – this time at a site in Caringbah that had a lot more exposure to traffic. Once again, the results were encouraging, and they continued to build on from there.

### **Invited to attend the first association meeting in Ultimo**

In 1990, Jim Miller contacted Richard and invited him to a meeting at his office in Ultimo where they discussed the establishment of an industry association. Jim and Barbara (who was Jim's Operations Manager) did much of the initial work for the association.

### **The association helps banks realise the true value of the investment in self storage**

Richard believes they were very fortunate to have Jim Miller as the founder of the SSAA since Jim brought a valuer from the USA who specialized in the self storage industry. This industry expert was able to liaise with the Australian financiers on behalf of storage owners, helping them to overcome some of the difficulties they had in obtaining finance from Australian banks.

One of the biggest bugbears for the banks was the one-month lease agreement. There was no track record of any success for this model in the Australian market, and they were concerned that the tenants may all leave at one time. For the industry, however, longer lease terms meant that six months of earnings depended on the loyalty of a single client.

### **Early days of self storage marketing**

As fifty-five per cent of their business came from Yellow Pages advertising and 45 per cent from passing traffic, early marketing mainly involved taking out ads and locating the facilities in high-traffic areas. Storage operators would put up signage that explained as simply as possible how self storage worked. Local storage owners

followed the example of their US counterparts using the simple line, "You store it, lock it, and keep the key. One month minimum rent."

### **Richard introduces a new pricing model**

At first, pricing was done by trial and error. Richard based his pricing on what he thought somebody would be prepared to pay for half a garage or a garage. This model worked out very well and yielded good returns. Comparing prices in dollars per square metre, it was well in excess of the rental income of small industrial factories. These days, the margin has contracted significantly, but self storage returns are still better than those on industrial unit rentals.

### **Procedures manual & standardized storage agreement streamlines operations**

The Self Storage Association built valuable connections between operators around the country, and this had marked benefits for both owners and storers as facilities improved and systems became more streamlined. The preparation of the procedures manual (MAP) and the standard self storage agreement made an enormous difference.

### **The ethos of sharing and generosity**

Richard believes that the self storage industry stands out from other industries in that stakeholders are quite relaxed about sharing how their businesses and their local industries are going. This isn't just within the context of the Australasian market. It's also evident when you travel to the USA or the United Kingdom.



## Ian Oliver | Foundation Member, Owner Capital Holdings Group

*Ian is a founding member of the SSAA. He owned and operated Capital Self Storage in Canberra from 1988 to 2014.*

Ian first came across a self storage facility in Sydney in 1987. Marvelling at the number of roller doors inset into the building's walls, he wandered over to talk to the manager, who explained the concept. Ian did some research, realized what an excellent idea it was, and decided to get involved in the industry.

### **Pioneering self storage in the ACT**

Back in his home territory of Canberra, Ian found an investment partner and together, they looked for a site to build a facility. Six months later, they found a four-acre block in Queanbeyan. It wasn't the best in terms of slope and undulation, but fortunately, they were approached by an excavator firm that wanted somewhere to dispose of their fill. This enabled them to level off the site.

Once the fill had been compacted, the site was suitable for a single-storey, 40-unit, ranch-style building, and the facility was completed within that first year. At that time, demand for self storage was so high that customers were moving in before they had completed the driveways.

### **Introducing innovative designs**

In the 1990s, most storage facilities were built in the garage style used by storage operators in the USA. Ian wanted to build facilities that better suited the Australian market. He came up with a design for a 12-metre span. They engineered the buildings accordingly and built 200 units from this design.

Next up, Ian and his team developed a very large facility in Hume. This site received three to four times more enquiries than Queanbeyan. The

business grew to acquire another site in Mitchell and then one in Philip in the ACT. There was also a little site in Goulburn and another couple in country towns in New South Wales. In 2014, all the properties were sold to National Storage.

### **Representing Canberra at the inaugural association meeting**

Ian and Dallas Dogger represented Canberra at the initial meeting of self storage operators in Sydney. They met industry icons, including Neville Kennard and Jim Miller, who had a lot to offer as they had been established a little bit longer.

This meeting primarily discussed Western Australia and their state revenue office asking for stamp duty on rental agreements. This situation highlighted the need for standardized lease agreements.

Owners in individual states didn't have the resources to pay for lawyers to create specialized agreements, but through the SSAA, operators across the country were able to collectively engage a legal firm to create a single standard lease agreement for all SSAA members to use.

This ethos of working together for the greater good characterizes the association, and Ian believes this makes the SSAA such an essential resource – protecting and challenging the industry as the need arises.

### **First-ever financial analysis for the Australian self storage industry**

In the early days of the self storage industry in Australia, stakeholders didn't have a clear understanding of self storage as a business and

as an investment. When bankers, valuers and new investors kept asking questions about financial data, Ian saw the need for industry comparatives.

Ian had previously been involved in the Financial Management Research Centre at Armidale, Research Centre (FMRC). So, in 2003, he asked them to facilitate compiling data from a select group of operators.

In his presentation to attendees at the SSAA Convention, he made his request for 100 storage facilities to submit their information for comparative data analysis. This marked the first analysis ever compiled for the industry.

The analysis compared the self storage industry to other real estate businesses, such as motels, service stations, food chains, etc. It became the basis for telling the story of what the self storage landscape looked like.

Ian is still involved in self storage from an investment perspective, both in Australia and overseas.



## Ian Hyland | Foundation Member, Melbourne Self Storage Pioneer

*Ian is gifted with natural business acumen and is one of the most likeable personalities in the self storage industry. He led the way in promoting additional services such as delivery acceptance, shelving in units and document storage.*

After obtaining his commerce degree, Ian took on a role in supermarket management before being lured into the bookmaking industry – a natural choice for a man of Ian’s affable nature and intellect. However, after living the “high life” for several years, Ian realised that he needed to get into an industry where he could build asset value.

So, in the mid-1990s, Ian leased a large old warehouse in North Melbourne with the plan to use the space for the storage of bonded containers. Unfortunately, not long after Ian had committed to the long-term lease, Australian customs changed their handling of bonded containers, and the demand for space vanished.

### **Pioneering self storage in inner Melbourne**

As he wondered what to do with the largely empty warehouse, Ian noticed that the first wave of residential conversion was taking place across inner Melbourne’s formerly industrial landscape. Ian realized that this influx of people living in the city centre would lead to an increased demand for self storage. This sparked his idea to divide the warehouse into smaller areas, which could be leased out as storage units.

Ian recalls fitting out as few as six units at a time in those exploratory days. The biggest struggle was customer awareness – “getting customers to understand what it is you offer.” Nonetheless, his idea turned out to be a good one, and the demand for self storage units continued to grow.

Within a short time, Ian had 300 customers in his North Melbourne facility, and he was ready to expand. He purchased a warehouse in Wellington Street Collingwood and carried out a significant

conversion on the property, constructing a three-level storage facility with over 750 units.

The late 1990s was a busy time for Ian as he built occupancy, but his hard work paid off and soon he was able to purchase the original North Melbourne building and expand it to hold over 900 units.

### **Strong focus on customer amenities & supplementary services**

The first-class presentation was the hallmark of Ian’s business, along with a commitment to client communication and service. Ian saw the advantage of providing supplementary services alongside the standard storage unit product.

He was a leader in promoting additional services such as delivery acceptance, shelving in units and document storage. All of these services contributed significantly to his revenue and business success.

While credit is given to Ian for his level of energy, he is keen to recognise the strong level of support he received from colleagues in the industry. He particularly acknowledges the great assistance he received from Bob Marsh.

In 2005, Ian sold both of his facilities to National Storage. As a strong friendship existed between Ian, Peter Greer, Alan Contini and Andrew Catsoulis, it was an open business transaction between good friends, and Ian recalls that it was one of the most pleasant real estate transactions he has done.

Ian has been an active member of the SSAA and a regular conference attendee. He has a bag of stories to tell and is proud of the strong friendship he made and retains in the industry.



## Elaine & Robert Coote | Life members, First SSAA Services Member President 2000 (Robert), Owners Lock Distributors

*Elaine and Robert Coote, owners of Lock Distributors, first became Service Members of the SSAA in 1991 when they were invited to attend the Conference and Trade Show on the Gold Coast. Robert was the first Service Member to become President of the SSAA in 2000.*

1991 was the first year the SSAA allowed suppliers to take part in its conference and trade show, and Elaine and Robert Coote were excited to be involved. Their company Lock Distributors had already been supplying padlocks to the industry for several years – primarily to Millers Self Storage and a few others – when Barbara and Liz Hart suggested they attend the 1991 conference. There were only a handful of suppliers exhibiting, among them Steel Storage, and Space Control a US-based supplier specialising in self storage management and accounting systems.

### **Any old lock won't do – designing locks specifically for self storage**

In the early days of self storage, many people thought any old lock would do, and they simply bought a padlock from the local hardware store. Would-be thieves quickly learned how to pick these locks, and storers looked for more secure specialized solutions.

Initially, Lock Distributors were resellers of locks, but they could see the industry growing, and they wanted to produce higher-quality products. The conference gave the business a boost as the industry put its faith in the company. And in 1992, Lock Distributors stepped up to fill the gap in the market with locks that were specifically designed for the storage industry.

### **First SSAA Service Member to become President**

Elaine's late husband Robert was the first Service Member to become President of the SSAA in 2000. Initially, there were concerns from self storage owners that having a Service Member as President would be a conflict of interest. However, in the 12 months of his term, Robert never used his

position to push Lock Distributors products. The example he set paved the way for future suppliers to become Board Members and Presidents without any product bias.

### **Successfully overcoming challenges and ushering in many changes**

During his time as President, Robert admirably dealt with several challenges and supervised many successful innovations, including:

- Additions to the Manual of Advice and Procedures
- The death of a storer
- The bankruptcy of a storer
- Dealing with an insolvent company
- The implementation of access to on-demand systems
- Dispute resolution, procedures, and disaster prevention and recovery planning
- The trialling of Simone Hill as legal advisor
- The introduction of a new format for the association magazine
- The redevelopment of the website as an industry portal, and the purchase of the domain name [www.selfstorage.co.nz](http://www.selfstorage.co.nz)
- The design and production of new marketing brochures
- The appointment of Maxine Poulton as Executive Officer

Elaine recalls that every week Robert was on conference calls with members and Board Members because in those days there was someone from every state on the Board.

Over the years, there have been many changes, and Elaine believes the association has become increasingly professional. In the early days, storage owners from the USA were invited to attend every convention as they were seen to have a greater knowledge of the industry. Now, the Australasian self storage industry has grown, and it can stand on its own feet.

Elaine believes that we can be proud of our accomplishments and acknowledges that most of what we have achieved can be attributed to the efforts and dedication of the Foundation Members 30 years ago.



## Mark Bateman | Life Member, Board Member (1993–1997)

*Mark has long been a strong advocate for creating a trans-Tasman self storage association. His involvement in self storage stretches back to the very beginning of the industry in New Zealand, and he has substantially influenced the structure of the SSAA.*

Mark's interest in self storage was sparked as far back as 1981 when, on a rugby tour in the USA, he got his first exposure to the industry.

Not long after that, Mark recalls a conversation with the prominent Auckland businessman Hugh Steadman. Hugh had a vacant building in Grey Lynn with no immediate prospect of a tenant. He and Mark decided to open a self storage facility on the site. They called it "Richmond Self Storage". Little did they know that it would later be known as "Storage King" and become one of the most successful Storage King facilities in Auckland.

### **A driving force in the success of the Storage King brand in New Zealand**

In 1992, Mark travelled to Australia for the second Self Storage Association conference held at Manly Sydney. He returned to Auckland, with increased knowledge, a notebook full of contacts, and even greater enthusiasm for the industry.

In his early years in the self storage industry, Mark took on multiple roles, including being the New Zealand representative for Hi-Tech Management Systems (later known as Storman New Zealand) and PTI Access Control Systems.

On joining Storage King New Zealand as their Regional Director, however, he realized the importance of maintaining a single clear goal. So, he stepped down from Storman and PTI.

Mark's role became increasingly demanding in the mid-1990s when Abacus Storage Fund purchased seven Lock n Leave sites and the New Zealand Public Storage Auckland site in a move

that doubled the number of facilities under the New Zealand Storage King Brand overnight.

### **Close but no cigar**

Mark once considered early retirement. However, his dream was short-lived. He was supervising a "sell-up" of the contents of a defaulting customer at the Grey Lynn facility in Auckland. After cutting the lock, they found piles of the Brazilian currency. It was counted, and the Cr\$ 5,000,000 (Brazilian Cruzeiros) were stored in his office. Sadly, when Mark made enquiries about the value of the cash, his bank informed him that the currency had been discontinued in 1986 and was worthless.

### **New Zealand & Australian self storage owners united in a single association**

In the early years of the industry in New Zealand, Mark became a strong advocate of having a combined New Zealand and Australian association. He persuaded New Zealand operators to support the merger of the two trans-Tasman associations in 1993. He says that the inclusion of the word "Australasian" in the association's title was an essential step in the recognition of the New Zealand industry.

Mark has been a long-standing and strong supporter of the SSAA. He has been a participant in SSAA conferences since the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Self Storage Conference. Mark was a member of the Board for five years from 1993–1997 and was instrumental in establishing the New Zealand versions of the Manual of Procedures and the Self Storage Agreement.

He was (and remains) a passionate representative of New Zealand operators in the

SSAA, always ensuring that New Zealand interests are considered. In fact, the strength of the New Zealand industry can be attributed mainly to Mark's initiatives.

Mark maintains a keen interest in the industry. He is one of the great knowledge holders in the self storage industry with an encyclopaedic knowledge of self storage in New Zealand and many of its participants.



## Phil Robbie | Life Member

*Phil Robbie managed the U-Stow-It Group from 1987. Under his leadership, the company became synonymous with industry best practice in the ACT. He has been awarded a Life Membership of the SSAA.*

Phil Robbie was an original participant in the innovative investment group formed under the leadership and guidance of the ACT entrepreneur King Leggett in the early 1980s.

After seeing the success of self storage operations in the US, King Leggett put together an investor group of 10 Canberra businessmen. Each participant contributed capital and, most importantly, was required to bring a relevant skillset to the group. Original participants included architects, civil engineers, builders, trade persons, and, in Phil's case, IT expertise.

Phil acknowledges the significant assistance and guidance offered by Jim Miller in the development of U-Stow-It. Jim provided the group with the level of confidence to pursue self storage in the challenging early days of the industry.

### **Leveraging the ACT State Government's new industry initiative**

The investment group took advantage of the State Government's push to establish a new industry in the ACT in the early 1980s. This enabled them to secure the U-Stow-It site in Belconnen under a favourable lease arrangement that provided an option to purchase in five years at the original land value.

Construction on the Belconnen site started in 1983. The buildings were based on a modular form of construction with tilt slab walls set at 6 m and 9 m grids. The final configuration within these modules was flexible. U-Stow-it implemented a staged fit-out design in response to demonstrated demand in the early occupancy build-up.

### **Innovative management models & localised software lead to growth**

The absence of an established, locally available management software program for self storage at the time meant that Phil was tasked with building a management and occupancy tracking system from the ground up.

U-Stow-It also developed an on-site management arrangement with site-based accommodation and a rotation system for two separate managers. This facilitated flexible operating arrangements for the U-Stow-It team and their site managers.

### **Managing Director of U-Stow-It**

With increased activity, Phil took on the role of Managing Director and further drove the development of U-Stow-It. He imbued the Canberra-based U-Stow-It group with the imaginative and incisive thinking necessary to develop leading-edge construction methods, progressive management systems, and innovative investment structures in the self storage industry.

In 1990, U-Stow-It commenced construction of its second facility at Kambah. Once completed, the facility extended over two neighbouring sites. Phil recognizes the high exposure location of these sites as significantly contributing to the success of this facility.

### **Investors' long-term approach pays dividends**

Despite funding constraints, difficulties in securing funds from banks and the general lack of understanding of the self storage industry in the early 1990s, U-Stow-It expanded its investor base to over 40 investors.

U-Stow-It investors took a long-term view, and original trading profits were reinvested in future growth and expansion rather than being distributed to investors. This led to further expansion, and in 1999, U-Stow-It expanded into Fyshwick. Here, the high-exposure site was developed in stages using innovative construction and design techniques that included two-level drive-up access to several buildings on the site. By 2005, the Fyshwick facility comprised over 1,000 units.

Investors were rewarded for their long-term support over the life of the assets when, in 2008, the U-Stow-It facilities were sold to Abacus Property Group. The U-Stow-It legacy continues with these sites currently operating as Storage King facilities.

### **Life Membership of the SSAA**

Phil has maintained a strong involvement with the SSAA and has generously supported other industry operators. In recognition of his contributions to the self storage industry, Phil Was awarded Life Membership of the SSAA in 2003.

Phil continues to take a strong interest in self storage and is in regular contact with the many friends he made in the industry.



## Paul McFadzien | Board Member (1999–2003)

*As an SSAA Board Member and Managing Director for National Mini Storage, Paul set the standard for management and self storage development in New Zealand for over 20 years.*

Starting out in banking at the Bank of New Zealand, Paul first came across the self storage industry when he funded one of Auckland's earliest, large-scale self storage facilities. He was also directly involved in financing the early National Mini Storage facilities in Penrose and Albany.

In 1995, Paul left the bank and took up the role of Managing Director (MD) for National Mini Storage. His first task was the development of an ambitious, multi-level, 500-plus unit facility on Cook Street in Auckland's CBD. The property offered excellent commercial exposure, and Paul worked hard to convince Auckland City Council to approve prominent building signage.

### **Introducing cutting-edge designs**

The concept of multi-level storage was still new, but Paul was able to establish services that provided a high level of customer amenity. His foresight was rewarded when the facility filled within 18 months.

Under Paul's guidance, National Mini Storage continued to grow. The company currently operates 10 institutional investment-grade assets in Auckland. They recently opened a new facility at Papakura Auckland, and another new facility is underway.

Paul's particular focus has been on consistently improving the functionality and design standards of National Mini Storage facilities. The result? Leading-edge, innovative facilities such as the Newmarket facility won the SSAA Facility of the Year Award in 2018.

Completed in late 2016, the Newmarket facility provides more than 1000 units over six levels with impressive standards of functionality. The facility is recognized for outstanding architectural design in a location that demanded a sensitive approach.

### **Strong financial management**

Paul also implemented strong financial management practices within National Mini Storage and developed a robust collegiate working environment, which remains one of the great strengths of National Mini Storage to this day.

He stepped down as MD in early 2020, although he continues to serve as a director with a particular interest in identifying and advising on new projects.

### **Building a trans-Tasman self storage association**

Early in his involvement in the industry, Paul saw the benefits of having consistent management practices across facilities and the industry at large. Along with his colleague Mark Bateman, Paul fostered the close relationship between the New Zealand self storage industry and the Australian industry.

Despite working for competing brands, both men were instrumental in establishing the SSAA as a trans-Tasman organization. Together, they helped to grow association membership in New Zealand, raising awareness of the association amongst operators and encouraging them to adopt SSAA-recommended procedures.

Paul was appointed to the Board of the SSAA in 1999 and served as a member until 2003. He was one of the lead organisers of the 1999 Auckland Convention.

### **Innovative facility design higher levels of automation in future**

Paul is optimistic about the future of the storage industry. He is a firm believer in continuous innovation and predicts that future facility designs will include higher levels of automation and new technologies to manage booking systems, client amenities, security, and environmental controls.



## Michael Tate | Board Member (2008–2013)

*Leveraging his considerable marketing expertise, Michael has provided self storage management and branding to SSAA members across Australia and New Zealand. He is co-founder and CEO of Storage King.*

Michael joined Millers Self Storage as General Manager of Operations in 1993 from an accounting and finance background. He believes that being able to bond with Jim Miller over a shared love of rugby helped him get the job.

### **Revolutionising self storage marketing & management models**

Michael's passion and talent for marketing soon became apparent, and Michael quickly moved to a marketing and sales role. He was influential in early Miller's marketing initiatives, including the establishment of Miller's TV advertising created in collaboration with John Singleton's advertising company. Miller's early advertising campaign turned out to be a major boost, not only for the company but also for the wider self storage industry.

Following the sale of Millers in 1998, Michael and David Scanlen could see the potential for further growth in the industry. However, the pair also identified the fragmented and disaggregated nature of the industry as an impediment and a constraint to value creation. After examining several franchise models, they formed Storage King.

Since its initial launch, the brand has shown continued strong growth. Starting with just 12 operators, Storage King now has 170 branded facilities throughout Australia and New Zealand.

In 2005, Michael and David bundled two independent sites with 14 Storage King-branded facilities to form an institutional-grade portfolio of properties that were sold to Abacus Funds – with Storage King holding onto the management of

the facilities. This transaction and the associated Storage King management model were essential in establishing the self storage industry as an institutional investment product.

With Storage King's assistance, Abacus purchased seven New Zealand Public Mini Storage facilities, and Michael and the Storage King team took on the challenge of managing these facilities on behalf of Abacus. This boosted Storage King's profile in New Zealand and added a new dimension to Michael's role.

Michael's wealth of experience has established the Storage King brand as a leader in management services in the self storage industry. He and David continued to refine the Storage King model and have, over the years, introduced several innovative management systems, while always focusing on high standards of customer service as their underlying goal.

Michael and the Storage King team were also leaders in developing national profile advertising and establishing innovative pricing and incentive models.

In November 2020, Abacus Property Group announced that it had acquired the remaining 75% interest in Storage King, and as part of this transaction, Michael joined the Abacus Executive Leadership Team. In this role, Michael continues to drive and grow the Storage King business, with the benefit of asset backing and management support from Abacus.

### **A bright future for the self storage industry**

While Michael accepts that the industry will face challenges, his enthusiasm for storage endures. He draws on the knowledge and experience gained in steering the Storage King brand through tough times, such as the 2008 Global Financial Crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure that he is well-positioned to navigate any future challenges.

Michael believes that any investment in self storage must be seen as a long-term investment and those who take this approach will continue to see strong returns.



## Joe Barbaro | Services Member, Owner Homestead Press & Mitchell Self Storage Facility

*The former owner of Homestead Press and Mitchell self storage facility, Joe has always been a regular and generous supporter of the SSAA and has personally attended 25 Conventions. He recently retired after 30 years in the self storage industry.*

Joe operated a successful printing business in Canberra when, in the late 1980s, his brother and family opened a storage facility at Mitchell in the ACT. As the project progressed, additional funds were needed, and Joe was invited to invest in the facility.

The early days were a difficult period for Joe and his family. They were short on operating experience, interest rates were high, and Keating's "recession we had to have" impacted their business.

### **Attending the Self Storage Conference helps reset thinking**

In 1991, Joe attended his first Self Storage Conference in Melbourne where the knowledge and insights gained from local operators and visiting US experts helped him to reset his thinking. He returned to Canberra with fresh ideas and the confidence to take up the role of managing the family facility.

### **Introducing more rigorous pricing discipline & streamlining staffing**

Amongst other things, he introduced a more rigorous pricing discipline and streamlined on-site staffing. After several years of hard work, the 450-unit Mitchell facility was performing well and making good returns.

### **Homestead Press provides speciality printed goods to self storage industry**

At the same time as managing the Mitchell facility, Joe also built his own printing business "Homestead Press". Astute as ever, Joe saw the opportunity to provide speciality products to the self storage industry. By offering quality printed

goods, backed by a high level of personal service, Joe built up a customer base of over 400 facility owners, including major operators such as Storage King.

In February 2019, Joe sold his storage facility at Mitchell to Abacus Property Fund. He also retired from his Homestead Press business in April 2020. Homestead Press runs as a separate entity after being bought by the Elect Printing Group in Canberra.

Joe is grateful for the support and friendship he has received from SSAA members over the years. He will attend one more SSAA Conference with the new owners, before moving on to enjoy his retirement. He plans to play golf and go fishing at his beachside retreat in Bermagui, travel around Australia, and, of course, catch up with friends from the storage industry.



## Shane Marshall | Foundation Member

*Shane and his family own and operate a portfolio of self storage facilities in Sydney, under the Storage King brand.*

Shane's "from the ground up" journey in the self storage industry began when, as a young builder, he travelled to England. After working through an English winter, he moved to the USA where he landed a job with Ribroof, a company specialising in self storage construction. He worked for Ribroof for three years before returning home to Australia with plans to implement what he had learned overseas in the Australian self storage industry.

### **Shane's business acumen paves the way for success**

In 1987, he found a site at Eastgardens in the eastern suburbs of Sydney. His primary restrictions at the time were a lack of available funds and an abundance of large sandhills covering the Eastgardens site. The latter needed to be removed before development could take place.

Shane used his business acumen to solve both problems in one go. He sold the sand to local builders and to the nearby Australian Glass Manufacturers at Alexandria, turning what could've been a crippling expense into a substantial financial gain. He then leveraged this income in order to obtain finance to fund the construction of his first self storage facility.

### **Overcoming tough times**

The early years were tough. Shane and his wife lived in a very modest caretaker flat on the premises and every dollar earned went back into the facility. After ten years, and three stages of construction, the 900-unit Eastgardens facility was completed.

Shane's astute business management throughout the recession in the early 1990s made it possible for him to expand while other businesses were struggling. He purchased a site at Penrith in 1990, and the first stage filled in less than two years. Shane went on to buy the adjoining site, doubling the size of the Penrith facility.

In 1992, Shane purchased his site on Forest Road in Hurstville where he developed a multi-level storage facility. In 2011, he purchased a facility on Princes Highway in Hurstville from his old fishing buddy, Marshall Bentnell.

Initially trading as Marshall Storage, Shane joined the Storage King team in 1998 and has stayed with them ever since. Shane recognizes the operating economies associated with the Storage King brand and has derived good value out of his association with Storage King.

Shane's hard work and persistence over the past 30 years have given rise to a portfolio of first-class investment-standard self storage facilities that extend throughout Sydney.

### **A new generation takes the reins**

Although he remains an active participant in the industry, Shane delegates a large portion of the day-to-day business activities to his children. His son Tom and daughter Brooke have been involved in the business from an early age and continue to make essential contributions.

Tom focuses on the identification and development of new business opportunities, while Brooke has become fundamental to the

operational side of the business. Brooke's knowledge of the Storman system is legendary, and Storman regularly uses Brooke as the test pilot for new products and innovations.

The family have forged a powerful team that is committed to the long-term growth of the business. They have received approval for the establishment of a large-scale, mixed-use development adjoining the original Eastgardens site and plan to add a further 4,000 sqm of net storage area to the original Eastgardens facility.



## Sam Kennard | Life Member

*Sam is CEO of Kennards Self Storage. When he took over the family business in 1991, the company operated eight facilities. Under his leadership, the company has expanded to include 96 storage facilities.*

Prior to joining his father in the business in 1991, Sam worked in the industry during his school holidays, cleaning and doing manual labour in a number of Kennard's storage centres. The business was a passion for the family. Many overseas family trips included drop-ins to self storage businesses.

Sam fondly remembers visiting storage facilities in Denver Colorado and meeting Buzz Victor in the 1980s. Buzz Victor was also a pioneer in the sector and was one of the Foundation Members of the SSA in the US.

Although the visits to storage properties seemed quite tiresome when he was a teenager, they shaped Sam's views on the storage industry. And he occasionally continues the tradition with his own children.

Sam's entry into the storage industry also coincided with Australia's serious economic recession, and Sam recalls how difficult it was to grow occupancy and set prices in this period. The business was tough. The economy was contracting. Awareness of self storage was also low, and the sales process required a strong product education element.

### **Shifting the focus from basic economy to sophisticated customer amenities**

Sam recalls that in the early 1990s, the sector and business were basic. Operating systems were manual, utilizing the Kalamazoo one-write accounting system. Self storage properties were built cheaply with high concern for the economy and lower concern for consumer amenities.

Sam took a different approach, acquiring development sites and building new centres from the ground up, focusing on amenities and

creating facilities that would yield greater client satisfaction.

The results speak for themselves. In 1991, when Sam came on board as a full-time employee at Kennards, the company operated just eight facilities. By late 1994, Kennards had grown to 14 locations, and Sam's father Neville retired, handing over the reins to Sam.

### **Acquiring Millers Self Storage**

By 2004, when Millers Self Storage was offered for sale to the market, Kennards operated 29 locations. After successfully negotiating the hotly contested acquisition that followed, Kennards Self Storage successfully secured the 24 Millers properties, plus three managed properties, for \$220 million. As a result, the company grew to 56 locations overnight.

The Millers acquisition was significant to the sector as Kennards brought a well-prepared and highly sophisticated offer to the market. Many lenders and investors became much better educated in the process.

### **Leveraging economies of scale lead to increased sophistication**

This acquisition was also a game-changer for the Kennards business as it enabled the company to leverage economies of scale and enhanced operating systems that led to greater sophistication and a higher level of self storage offerings.

Today, Kennards Self Storage remains privately owned and has 96 operating centres across Australia and New Zealand, with more than 10 new projects in the development pipeline.

The business has deliberately remained new-build specialists, focussing on new development,

securing superior locations and developing them to their preferred quality standards.

### **Continuing Neville's legacy – a long-standing association with the SSAA**

Neville Kennard was instrumental in the establishment of the SSAA in 1990, and he served on the National Committee in the formative years. At the time, Sam was in the final year of his business degree, and he also attended the SSAA's first conference where the association was launched.

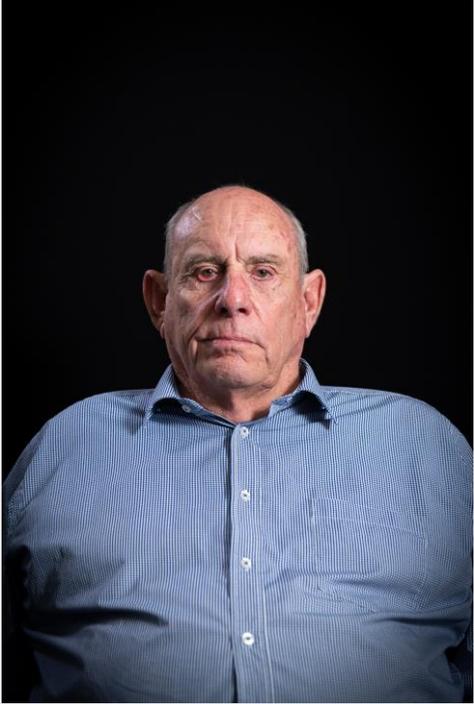
Sam recalls meeting many of the iconic leaders of the self storage industry, including Liz Davies, Jim Miller, Phil Robbie, Frank Cooney and others. And he appreciates how warm, open and generous they were with their time and insights.

### **SSAA has cultivated industry best practices & higher standards of customer service**

Sam believes the SSAA has served the sector very well by establishing and accelerating better practices and higher standards of customer service. He feels that it is in the whole industry's interest for customers to have a good storage experience. He also believes that the cross-sharing of ideas and willingness to help other operators tackle problems has brought benefits to everyone.

Sam was on the SSAA National Committee for a number of years in the early 2000s, assisting the organisation with a number of conventions and membership-facing initiatives.

He returned as an SSAA Board Member in 2022 and continues his stewardship of industry.



## Garth Davidson | Fort Knox Queensland

*Garth Davidson and the Fort Knox Storage brand have been synonymous with self storage in Queensland since the early 1990s.*

Although Garth spent the early part of his life as a grazier in central Queensland, he always had a strong interest in real estate. After leaving the countryside and moving to the Gold Coast, he opened a furniture hire business. He stored a lot of his equipment at the Millers' Gold Coast storage facility and, in doing so, started to take an interest in the self storage industry.

### **Pioneering self storage in Queensland**

Garth worked out that he could buy a facility at a yield of 13% and, recognizing a good investment when he saw one, he jumped into the self storage industry, opening his first facility in Greg Chapel Drive Burleigh Heads.

Like so many pioneers of the industry, Garth was there through the hard times when banks and insurers did not see self storage facilities as viable investments. He recognizes the important role that the Self Storage Association and the larger operators played in turning things around so that the banks now come to him.

He recalls that in those early years, marketing focused on achieving the top spot in the Yellow Pages and marvels at how things have changed. These days, the challenge for self storage operators lies in managing social media accounts.

### **Aggressive acquisition strategy leads to growth**

Garth proved to be an astute purchaser, and together with a diverse pool of investors, he pursued an aggressive acquisition strategy. He combined that with investing in the upgrade and further development of key sites.

Over close to 30 years of self storage industry

involvement, he built a portfolio of 28 Fort Knox facilities on the Gold Coast, Brisbane and North Queensland.

### **A regular attendee at SSAA conferences**

A regular attendee at the yearly SSAA conferences, Garth also toured the US on a Self Storage Association Study tour in 1995. He values comradery and the ability to share experiences with other self storage operators.

### **Leaving a legacy for the next generation**

In 2019, Garth stepped aside as CEO and Managing Director of the Fort Knox Storage Group in Queensland. His daughter Katrina and son Mark (Shorty) now hold senior roles with Fort Knox Group.

Garth remains active in the industry and is still out there negotiating the purchase of additional self storage facilities. Despite the consolidation of the industry into the larger investment fund, Garth believes that there are still excellent opportunities for smaller operators.

Garth says the most significant reward he has had in his career is the many firm friends that he has established with the staff that worked with him in Fort Knox Storage.



## Andrew Catsoulis | Managing Director, National Storage REIT (NSR)

*As Managing Director of National Storage, Andrew has had a profound and transformative impact on the self storage industry. The strong commercial standing of the Australian and New Zealand self storage industries has been substantially influenced by Andrew's vision and his guidance of National Storage for over 30 years.*

A qualified lawyer, Andrew was admitted to the Supreme Court of Queensland and the High Court of Australia. During his early career at major law firms in Australia and overseas, he gained extensive experience in the fields of financial, commercial and property law.

Andrew's involvement in the self storage industry started in 1995 with the development of a storage facility on family-owned land in Oxley southwest Brisbane. This was followed by a second facility at Aspley. These centres were branded Stowaway Self Storage.

### **Acquisition of National Mini Storage with a view to building a self storage network**

Andrew could see the advantages and opportunities in operating a network of facilities, and with that in mind, he purchased National Mini Storage.

With the assistance of his financial advisers, he stripped out the company's self storage properties for direct ownership. This portfolio comprised seven properties in southeast Queensland and three Adelaide properties, which Andrew purchased with the assistance of the Bryan family, who then owned Premier Self Storage.

National Mini Storage, Premier Self Storage and Stowaway Self Storage formed the original nucleus of what has become National Storage today.

### **Creating the APN National Storage Property Trust**

In 2003, Andrew and his partners formed the APN National Storage Property Trust, and all the National Storage properties were sold into the Trust. National Storage Operations Pty Ltd took a long-term lease out on the properties in the

Trust. The APN National Storage Property Trust operated successfully through demanding economic climates, including interest rate peaks and the Global Financial Crisis. Originally comprising 20 properties, the Trust followed an active acquisition programme and rapidly grew to include 44 properties with a value exceeding \$350 million.

### **Managing Director & Founder of the National Storage REIT (NSR)**

Although National Storage eventually bought back the properties in the APN National Storage Trust, Andrew acknowledges that the APN National Storage Property Trust experience impressed on him the importance of holding direct ownership of self storage properties and influenced his planning of the National Storage REIT (NSR).

A key player in its formation, Andrew has led the NSR as Managing Director since its inception. The NSR was formed as a stapled security, combining direct property ownership with skilled operational management. It was listed on the Australian Stock Exchange in December 2013.

The NSR originally comprised 60 operating businesses and 38 owned storage properties with the balance being held in joint ventures or through long-term lease arrangements.

Under Andrew's guidance, the NSR has grown rapidly, and as of 30 June 2020, it operates 188 storage facilities throughout Australia and New Zealand with a book value of more than \$2,280 million. Over 95% of these are wholly owned by the NSR. Recent reporting shows continued strong growth in acquisitions.

### **Four principles for growth**

Andrew's continued growth strategy is based on the following four principles:

- Organic growth through a balanced approach to occupancy and fee rate management
- A strong commitment to the acquisition of established storage facilities
- Development of new facilities and expansion of existing facilities
- Technological innovation, including the development of call centre operations, the introduction of revenue management systems, and the implementation of centre operation automation.

The establishment and success of the NSR have had a profound impact on the self storage industry – transforming the industry from a small-scale private investment medium into a well-recognised, institutional-grade asset class.

### **Raising awareness of self storage as a viable investment**

Under Andrew's leadership, the NSR has raised awareness of the self storage industry in the banking, finance, and investment sectors. And this increased awareness of self storage as an investment class has benefited the whole self storage industry and resulted in value growth across the industry.

Andrew takes great pride in the NSR team. Many of his senior executives have been with the organisation since the inception of National Storage in 2000. Andrew has great confidence in the capabilities of his executive team and has applied a management philosophy where he provides clear guidance in an environment that allows a high level of individual responsibility.

## 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Reflections

The SSAA had the rare pleasure of hosting a panel of industry pioneers at the SSAA GC22 Convention in November 2022 on Queensland's Gold Coast.

Thirty years is a special milestone for the association and the industry at large, and we were privileged to hear from these amazing panellists, who shaped a handful of fledgling self storage businesses into the successful and thriving industry it is today.

Cognisant that it is an extremely rare occurrence to have all of these esteemed people together on the one stage, we felt it would be fitting to create a record of the stories, recollections, reflections, and insights they shared at the Convention.

### Panellists:

David Blackwell | Independent Consultant  
Andrew Catsoulis | Managing Director, National Storage  
Liz Davies | Chief Executive Officer, Self Storage Australia  
Sam Kennard | Chief Executive Officer, Kennard's Self Storage  
Michael Tate | Chief Executive Officer, Storage King  
Richard Whalan | Managing Director, Rent A Space



Scan the QR Code  
to view the panel discussion.

**30**  
**YEARS**  
1990-2020

