

# Ordinary Kytherians Extraordinary Achievements

## Peter V'landys Member of the Order of Australia (AM)

### 3rd Kytherian receives Award



On Australia Day 2014, Peter V'landys was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia for services to racing.

In the Australian honours system, appointments to the Order of Australia confer recognition for outstanding achievement and service. The Member

of the Order of Australia is awarded for service in a particular locality or field of activity or to a particular group.

*Recipients of the Order of Australia are from many fields of endeavour and all walks of life. The Order of Australia has four levels:*

- Companion of the Order (AC)
- Officer of the Order (AO)
- Member of the Order (AM), and
- Medal of the Order (OAM)

Peter V'landys is one of those fortunate people who are able to combine their passion with their profession. He is an Australian racing administrator who holds the position of Chief Executive and Board Member with Racing NSW (an independent body established to control and regulate the NSW Thoroughbred Racing Industry).

As chief executive of Racing NSW, Peter oversees the state's massive thoroughbred racing industry - the ideal job for someone who has been passionate about

racing since childhood. He formerly held the position of Chief Executive of the NSW Harness Racing Club and currently serves on a number of Boards associated with the thoroughbred racing industry.

Peter attributes his Member of the Order of Australia honour to the hard work of his parents, who migrated from Kythera, Greece when he was a young boy.

#### **Kytherian roots**

Peter V'landys was born in the Vlandis "patriko" house, in the village of Kalokerines on Kythera, Greece, in 1962. The patriko house of Peter's grandfather is easy to locate. It lies 80 metres from the church of Ayios Spyridonas, Kalokerines, on the road to Myrtidiotissa. There, 30 metres off the road, on the right, is a 'camara', known to all the locals, as "Fossa". Another 'patriko', Peter's father's family's house, is located adjacent to the 'camara' of his grandfather.

His pappou, Paul Vlandis - known as "Pavlis" - was extremely well known on Kythera. One of his tasks, in the lead up to ceremony of Myrtidiotissa, was to go to every house on the island on a donkey, and collect the oil that each household donated to the church. Pavlis had 12 children, one of whom was Peter's father, Nick(olas). Nick was one of four (4) of Pavlis's twelve (12) children who migrated to Australia.

Peter V'landys mother was Katerina Petrochilos, known as 'Peters' in Australia. She was the daughter of Alex and Kirrani Petrochilos, from Fratsia, Kythera.

Despite leaving the island at age 3, a number of childhood memories have remained very vivid for Peter. He recalls as a small boy that he loved eating almonds. "I used to eat them by the bucket loads". When it was time for him to leave the village, his grandfather Pavlis planted an almond tree with him. "You will be gone", his grandfather said, "but this tree will still be here."

He vividly remembers falling off a donkey, and "splitting my head open". Also the many long walks, even as a small child that he undertook, up and down the road between Kalokerines and Myrtidiotissa. He also recalls vividly his best friend at the time - a young girl called Maria.

Peter's father Nick migrated alone to Australia in 1963. He had joined a brother and sister in Wollongong, and another at Gosford - in Australia. In 1965 Peter's mother Katerina along with his two older brothers Paul and Alex, left Kythera and migrated to Australia on the Patris.

Jim Vlandis from Gosford recalls picking up the family from the dock in Sydney, and waiting for Nick to arrive from Wollongong to be reunited with his family. The family settled in Wollongong.

Nick and Katerina lived the typical Kytherian-Greek migrant's life in Australia. "We were very poor," Peter V'landys says. "It was a struggle early on. My parents sometimes had to go without food to feed the three kids. Dad worked 18-hour days in the Wollongong steelworks. Because he didn't have the language, that was the best he could get. He was a 'doubler'. He worked every day from 6 am and he would normally finish at four, but then he would do a doubler. He'd finish at 1 am, and then start at six again. He retired when he was 60 and died when he was 64. Mum worked 12-hour shifts in a cafe so that I'd have a good chance in life. My work pales into insignificance compared to theirs. I've never seen a man and woman who worked as hard." Peter had jobs from age nine.

Peter V'landys has returned to Kythera on two occasions, the first time as a 28 year old. "When I went back, the first thing I went to look for was the almond tree. It was there were pappou had planted it". It filled Peter with joy to see it. He was also reunited again with his childhood friend, Maria.

In 2009 he went back to Kythera a second time with his wife Philippa. On this occasion, under the bed in the patriko home, Peter found a small icon of a patron saint. He put it in his wallet, and has never removed it from his wallet since. "You know, I have lost my wallet twice, but on each occasion it has been returned to me with all its contents intact. I am sure that it was the patron saint that ensured that this happened." The saint has been identified as Ayia Paraskevi. Again, on the 2009 visit, he met with his childhood friend, Maria. Tragically, Maria has since 'passed away'.

### ***Personal life***

Growing up in Wollongong, Peter fell in love with racing when a friend introduced him to neighbours who used to regularly watch Harold Park harness racing on television. "There was a horse called Paleface Adios that really got my interest. At the age of 10, I used to buy the Trotting Guide and The Sportsman, and go to the TAB and find somebody older, an 18 year old, to put my bets on. "He would take a 'sling' (a %) every time I'd win". I had an unbelievable strike rate. I was a very good form reader. I used to punt quite a bit for a young bloke." "But I also realised early on that betting really had to be

treated as entertainment - it's not something you do if you want to buy a house"?

Peter attended West Wollongong Primary and Keira Boys High School. It was a teacher at Keira who insisted on spelling his name "V-'l-a-n-d-y-s". "He kept on spelling it that way...and it stuck". At Keira Boys High his mathematics teacher advised him to study Accountancy. ("There's no money in Teaching".) He gained entry to Wollongong University, graduating with a Bachelor of Commerce Degree majoring in Accounting.

To pay his way through accountancy at Wollongong University, V'landys became the manager of the Unanderra Hotel at the tender age of 18. Originally employed as a glass collector and cellarman, owner, Duke Taylor employed him to manage the Hotel. "I thought, this a bit of a hard job for me at 18," says V'landys. "And all the staff agreed. They went on strike." But V'landys stayed, and Taylor, he says, taught him the motto, "If you can't dazzle them with brilliance, you baffle them with bullshit". "And that's really been a good piece of advice," he says. "It's helped me a lot."

At 20, V'landys used money he had saved and borrowed to buy the Courthouse Tavern - "a good, wholesome, old-fashioned restaurant" across the road from the (legal) Courthouse in Wollongong, which thrived, despite having no new-age chefs et cetera".

Peter worked part-time for a Wollongong accountancy firm throughout university. "So I was basically getting up at five o'clock in the morning and studying for uni," he says, "starting at nine o'clock at the accounting practice, and then taking over at the restaurant at 5.30 until about 10pm. I learnt what hard work is." He sold the restaurant after about two years, making "a reasonably good profit".

"The education I received at university was invaluable and a major factor in my career path. I was very impressed with the relaxed atmosphere and the social life, but coming from an all-boys school I remember feeling quite intimidated sitting next to girls, because I didn't know the etiquette."

After he graduated at the end of 1984, Peter joined a multinational mining company in Sydney. Within 12 months he was promoted to company secretary, but the lure of the racing industry would prove to be irresistible.

On February 15th, 2003 he married his wife Philippa (nee, Hooke), an executive assistant at the CSIRO. They live in Hunters Hill with the cat and their three children, Katerina, Nicholas and Maddie. Peter and Philippa have followed the Greek-Kytherian tradition of naming their first two children after the paternal grandparents. In fairness Philippa chose Maddie's name. Maddie's middle name is Anna, named after Peter's mother's mother.

Speaking in June 2010, when Nicholas was 20 months old and Katerina six months old, Peter asserted, "That's

the best thing that's happened to me, the two little ones. My little girl is completely hyperactive – I don't know where she gets that from – and the little boy's as docile as anything.”

He'd been awake with the kids since 4am but, he says, “I never used to sleep anyway, so it's nothing new. When you work in one of these roles, you lie in bed and your mind just keeps going at 100 miles an hour. You find it very hard to sleep. But when you do, it's a real joy.”

### **Racing Administration**

After commencing his career in the mining and leisure sectors, V'landys became involved in racing administration in 1988 when he was appointed as Chief Executive of the NSW Harness Racing Club the leading harness racing club in Australia which operated successful racing operations at Harold Park and Menangle Paceway. At that time he was the youngest person in Australia to be appointed as Chief Executive of a major metropolitan race club and under his administration, the NSW Harness Racing Club established a record of innovation including conducting an on-track registered club which made Harold Park the first racetrack to have poker machines (200) on course. This and several other commercial enterprises provided the Club with the broadest revenue base of any racing club in Australia.

During his tenure at Harold Park, Peter helped organise a number of Kytherian Association of Australia functions at the race course.

During this period Peter V'landys also played an integral role on behalf of the NSW racing industry in negotiations in relation to the \$1 billion privatization of the NSW TAB and the restructuring of the Racing Industry's finances.

In 2004 he was appointed to the position of Chief executive and Board Member of Racing NSW. In this role Peter V'landys also sits as a Board Member of several other NSW and Australian racing and wagering industry Boards.

### **Peter V'landys' career achievements**

#### **Equine Influenza**

In mid-2007, the States' (and the country's) racing industry was brought to a standstill as a result of an outbreak of equine influenza (a highly contagious exotic disease). New South Wales was the most effected State with all racing cancelled and the movement of all horses prohibited indefinitely. These actions had disastrous ramifications for the 50,000 persons who rely on the industry for all or part of their livelihoods and on the economies of Australia and New South Wales.

As V'landys noted, other than wars and the Depression, the only time racing stopped in Australia was in 1814,



*A sign informs punters of the cancellation of the Royal Randwick meeting due to the equine influenza outbreak. - Source News Limited*

when Governor Macquarie put a halt to the very popular thoroughbred meetings because people were unfit to work for many days afterwards due to excessive celebrations.

V'landys assumed responsibility for the overall coordination of the industry's response to this crisis and developed and implemented contingency plans to counter the effects of the outbreak and

ensure the protection of the industry's stakeholders. This involved negotiating with the Federal and State Governments for the provision of funding to establish emergency welfare schemes. He personally negotiated with the Prime Minister, the Hon John Howard MP and was successful in obtaining Government assistance in an unprecedented \$235 million Rescue Package.

“Peter V'landys alone devised the concept of subsidising race horses,” Peter McGauran, then Federal Agriculture Minister recalls. “At \$20 a day for trotters and pacers, and \$60 for thoroughbreds, V'landys reasoned they could keep a multibillion-dollar industry afloat - and the trainers, jockeys and strappers in work - so they could race as soon as the disease was eradicated”.

“It was brilliant in its concept,” McGauran says. “But subsidising racehorses is a totally foreign concept with treasury and finance.” So he introduced V'landys to then Prime Minister Howard - who, after 90 minutes, was a “champion” of the scheme. “Without V'landys enlisting the personal support of John Howard, the industry today would be a shell of what it once was.”



*The equine influenza outbreak in August, 2007, crippled the racing industry. Source News Limited*

McGauran testifies that Peter “builds an instant rapport and establishes a basis of trust quicker than almost anyone I’ve met. He’s compellingly sincere and reliable, and he’s relentless in his advocacy for racing, an industry structured in portals of self-interest. His rare gifts are that he got them unified into one voice, and that he understands racing in all its complexity. Too often others have no idea about achieving the possible.”

V’landys oversaw the administration of the schemes to combat Equine Influenza, which were directed at participants, not only in the thoroughbred racing industry, but also in the standard bred racing and leisure horse industries.

On a State level Peter worked closely with the Minister for Primary Industries and his Department to contain the spread of the disease and our joint activities helped to mitigate the financial impact of the outbreak.

He also lobbied relevant NSW Ministers for the provision of further financial assistance which resulted in the provision of a \$7.5 million grants scheme for the industry’s participants and race clubs and the establishment of a Special Mortgage Deferment Scheme for racing industry participants and a further one off grant to help promote the industry following the resumption of normal racing activities.

V’landys received many letters, and other messages of support, in the days following the announcement that he has received the Member of the Order of Australia award.

Peter is not an openly emotional man, but he was genuinely moved by one writer’s sentiments. “I will never forget what you did for the racing industry participants during the equine influenza outbreak,” the letter read. “You kept food on the table for many families in racing, you gave us hope to keep going.”

### ***World Youth Day negotiations with State and Federal Governments***

Following the Government’s announcement that the 200x World Youth Day would be held in Sydney and centred at Randwick Racecourse Peter V’landys coordinated the industry’s planning for the use of the Racecourse and the disruption which would be caused to the activities and livelihoods of racing industry participants during the World Youth Day activities. This included dealing with the NSW and Federal Governments and the Catholic Church and he was able to negotiate a \$40 million compensation package for the racing industry.

Peter V’landys stood up to the authority of the Catholic Church, and what was referred to at the time, as “bullying tactics”, and won. “I ... think Mr Pell is a bully,” V’landys said at the time. “He’s refused any meeting with us because he realises he’s not in a position of

strength, because he’s forcing his will on someone who doesn’t want to comply. I’ve got nothing against the Catholic Church, or against a world-significant event, but it shouldn’t be at the expense of the racing industry.”

### ***Race Field Legislation***

Immediately upon his appointment with Racing NSW in 2004, Peter recognized the importance of the Thoroughbred Racing Industry maintaining ownership of the intellectual property rights in its racing product so as to ensure the protection of its wagering revenues.

Initially he explored the application of copyright laws to achieve this purpose. However, in 2008, as a result of his recommendations, the NSW Government enacted race field legislation which allowed the NSW racing industry to generate significant revenue from interstate and overseas wagering operators who were using the NSW product to conduct their wagering operations. Wherever corporate bookmakers based themselves, they had to pay a percentage to Racing NSW for publishing the field.”

In accord with the legislation V’landys developed a scheme for the collection of revenue from those operators. This program is returning up to \$50 million per annum to the NSW thoroughbred racing industry and following the successful implementation of the scheme, the Governments and racing industries of other Australian States and Territories also introduced similar schemes.

Subsequent to the commencement of the scheme, the legislation and its implementation were challenged in the courts by two major wagering operators, Sportsbet and Betfair.

V’landys coordinated and ran Racing NSW’s legal defence against those challenges and the matter came before a single judge of the Federal Court, the Full bench of the Federal Court, and subsequently before the High Court of Australia which found unanimously in favour of Racing NSW. The March 2012 outcome allowed the release of \$150 million in accrued funds to the industry and ensured the on-going receipt of \$50 million per annum. V’landys’ efforts on this front have been recognized world-wide by international racing authorities.

Peter attests that “the biggest battle I’ve had in racing was with the wagering operators.” Again, he won the long



*Racing NSW CEO Peter Vlandys arrives at the Federal Court in Sydney for the race fields legislation decision. Source News Limited.*

fight but, “it was a strenuous battle, because it got quite personal”. The bookmakers accused him of dissembling, incompetence and misrepresentation. “They unleashed a tsunami of personal attacks which I had to cop. Sometimes I used to go to bed hating myself, after some of the stuff I’d read. It got to a situation when I got home and the cat kicked me, rather than me kicking the cat.”

In addition to its positive effect on the NSW thoroughbred racing industry the High Court result also provided certainty for the NSW Harness Racing and Greyhound Racing industries and all racing industries in the other States and territories, which were then able to proceed confidently with their funding models.

### ***The Australian Jockey Club (AJC) and Sydney Turf Club (STC) merger***

The Australian Jockey Club (AJC) was founded in January 1842. The AJC was considered the senior racing club in Australia and was responsible for founding the Australian Stud Book, which the combined club still oversees today. The club also, in conjunction with the Victoria Racing Club, formulated the Rules of Racing that is followed by all Australian race clubs.

The Sydney Turf Club (STC) was founded in 1943 and was the youngest of Australia’s principal race clubs. It was formed following an Act passed by the New South Wales parliament called the Sydney Turf Club Act.

Both the AJC and the STC had co-existed as independent bodies since the early 1940s. A merger proposal was first mooted at the turn of the 21st century. However, the first real push for a merger came with the release of a report by Ernst and Young in June 2009 which recommended that a merger would save the New South Wales racing industry from collapse. The NSW Government pledged \$174 million for Sydney racing if the merger went ahead, including a



*Racing CEO Peter V'landys is confident prize money for The Championships can be sustained. Source News Limited*

major revitalisation of Randwick racecourse. The move for a merger was controversial, with members of both clubs hesitant to lose their respective identities. While AJC members voted in favour of a merger, STC members voted against a merger. Nevertheless, the board of the STC decided to proceed with a merger.

Against resistance from traditionalists, Peter V'landys pushed the merger of the AJC and

the STC, and a deal was clinched in October 2010, with

a \$174 million injection into merged bodies coffers.

### ***Trackside***

More recently Peter negotiated the sale to TAB Ltd of the NSW Thoroughbred Racing Industry’s future revenues from the computer generated racing game “trackside”.

This sale realised \$150 million for the industry and has allowed the development of new world class spectator facilities at the Randwick Racecourse. These magnificent facilities’ include two new grandstands, a function centre, restaurants, corporate boxes and a 4500-seat horse parade ring. He has also driven significant prize money increases across the three tiers of racing. Little wonder that they call Peter V’landys, “the messiah”, and “the man who saved the industry”.

### ***The small punters mate***

Peter V’landys has masterminded deals that have pumped more than a \$1 billion into the NSW thoroughbred industry - but it’s the little wins for battlers that he holds most dear.

V’landys has said that one his of career highlights was convincing the TAB not to proceed with a decision to increase its minimum bet limit from 50c to \$5.

“I felt sorry for all the little punters, many of them pensioners, who really enjoy a 50c each-way flutter,” he said. “I went as hard as I’ve ever gone to help keep that minimum limit - it’s probably my battler background coming out.”

### ***One of Sydney’s 40 Most influential people. One of Australia’s 50 Top Sports People.***

In the Sunday Telegraph of the 3rd March, 2013, Peter was ranked 40th amongst Sydney’s most influential people.



The Australian of the 5th May, 2013 ranked him 22nd amongst the Top 50 Sports People in Australia.

### ***Looking to the Future***

It is unheard of for a Chief Executive of Racing at the highest levels to maintain the position for even three years. February 2014 marked 10 years since Peter V’landys was appointed to the position of Chief executive and Board Member of Racing NSW.

Adam Taylor writing in the Daily Telegraph on the 28th February, 2014 argues that “even V’landys must reflect on what a difference a decade makes. Sydney racing is preparing for the inaugural The Championships series and the most anticipated autumn carnival in memory. The sport is well-placed to take full advantage of the gilt-edged opportunities delivered by the preceding decade”.

Peter V'landys is not a person to rest on past achievements. He is always guided by a vision for the future. "There's still a lot of work to be done, the racing industry has many challenges ahead." When asked to elaborate on what those challenges are, he specified the following:

Racing needs to find ways to stay relevant to the new generations.

Racing's revenue base is and has been under threat so it must do everything in its power to at minimum maintain the base and ideally ensure it grows.

The need to embrace and maximise the advantages provided by technologies

Maintaining the integrity of racing at all cost.

***Racings big issues for V'landys include***

### ***The Championship Funding.***

"We would never have commenced The Championships if we didn't believe we could sustain the prize money.

Sydney Race Clubs Merger.

"Naturally with new facilities at Randwick some people's perception is that the AJC has benefited most. I think the ATC is working very hard to ensure the success at Rosehill."

### ***Racing's NSW's Strategic Plan***

It was completed 12 months ago but cannot be released as the major driver for all the initiatives is currently under consideration by a third party and releasing the plan may jeopardise success with the delicate state of play.

### ***Racing Politics***

"Like any industry there are people who are driven by self-interest and those who have an unhealthy sense of entitlement. Unfortunately I have a low tolerance for these types".

### ***The Past Ten Years***

"I think in the ten years I experienced every emotion known to humanity. As psychology professor Robert Plutchik says there are eight emotions: joy, sadness, fear, trust, disgust, surprise, anger and anticipation. I definitely experienced every one of these".

Whilst we are on the subject of psychology, a number of psychological qualities have been consistently attributed to Peter V'landys by astute observers. Above all, he is a winner. Rick Feneley from the Sydney Morning Herald has quipped that "the state's straight-talking racing boss has winning form". Robert Nason, then Tabcorp's boss of wagering, encountered one of the toughest negotiators he has ever seen. Nason, now with Telstra, always respected V'landys honesty. "A lot of people have underestimated Peter to their ultimate detriment."

V'landys is a hard-nosed negotiator; his modus operandi is to tackle the difficult issues head-on and find a solution with a "can-do" machismo which often irritates his opponents. Peter has time and again been called the "can do" man. Some even go further, calling him a "saviour", and some go even further still, calling him a "messiah".

V'landys makes no apologies for refusing to back down when he believes passionately about a cause. He is straight-talking to the point of bluntness. "I think you've got to do your best for any organisation. If that sometimes comes across as abrasive, so be it. I've never wanted to win a popularity contest." V'landys is tough. He is very combative. As one racing identity put it, "he would rather have a fight, than a feed".

V'landys always thinks holistically about racing. His vision ranges beyond entrenched and factional interests; always seeking the greater good for the entire racing industry.

The Member of the Order of Australia honour is a deserved acknowledgment for the man who has been at the helm of the NSW racing industry for a decade, throughout the most turbulent period in its history. This also makes him very durable.

***Peter V'landys achievements are profoundly significant. All Australians, all Greek-Australians and all Kytherians around the world can take great pride in them.***



*Tony Abbott, Peter V'landys and Barry O'Farrell*

*The author would like to thank Peter V'landys for agreeing to be interviewed, and for the candour of his responses. Also to Jim Vlandis, Gosford, for providing information about the Vlandis family in Kalokerines, Kythera.*

*George Poulos*

The structure and content of information about the Racing Industry was sourced from the WIKI entry for Peter V'landys [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter\\_V'landys](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_V'landys) Links to numerous newspaper articles about Peter V'landys, and Racing NSW Annual reports were accessed from the WIKI article bibliography as well as Google searches.

Most families who have emigrated to Australia have an extraordinary story to tell. If you would like to share your story please submit it to the Editor at - [newsletter@kytherianassociation.com.au](mailto:newsletter@kytherianassociation.com.au)