

Simon Garnett

Someone once said you can't teach an old dog new tricks. Simon Garnett is one dog who this year is volunteering to learn new tricks, none of which will involve rolling over.

As of 1 July 2003, Simon will become the new Victorian Branch President. A founding member of the organisation, he has served on the branch committee since 1999 and also established the Workers Compensation Special Interest Group in 1997, which he chaired for five years. Simon can also be credited with APLA's recent successful National Conferences.

Simon is a very passionate individual. In fact, his passion often leads him into trouble. When Simon was in year 10 he was expelled from school, his teacher claiming 'he was taking up valuable breathing space in the class'. But it's these behavioural problems that have made him a strong advocate for his clients.

Simon's passionate attempts to improve Victoria's workers' compensation system forced the Victorian WorkCover Authority to consult with the legal profession about the rights of injured workers.

Like a dog at a bone, he said the VWA talked the talk, but did not walk the walk. Communication between the profession and the VWA has improved markedly since. The success of this liai-

son resulted in the establishment of a legal liaison group with the Victorian Workcover Authority and Transport Accident Commission.

Before going into practice, Simon was a high school teacher. While he admits he loved teaching, he decided in 1982 to try legal practice and was articled at Ryan Carlisle Thomas.

Simon, now a partner at RCT, has served his entire legal career with one firm. He specialises in workers compensation matters, and finds going into bat against the insurance industry very rewarding.

He says that while the job becomes more difficult everyday, he has loved it since day one.

Breaking down the barriers between plaintiff law firms has been one of APLA's greatest achievements, he says.

It's enabled the profession to share information and boosted its ability to protect injured people. But the increased restrictions on injured people's rights will mean considerable difficulties for APLA in the next five years, he believes.

After 21 years of practice, Simon is still passionate about protecting injured



people's access to justice and compensation, and improving Victoria's Workers Compensation system. However, his passions do run deeper. Simon is a dedicated family man and sportsman, though he blames his wife and daughters for his hair loss.

He played basketball until three serious knee injuries finally convinced him to retire at 42. He now coaches a local girls' team and is also president of his pony club.

What are Simon's downfalls? Perhaps it's his dedicated following of the Melbourne Demons, despite their poor performance in the AFL. Perhaps it's his preferred drink of choice - port.

For those who know him, his methods can sometimes be abrupt, confronting and unorthodox. However, as Victoria's new Branch President, he will make a formidable leader, though he may need to learn a few new tricks. ■