

Fate of old fig tree hangs in the balance



ONE of five mature fig trees in Dulwich Hill is under threat after local residents complained about falling leaves and fruit messing up their street.

Andrew and Theodosia Kotsonis, both in their 70s, have asked Marrickville Council to remove the 80-year-old Hills fig on the corner of Wardell Rd and Margaret St.

They believe the "excessive seeds and leaves" from the large tree make the path slippery and dangerous for pedestrians.

Their neighbours have also complained to council about noise from the branches which "sway back and forth during windy and rainy days".

Independent councillor Victor Macri said the tree was not suitable for the area and moved a motion to get an independent report on its impact on the street.

"It's not a street tree, it's a park tree. That's the bottom line here," Cr Macri said, adding that the tree's debris created a trip hazard.

Independent councillor Dimitrios Thanos agreed.

"It's also vermin and the birds and the bats that it attracts. Sometimes you have to remove a healthy tree," he said.

Greens councillors voted against the commissioning of a report, arguing that the council's arborist had already deemed the tree to be healthy and that it should not be removed.

Greens councillor Max Phillips said the figs were probably planted during the Depression.

"The figs have grown into a beautiful avenue and appear to be in excellent health," he said.

"There are some issues with fruit and leaf litter but this is what trees do naturally, and is certainly not a good reason to wield the chainsaw on a beautiful and healthy tree."

The tree was also an important part of "our ecological heritage", Greens councillor Cathy Peters said.

The seven Labor and independent councillors voted for the report, defeating the five Greens councillors.

Body builder Michael Kesalianos stuns gym members



THEY came, they flexed, they inspired. Two of the biggest names in international body building muscled their way into Erskineville recently for a three-hour session of posing and pumping iron. Michael Kesalianos from Greece and American Tony Freeman are both well-known competitors on the International Federation of Body Building circuit, competing on the Olympia stage in the US. The pair posed for about 1500 members and guests at the Lifestyle Fitness Australia gym last Tuesday. They also gave a seminar on nutrition and their careers.

"It was fantastic ... phenomenal," said gym owner Paul Gallanos. "People were taking a lot of photos and buying pictures and T-shirts. To get free advice like that, it never happens. You'd have to pay lots of money for it." Mr Gallanos, a former competitive body builder, said the visit had helped to inspire many gym members.

The pair were here for a national tour and also guest posed at the Australasian Body Building championships at the Cronulla Sharks club last Sunday.

Jim Raptis lifeline creates anger

HIS creditors have lost millions and some could go to the wall but high-flying Gold Coast developer Jim Raptis is back in business.

THE man who has transformed the Glitter Strip's skyline has also shown a Midas touch for survival after pulling off a \$1 billion rescue of his embattled Raptis Group.

But angry subcontractors and suppliers branded him "Teflon Jim" after, for the second time in his career, he cut a deal with creditors which will see them paid a fraction of what is owed.

While a majority of creditors agreed to throw him a lifeline, others said Mr Raptis did not deserve another chance. They said his companies should be liquidated and pursued for possible insolvent trading.

"Why would we want that person (Mr Raptis) to run the company again?" businesswoman Katrina Pollard said.

Highrise window cleaning company boss Paul Scott said businesses owed about \$10 million by Raptis would be "lucky to see 4c in the dollar" and some would not



RELIEVED ... Jim Raptis after his rescue deal was accepted.

survive.

"Teflon Jim's a good name for him," Mr Scott said. "He's used the legal system to get what he wants and he'll be back in business next week. We'll struggle to survive it."

The Raptis Group and associated companies collapsed late last year with debts of around \$1 billion, leaving subcontractors out of work and a \$700 million Hilton Hotel project in Surfers Paradise in limbo. Assets including the Sheraton Mirage hotel and two waterfront mansions owned by the Greek-born developer were put for sale.

But it was a beaming Mr Raptis who emerged from meetings of creditors of his listed Raptis Group and building company Rapticvic Contractors yesterday, after Rapticvic creditors voted for a deed of company arrangement which would see them paid a maximum of 16.5c in the dollar and five million near-worthless Raptis Group shares. However, their return could plummet to only a few cents if a \$26 million claim by the Australian Taxation Office is successful.

Raptis Group creditors - mainly banks including the ANZ - also approved a deed under which they will receive 35 million Raptis shares currently worth 1c each.

"It is the best possible result we could have under the circumstances," a "relieved" Mr Raptis said outside the meeting. The deal is similar to one he struck when he nearly went broke in the early 1990s and paid creditors just 3.5c in the dollar. Asked what he would do differently after his second brush with corporate oblivion, Mr Raptis answered: "Lots."

"Less debt ... it's a huge learning curve. It's a matter of learning from our mistakes and past experience."

Raptis shares have been suspended from trading since late last year but administrator Brian Silvia, of BRI Ferrier, said the company could be re-listed on the stock exchange within two months.

Callas photo exhibition

Nicosia -- A photography exhibition on Maria Callas opened at the Journalist Center congress halls in Nicosia within the framework of the cooperation memorandum signed between the parliaments of Greece and Cyprus. The exhibition under the title "Maria Callas: 30 Years Later" was inaugurated by Cypriot Parliament Speaker Marios Karoyan in the presence of a Greek Parliament delegation. Karoyan underlined that the Cooperation Protocol signed is aimed at promoting cultural cooperation through the exchange of exhibitions and the co-hosting of events. He also announced that the Cypriot Parliament will host other two Greek Parliament exhibitions on the art of caricature in the Europe of the "27" and folklore songs. The exhibition was first presented in Athens in 2007 on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the death of Maria Callas, one of the most renowned opera singers of the 20th century. In 2008, under its current title, the exhibition was presented at various locations in Greece, in Trieste, Italy and in Washington, DC. Focusing on Callas' stage appearances in Greece and across the world, the exhibition presents a selection of photographs from the archives of the Teatro alla Scala in Milan, the Greek National Theatre, Associated Press, Hellenic Literary and Historical Archives, Benaki Museum in Athens, EMI Classics, ERT Historical Archives and the Arena Theatre in Verona, as well as private collections.