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OPINION PIECE

In a difficult week, when 400 of our fellow citizens will finally end their employment with Alcoa and thousands more in related industries, it is well to think about what defines us as a city.

Geelong's brand will determine how we project to those who would seek to build their lives and businesses in our town and build opportunity in the process. It will determine the place we take in the world.

Given the pain of the current times we are fortunate that over the last decade we have seen the forging of a new Geelong brand.

It is no better evidenced than in the Geelong Football Club. September 29, 2007, was a watershed day in the life of our city. In winning that Grand Final and exorcising the demons of the previous 44 years we also buried the Sleepy Hollow brand that had held Geelong back. Rather than a place where nothing happened, Geelong had produced a team that would set new records and provide a definition of excellence in Australian football.

In Jimmy Bartel we saw unassuming but exquisite skills and in Tom Harley we saw leadership combined with humility.

Under the guidance of Brian Cook the whole footy team exuded a brand of humble excellence. And humble excellence has become the brand of Geelong.

Beyond the football club, Deakin University has quietly gone about its business and is now one of the finest universities in Australia. It is changing the lives of thousands of Geelong students by providing them with a first-rate tertiary education.

At the same time it is undertaking research that promises Geelong a new dawn in innovative and advanced manufacturing.

Cotton On has grown with breathtaking speed to take on the world in value-for-money label clothing. Without any fanfare its North Geelong headquarters, combined with its warehouse in Lara, will soon be the biggest private sector employer in our town.

And the Costa Group is the remarkable story of a man who took a small family fruit shop and turned it into a national empire that is one of the biggest private companies in the country.

Whether it's Brian Cook or Jane den Hollander, Nigel Austin or Frank Costa, each of these people exhibits genuine excellence, a leadership style that is irresistible, and does it in a way that is infused with humility and an openness to be better.

Together they are the new Geelong: really smart people who are still willing to learn from others. They embody humble excellence.

In contrast, there is a thesis that says that self-promotion helps Geelong's promotion: that any news is good news.

While this maxim may work in the world of celebrity where your face is your brand, it is simply not true for Geelong.

We are seeking people who would invest their hard-earned in Geelong. And that means they need to see quality they can trust and people who will listen. A sense of circus scares new business away.

Companies, which also seek investment and client confidence, spend a fortune on their brand and they protect it jealously. Publicity for publicity's sake, when it is not consistent with their values, is strictly avoided.

Over the last few years Geelong has built a wonderful brand. If we can steer clear of the cheap and nasty, then a brand of humble excellence will work. Because it will attract new investment, which Geelong at this moment in time badly needs.

TUESDAY 29 JULY 2014