

## Nicholls fell on feet as pensioners' consultant

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### ANALYSIS

The close business links between Roger Nicholls and Retirees WA began when he lost his seat of Mandurah in the 2001 State election.

A former seniors' minister, Mr Nicholls became a \$1000-a-week consultant to what was then the Australian Pensioners' League and had branches throughout the State.

He was one of the architects of the group's name change, new constitution and its controversial decision to commit \$750,000 to struggling community broadcaster Curtin Radio in return for advertising.

In 2003, at least eight branches of Retirees WA closed in protest at the direction Mr Nicholls was taking the 72-year-old grassroots association.

But in 2004 he extended his consultancy deal to a commercial business arrangement involving maintenance work at the organisation's retirement villages.

Total Retirement Village Maintenance (TRVM) was operated by Mr Nicholls' wife Linda and the firm was owned by a company called Dalerose Nominees Pty Ltd, which lists Over 55 Lifestyle Villages Pty Ltd as its sole shareholder.

Mr Nicholls and his business partner Frank Pinner own Over 55 and until recently ran it from the same city offices as Retirees WA. The pair's business dealings can be traced back to 2002 when they were directors of Samson Homes.

According to Retirees WA chief executive Sue Hiddlestone, the maintenance deal was scrapped last year when she became aware of who was behind TRVM.

“When I found out I ceased using them,” she said. “I didn't think that sat well. I realised that price-wise they weren't doing the right thing.”

But Ms Hiddlestone defends the current business connections Retirees WA has with Mr Nicholls, Mr Pinner and his wife Margaret Thomas, who is the organisation's current chief financial officer.

“At the end of the day if the membership doesn't want them they can throw them out,” she said. “I don't think we are exposed (financially), but time will tell, won't it?”

When asked about a letter sent to her by four finance committee members raising concerns about the business deals, Ms Hiddlestone denied receiving it. “I haven't got it,” she said. “I have not seen it. Roger Nicholls has it. I gather they decided to pass it on to him.”

Mr Nicholls also denied seeing the letter, but said he was aware of its contents. “I am not running Retirees WA,” he said. “I have a very strong commitment to the organisation.

“There were people who felt that people like myself had an undue influence simply because of my political background. There was a mindset that not-for-profit meant you weren't allowed to make a surplus. No organisation can survive if that's the mindset.”

John Trewin, a retired lawyer and serving member of the Retirees WA finance committee, is one of four members querying transactions approved by a previous committee.

“It all looks strange,” he said. “We are researching the finances and the companies behind it all.”

## A TANGLED WEB

Retirees WA now leases part of this East Victoria Park building after lending \$1.8 million to Mr Nicholls' company to buy it.

Roger Nicholls

RWA honorary liaison consultant

HUSBAND / WIFE

Linda Nicholls

Total Retirement Village Maintenance

RETIREEES WA (INC)

(Formerly Australian Pensioners League)

Sue Hiddlestone RWA CEO

Margaret Thomas

RWA chief financial officer

HUSBAND / WIFE

Frank Pinner,

Businessman

Over 55 Lifestyle Villages

Australasian Group Investments

Daleroose Nominees

Samson Homes

Over 55 Lifestyle Villages Pty Ltd

(\$1.6m redeemable shares and \$1.8m loan)

Over 55 Lifestyle Villages

Australasian Group Investments

Daleroose Nominees

Samson Homes (ceased 2002)

Roger Nicholls

RWA honorary liaison consultant

Caption: **Roger Nicholls**

Sue Hiddlestone

Margaret Thomas

Frank Pinner.

East Victoria Park building.

Memo: **ROGER NICHOLLS**

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