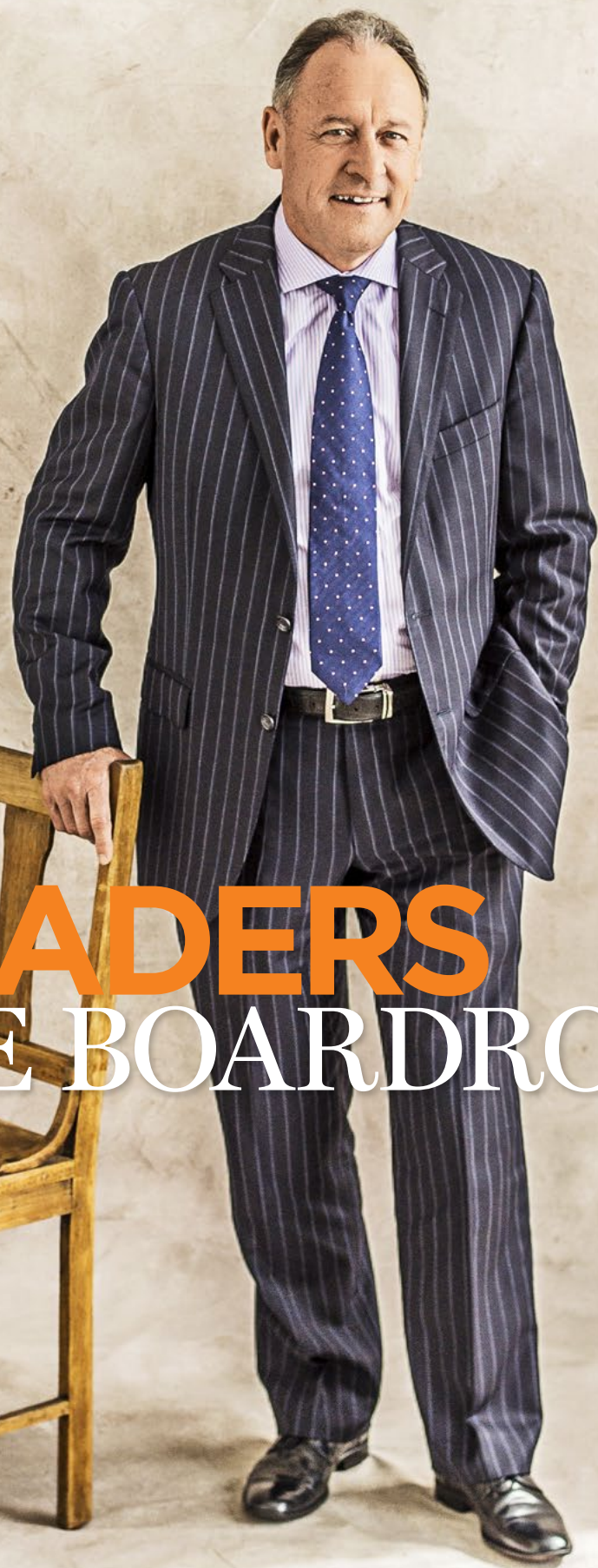


A program to take Aboriginal youths from their home communities and place them in the country's top private schools is having remarkable results. **Michael Sheather** meets the high-powered executives leading the charge.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **TIM BAUER**

CRUSADERS IN THE BOARDROOM



Sir Ralph Norris

Former CEO, Commonwealth Bank and Air New Zealand, current non-executive director of Fonterra and Origin Energy.

GROOMING BY NICOLA JOHNSON. THESE IMAGES HAVE BEEN RETOUCHEE.

Mark Arbib

Former federal Cabinet Minister, currently adviser to businessman James Packer.

John Hartigan

Former CEO of News Limited, current Chairman of Prime Media, member of SCG Trust.

John Eales

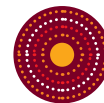
Former Wallaby, currently director of Flight Centre and GRM International.



IN 2007, CORPORATE high-flyer Andrew Penfold turned his back on a lucrative banking career and founded the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation (AIEF). As a teenager in Redfern, Sydney, Andrew had lived a life of delinquency – saved only by his mother’s efforts to have him admitted to Sydney’s exclusive private boys’ school St Joseph’s College on a full scholarship. That decision changed the course of his life. Determined to give back, Andrew created the AIEF and now administers a program which in the past six years has placed more than 200 promising young Aboriginal students in the country’s top private schools. The results so far? Two hundred and twenty-two high-school graduates and 12 university graduates. According to the high-flying business executives who are ambassadors of the program (for details, visit aief.com.au), it’s an idea of and for its time.



“What struck me is the degree of confidence”



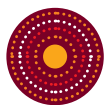
New Zealander Sir Ralph Norris, the former head of the Commonwealth Bank and Air New Zealand, got his start in business as a computer programmer during the IT revolution of the 1980s. For him, involvement in AIEF is all about creating a new generation of indigenous leaders.

“Over the years, I have met many of the young men and women who have been awarded scholarships, and what has struck me is the degree of confidence that they have. Normally, indigenous students are somewhat shy, but after a year or two in the program and the opportunity to mix with other high-achievers, they develop an underlying self-esteem that is wonderful to see.

“It’s not just the fact that they have access to a good education, they develop as a whole person. I have no doubt we are looking at new generations of indigenous leaders, who are going to do so much for their people.” >



“This gives them back their dreams”



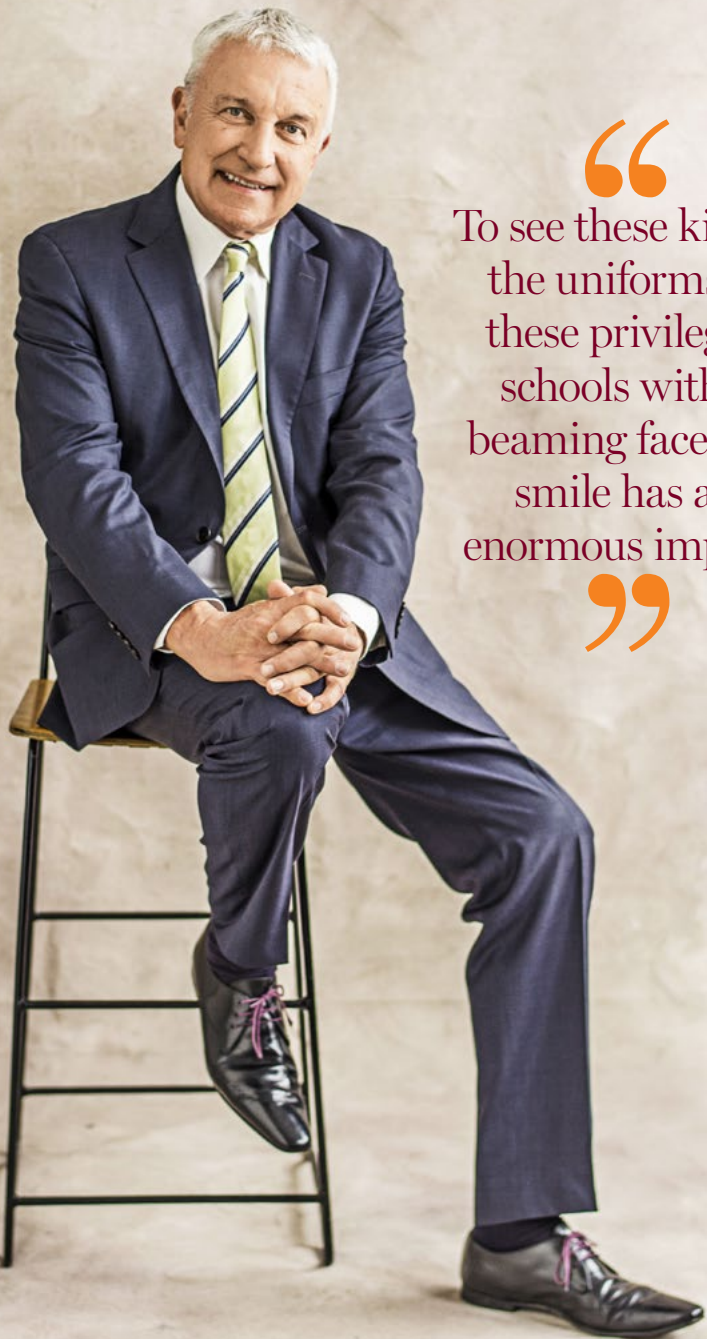
As the son of a Libyan migrant, former Senator Mark Arbib knows better than most the importance of equal opportunity, of giving a leg-up to the disadvantaged in society. Not long after his father, Eric, settled in Sydney, he passed away, leaving Mark’s mother, Lola, to raise the family alone.

Mark has been largely invisible since he left politics to work for James Packer’s Crown Resorts, yet Mark agreed to take part in this story because he has seen how the indigenous scholarship program transforms lives.

“When I was the Minister for Indigenous Employment, I came across a young guy who

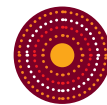
had been through the program and I was bowled over by how dynamic and ambitious he was. AIEF gives kids a pathway – and hope. And that hope has a ripple effect when these kids then go back to their communities.”

Known for being one of the so-called “faceless men” of the ALP, (the group of powerbrokers that instigated the removal of Kevin Rudd as Prime Minister), the former Senator has been an ambassador for the AIEF since its inception in 2008, testament, he says, not only to the persuasive powers of its founder, the human dynamo that is Andrew Penfold, but also to the effectiveness of the program itself.



“
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”

*“Young people will be
the agents of change”*



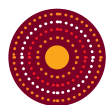
When John Eales was captain of the Australian rugby union side, his teammates called him “Nobody” because “Nobody is perfect”. He holds an Arts degree with a double major in psychology and is today a corporate consultant and motivational speaker.

“My father was a school principal. He drummed into me the importance of education and that’s one of the reasons I’m so passionate about this program, it is about opportunity through education. What it is doing is setting up a cadre of young people who will be the agents of change in indigenous communities, wherever they are. But they are not going to be leaders coming from the outside, but rather from the inside. That will make a great difference because they already intimately understand the problems from their own experience.

“AIEF is really an enabler. It’s an enabler for individuals, but also for our society, to allow us all to be the best that we can become. We are suboptimal in so many ways, but especially in the way we have engaged with indigenous Australians. I don’t know if this is the perfect way to do it, but it’s the perfect way to start.” #



“He knows what poverty and privilege is”



When he was Rupert Murdoch’s main man in Australia, presiding over the media mogul’s News Corp Australia (then known as News Ltd), John Hartigan forged a reputation for being a consummate newsman – a journo’s journo with a proud tabloid heritage (albeit one with an unusually sharp dress sense).

Now heading up Destination NSW and chairman of Prime Media, and married to sports broadcaster Rebecca Wilson, his name is still invoked as a contender whenever plum media jobs are in play. Yet it’s as an ambassador for AIEF that he was moved

to break his usual media silence and take part in our shoot.

“(Founder) Andrew Penfold has been on both sides of the street – he knows what poverty is and he knows what privilege is. To see some of these kids from Arnhem Land or outback Alice Springs in the uniforms of these privileged schools with a beaming face is something that has an enormous impact.

“Imagine the impact of these kids going back to their communities with memories of the schools, the friends and the opportunities they have experienced. It’s rekindling ambition in indigenous Australia.”