

Leu: Rebel with a cause

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Saturday, August 30, 2008

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YOU wouldn't pick Julia Leu for a rebel or a renegade.

If you didn't know the woman in conservative pinstripe shirt and tailored black slacks represented Cairns Regional Council's notoriously fiery Division 10, you might peg her as a teacher or public servant.

And Cr Leu has held both those roles during her career.

But make no mistake.

The quietly-spoken mum-of-two is more than capable of holding her own on the barricades as the former Douglas Shire tries to battle Cairns Regional Council and the State Government for its independence.

"I've always tried to have an attitude of 'why can't we do that?' instead of 'we cannot do that'," Cr Leu told *The Weekend Post* yesterday, after a week in which she fronted a fiery anti-merger meeting of 500 people in Mossman and accused Mayor Val Schier of betraying her.

"It's just about trying to work through the blockages or the barriers."

After sweeping into office with a landslide 47.85 per cent of the vote in March, there have been plenty of challenges.

"I certainly didn't think the negative impacts (of the merger) would have been so swift or hit so many people so strongly," she admits.

Two weeks ago, her council colleagues hauled her over the coals in a private meeting, accusing her of disloyalty and inciting an environment of hatred.

The bid to split from Cairns might be, as she calls it, "an extraordinary situation". But the one-time politics and geography student from Melbourne has led anything but an ordinary life.

Time as the Douglas Shire's acting CEO and its community, culture and economic services manager was preceded by stints teaching and working as a senior public servant in the Commonwealth Government, in community services and indigenous education.

Before Cr Leu and husband Andre put down roots in the Daintree, where they farm exotic fruit, the pair travelled across Asia, South America and Europe, including an overland trip across Afghanistan in the 1970s.

"You never knew what each day would bring," she said.

The years of globetrotting will stand her in good stead covering the sprawling Division 10 from the Bloomfield River, through Cape Tribulation to Mossman, Port Douglas and Clifton Beach.

"I have the most exciting, diverse and beautiful division, I think," she says.

Through the de-amalgamation furore Cr Leu has hung on to her sense of humour.

After a photo with one of few remaining Douglas Shire signs at Rex Smeal Park, she jokes: "You should have told me. I could have found another one."

It seems the blue and green logo has become something of a collector's item around Port Douglas and Mossman.

"We didn't know if we'd need them again," she says, tongue in cheek.

A public meeting to discuss de-amalgamation will be held tomorrow from 1pm at Rex Smeal Park, Port Douglas.