Amy's honour

Delegates welcomed in Gumbaynggirr, English

By JEANENE DUNCAN

When she was a youngster Gumbaynggirr woman Amy Jarrett spoke a handful of words of her native language.

Until more recent times, indigenous Australians were not permitted to speak, or even learn, their native tongue.

However, when the Muurrbay Language Centre at Nambucca Heads was established in the mid-1980s Amy embraced the opportunity to learn the Gumbaynggirr language with enthusiasm.

It took four years for Amy to master this difficult and challenging language, but the journey has had an amazing outcome – both spiritually and fundamentally – for this Bellwood grandmother.

"It's amazing; I feel so different since I learnt my language," Amy said.

"I am more in tune with Mother Nature – I have a greater appreciation for the environment."

She explained that Koori people looked on the earth as their mother.

"And, I have come out of my shell."

Before learning her language, Amy would shy away from groups and would rarely contribute to a conversation.

As the *Guardian News* went to press yesterday (1st), Amy was putting aside her nerves to stand before some of the country's most respected and important members of the Aboriginal community, judges, academics, politicians and members of the community welcoming delegates and guests to this year's Native Title Conference in Coffs Harbour.

The 2005 conference, held until tomorrow (3rd) at the Opal Cove Resort, is being hosted by Gumbaynggirr elders.

Amy's scheduled welcome was on behalf of the southern region and her speech was to be read in both English and Gumbaynggirr.

"I was overwhelmed; so proud and honoured to have been chosen," she said.

Amy was educated at the Bellwood Public School, Nambucca Heads (now preschool) and St Patrick's Primary School, Macksville, before being sent to Sydney at the age of 14-years.

Gumbaynggirr woman Amy Jarrett... she was chosen to welcome delegates to this year's Native Title Conference in Coffs Harbour.

Until homesickness drew her back to Gumbaynggirr country, Amy worked for a North Shore family as a maid.

Returning home after 12 months, Amy harvested vegetables and picked bananas before marrying Max (dec).

She has two daughters, Maxine and Bridget, 10 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren (with one on the way).

Amy recognised Australia had changed greatly during the past 50 years, however, she believed more could be, and should be, done to better reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

"There will always be racism on both sides and we will have to deal with that as it comes along."

Amy, who learned much from the elders as a child, wanted to encourage Koori children to embrace their culture, and go back to basics.

"Now they are getting into drugs and drink," she said.

"We were never exposed to those sorts of things.

"I was taught to fish, catch worms, where to go and where not to go; the simple things in life such has how to survive in the bush."