Long serving Geraldton Universities Centre Director Meredith Wills retires this month after nearly 10 years leading the Centre.

She leaves a legacy which will benefit the Mid West community for years to come with the opportunities that have been created for local people to access university education under her watch.

When Meredith started with the GUC in 2005, there were none of the magnificent buildings and campus environment that GUC now has on Onslow Street. GUC was co-located with CUCRH (now WACRH) and it was one of Meredith’s first tasks to fit out the new dedicated GUC building that was under construction up on the hill.

Back then there was 51 students enrolled and the university places they studied within had been allocated specifically for Geraldton. While a small number of students had completed their courses prior to Meredith commencing at GUC, she presided over the first formal GUC graduation ceremony in 2006, coinciding with the opening of the first GUC building.

However, it was not all smooth sailing. Funding models for university places changed and by 2008, the GUC was at a financial and governance crossroads. Times were tough, but Meredith showed great perseverance, fighting for the future of GUC.

A review was commissioned, recommending GUC move to an independent, not for profit model, with a regionally based board. Once again through Meredith’s perseverance, negotiation and stewardship, by 2010, this was delivered. So began a period of renewal and expansion for GUC.

Independence had granted the GUC the ability to negotiate with any university across Australia for courses demanded by the community. As Meredith has often described, this was like jumping off a cliff without a parachute! But as she always has in her time with GUC, Meredith rose to the challenge and by mid-2011 the first partnerships were secured with Central Queensland University and Charles Sturt University.

GUC required financial assistance. Meredith and her team lobbied hard and created projects so that, together with the support of the Mid West Development Commission, Royalties for Regions funding for services and infrastructure would ensure a sound financial footing to put GUC on the road to sustainability.

Throughout all this growth and change at GUC, Meredith has been a stalwart of the community serving on Boards and committees as diverse as the Mid West Development Commission, Mid West Sports Academy and Beachlands Primary School.

In Meredith’s final year, 2014, two significant milestones were achieved – opening of the stage 2 building and reintroduction of a Bachelor of Nursing following a partnership with the University of Southern Queensland.

Under her leadership a genuine campus has been forged at GUC. She leaves a legacy whereby some 187 students have graduated from courses supported at GUC and in 2014, nearly 200 students studied at GUC across eight different programs.

Meredith – your staff, students and community thank you for your passion, commitment & unwavering support to making GUC, and the Mid West community, a better place to live, work and study.
Meredith’s farewell - a night to remember

“She has brought both character & conviction to the GUC, which has imprinted those around her.”

“Meredith has high expectations about everything & everyone - expectations she herself works hard in order to achieve.”
Social Work to start at GUC in 2015

GUC will introduce CQUniversity’s Bachelor of Social Work into the range of university programs supported at the Centre in 2015.

Articulation arrangements have been secured from CQUniversity for Durack Institute graduates in the Diploma of Community Services, Youth Work and Counselling to be admitted directly into the second year of the Social Work program.

As a result, GUC will roll out both first and second year of the program should sufficient numbers of Diploma qualified students apply for entry.

It is anticipated that first year students will share courses with students enrolling in CQUniversity’s Bachelor of Psychological Science also supported at GUC.

Applications are now open. Check guc.edu.au for details.

“She has a style marked by her humanistic, intellectual, considerate, determined & ‘lets get the job done together’ rapport with all who work with her.”

“Meredith displays perceptiveness & perseverance, appreciation and focus on the ‘big picture.’”
Recognition for university education in the Mid West

The importance of a university degree has been firmly recognised by a local family, contributing to secure a future for Mid West students studying, or looking to study locally.

David and Jill Horwood donated land at Deepdale for the 2014 Telethon Home, under the proviso that $50,000 would be returned to a local charity after its sale. Member for Geraldton, Ian Blayney, recommended the Hollomby Foundation and the family sieved on the opportunity to support local university students to be their very best.

The donation will now support scholarships under the name of the Deepdale Bursary and activities related to nursing.

But the Horwood’s generosity did not finish there. With Jill’s teaching background, and her motto of “educating a girl means educating a family,” the Horwood’s took additional step, pledging family funds to provide a second annual scholarship - the Horwood Family Education Scholarship.

The Horwood Family Education Scholarship is a $5,000 scholarship open to a continuing Education student studying at the GUC who can demonstrate their commitment to excellence in teaching and to serving their regional community, and is open to current Education students in 2015.

Incoming Director of the GUC Natalie Nelmes thanked the Horwood family for their support of the Hollomby Foundation and its scholarship program.

"On behalf of the GUC and our students, we thank David and Jill Horwood for their significant donations to the Hollomby Foundation," she said.

“It is important that regional students can be assisted to study and then recognised for their achievements. Donations such as the Horwood’s means we can help fulfil that objective.”

Since introducing the locally supported Education degree at the GUC, local students continue to gain national recognition for their high achievements, and 2014 is no exception.

Second year Education students Emily Malycha, Maree Espinos, and Caitlyn Patman have received invitations to the credited Golden Key International Honour Society through Central Queensland University. Third year Education student Demi Ahearn was honoured with this invitation in 2013 and students in local Accounting/Business degrees have also gained an invitation.

All 2015 Scholarships available through the Hollomby Foundation are now advertised on the GUC website.