

Jenny Aitchison, Managing Director Northern Highland Travel



Jenny Aitchison is the Managing Director of Northern Highland Travel, a coach tour operator and travel agent in Maitland NSW. She has been working in the industry since 1998 when she moved to Walcha to marry Robert, who was operating the Walcha Motel and Northern Highland Travel with his parents, Bruce and Elaine Aitchison

In 2006, Jenny was presented with the Young Achiever's Award by the Bus Industry Confederation at its National Meeting in Canberra, after having won the state award earlier in the year. In 2005 Jenny was awarded the Lower Hunter Business Woman of the Year, as well as receiving an award from Hunter Regional Tourism Organisation for her Outstanding Contribution to Regional Tourism in Hunter River Country and she was a finalist for the Maitland BPW Club's Career Woman of the Year Award.

Jenny has managed major structural change in the company on a financial and operational base, including relocation to Maitland in a time of rapid change in the tour and travel industry. Northern Highland Travel has gone from small family partnership of four to a company employing 18 people. Jenny has managed the doubling of the fleet of the company, as well as a major injection of technological change including the development of a comprehensive web site, implementation of a fully computerised booking system and the transition to incorporating rail and flights into the company's itineraries.

Recognising the important influence of fuel prices, cheaper international and domestic air travel and other issues that make domestic coach tourism vulnerable, Jenny has developed and implemented a strategic plan to harness these threats to become opportunities to her business, whilst still expanding the coach business.

At the same time, Jenny has worked hard to increase the professional standards of her industry, in projects such as the Bus and Coach Association's OH&S video and through her promotional and community activities such as entering awards, becoming involved in community and industry groups and addressing community groups on issues to do with tourism.

In 2006, Northern Highland Travel was one of the *Telstra Business Awards NSW Finalists*. The company have been inducted into the *NSW Tourism Hall of Fame* for its three successive wins in the NSW Tourism Awards program over the last three years. The company also won

its *third successive win at the Hunter Regional Tourism Awards for Business Excellence* in 2006.

In 2005 their coach won *Coach of the Show* at the NSW Bus & Coach Association Conference for one of its three new Mercedes Benz RF0500 coaches and Northern Highland Travel was the *Lower Hunter Business of the Year*. In 2003, 2004, and 2005, Northern Highland Travel won the *Lower Hunter Business Excellence Awards*, and were finalists in the *Australian Tourism Awards*.

Under Jenny's management, the company has become much more involved in community and business associations, including the Bus & Coach Association, the Hunter River Country Tourism Advisory Group, the Lower Hunter Business Enterprise Centre, the Maitland Chamber of Commerce and the Maitland Business & Professional Women's Club. She is the inaugural President of the Hunter Women's Network.

Jenny gives much of her time to addressing community groups in the Hunter and Sydney regions on issues in the coach and travel industry, including Cessnock Business & Professional Women, Rotary, Probus, View Clubs, and Pensioner Clubs.

Jenny was a panellist at the BIC conference in Canberra in October 2006 on the topic of Marketing, and is a member of the NSW Bus & Coach Association's Marketing Committee. She is also the NSW BCA's representative on the NSW Tourism Industry Forum, a peak industry group representing all industries within the NSW Tourism Industry.

Jenny and her husband Robert have two children Joshua and Jessica. She enjoys bushwalking and going to the gym when business and family commitments permit, and reading, which she does in any spare moment.

Early Background:

Jenny Aitchison was born in Canberra, where she studied a BA (psychology) ANU, and a Grad Dip in Applied Psych (Uni of Canberra). She was a policy officer in the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in the Social Justice Coordination Section (Women's Unit), and also had experience in the Settlement Planning and Policy and Review of Migration Decisions Sections. During this time she was elected Vice President of the ACT Branch of the Community & Public Sector Union. In 1997, Jenny was appointed as the Senior Advisor and Media Advisor to Steve Dargavel, MP. In 1998, whilst half way through her Masters in Community Education, Counselling, Jenny left Canberra for Walcha, a town of 1600 people, to join her husband Robert Aitchison in his parents' business, the Walcha Motel and Northern Highland Travel. A week later she began her management career in hospitality and tourism!

During her time in Walcha, Jenny was a member of the local Younger Set Women's Hospital Auxiliary, as well as the first and last woman member of Apex in the town.

In 2000, Jenny and Robert became formal partners in Northern Highland Travel when it relocated to Maitland, after the sale of the Walcha Motel, and in 2003, Jennifer received her Certificate in Coach Management.