A mistake that’s paid off

QC recognised for her service

By ALICE HIGGINS

AUSTRALIA DAY: She may be one of the state’s most respected and experienced legal professionals but it was a stroke of luck that the Honourable Robyn Layton QC entered law in the first place.

“I came into law completely by accident,” Ms Layton says.

“My mother was a teacher and I thought to myself I did not want to do what she did.

“My father started off in social work then became the manager of a division of a car company. English was my strength but an arts degree was too generalist so I became involved in the Council for Civil Liberties and then later, as a lawyer, I went to work with (the late Honourable) Elliott Johnston.”

The city resident was last week named an Officer of the Order of Australia for distinguished service to the law and to the judiciary, particularly through the Supreme Court of SA, as an advocate for Indigenous, refugee and children’s rights, and to the community.

During the 1970s, Ms Layton practised as a barrister and solicitor in criminal, industrial, civil, family and personal injuries law.

She became a judge at the SA Industrial Court and took up a position with the Commonwealth Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

She became a barrister at the Independent Bar four years later and went on to become a Queen’s Counsel.

In 2002, she carried out the State Government’s Child Protection Review and three years later was appointed to the Supreme Court before resigning in 2010.

“I had been a judge for 16 years and you decide a lot of cases in that time,” she says.

“I thought I could make a greater contribution in a broader area rather than presiding over cases.”

Ms Layton, who was recently named Australian of the Year for SA, now works in a range of positions, including the adjunct professor at UniSA’s School of Law, Reconciliation SA co-chair and Advisory Council for the Australian Centre for Child Protection.

She says they allow her to further promote public awareness of her four passions – the rights and needs of the Indigenous, women and migrant populations, and child protection.

OTHER RECIPIENTS

Dr Jillian Benson
Awarded a Member of the Order of Australia for service to medicine through contributions in the field of mental health, particularly for refugees and people seeking asylum, and to the Indigenous community in SA

Ms Margot Jean Foster
Awarded a Public Service Medal for outstanding public service in the area of education

HONOUR: Robyn Layton has been named an Officer of the Order of Australia.