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## NEWS

# Long-term staff left jobless after Flash Harry's closures

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NOT SO FLASH: Michaela Manley worked for Flash Harry's at Sugarland Shoppingtown for more than eight years but will now need to look for a new job after Flash Harry's went into liquidation. Photo: Max Fleet / NewsMail

Max Fleet

FOR more than eight years - since Flash Harry's first opened its doors at Sugarland Shoppingtown - Michaela Manley went to work each morning, loving her job at the variety store.

But after the company went into liquidation on Tuesday and closed its doors on Wednesday, Miss Manley will have to look for a new position, along with the store's nine other employees.

Miss Manley is one of 50 staff across five locations, including Bargara and Bundaberg, left jobless and while she said it was emotional to be leaving Flash Harry's, she credits the company with helping her become a confident and qualified retail worker.

"When I started I was just a normal full-timer but they (Flash Harry's) put me through my certificates so I've got my certificate two and three in retail," she said.

"It was a heap of fun and a really good place to work for."

Ms Manley said it was difficult but believed the tight knit work colleagues would keep in contact.

"It was emotional, it's what I've been doing for the last eight and a half years, so it was upsetting," she said.

"It was a shock and we are emotional but we all are strong together and we're all very close friends so we'll keep in touch."

Miss Manley said the liquidators had assured staff they could claim staff entitlements through the government.

Liquidators Worrells Solvency and Forensic Accountants partner Paul Nogueira said staff could submit applications to the government's Fair Entitlement Guarantee Scheme to secure payment entitlements.

"We've met with all of them (staff) and they're in the process of submitting those forms through the proper department to get paid," he said.

"It pretty much pays out everything except superannuation but I understand there's not a lot of superannuation actually due in respect

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Mr Nogueira said the process now needs to be to assess the value of the stock and then canvass the market to see if there was anyone interested in picking up either the businesses or stock or whether it was abandoned.

"We're waiting on advice from our valuers about the best approach," he said.

Mr Nogueira said creditors were owed about \$1.2 million in addition to what was owed to the banks and employees, with the final figure dependant on staff redundancies.

He said the directors had exhausted all options to keep the business going but the closures were largely due to a significant downturn in trading and high rentals.

"There's been a spate of other liquidations of other variety stores throughout the industry. That applied a lot of pressure to suppliers in the market so they were prepared to provide a lot more credit so that put some serious cash flow problems on the business as well," he said.

Mr Nogueira said variety stores such as Flash Harry's and Crazy Clarks were reliant on discretionary spending and the closures were a sign that individuals were tightening their belts as the downturn in the mining sector was putting pressure on wages.

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