

## Business

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# Luigi hangs up singlet on a long career

LEE-ANNE PETCHELL

Three decades ago, then 35-year-old Italian migrant and operatic singer Claudio Versaico donned a blue singlet, placed a handkerchief on his head and the West Australian icon Luigi Savadamoni was born.

After more than 30 years in the television advertising spotlight, Mr Versaico is taking a rest with last week's announcement that WA Salvage will be phased out of the market — and along with it his alter ego, Luigi.

Mr Versaico, 68, said he never expected the role to last for as long as it did, despite the company telling him when he got the job that he would play the character "forever".

The Luigi character and his tagline, "we're not fancy but we're cheap", is one of WA's longest running marketing campaigns.

Advertising veteran Keith Ellis said he came up with the "we're not fancy" tagline, but said there had always been differences of opinion as to who came up with the Luigi character.

Mr Ellis has been involved with the campaign from its inception, when he worked for Marketforce, to the present day through his own company, KEA Media & Marketing.

He remembers the first advertis-

ing budget for the television advertisements was \$18,000 — a far cry from today's budgets.

One of the key planks of the advertisements was repetition — shooting between 10 and 16 commercials a month with almost 200 spots filmed in some years.

"One of the biggest things to success in television is continuity," Mr Ellis said. "A lot of people were young kids when the ads started and they have grown up with Luigi, and now their kids are watching the ads."

With WA Salvage originally a second-hand business selling salvage materials from many of the historic homes and buildings knocked over in Perth in the 1970s, the idea of Luigi, a migrant Australian, fitted with the typical "Aussie battler" that the company wanted to attract to its store.

Mr Ellis said Mr Versaico's natural manner in front of the camera also helped to make the ads a winner.

Brand Agency director John Anderson said some of the most successful brands were simple and consistent in their approach.

"It's a very well known and recognisable icon," Mr Anderson said of the Luigi campaign.

"They haven't tried to reinvent the wheel over and over again."

Mr Anderson is charged with



Role over: Claudio Versaico has ended his career as Luigi Savadamoni, the face of WA Salvage. Picture: Barry Baker

## FLASHBACK WEDNESDAY, MAY 11 2005

Luigi gets the chop as Wesfarmers' discount chain goes upmarket to compete with homeware giants

### New look for WA Salvage

developing a new marketing and advertising campaign to cover the stores which will replace WA Salvage, a new homewares retailer called HouseWorks.

WA Salvage general manager

James Todd said Luigi had been a successful marketing icon for WA Salvage but it was time to move on.

"He (Luigi) has stood the test of time and has aged indistinguishably in front of the camera, but we are

changing our business and with that we need to change our advertising strategy," Mr Todd said.

The change in direction was revealed by WA Salvage's parent company, Wesfarmers, at an analysts briefing last Tuesday, but Mr Versaico was told of the changes months earlier.

He said he would miss the monthly cheque, but more than anything he would miss WA Salvage, a company he ended up working for as a warehouse foreman after he left his previous job at Main Roads.