

Justin sets a jolly rat trap

HOTELIER **Justin Hemmes** is fighting back against an invisible enemy determined to undermine his expansive business empire.

As unsubstantiated rumours continue to sweep the city claiming that the receivers are soon to be called in to his prestigious hotels Ivy and Establishment and that Hemmes is under pressure to sell some of the hotels in the Merivale Group, the swinging young impresario issued a challenge to colleagues in the hope of flushing out the source of the damaging rumours.

Hemmes has had a Wanted poster designed and distributed to staff, associates and friends.

The poster, distributed via email yesterday, features an image of a rat, a phone number — 1800RAT — and a ludicrously generous reward of \$1,000,000,000 which is paid out “at liquidator’s discretion”.

Hemmes insisted yesterday the rumours were “so ridiculous you have to take a light-hearted approach to dealing with them”.

“I felt I had to address it because you don’t want staff hearing this stuff. They need to know their jobs are safe. Business is fantastic. This is just some jealous monkey making trouble.”

Hemmes’ father **John**, recovering after treatment for prostate cancer — now all clear — said the reward was a joke.

“It’s funny though, yes?” he said, adding that he had lunched last week with Westpac’s **Gail Kelly** and CommBank’s CEO **Ralph Norris**. “They’re the people who lent us the money and it’s all good with them.”

In an email to Merivale Group staff circulated on Tuesday, Hemmes the Younger wrote:

“Hi all, In light of the pathetic rumours floating around our fine city and the article in today’s paper (*SMH* Dec 9), I wanted to put everyone’s (sic) mind at rest

that there is no truth to these ridiculous rumours! We are not in receivership, I am not in jail, and no I am not pregnant! Everything is fine (in fact excellent) on the Merivale ship. Its (sic) clear sailing with no icebergs in these tropical waters! Merry chrissey, Jus (your captain).”



Maintaining a sense of humour: Justin Hemmes and Amber L'Estrange

Picture: Icon Images