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## **Australian Story: A Force of Nature (Margot Spalding)**

**Airs Monday, November 23 at 8pm on ABC and introduced by Caroline Jones. This is the final program for the 2015 season.**

A mosque will be built in Bendigo despite protests by the ultra right wing group, United Patriots Front, according to colourful local business identity, Margot Spalding.

Spalding is leading a campaign, *"Believe in Bendigo"* that has been set up to support Bendigo's small Muslim community and to *"fight back against intolerance and hate"*.

***"There's a shocking group of people who are terrorists and out to harm other people but they're not the Muslim community we are talking about in Bendigo," Spalding says. "They despise terrorism just the same as we despise terrorism, (as) they want to live safely here."***

This week's *Australian Story* features former Telstra Business Woman of the Year, Margot Spalding. The 62-year-old woman who co-founded Jimmy Possum furniture has known both personal tragedy and early business hardship.

***"Margot understands that everybody in life gets a bit of a knock. Some people get an unfairly big knock and not everyone gets up to dust themselves off on their own. Margot did and it's an indication of how powerful a personality she is."*** – Ken Marchingo, friend

Today she is the matriarch of a multi-million dollar company that employs more than 100 people including three Afghan refugees.

***"It makes me very happy and proud to have a job"*** – Sayed Hussaini, Afghan upholstery apprentice

In Bendigo, Spalding is known as much for her flamboyant style as she is for her philanthropy. Despite being the target of hate mail and having her home under police surveillance, Spalding says she will continue to campaign for the rights of Muslim people to have their own place of worship.

***"I have a personal view that everybody has the right to pray where they are comfortable. I question whether some of those who are so anti mosque have ever spent much time in the company of Muslim people."***  
– Margot Spalding

Spalding is hopeful a Victorian Supreme Court of Appeal will overturn the latest objection to the mosque. The City of Greater Bendigo granted a permit for Bendigo's first mosque in June last year. Local residents unsuccessfully appealed to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal in August.

Spalding says she doesn't know what "*all the fuss is about*" as nearby Shepparton already has several mosques. The permit for the Bendigo mosque will allow construction of a building that seats 375 people. It will be located in a light industrial area on the outskirts of the city.

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Join the conversation: **#AustralianStory**

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