

Friends of Geelong Botanic Gardens Annual Report 2016-17

The last twelve months have, as usual, been busy and rewarding for the Friends of Geelong Botanic Gardens and it has been pleasing to see long term projects come to fruition and new ones begin. It is particularly pleasing that our volunteer participation has significantly increased. Our general membership has also increased, ensuring a positive future for the Friends.

It is fitting that our Annual Report notes the passing of founding member and inaugural President George Jones in late 2016. George's vision, horticultural knowledge and mentoring role shaped the dynamic organization that the Friends of Geelong Botanic Gardens grew to become. It is with gratitude that we honour George Jones.

The Annual Report gives an opportunity to reflect on the purposes of the Friends, whose role is to advocate for, and support the Geelong Botanic Gardens (GBG). It also aims to provide opportunities for participation of its members.

This report notes the significant achievements, both for the Gardens and for the Friends, resulting from the continued commitment and endeavour of Members of the Friends of Geelong Botanic Gardens throughout 2016-17.

Ladies Kiosk - Eastern Park - Restoration

In 2010 the Friends committed \$16,000 to initiate, in partnership with the City of Geelong, the restoration of the historically significant Ladies Kiosk pavilion in Eastern Park. Our application to Heritage Victoria for an \$80,000 restoration grant was awarded in 2014 and in May 2015 the Friends secured a Community Concepts grant for a further \$30,000 to cover a significant overrun of the original estimate of costs. In September 2015 the Friends committed a further \$36,548 and in January 2016 the City commenced the project.

The complete restoration of this historic and arresting Geelong landmark was finally completed in September 2016. In April 2017, to celebrate the successful conclusion of this project, the Friends had the great pleasure of hosting a community celebration, complete with the mock re-enactment of the original opening. Brass, ukulele and jazz bands, heritage games run by the National Trust and a picnic atmosphere rounded off a very convivial occasion. The Friends are proud to have initiated this historic project.

Sustainable Visitor Facility

A multi-function shelter and storage facility, located in the Southern part of the Gardens, behind the fern garden, for use by the GBG Education program, private weddings, small community functions, scheduled Friends activities and the provision of proper toilets for visitors, had been considered necessary for the Gardens for some time. In 2015 the GBG Director Annette Zealley applied for a Capital Grant for the preliminary design stage of the facility. The Friends submitted a supporting letter, with a commitment of \$10,000 to assist funding. In July 2016 the City accepted the application and allocated funds for the design stage and plans for the necessary sewerage installation. This is a three year project and in 2017, once again, the Friends supported, in writing and in person at the Community Budget Submission hearing, the GBG's application for funding for the next stage. This will be a wonderful addition to the amenity of the Geelong Botanic Gardens and the Friends will consider future opportunities to support this important facility.

Learn @ GBG

In 2016-17 the Friends continued to support the Geelong Botanic Gardens Education Program with \$10,000, committed annually since 2013. This is the last year of the current five-year Education Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Friends and the GBG and we look forward to reviewing this important partnership. Education is an integral component of the purpose of Botanic Gardens.

Signage Project at GBG

In 2014 the Friends made a submission, through the Council's Community Concepts process, for new signage and plant labeling in the Gardens. This was successful and Geelong Council allocated \$35,000 to the GBG Capital budget. In 2015-16 a plant labeling machine which connects to the GBG plant data base was purchased. During the last twelve months, after extensive planning, the rollout of interpretive signage, plant labeling, brochure boxes, location maps, events A-frames and directional signage, as well as a grand sign at the entrance of the Gardens, have



occurred. These create a striking and unified style throughout the Gardens. In 2016 the Friends logo was updated, moving to black and a fresher shade of green, which sits well next to the orange and black of the GBG logo.

Memorandum of Understanding

Since 2014 the Friends and City have been working towards a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to create a framework of co-operation and expectations between the two parties and which complements the existing Events and Education MOUs. In 2017 a formal recognition of the partnership between the Friends and the City – an MOU - was signed by the Friends and the City of Greater Geelong. This is an important milestone for the Friends and although non-binding, acknowledges the importance and parameters of the relationship between the Friends and the City.

Geelong School of Botanical Art

In late 2016 the Friends formally registered the trading name of Geelong School of Botanical Art – another significant milestone for the Friends. A Botanic Art Sub Committee has been formed, comprising Committee members, our office staff and a representative of the Botanic Art tutors and students. Whilst the Friends' Committee of Management has overall responsibility, the Botanic Art Sub Committee meets to carry out the organisational duties required for the School.

The Geelong School of Botanical Art provides the Friends with a significant source of income as well as an opportunity for members and the public to receive tuition from internationally recognized artists. It is very pleasing to report a significant increase in the number of Botanic Art workshops and classes that we have been able to offer in the last year, as well as an increase in student intake.

In 2017 our Botanic Art School welcomed new tutor, Amanda Ahmed after farewelling tutor Rita Parkinson late in 2016.

The opening of the 'Gilded' exhibition at the Friends' 2016 Christmas Drinks showcased beautiful artworks by the Geelong School of Botanical Art. The very high standard of our students and tutors is widely regarded and admired.

Professional Development

The Friends have always had a strong commitment to encouraging and supporting the professional development and education of its members and GBG staff. This year nine volunteers undertook the one-day Level 1 First Aid training. It is very gratifying that so many members were willing to take on the responsibility of this training, which ensures that we have sufficiently trained people at our events and activities. In November 2016, five members attended a Botanic Gardens Australia and New Zealand (BGANZ) network meeting at Ripponlea in Melbourne and five members attended a BGANZ network meeting at the Melbourne Zoo in 2017. These meetings allow our members not only the opportunity to keep abreast of contemporary issues related to botanic gardens, but are also invaluable in developing networking with Friends and others involved in horticulture and botanic gardens. In November 2016 Committee members met with the Geelong Administrators to familiarise them with the Geelong Botanic Gardens and the role of the Friends. It gave us an opportunity to advocate for the Gardens and the Sustainable Visitor Centre.

Jubaea

Our quarterly magazine *Jubaea* continues to be produced by the Gordon TAFE in vibrant colour and is also now received by most of our members electronically, dramatically reducing production costs associated with paper editions. We thank Luanne Thornton for agreeing to stay on as Editor after her retirement from committee last year.

Social Media:

The Friend's Social Media presence on Instagram, Facebook and our very attractive and informative Website, continues to be extensively used and regularly updated. An 'Instagram Workshop' was held to assist members to learn about this relatively new technology. Thanks to Judy Fyfe and staff members Tracey Tilbury and Sally-Ann Bird for maintaining our website and regular Facebook and Instagram updates. These forms of technology have become essential means of communicating the Friends' role with the wider community.

Friends Volunteer Activities

Our Volunteers are the backbone of the Friends, providing opportunities for our members and the public to actively participate in Friends activities and affairs. The **Guides** continue to be a vibrant and innovative group.

Cherry Collins took over from Liz Bennetto in January 2017 as Guides' Co-ordinator. Many thanks are due to Cherry and to Liz for their contributions as co-ordinators. The very successful U3A Guiding course, initiated in 2016, continued with a second course being offered in 2017. In 2017 the Guides implemented a new training course which has attracted an impressive number of participants. The inclusion of regular professional development at the Guides' monthly meetings is another progressive strategy. The **Perennial Border, Heritage Rose and Silver Border** volunteers continue to work with GBG staff to maintain some of the most admired floral aspects of the Gardens. The stunning results of their toil over so many years are appreciated by all who visit the Gardens. Sales from the seasonal Plant Sales in the **Growers' Nursery** have been pleasingly high throughout the year and Co-ordinator Roz Hill and the team are to be congratulated.

There has been a significant emphasis on creating a safe and productive work place for volunteers and the public; volunteers are actively encouraged to keep safety as a priority in their workplace. A Growers' Working Group has been established to look at the footprint of the Nursery and to make recommendations regarding safety and efficiency requirements. Our **Library and Plant Data Base volunteers** carry out vital work to support our Nursery Growers and members. **Library volunteers** have been busy processing a large number of books that were donated for use by the GBG staff and the Friends by the family of well respected member George Jones, after he passed away in 2016. The Friends contributed an article to the BGANZ magazine to acknowledge George's contribution, not only to the Friends and GBG, but to the broader horticultural community. **The Friends Committee** continues to meet monthly, being responsible for the smooth operation and governance of our Association. They are responsible for all areas of management and the administration of our Rules and Purposes.

Friends Events

The Friends' Events Team continues to organize events and activities for our members, their guests and the wider public. Their meticulous approach has ensured a wonderful variety for members to enjoy.

- August 2016 **Winter Lunch** at Jack Rabbit Winery, guest speaker Richard Allen, author of Gardens of the Western District.
- September 2016 **Spring Stroll** through the Gardens with volunteers and GBG staff, outlining their various roles within the Gardens.
- November 2016 **Through the Garden Gates** self-drive tour continued showcasing outstanding private gardens in Inverleigh and surrounds.
- December 2016 **Christmas Drinks** and '**Gilded' Art Exhibition** featuring artists from the Geelong School of Botanical Art.
- February 2017 **Supper and Film Night**, featuring 'A Little Chaos' at St Mary's theatre.
- Feb 2017 Walking Bus to the Wool Museum with GBG staff, to view the **International Wildlife Photographic Exhibition**.
- April 2017 **Bus Trip to Shepparton** visiting Noorilim Historic House and Garden and the Friends of the Australian Botanic Gardens Shepparton, who showcased their new botanic garden.
- April 2017 Ladies Kiosk re-opening, '**Echoes of the Past**' community event celebrating the complete restoration of this historic pavilion, initiated and part funded by the Friends, in partnership with the City of Geelong and Heritage Victoria.
- May 2017 **Volunteer Week Luncheon** with floral art demonstration by floral art judge and artist, Joy Benbow.
- May 2017 **Guest speaker - Professor Mardi Townsend** speaking about her experiences in the field of the Therapeutic Value of Gardens.
- June 2017 **Guided walk** along the walking tracks and **wetlands of the Warralily / Armstrong Creek** housing development.
- June 2017 **Cooking Demonstration** of Pies and Tarts by Gwen Anderson.

Thanks:

Many sincere thanks to all of the Friends who have contributed to the administration of Friends affairs, events and activities and to the members who have supported them. The active participation of all of these people contributes so much to the experience of being a member of FGBG. After many years Friends Vice President Susanna Keith and Treasurer Judy Fyfe are not re-nominating for Committee. On behalf of the Friends I thank them for their outstanding contributions and wish them well. Thanks to our Administration staff for being the helpful 'first port of call' of the Friends and for supporting the Committee and members so willingly.

Thank you to all of our amazing volunteers for their tireless work and valuable contribution to the life of the Friends and the advancement of Geelong Botanic Gardens. The Friends' Committee of Management has worked energetically to promote the Geelong Botanic Gardens and provide an interesting program of events and good management and governance for our organisation. They have risen to challenges and have supported each other and our members whenever it has been needed. It has been a privilege to be part of such a committed team.

Allison Martland FGBG President

August 2017