

FRIENDS *of* GEELONG BOTANIC GARDENS INC.

ABN: 21 699 253 561 INC NO. A13509G



President's Annual Report 2021-2022

We acknowledge the Wadawurrung People as the Custodians of the land, waterways and skies. We pay our respect to their Elders, past and present. We acknowledge all First Nations Peoples who are residents of the Greater Geelong Community.

To commence my report, this is our new mission statement:

The Friends support and promote the Geelong Botanic Gardens and Eastern Park, by providing Garden Volunteers, the Guiding Program, the Nursery, the Botanic Art School, Library, Jubaea newsletter, and an annual program of events.

The Gift Fund provides financial support for projects and programs within and initiated by the Geelong Botanic Gardens.

Subscriptions, volunteering activities, events and the Friends Nursery provide the major source of funds for the Friends

OUR VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS:

The Growers: Coordinated by Leanne Barnes

This enthusiastic group recommenced attending weekly last year, after the huge interruption caused by Covid. The Growers have been very industrious propagating, weeding, creating plant labels and attending to plant sales. In addition to their weekly sales, they have had seasonal Saturday sales.

Late 2021 Growers propagated many plants for a successful stall at the Through the Garden Gates.

This year the nursery staff spent time increasing stock which was depleted during Covid. This was very successful and so they have had very profitable Wednesday and Saturday plant sales. New flags at the front gates announce to visitors that a sale is beckoning.

Leanne Barnes reports that there has been great liaison with the GBG Director and Supervisor. Liaising on issues such as propagating material and occupational health and safety also occurs regularly.

The Heritage Rose Growers: coordinated by Lyn Lang

It was very difficult for these volunteers during the epidemic when volunteers were not permitted to attend their roles. During their absence the GBG staff attended to the roses. But for our volunteers this was a very difficult adjustment.

A new project for these volunteers this year is the creation of a Heritage Rose Growers Manual, with the assistance of Rosslyn Jablonsky. This volume will ensure that the collective knowledge of these experts is preserved for generations of future volunteers. Each type of rose in the collection has a unique care plan which is clearly outlined.

Lyn Lang, who has been part of this group for nearly 25 years, is looking at a succession plan to ensure the ongoing consistent care of the roses is maintained.

The Guides: Coordinated by Gwen Anderson

The Covid 19 epidemic was quite a difficult time for the Guides. Guided walks were on hold for quite a while and there were no booked walks for groups. There was no recruitment of volunteers to train as guides and no U3A. In addition, there were no Cruise Ship passengers requiring guided tours and of course no themed walks.

From January to June things gradually improved. A U3A course had good attendance. However, although there were themed walks and the monthly discovery table numbers were low. If there was no one at the front gate wanting a tour guides roamed the gardens being available for any visitors who may have questions about the GBG. The very wet and cold Winter weather this year also affected the Guides.

This year following the U3A course the guides' professional development commenced. This included lectures by Alistair Watts and David Johnson. Guides also contributed last year and this year to the Friends Winter Lecture Series.

In addition, the Worksafe consultant advised that the Guides review the Occupational Health and Safety of their volunteers. This was completed and some changes made.

The Library: Coordinated by Luanne Thornton

The Library has 4 volunteers who are working harmoniously together to keep the collection and historic al documents in an accessible and orderly system.

Their other work is to record the historic events in the GBG and with the Friends and to prepare a Jubaea index. Recent work includes the historical timeline from 1985 to present as well as recording the Honorary Life Members list and their citations.

Our newest recruit, Dale Gordon, has brought her valuable editorial skills to the Library team.

Events, Fundraising and Catering: Coordinated by Allison Martland

The Events group has rebounded since the lockdowns, after two years of cancellations. This includes a new initiative such as the Winter Lecture series in both 2021 and 2022. In addition, the usual variety of regular events have been very successful in raising funds, such as the Winter Lunch, a self-drive tour, a Guest Speaker night, Coach Tour, and Through the Garden Gates .

The Events team has expanded to include a Fund Raising and Catering Group. The group accepts requests from Horticultural not for profit organisations for catering for their events held in the GBG, thus raising funds for the Friends, and promoting the GBG. The catering group has acquired new volunteers with much valued professional catering experience. In addition, this group has catered for several events of a more social nature: Ashley's farewell, the Conserving our Heritage lunch, Volunteers Day and two High Teas for new members. Thank you to all volunteers who also assisted in making these events gastronomically pleasing. On Volunteers Day our guest was Vasili, who has agreed to be an Ambassador of the FGBG.

The Perennial Border: Coordinator Jan Cheyne

The perennial border has been spectacular in last couple of years. This is this achieved after years of research. It is maintained by a team of happy volunteers who have much experience and expertise. Many hours have been put in at nurseries, and o- line to source new desirable plants to add to the collection. Consideration is given to the colour of blooms, height, time of flowering and whether it enhances the general look of the bed.

However, mostly the teams' role is weeding, feeding, and cutting back. The border is a much-photographed seasonal floriferous border.

The Weeders: Coordinated by Peter Jablonsky

On the wish list for many years has been the idea of a Weeding Team. This group was a goal of both GBG staff and the Friends. Early this year this group was finally formed. Its role is to go to a designated area each week and weed. All equipment is provided. The Weeders are very popular with GBG staff. This long-anticipated group has had a productive season with good company, humour and regular participation. The main criteria for team members is that they know the difference between a weed and a desired plant, and that their back is sound.

Geelong School of Botanical Art: Coordinated by Pammi Pryor

The 2021 financial year commenced with classes being on Zoom due to the Covid 19 restraints. We are very thankful that Tutors took on the difficult task of teaching on Zoom during this time. Classes resumed face to face in term 4, with Covid 19 safe practises in place. Covid's impact could be seen in the fluctuating class numbers. We are grateful for the

care, attention to protocols and diligence of the Friends' office staff and Tutors in keeping the school going during these difficult times.

2022 commenced with four face-to-face fortnightly classes. It was wonderful to see some new faces among those enrolled. Offered for the first time is a new approach for our school - large scale gouache botanic painting as a key medium. The accuracy of form, structure and detail remain true to the subject. But this style offers an exciting option.

We are most thankful that we have retained our tutors John Pastoriza- Pinol, Amanda Ahmed, Craig Lidgerwood and Amanda Blake Sutterby, to tutor students so professionally.

Our Inspired by Nature Botanic Art exhibition was finally held in March at the Exhibition Gallery, Deakin University Waterfront Campus, for a month. Although the number of works exhibited was down, as were sales, the number attending was much higher. The exhibition is not only a way of showcasing the artworks by our established students but also a celebration of the emerging talents of our newer students. Of course, the works of Tutors and that of our professional students was again outstanding. Thank you to the Team, who ensured the pristine presentation of the exhibition and also to those who provided information and recorded data at the entrance.

This year tutor Amanda Ahmed conducted two intensive workshops, graphite and coloured pencil, which were booked to capacity. Our Art school has earned the reputation of an exceptionally high standard thanks to the dedication and professionalism of our Tutors.

Special mention must be made of the role played by the retiring convenor of the Art School, Judy Lavery. We valued her leadership and contributions over the past years. Particularly valued were her compassion, diligence, and attention to detail. Pammi Pryor has graciously picked up the role as Botanic Art Coordinator in her stead.

The Gift Fund: Coordinated by the Management Committee

The Gift Fund, which can only be used for projects within the Geelong Botanic Gardens, has again funded projects referred to the Management Committee by the Gardens Director. These important works include the restoration of four urns and the Hansen Gates, extending and improving the pond in the Conservatory, and the purchase of a roller door and additional orange chairs for the Visitors Centre, and other items which are detailed in the Treasurers Report.

The Gift Fund continues its important work because members and the public have in the past donated funds. We acknowledge that the work of conserving the Garden's Historic assets and building on its current capacity and amenity, will only continue if the Gift Fund has the support it has had in the past. Our sincere thanks to all those who have already contributed or who plan to contribute to this important fund in the future.

Organizational Strengthening

Over time the accountability and sustainability of Not-for-Profit organizations undergo change. Not consciously, but as society changes so do we. Not in changing the culture and traditions of the Friends, but how we operate, how we organize ourselves, how we care for our volunteers, and how we can sustain ourselves in an increasingly inflationary climate. A major change has been in the support of volunteers. According to Work Safe, Volunteers are now to be treated with the same care as employees.

Hence in the last financial year we have undertaken several strategies to ensure that we are prepared and capable of weathering these changes in the short term.

These are the areas we have reviewed:

Occupational Health and Safety

A Worksafe consultant visited the Friends in February to review our OHS status.

An OHS Essentials Safety Action Plan was drawn up and helpful advice was given. We had six months to build on our policies and procedures which were identified as needing review.

In the intervening period regular OHS meetings were established and OHS is a permanent agenda item for the Committee of Management. The physical work environment for all volunteers has been reviewed. Volunteers are not able to undertake activities which necessitates them to use a step or ladder. We now have a Management Committee OHS representative. There is now a re-drafted Emergency response plan for serious accidents and illnesses, and a step-by-step process for reporting and responding to near misses and accidents/health incidents.

The 6 monthly review process by Work Safe was satisfactorily completed and it was confirmed that the volunteers had addressed and met the requirements outlined in the OHS Essential Safety Action Plan.

The consultant was satisfied that the informal morning tea “toolbox meetings” were an effective alternative to a more formal monthly OHS meeting.

The Growers’ nursery OHS representative, Ian Martland, has produced a thorough and concise “return to work” document for volunteers, which can be included in the volunteers’ induction.

The relationship and communication between the Committee OHS Officer, Charles Pond, and the Growers’ Nursery representative is working well, being open and transparent. An effective working relationship between the Committee’s OHS Officer and other working groups within the Gardens is developing well. And the working relationship between the volunteers involved in OHS and the GBG staff is constructive and productive, with good two-way communication established between all parties.

Nursery Master plan

Over the past few years there has been a lot of discussion about changes needed to make facilities in the Growers Nursery more amenable for volunteers and customers. For example, providing shelter so that volunteers don't have to work in the rain, wind and heat. Ensuring that plants are in the position to receive the most sunshine. Providing an identifiable point of sale. And that customers have a clear path to purchasing.

In consultation with the GBG Director a strategy was developed to work with a planning group with the skills required to create a Nursery Master Plan.

Meetings commenced in June, chaired by Renee Matthews, Acting Director, the goal being to have a design which encompasses all the needs identified. This plan would then go to the Committee of Management for comment.

First Nations Project

For some time, Liz Bennetto, volunteer, and Sheree Parker Horticulturist, had a shared dream of increasing the First Nation attributes of the Geelong Botanic Gardens. The Gardens Director strongly supported this initiative. Firstly, plant lists were created, including edible plants, and liaison with Wadawurrung representatives commenced.

The plan is to have a First Nation welcome sign at the Garden's entrance, to add indigenous plant names to existing signage, to increase the variety of local native plants, to have regular guided walks focusing on First Nations planting and information brochures. The complete process will involve Wadawurrung input at every point to ensure the project is faithful and sensitive to their culture. We look forward to the implementation of this plan.

Re-establishing Coordinators Meetings

Last year it became apparent that the Volunteer teams working in the GBG had no time together to be informed and to contribute to developments e.g new policies, new projects etc. Volunteering has developed in our society to become almost as exacting for organizations as employment. Hence our need to have formal meetings

So, in December Coordinators meetings were reinstated. The plan is to hold these twice yearly.

In this way the disparate groups can be fed information through their coordinators. Alternately, information from the teams can be fed back to the Committee of Management. Coordinators have had a say in the Friends Business Plan, and in looking at our strengths, weaknesses and possibilities for the future. The feedback from Coordinators has been that these meetings have been very helpful.

Reviewing and writing new policies

As part of the changing face of volunteering it became obvious to the Committee of Management that clear guidelines needed to be developed on many aspects of the

functions of the Friends. This included a review of existing policies and creation of new ones. This is an ongoing process. Our goal is that these policies will be placed on our website so that members can easily access them.

Liaison with the GBG

We are blessed to have a positive relationship with all Gardens Directors. They have listened, they respect the Friends and they are aware of the physical needs of our organization.

We have worked together collaboratively on many issues this year.

- Grants/Gift Fund for projects
- OHS support and advice
- Participating in the support of visiting Horticultural Tour Groups: catering and guided tours
- Monthly meetings the with Director
- Coordinated horticultural activities
- Sponsoring professional development for horticulturalists
- Sharing plants, propagating materials, potting mix, and access to glass houses and other horticultural resource.
- Joint social events: e.g Volunteer Day and Christmas Picnic
- Joint marketing ventures
- The Nursery Master Plan

Challenges moving forward

- Our shared goal for the future is that the Friends of the Botanic Gardens remains a relevant, viable and productive organisation, able to continue its primary purpose of supporting the GBG and Eastern Park into the future.
- That the Friends strive to engage a vibrant membership to achieve our vision.

Thank you to all Committee Members, to our amazing staff Tracey and Sally, volunteers and members. My sincere thanks for your contribution to the ongoing role of the Friends. Without you all doing your part, no matter how small, the Friends could not continue to be the positive benefit to the Geelong Botanic Gardens and Community that it is today.

Denise Feldman

FGBG President