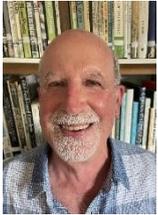


FBBG President's Report – AGM February 2022



It is a privilege to be presenting this report on FBBG progress from Feb 2021 to Feb 2022. In a year when many organisations have had their plans “stalled, stilled and spelled” FBBG has been able to achieve quite a lot. Most of our major events took place, good times were had, membership grew, and increased plant sales have kept our finances in a healthier state and there were many highlights in our year. FBBG have a committee that strives and works positively to promote community connection with these gardens. This year we have had to adapt to run some of our events. The Wendouree Bowling Club has been an excellent alternative venue for some of our large meetings and the Spring luncheon. We thank the management at the Club for the way they were so helpful to us. The Botanikids showed their enterprising spirit with a click and collect arrangement for one of their activities. The year ahead is still clouded with COVID uncertainty but generally there is more optimism. We go down this path unless we must detour. We look forward to an interesting year ahead in which we celebrate the 40th milestone through events and experiences that highlight the gardens and Friends role in these gardens.

Committee: The committee have put in a significant amount of time and energy. Attached is a sheet that summarises the topics and wide range of initiatives that the committee members have been involved in. The committee is a mixture of members with a long association with FBBG and more newly arrived members. This keeps the committee fresh. FBBG is fortunate to have such a skilled experienced group of individuals who are ambitious for FBBG. The initiatives followed through or in progress are testament to a committee that achieves momentum and cohesion. I thank all committee members most sincerely for the support and counsel they give to me as president and to each other.

BBG Staff: FBBG is a broad umbrella organisation and committee work is only ONE part. Our relationship with COB staff is most important. Peter Marquand, Donna Thomas, and Glen Fisher on site are always helpful. Contact with other staff members is more irregular but always of interest and helping us appreciate the tasks underway. Garden staff have been challenged this year not only by the pandemic restrictions but also the November storm destruction. Interaction between staff and volunteers is an important information network for us. Support from staff is also an important element in the management of our plant nursery. The staff assist with the daily movement of plant sales trolleys and watering during the week. All of this is much appreciated. Participation by Peter Marquand and Glen Fisher in the FBBG Open Gardens Days is an example of our mutual support and mutual interests. Thank you, Peter for all the contributions at meetings and as our guest speaker for our AGM.

City of Ballarat Projects: Projects underway by COB involve consultation with FBBG. Initial Fernery consultations were open and attracted many. As the Project moved forward the Foundation through Elizabeth Gilfillan and FBBG through me as President have been kept informed. At our AGM the Mayor will give us an update on the Fernery Project. Access works and the garden at the Gatekeeper's Cottage are underway, and Julie Bradby is our representative for consultations there. Robert Selkirk is driving the discussions about the Nursery and GLB relocation with COB. Refer to the accompanying report attached that gives the follow up progress on the motion passed at the last AGM.

Foundation: Working with the Foundation on our shared interests is also important. This year we arranged for the Foundation to attend the May committee meeting and since then we have had some joint task meetings where Foundation and FBBG members came together. Elizabeth Gilfillan's long involvement over many years with Botanical gardens provides valuable and accessible counsel. The FBBG and Foundation have worked together on more refitting of the Gatekeeper's cottage this year. Installation of the microscope, table and 'plant evolution display' were made possible by benefaction through the Foundation. Tap point and donation box donations in the Conservatory have been reduced due to COVID restrictions but a highlight in contributing to projects for the Gardens this year was a benefactor's contribution to the wages for an apprenticeship. A new Gardens apprentice will complete his Certificate 111 and the annual wages are funded by the Foundation via the external benefactors.

Administration: Several key people support the administration of our organisation. Kim Nolan manages the Office with the support of Ann Brech and their caring committed approach and efficiency is appreciated by us all. They have been developing new procedures to improve efficiency and archival processes of our required documentation including finances and current Friends History. Natalie Radomski is another important link in our administration as our very efficient minute secretary at our meetings and developing collation of information.

Efficiency can lead to overload as tasks are handled so well another one is added. We must avoid this, and we are always looking for people with some skill to offer to share the load. There is a whole range of admin tasks that we can break up and so alert us if interested and we will endeavour to match your skill with a task. Accounting skills, computer skills, general admin Office skills and help with extending our use of social media are some of the areas of need. Our library has grown richer with more specialised texts. Lorraine Powell and recently with some assistance from Natalie Radomski have worked on cataloguing the collection, but it needs a dedicated person/librarian to manage and keep promoting use of the collection. We thank members who have put their hands up with helping with plant trolleys at the weekend, collecting money from Donation box in the Conservatory and helping with people power to run our events at Begonia Festival and other busy times. We can't thrive without this help!

Promotion: Throughout the year FBBG activities have been strongly promoted. COB gave plenty of prominence in their Begonia and Heritage Festivals advertising to FBBG activities. Julie Bradby and Botantikids have a strong following on Facebook. Wendy Taylor very successfully negotiated the article in the summer edition of Ballarat Living, "That's what Friends are for". FBBG also got featured in the Feb edition of "Our Ballarat". The free publication, "Ballarat Times" regularly supports what we are doing by advertising our events and special articles. Work has already started to also make greater use of our web page so that it is up to date, useful and easier to navigate. Our "Wellingtonia" is an important part of how we connect with the community and Michael Bird is to be congratulated for the high standards maintained. Again, nothing happens without effort and time and Michael has indicated it takes 80 hours to produce. We think we have the balance right in the number of emails sent to Friends and complimentary feedback has come through appreciating being informed. Our new noticeboard near the Robert Clarke Centre is another way we can keep people informed, especially for those without email.

A new small souvenir type booklet that informs and highlights our Gardens will be launched at the AGM and will be available at \$10 a copy. The booklet is the result of teamwork and prolonged work by Elizabeth Gilfillan, Wendy Taylor, Warwick Sellens and myself.

Hospitality: For our catering team led by Doff Kemp having to adapt to changing regulations is a challenge but always the hospitality we provide at our activities is something we are proud of. The five members of the Hospitality group estimate they have worked over 100 hours this year!

Ambassadors: Opportunities for the Ambassadors have been very minimal and hopefully we will get more momentum this year now that the Conservatory is open! Trish and her team offer a wonderful service that welcomes and informs our visitors with the added benefits of the social connection that this involvement brings and are always looking for more helpers!

Nursery: The pandemic has brought benefits - more garden interest and booming plant sales. The nursery provides a real connection with the public to extend their experience of the gardens with the purchase of a plant. The nursery is also our business and has all the elements that go with that. Balancing stock, keeping stock up to standard, ordering supplies, sorting out labels, arranging displays, managing the books and staff and all through the year. This doesn't happen unless we have committed helpers. Convenor Yvonne Curbach with the support of Sue Rattray, Kim Nolan, and Bruce Holland and all the Growers contribute so much to this important part of FBBG.

Membership: There has been an increase in memberships this year and great to see us pass the 400 marker. As someone said to me recently membership is like a leaking bucket – some attrition is expected and so never static and promotion needs to be constant.

Feb 2021 – 374

Feb 2022 – 409

I thank Warwick Sellens for his efficiency in managing and processing these records. Options for corporate membership of FBBG are currently being developed. The special morning teas for new members we have introduced have worked well. It is an opportunity to get to know new members and orientate them to FBBG sites and activities.

Guides: Part of FBBG mission is to involve the community in educational events. This is achieved in so many ways – tours, excursions, nature walks, exhibitions, workshops, talks etc. Some of the group tours for the Guides were cancelled as people shied away from bus trips this year. Julie Chandler and Jane Munro and the Guides will be encouraged to see the momentum returning with new group bookings now being made. The guiding group are to be congratulated on their informative tours they continue to give on Sunday mornings and for other special events.

Events: Carole has done a wonderful job as Events Convenor assembling a great range of events and speakers this year and many compliments were received. 190 volunteer hours and bringing 585 people to these activities are some of the statistics we need to be mindful of here. Speakers for the year have included Doug Bradby, Peter Voterakos, Lorraine Powell, Merrill Shulkes, Wendy Sandiford, Jock Gilbert, Peter Marquand, Tim Entwistle, Anthony Marshall, Carolyn Blackman, Simon Rickard, John Gregurke and Carolyn Hall. I hope this list of names will bring back your recollections of the events and just how good these sessions were. If you didn't come you missed out on some of the highlights for the FBBG year. Hope you get to them this year.

As President I do like it when I see the different parts of FBBG coming together to support events. The Heritage Festival activities in May involved our patron, our botanical artists, our History, Guides and Catering groups and our FBBG committee and COB staff. These joint efforts strengthen FBBG as we appreciate the inputs that different sources bring to our organisation and with wider involvement, we increase the impact of our efforts.

Botanical Artists: The Botanical artists this year have contributed to Conservatory displays, the new booklet *Explore an "Eden of Loveliness"* and their work featured in the material printed for the 40th celebration event.

Other Botanical Gardens: Part of our education is finding out about what is happening in other Botanical gardens. It is interesting but also can be stimulating. Merrill Shulkes who is on the AAFBG (Australian Association of Friends of Botanical Gardens) committee keeps our committee well informed. Regular news and updates come through to members through our emails and newsletters as well.

Botanikids: The self-guided walks with botanical notes produced by the Botanikids team this year have been widely praised. The Botanikids despite the disruptions have achieved a lot. They partner with a range of groups and individuals and come up with interesting, appealing and specially themed activities for under-fives and families and school holiday programs. 25-30 families are attending activities. Working with Loreto VCAL students to support the program will hopefully resume this year. Julie Bradby and her team do a tremendous job working and connecting with children and families. Wider membership support is sought to support these activities to allow more opportunities at the Cottage.

Julie is also looking for financial support for the etched rock installation planned in the developing garden at the cottage. Julie's team were delighted with a \$500 and \$100 donation in December and is indicative of the appeal and strength of what is provided. A full rich program is planned for term 2 and will be communicated in the Autumn "Wellingtonia".

History: Funding was provided to the History group for two new computers and a scanner to help their work preserving our records. Digitisation and archiving is underway and it is rewarding to see the organised progress made. The History group with Natalie Radomski have just completed a submission for PROV Local History Grant Application "Stories of Community Engagement and Connection in BBG". I anticipate this will be of wide community interest, but we won't know until August if the submission is successful.

Volunteer Recognition: The AAFBG Handbury awards were presented to Beth and Raoul Dixon at our May meeting for their long combined dedicated service to FBBG. We have worked this year on our own recognition for our volunteers. This will be launched when we reschedule the event that had been planned for Feb 3rd. The group planning both the way to acknowledge dedicated service to FBBG and celebrate our 40th year have put an enormous effort and time into researching and organising this and we are grateful to Carole Haines, Meryl Shulkes, Doff Kemp, Geoff Notman, Lorraine Powell, Wendy Taylor, and Julie Chandler for their work.

Wendy Taylor was largely responsible for a successful application for a community Impact grant to cover some of our costs to support the planned 40th celebration.

Summary: We currently do not have a Vice President. I need to acknowledge the support that I receive to help fill this void. Kim Nolan provides enormous support following up with me all the communication and other administrative matters that need to be guided, developed, and talked through. I also like the way I can freely contact committee members and sound them out on pressing matters. I would especially like to thank Robert Selkirk for his wise counsel throughout the year.

The report largely focuses on members with a particular role in our organisation, but appreciation needs to be given to those members who also support us with their membership. The membership number does help to increase our impact when in discussions with COB and elsewhere as it demonstrates the concern and interest our community has for these gardens.

Our patron, Tim Entwistle, is another strong support for us. He is always receptive to any help requests and is also an accessible mentor we can approach. Thank you, Tim, for your time and generosity to this organisation!

I hope you enjoy the year ahead and become richer for your involvement with FBBG.

Terry O'Brien, President FBBG