



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – 16TH FEBRUARY 2017

It is my pleasure to present this Annual Report on the Friends for this, our 34th year.

2016 was again a busy year for the Friends with a successful continuation of our regular activities.

Firstly, the Gardens – Peter and his dedicated team consistently maintain our Gardens in great condition and are to be congratulated. The Conservatory displays have also attract much favourable comment from visitors.

Now to report on our various interest groups.

The **Growing Friends** continue to be the principal source of funds through their nursery sales. Ably led by Yvonne, the work of this dedicated team resulted in sales of \$33,150 for the year including excellent sales at the Begonia Festival and Springfest. This is a big improvement on the \$25,000 in sales the previous year. The Plant Trolley continues to prove a great success, having contributed \$12,430 to the total sales. We are grateful to Gardens' staff for continuing to move the trolley in and out of the Conservatory, and to those Friends who attend to it on weekends and who keep it stocked up.

### **Guiding Group.**

Guides conducted 26 free public tours and 12 group tours.

The fourth U3A/FBBG course was again very successful and well received. This will not be run in 2017 and will be reviewed regarding a further course at a later date.

A novel function was held in January "Tree tales and a picnic" – honouring our mature trees in the gardens. Guides and Peter Freund from the Art Gallery made presentations. Four guides attended training sessions in Melbourne at the Royal Botanical Gardens Victoria which they found to be very stimulating.

Although Terry will continue as Convenor in 2017, he is taking a break from the tasks of organising meetings and arranging tours, these duties will now be shared amongst the Guiding Team. The Friends owe Terry a great deal for his enthusiasm and leadership.

The **BotaniKids** program, led by Julie Bradby, has had a very busy and successful year with a range of activities familiarising not only school children but the wider community with our Gardens. The Young Families program, promoted through social media, is consistently well supported with upwards of 30 children plus parents or grandparents each session where they learn about nature with occasional involvement with the Tramways Museum whose support is greatly appreciated. 120 preschool children visited the Gardens last year with the BotaniKids team helping them learn more about gardens and gardening.

The **Education Group**, also led by Julie successfully applied for a grant from Rotary's Springfest funds which was used to develop resource and curriculum materials. These materials are available to teachers to download from the website and can be used for planning, teaching and enhancing visits to the Gardens by schools.

Both Donna Thomas, CoB Gardens Education Officer, and Julie conducted two tutorials with Education students, briefing them on teaching programs and ideas. The Begonia Festival was again a great success for BotaniKids. With support from Bunnings and the CoB event team, 3,000 children and families were involved with making a Japanese kokadama hanging plant.

A new event was a Popup Nature Club in the North Gardens and Wetlands held in October. Working with the Field Naturalists, Bird Observers and Corangamite Water Catchment, 25 young families learnt about the flora and fauna in and around the Gardens and lake.

In partnership with Donna, the Friends paid for a teacher to assist in running a school holiday program on worms, attended by 28 children.

The **History Group**, a dedicated team led by Lorraine Powell, continues to research Gardens' history at the Public Records Office of Victoria and are now up to the 1970's. They are also working hard on researching the original Zoo and we look forward to seeing what they uncover. At our August meeting we were pleased to hear Lorraine present her talk "Garden to Table" which she had delivered the previous year at the AGHS Conference in Adelaide.

The **Western Beds Group** with Bill O'Driscoll as Convenor, has had a relatively successful year. The the monocot bed has been maintained and the initial plantings have thrived.

With the support of the group and under guidance from the gardens staff the Sensory Garden was replanted in its entirety. It is presently looking extra good so has ended up being a great result for the gardens. The group also engaged in general work in the gardens including propagating a few of the salvia varieties for replanting in the gardens so as to keep the garden display up to the mark.

The assistance of the Gardens staff and their input to the group's activities is very much appreciated. Michael Bird continues to produce our quarterly newsletter, **Wellingtonia**, very professionally and it is always well received by members and others. In order to help share the load, duplicate software has been purchased for our Administrative Assistant, Susan Pilbeam, to be trained in setting up this publication. The printing and distribution by Ballarat Mailworks is much valued. The City of Ballarat pays for all printing and postage of Wellingtonia and we are most grateful to them for that.

Valerie Richards, Convenor of the **Botanical Art Group**, reports that It has been another year of the joy, challenges and successes. Eight artists participated, working mostly on their own projects and also illustrating some of the significant trees in the gardens One workshop was held this year, with Mali Moir as tutor.

This year's **Speakers Luncheon** was again inspiring, educational and fun with three speakers - Simon Rickard, Karen Sutherland and Claire Takacs - providing a personal journey of experiences, insights & philosophies into all things gardening, design and plants. This was followed by a weekend of selected Open Gardens with a very good response in spite of inclement weather.

Joy O'Brien prints out **plant labels** as required. We are grateful for her attention to this facet of our activities. Work on the **Fernery Redevelopment** project has continued throughout the year with many meetings between the Project Control Group (comprising CoB and FBBG representation) and the architects. Progress has been slower than expected but it is hoped that here will be some positive developments in 2017. Elizabeth Gilfillan continues to do an amazing job in negotiating and persistently driving the project.

Carole Haines continues to do an excellent job arranging **catering** for our various functions as well as organising guest speakers for our quarterly meetings. -We had two outings, firstly a visit to Melton Botanic Gardens by car convoy where our members were most impressed by the developments by the dedicated group of Friends led by John Bentley. The other outing was a bus trip to selected gardens and Botanical Gardens in the Kyneton/Malmsbury area, a most enjoyable trip despite the wet weather. We tried a new idea for our end-of-year function with a "nibbles and drinks" provided by the Friends instead of BYO BBQ. This proved to be a great success and we again thank Carole and her helpers for their excellent catering.

We finally had a panel prepared for the Conservatory to promote the Friends and we will be setting up a group of **Ambassadors** in 2017 who will staff this panel on weekends to inform visitors about the Gardens.

Our **Treasurer**, Bruce Holland, continues to meticulously and accurately record all financial transactions assisted by Sue Rattray and we value his reliability and diligence.

New member ships were offset by a large number of non-renewals who have now been deleted from our list. Accordingly **Membership** was 335 at the end of 2016 which is a slight drop. We also now have five Corporate membership from local companies and we thank them for their support and interest.

Susan Pilbeam continues to be of invaluable help in her role as **Administrative Assistant** and we thank her for her reliability and willingness to help whenever needed.


We have had numerous meetings with Councillors and staff throughout the year and a get-to-know-you session with Councillors, all of which greatly assist in keeping the Council aware of not just what we are about, but the importance of maintaining and further developing our excellent Botanical Gardens.

So as you can see, we have a great committee of dedicated convenors and I thank them all for their diligence and enthusiasm.

Thanks are also due to all those members who assist when called on to help at such events as Springfest and the Begonia Festival, as well as those who quietly assist behind the scenes such as in watering the nursery plants.

The total hours put in throughout the year by members with all our various activities has been estimated for the year as 8,650 hours. Using a conservative figure of \$20 per hour, it could be said that we have contributed \$173,000 to the people of Ballarat in promoting and supporting our magnificent Botanical Gardens.

Finally, I again extend my heartfelt thanks to Elizabeth for her untiring support and devotion to the interests of the Gardens, as well as to my wife, Beth for her advice and support for me in the performance of my duties as President. So to conclude this report, I again thank one and all for helping us to support the Gardens.



Raoul Dixon  
President