

FBBG 2024 AGM President Report for Year 2023

President's Report

Terry O'Brien, President

The Friends is the sum of many parts and there are many different groups and individuals who contribute. Some members contribute sparingly, some generously, some humbly, some with a louder presence, some more hands on, some delve into plans and ideas. All are contributing to make FBBG have impact and each individual needs to be acknowledged for their contribution that helps FBBG flourish.

The committee has worked very productively throughout the year and again this commitment and use of time by busy people is appreciated and acknowledged. My tenure as President ends at this AGM and I am very aware of how much I and the organisation are indebted to the generous and considered contributions by committee members. It is the committee that moves the ideas that float around into action. Our 2023 achievements flow from the calm, fair and friendly discussions, and open communication within committee. Keeping communication channels between all parts of FBBG is a constant need and priority for an organisation to stay connected.

We have had a busy year and have run a very full program. Our regular calendar events plus new initiatives have demanded a lot from the convenors and Office support. No short cuts are taken as FBBG takes pride in its reputation for quality activities and hospitality. All groups need more support to sustain this energy and we look to our members to respond when and where they can. Below are some highlights for the year and more detailed convenor reports which will help gain an understanding of what we have achieved.

2023 Friends Highlights

- Equipment upgrades for Nursery, History, George Longley Building, Guides, Botanical Artists, Cottage, Office brought significant improvements in efficiency.
- The increase in plant sales flows from the Grower's commitment and skill they bring to these operations and the accompanying support by the Plant Trolley volunteers. The addition of the 'Tap Point' in the Conservatory has also contributed to more sales.
- Ongoing support by our corporate members.
- Increase in the number of high standard exhibitions.
- 2 new groups formed - Photography and Biodiversity - to tap into other interest areas and appeal to younger members wanting more active participation.
- Wellingtonia newsletter has increased its impact with longer issues, enhanced use of graphics, layout and photos as well as new writers and topics. Option now to have digital subscription.
- Professional approach with systems and processes in Office, History, Library has improved accessibility to our resources and support for groups and convenors. Some significant donations also added to the collections.
- Changes in convenors this year in Botanical Art, Hospitality and Membership bring different approaches and styles with these transitions and enriches the dynamics in the organisation.
- Membership growth. Jan 2024 membership was 454 and reflects the attraction of the opportunities provided by FBBG and the introduction of mini members.
- New member publications were updated, and a new Handbook produced. New member orientation sessions have been well supported.
- Strong partnership with BBG Staff continues to be strengthened. FBBG collectively has a range of knowledge, skills and expertise and networks that can be drawn upon.
- Sizable donation made by FBBG to Fernery. The joint Fernery project with COB, FBBG and BBG Foundation was also helpful in bringing these 3 groups together and encouraging respectful relationships. Luke Ives, COB Executive Manager Operations was very helpful in keeping us informed.

- Botanikids increased its impact with more programs and there was increased use of the Gatekeeper's Cottage for activities and exhibitions.
- Stronger environmental focus in choice of some of our speakers and "Wilding the Garden" day attracted support from local environmental groups.
- Combining the energies of our groups at key times such as with the May Heritage program makes for effective impact. In October when we had the Nursery, RCHC, Courtyard and Gatekeeper's Cottage providing programs on the same day we were able to cater for the spread of generations and interests and attract stronger support and interest.
- High appreciation for the Ambassadors and Guides in their support for visitor experience this year but we need more volunteers to help with rosters.

Donna Thomas was appointed as the new BBG Curator in 2023 and we would like to acknowledge her contributions to FBBG. The Friends have appreciated the time and assistance given attending meetings and keeping us informed about project progress, building links with the Gardens team and helping our many groups.

We thank our Patron, Tim Entwisle a great supporter of the Friends who gives his time readily to attend and speak at our meetings, inspiring us and raising the profile of the Friends.

There will always be challenges moving forward with a large organisation like FBBG, but an exciting future is there for us. Mental well-being, nature deficit, COVID, Climate change, biodiversity and plant extinction are impacting to make us all realize how important these gardens in central Ballarat are. We all have our dreams and hopes for these gardens and in 2024 the opportunity is there to communicate these through the Masterplan discussions. FBBG with its buildings and resources and enthusiastic personnel is well positioned to play a very important role as these gardens move forward in our changing world.

Any organisation has keen standout people that we rely upon. Merrill Shulkes and Robert Selkirk who are both stepping away from the committee in 2024 will be greatly missed. Robert will remain active on the Ballarat Botanical Gardens Foundation and Merrill will be about but just not contributing as AAFBG representative on the committee. On behalf of FBBG we acknowledge their highly appreciated contributions. Time for change for me as well. Change helps individuals and organisations grow. New inputs and new dynamics enliven. I sincerely thank everyone for the opportunity to be your President for the last 3 years and your support and dedication to FBBG and I wish everyone the best for the coming year.