

Friends of Williamstown Botanic Gardens Inc.
Annual General Meeting
21st of October 2015
President's Report for 2014-2015

The Friends of Williamstown Botanic Gardens Inc. have had another productive and enjoyable year. Our focus has been on art and education involving the wider community as well as opportunities for the Friends to be kept up to date about our Gardens and listen to speakers on broader topics. We play an important role as advocates for the Gardens.

While we undertake a number of projects and activities each year we only have a small number of general meetings to hear speakers and work on planning for specific events. General meetings are in addition to regular committee meetings. Most notably members supported the culmination of the Oral History project "Voicing the Gardens" on 13 November 2014 and presentation of Paint the Gardens on 29 March 2015 – both outstanding successes enthusiastically supported by our members and the public. Paint the Gardens was the first event of Art in Public Places. It attracted excellent support from local sponsors and drew a great response from artists particularly in the Young Persons section where we received 300 entries. We shared the day with the launch of Art in Public Places.

As Art in Public Places is going to become a biannual event it will not be held in 2016. The committee has proposed therefore that Paint the Gardens will not occur in 2016. The next opportunity will be 2017 as part of Art in Public Places to keep that connection.

The Children's Education/Activity sub committee's work is an invaluable part of our programme.

Led by Anja Lee we have partnered again with Hobsons Bay Libraries to present another season of five "Story Times under the Golden Elm" over spring, summer and autumn. All sessions run by Anja and Russell Barrett have attracted at least 150 people and the Christmas one was absolutely packed. Anja also piloted a story time in October with her bilingual kindergarten group – using a newly purchased book they explored flowers and butterflies and hunted for butterflies in the Gardens. Anja conducted this session in German, translating the book for the children.

Once again Anja has run activities for Williamstown Primary School students in the Gardens –the "Jack and the Beanstalk" sessions delighting younger children.

The Reading Corner has been put out again during the summer, autumn and spring school holidays. The feedback demonstrated that yet again it delighted visitors who came across it. Thanks to the committed members of the Friends who set it up and packed it away each day the weather allowed. This season we incorporated extra cushions and books funded by a community grant from the Hobsons Bay City Council. In October the Reading Corner featured at the "Reclaim, Remember and Recreate Festival" held at the Loom Room in the Senior Citizens Hall.

Regular newsletters have provided information about our upcoming activities as well as reporting on recent events and activities. Our web site and facebook page have really put the Friends out in the public arena. John Poke of Vision Australia recorded a number of interviews about the Williamstown Botanic Gardens and the Friends group for his radio show Pokey's Garden.

We continue to interact with other Friends groups. A number of members visited the Friends of Bendigo Botanic Gardens at White Hills Botanic Gardens travelling to and from by train on 14 April 2015 for a most informative and enjoyable day. Helen Tribe's report was published in our May Newsletter. As members of the Association of Friends of Botanic Gardens Inc Australia we keep in touch with activities of other Friends groups through "Campsis" as well learning of interesting events via our Friends email.

We are kept up to date about the Gardens – Head Gardener Michael Wilkins has provided reports for our newsletters and our curator Shelley Wood gave a fascinating talk on the Gardens and the status of the Master Plan at our general meeting in February and another update at our August meeting.

Members enjoyed the Tree Tour of the Gardens led by horticulturist John Hawker from Heritage Victoria on 17 May. We engaged Laurens Goud of Trade Creative Media to video the walk – the edited video was shown at our August meeting. It is now produced in DVD form and we have 100 copies for distribution and sale. This is a great record of the Gardens in May 2015 and a wonderful source of information about the role of botanic gardens and their arboreal collections. Thanks to Trade Creative Media for their excellent work. Helen Page's presentation about the Boroondara Cemetery in Kew was greatly enjoyed at our October meeting.

As advocates for the Gardens we have raised concerns about how inappropriate or disrespectful behaviour in the Gardens may be dealt with. In August we wrote to the CEO of Hobsons Bay and emailed councillors with a copy expressing concerns about current staffing in the Gardens as our curator is carrying a much larger role in the Hobsons Bay City Council horticultural team which significantly reduces her time in the Williamstown Botanic Gardens. We are requesting that sufficient qualified staff be in the Gardens on a daily basis. At a follow up meeting with Ian Brown we were advised that there would not be any immediate change. We agreed we will revisit this in six months time.

At a public meeting in June about the Dennis Reserve we were represented by Kim Sawyer where we were advocating for the Ladies Bowling Club Site to be either a community garden or public open space not tennis courts as the Hobsons Bay City Council was proposing. A Community Working Group is being set up to consider a Master Plan for the Dennis Reserve and Barbara Sloan will represent the Friends on it with Betsy Dunne as a reserve delegate. Thanks to Barb and Betsy for taking this on.

We continue to be members of the Royal Horticultural Society of Victoria through whom we obtain liability insurance.

Newsletters past and present are available on our web site providing a comprehensive record of our activities.

Acknowledgements

We value our continuing partnerships with HBCC staff.

- Shelley Wood, Curator of the Gardens continues to be unstinting in her support - attending our functions and meetings, assisting in publicising the Friends and always being available to provide advice and assistance no matter how busy she is.
- We enjoy Head Gardener, Michael Wilkins reports and his readiness to give a hand.
- Loraine Callow has been untiring in her work at the Gardens and in her support of the Friends - especially for the history project "Voicing the Gardens" and "Paint the Gardens"
- Ian Brown, Manager City Services is always most generous and encouraging.
- Many other HBCC staff including Andrea Ellis, Andrea Aegis, Megan Murray, Janet Dawes, Tania Blackwell, Toni Burton, Hazel Finney, Rosemary Clark, Jenelle Colston-Ing, Russell Barrett and Jake Carroll were most helpful.

We appreciate the network of support which has developed and thank all of them.

Williamstown Croquet Club generously allows us the use of their club house for meetings at a nominal rent for which we are most grateful. Thanks to John Grieve for his assistance with bookings.

Our yearly art show Paint the Gardens has become an important fixture in the calendar of HBCC's Art in Public Places:

- Thank you to our generous sponsors Back to Basics, Banjo Plumbing, Bendigo Bank Williamstown, Book and Paper, Bunnings Altona, Dog Town Pet Supplies, Fitzgerald Optometry, Friends of Williamstown Botanic Gardens, Hobsons Bay City Council, Jas H Stephens, Knight Frank Valuations, Lions Club Williamstown, Paint Right; Pioneer Textile Cuttings Pty Ltd; Point Gellibrand Rotary Club; Provisions; Saturday Morning Team, Yellow Diva.
- The Saturday Morning team (fund raisers for Cancer research) again provided al fresco dining much appreciated by everyone at the event. Thank you all.
- Vice President Kim Sawyer led the event again – organising publicity with HBCC staff, sourcing the entrants, obtaining the easels, liaising with schools, co- coordinating set up on the day with the assistance of his wife Kessada and daughter Clarisse, liaising with the judges and preparation of the catalogues and tags for each painting.
- After lending his large black easels each year Leon Frankcom has generously donated them to the Friends. We thank him for all his support.
- Once again Nora Roberts and her family provided photographic displays of invertebrates she discovered in our Gardens and images from Melton Botanic Gardens.
- Thanks to all our members who worked to make the day such a success.
- As always, Shelley Wood and Loraine Callow made a wonderful contribution to the day.
- Ian Brown, Manager City Services generously funded the infrastructure for the day.
- The judges did a great job and we thank them.
- Finally we acknowledge Tania Blackwell and Toni Burton of HBCC Cultural and Economic Development for their work with planning and publicity and we thank Manager Janet Dawes who is a great supporter of the event

Thanks are due to Anja Lee and Carol Challis who are indefatigable in their work. Anja's work has already been detailed. Carol set up and maintains the web site and our facebook page, produces flyers, made certificates of appreciation for sponsors and co-ordinated the Book/Reading Corner Roster. All the Friends who have assisted setting the Reading Corner up and putting it away over summer, autumn and spring we thank you.

Our current secretary Lindy Wallace has devoted many hours working on the archive at the Gardens with Loraine Callow. She has also carried through the oral history project. The history panels are now on display in the Gardens. Helen Tribe has done sterling work as treasurer and as an organiser and our longstanding committee members Barbara Sloan, Geoff King, Alan Murray, Diane Robinson, Helen Page, and Kim Sawyer have put in six remarkable years for the Friends. So in conclusion I would like to thank our office bearers, committee and subcommittee members and all of our general members for the many ways they support the Friends and the Gardens. It has been a privilege to be President for the last 6 years.

Sue Murray