

WHEN I RULED THE WORLD



Colin Burns

2003-04 – “My Year” as President of the Rotary Club of Bendigo 2003-04 was the greatest of all my years as a Rotarian. I was absolutely delighted to be asked, by PP Brian Doherty on behalf of the club, if I would consider taking on the role as President and, after considering the matter for all of two or three seconds, gratefully accepted the invitation to lead what I consider to be an outstanding part of an outstanding organisation.

One of the challenges in leading a long established and strong club is to find ways of improving on what is already a high degree of excellence. While leaving everything as it is could not be seen as failure, it is in my nature to strive for continual improvement. I believed that, in the case of the Rotary Club of Bendigo such improvement required combination of small improvements to existing and well-proven projects and the introduction of new initiatives.

One existing project was the Easter Art Show. At the beginning of my year I was well aware that the wonderful work of many Rotarians over many years had resulted in the Easter Art Show being an amazingly robust project, which had become a community institution and arguably was not in need of improvement. Despite this I count among of achievements of “my year” an improvement to our Art Show. After considerable debate it was decided that the venue for our Art Show should be changed from the Bendigo Senior Secondary College to the Bendigo Town Hall. What made this decision so difficult was the fact that a rational comparison of venues indicated little to separate the alternatives. I am now proud to say that in the end we made a “courageous” decision, based on our gut feel, resulting in the return of the Art Show to the Town Hall. The 30% increase in attendance over the previous year was the reward for our courage. It was my view that this result, and the magnificence of the show we were able to put on, provided confirmation of my belief that the Town Hall was, and still is, the natural home of our Art Show.

Another existing and much-loved project also needed attention in regard to its venue. The City of Bendigo decided that Rosalind Park, which many have long considered to be the natural home of Carols by Candlelight, was not available. Much time was spent with committee members, including some who had being “doing carols” for a long time, looking at alternative venues. We settled on Lake Weeroona and many hands made light work to set up and decorate the site. All was in readiness for another great night when the heavens opened and the sound and lighting people said “no way”. This was one of my few disappointing moments in a wonderful year; however, what it did show is that there are different ways of doing things when we put our minds to it.

A number of other long-standing projects were continued in “my year”. I was particularly pleased that we participated in the Rotary Youth Exchange Program by sending and hosting students. I am a strong believer in the good that comes from youth exchange both for the students and everybody they touch. I was also delighted with the continuation of our work in Samoa with assistance being provided to the people of the village of Uafato and

more new volunteers being provided with the opportunity to wonderful work in wonderful place for wonderful people.

In addition to the development of well-established projects, I counted a number of new initiatives amongst the club's achievements in my year. These achievements included:

The formalisation of our association with the Rotary Club of Los Altos by way of a Twin Club Agreement;

The introduction of the International Disability Day BBQ;

Initiation of Community Volunteers Recognition Day;

Participation in the "Shine On" Awards;

The successful fundraising event, Circus Quirkus;

and perhaps most importantly The induction of nine new members.

There was also some sadness with the passing of PDG Ray Downey PHF (Sapphire), Ted Jenkins, Bruce Beasley PHF, Dal Martin PHF, Jack Paynting, Joyce Paynting and Gwen Jeffrey. While all of these outstanding individuals were, and are, sadly missed, their wonderful contributions to their families, their communities and to the Rotary Club of Bendigo was, and remains, a cause for celebration and a source of inspiration to me.

In my view the Club's achievements during my year show that through the development of long-established projects, the extension of the service provided by the club to both local and international communities and the induction of new members, it was not just a good year but one that laid the foundation for future years. This was, perhaps, our greatest achievement and the one of which I am most proud.

The things that I enjoyed most during my year may not, however, be obvious. They included:

- Attending weekly club meetings. The enjoyment is due in large part to the outstanding work of the Program Committee but, to be honest, having the first and last say is something I enjoyed immensely;

- Writing my weekly “Comments” for the Fossicker. My expectation had been that this would be a chore, however, as it turned out, having to reflect on each club meeting and send out the message of Rotary became a source of great satisfaction and enjoyment;
- Understanding and hence appreciating the contributions of our mature members and being able to recognise two of them, Tom Tweed and Ron Meurer, by making them Paul Harris Fellows;
- The support provided by Secretary John Flood whose dedication, reliability and commitment made him a most worthy Paul Harris Fellow. I was greatly honoured to have played a part in recognising John in this way;
- Living for two weeks with a Samoan family in their humble abode to both witness and experience the good that comes from understanding and valuing the culture of another;
- Introducing my son Chris and my friend Sam Harding of the Rotary Club of Los Altos to the joy that is Samoa;
- Witnessing the power of Rotary that comes from members, old and new, joining together to get the job done.

I will be forever indebted to the members of the Rotary Club of Bendigo and to the associated Family of Rotary, which, of course, includes my own family, for the honour, privilege and great joy that I feel at having been the President of the Rotary Club of Bendigo.

While it is for others to judge, I believe that, at the end of my presidential year, our club was a little better and a little stronger than it was 12 months prior. If this is so then, together we achieved greatness and any accolades that are due are equally shared with all who have contributed.

Colin Burns PHF (Ruby) PP Rotary Club of Bendigo