

**Edited highlights of the address to the Annual General Meeting of Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens Limited by the Chairman, Charlotte Webb, on 8 September 2014.**

I am pleased to present the first Chairman's Report for Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens Limited. We have had a very eventful couple of years since my last report as President of Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens Incorporated in October 2012.

We changed our business structure from an Incorporated Association to a Company Limited by Guarantee on 7 June 2013. As we are also a charitable organisation we are not required to hold Annual General Meetings, but we have decided to continue with them to ensure our members are kept informed about our activities.

The Directors of the new Company are Barry Barford, Frank Nevill, Jacqui Page, Chris Webb and myself. Members are Jan Edwards and David Cummins. Jacqui, Jan and David hold the honorary positions of Secretary, Treasurer and Solicitor respectively. I would like to take this opportunity to thank David, Jan and particularly Barry in helping us successfully migrate from one entity to the other; it was not easy.

We welcome Barry Barford and Frank Nevill into the Botanic Gardens community. Neither has a background in gardens, however they have excellent backgrounds in governance and policy. Since joining the Board late last year they have been very busy bringing us up to speed in both of these areas.

I would like to acknowledge my thanks for the support and contribution made by Ross Stone who stood down from SHBG Ltd late last year.

We have recently adopted our first business plan for SHBG, which was many years in the making. Thanks to Jan for the early work and to Frank, Jacqui and Barry who helped remove the "Draft 8.4" stamp from the document when it was finally adopted by the Board in July 2014.

The lease for the site from the Wingecarribee Shire Council was finally placed on exhibition in July 2014. I would like to thank David Cummins for all the work he put into the lease negotiations with the Council. Again, it was not easy.

We continue to meet with Wingecarribee Shire Council regularly to ensure the gardens follow proper procedure in their development. Thanks to Duncan Gair for championing the gardens through Council and the broader community, and to Mark Pepping for his perseverance in helping the gardens move from dream to reality.

Our partnership with Southern Highlands Foundation continues to provide the facility to offer tax deductibility for donations. Thank you to all who manage our account, in particular Shelley Boyce and Mandy Pfeiffer.

Thank you to Jan Edwards and her very capable offsider Sue Oberman for maintaining and managing our day to day accounts which are often quite complex, particularly with our major fund raising events.

## **Garden Design**

Taylor Cullity Lethlean, the designers of our garden, have reviewed and refined the design of the gardens to incorporate the bird protection area required by the Federal Government. We anticipate the final plans for the garden will be on display by the end of this year.

We have engaged APP to set up and run a competition on our behalf for the design of the principal building on the site. It is anticipated this building will have a cafe, lecture and meeting room facilities, and a horticulture library. The competition is currently on hold pending the signing of the lease.

## **Site Progress**

The official opening of the gardens by the Governor of New South Wales, Dame Marie Bashir, took place in December 2013. Other site progress includes the following:

### **Structures**

- Erection of the boundary fence along Kangaloon and old South Roads.
- Construction of the Volunteer support Centre, with the help of a Community Building Grant.
- Installation and opening of the Pioneer Square by the Governor, Mayor Councillor Juliet Arkwright, local State MPs Pru Goward and Jai Rowell and Federal MP Stephen Jones. The Pioneer Square features the numerous pavers donated to celebrate the Sesquicentenary (150th) birthday of Bowral.
- Planting of a time capsule in the gardens, to be opened in 50 years (2063) as part of the bicentenary of Bowral.
- Construction of the plant growing area and the shade house, all of which was made possible by a Community Building Grant and a private donation.
- Installation of automatic watering system for the nursery and general garden areas, with the help of a grant from Illawarra Mutual Building Society (IMB).

### **Plantings**

- The Autumn woodland, featuring many sponsored trees.
- The birch grove, with funds from the Highlands Garden Society Inc. This is the first Botanical Collection to be held in our gardens with 15 different species and cultivars planted so far.
- The Buxus (Boxwood) collection, with 18 different species and cultivars included in the collection. All Buxus in the collection were donated from those held by Dr Tony de Francesco and Chris and Charlotte Webb.
- Planting of commemorative 'The Red Cross' roses to celebrate Red Cross in Australia's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday

## **Friends of SHBG**

The Friends of SHBG is a special group that plays an important role at this early stage of the development of the gardens. Active volunteers are the key to our

success and I can't speak highly enough of the many members of the Friends who contribute. Currently we have 214 households as members of the Friends, which equates to over 300 individuals, many of whom are involved in the gardens or in Friends activities on a regular basis.

Over the past two years the Friends have been busy raising funds and awareness of the gardens including the following:

### **Activities**

- Town and Country open Garden Weekends held in April each year are the overall focus of the Friends Committee. Approximately \$50,000 was raised in 2013, and \$70,000 in 2014. Over 100 Friends and Volunteers gave freely of their time this year to help man gates, direct buses, sell plants, erect tents etc.
- Plant Growers Group (PGG) is increasing in size and activity. This group contributes significantly to the overall funds raised by the Friends, including nearly 50% of the funds raised during the Open Garden Weekends. It is this group which will have the capacity to increase income for the Friends as more opportunities arise for the sale of plants.
- An average of 20 to 30 Volunteers turn up on site each month to help with the working bees where they mow, trim, weed and generally maintain the site, particularly around the area of the Volunteer Support Centre, the Autumn Woodland and the Birch Grove. Approximately 350 Volunteer hours have been contributed to the gardens since January this year. I thank Chris Blaxland for taking on the task of organising these monthly working bees.
- As many of our volunteers are at or over the age limit covered by our insurance, we have renegotiated the policy to cover them up to their 91st birthday.
- I would like to thank all the members of the Friends Committee for their untiring support of the gardens – Chris Webb, the Chairman, Judy Keast, his Secretary, and committee members Chris Blaxland, Ian Dwyer, Shandra Egan, Meg Probyn and Elizabeth and Noel Symonds.

I would also like to thank Carolyn Dwyer and Rosemary Willis – who retired from the Friends Committee earlier this year – for their support and contribution to SHBG, in particular their help in the promotion of the Town and Country weekend and for the survival of our newly planted trees during this past summer drought.

### **Archive Committee**

Over the past three years Helen Johnstone and Jenny Simons have set up and managed the archives for SHBG. They retired from the Archive committee in August, handing over to Elise Shepherd and Janet King.

### **Education committee**

After meeting with a number of local school teachers earlier this year, we set up an education committee headed by Margaret Stuart. Thanks to Frank Nevill, who was

not only instrumental in setting up the committee, but has taken on liaison with the committee as one of his Board duties. The aim of the committee will be to liaise with the local schools as we move towards providing educational opportunities in the gardens. It is anticipated Exeter Public School will trial a pilot education program in the gardens during the 2015 academic year.

We have already commenced some limited adult education with workshops and demonstrations held both on and off the Botanic Gardens site. The workshops were particularly aimed at Friends and the general public interested in propagating plants.

### **Communication media**

A major achievement this year has been the redesign of the website. This is operating more and more as a most effective communication tool. The majority of membership applications are now received through the web site, although at this stage no payments can be made through the site. Thanks to Barry Barford in guiding the direction and content for the new site.

Meg Probyn continues to do an outstanding job, producing four editions of our newsletter *Operculum* during the year. The quality of the newsletter and articles is outstanding.

### **The Year to come**

I look forward with anticipation for the year to come now we have in place our business plan, garden plan and a dedicated team of Friends and volunteers to make it all happen.

Once the lease is signed we will run the architecture competition, pursue Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status in our own name and commence detailed design for the development of the central part of the gardens. Hopefully the only hurdle then will be raising the funds necessary to develop one of the best botanic gardens in Australia.

Finally I would like to express my extreme gratitude to Jacqui Page, our Secretary, for her dedicated involvement in the development of our gardens. Throughout everything Jacqui is there minuting, supporting and organising us all. Thank you Jacqui.