

Chairman's Report 2017

2016/17 has marked a turning point in the development of the Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens. This year we have taken a giant leap forward.

The main focus has been the appointment of John Wardle Architects to design the new Visitors' Centre for the gardens. John and his team won our architecture competition against very stiff competition from some of Australia's finest architectural firms. The task ahead is to raise the funds to construct a centre which will become the heart of the gardens, the centre of environmental education, a facility for local residents and an essential tourist attraction.

In keeping with our aspirations for the gardens we are the grateful recipient of a 2 metre tall bronze leaping frog sculpture gifted by the sculptor and world renowned local artist John Olsen AO, OBE. The frog has been temporarily installed under the shade of the Eucalypts in Foundation Walk waiting for the day it will leap into the Parterre garden at the Visitors' Centre.

We continue to develop our gardens with new constructions including the Oak Rondel, the Southern Entry Garden to the native area and 200 metres of the pathway network which will eventually link all areas of the gardens. Plantings have also continued, particularly in the winter woodland. We extended our collections to include 9 types of dwarf Cornus (dogwood) and 12 types of Sambucus (elderberry). These collections will join our existing Buxus (boxwood) and Betula (birch) collections, both of which are registered as National collections.

Over the coming months we will be working closely with the Australian and the Blue Mountains Botanic Gardens as we begin our native plantings in the eastern side of the gardens.

Needless to say with increased development our maintenance requirements have also risen. Although our monthly working bees regularly attract 30 – 40 volunteers, we have now introduced a second monthly working bee to keep up with works.

Our activities both on and off site continue to grow. Our main fundraising event of the year, the 6th Autumn Open Gardens and Plant Fair, again triumphed in its success both financially and in attracting visitors to the district and our botanic garden. Five smaller events were held as fundraisers and to bring awareness of the gardens to the community. These events, run entirely by our Friends and Volunteers, require enormous effort. Plants offered for sale are all produced by our Plant Growers' Group with help from the travelling Plant Grower's Troupe.

With thanks to the Paul Ramsay Foundation we welcomed our first paid employee for the gardens. Sara Morton-Stone joined our team in December 2016 to develop a fundraising strategy. In June this year Louise James took over from Sara, extending the role to become our Partnerships Manager. In the coming year Louise will spearhead our fundraising activities and develop partnerships both in our local community and beyond.

We continue our partnership with Southern Highlands Foundation, which enables us to offer tax deductibility for donations. Through the 'My Community Saving Account' BDCU Alliance Bank continues to support our gardens.

This year we welcomed Peter Baillieu as our honorary bookkeeper to replace Sue Oberman who stepped down due to work commitments. Lucky for us Sue could not stay away for long and has now re-joined our financial team assisting Peter. Many thanks must go to Susan Ingram and Kathy Pearson who helped with our Friends record keeping and database management.

Geoff Prosser has continued diligently as our Honorary Webmaster. Thanks to Geoff for his work and to Acenet for sponsoring the hosting of our web site.

Finally I would like to acknowledge the unwavering commitment by the Directors of the Board. Behind the scenes this energetic, hardworking and cohesive group drive the development of the Company and the Gardens. Each Director is focused on their individual portfolios including governance, communications, grant applications, legal, site development and coordination of Friends, volunteers and visitors.

I look forward to the coming year with excitement when we will introduce our first education program into the gardens. I also look forward to hearing the laughter and chatter of the younger generations as they discover the intrigue and fascination of the gardens and the environment.

Charlotte Webb OAM
SHBG Chairman