President’s Annual Report to the Annual General Meeting

Melbourne Bearbrass Probus Club

Tuesday 12th March 2024

How quickly a year passes. And what a busy year it has been. With borders well and truly re-opened, members have returned to travel - inter-State and international – with gusto. Travel has resulted in rolling absences and it has been heartening to observe the flow on effect of widening the pool of members taking up leadership roles of various sorts, organising events and filling in for one another.

53 of our 76 members at that point responded to our annual survey last April. This represents a 70% return

which is very high in absolute terms for a survey and reflects a level of engagement of the membership more broadly. 89% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their expectations of the club are being met in terms of fellowship and fun. Our monthly meetings form the core of the Club’s activity and these have been attended - typically - by around 40% of the membership. It’s a different 40% from month to month

The guest speaker program is a core part of the Probus offering to members. This has been ably co-ordinated by Coral-lee Keep. A number of the talks have had a focus on our fairly immediate environment which has been very engaging. Once again a special thank you to Tony Thomas who stepped in at fairly short notice to fill a gap and who enthralled us with stories from his recent travel in Africa

We piloted a different approach to our winter meetings in July and August. A different venue, earlier start and no guest speaker allowed a games-based approach. Members’ feedback was very positive about the venue – and in consequence all of the meetings for 2024 have been booked into the Community Hub rather than the Performance Space. The post-meeting survey also found sufficient support for the games-based approach to repeat it in the 2024 calendar for July and August. Thanks to Bill Attard, Kerry Franklin, Coral-lee Keep, Shane Mason and Judy Stinson who worked with Ray Duncan and Sue Hoile to bring these two meetings to life

The calendar in 2023 was so busy that it was not feasible to organise an overnight trip away. This was pushed back into 2024. Three members joined Activities and Events Co-ordinator Jan Stewart in a combined Bearbass/Sunrise Probus Clubs cruise around New Zealand in February /March and nine members are joining Jan for two nights in Daylesford in April.

Jan has put in another stellar year as Events and Activities Co-ordinator. Members have had the opportunity to visit the WW2 B-24 Liberator museum, and to tour the Exhibition Building Dome and State and Athenaeum Libraries. A visit to the Alma Doepel resonated with the maritime theme running through a number of our guest speakers’ talks. The Lindsay Fox car museum and RAAF Point Cook Museum

offered a fascinating experience for members, and their grandchildren. For those members interested in the arts – visual and performing arts as well as music, there has been a bonanza across the past year which included: an evening with 2 titans of film and stage (Sir David Hare and Sit Tom Stoppard) and visits to

* The Australian Centre for the Moving Image for the special exhibition titled Goddess: Power, Glamour, Rebellion,
* Mornington to see the Archibald prize finalists in Mornington

and

* the Botanic Gardens for Lightscape

while group bookings enabled interested members to attend Moulin Rouge, Grease and Last Night at the Proms.

Food and drink feature high on the Bearbrass list of favourite things to do. Think weekend lunches at pubs in Prahran and Abbotsford, picnics to celebrate the 2023 Festive Season and to welcome 2024. We like Christmas so much we celibate is twice – in July at P.J. O’Briens and then again in December in a Gilligan Island themed cruise on the Yarra River! Thanks to Mel Gray (July) and Sheryl Tipton and Colleen Hanna (December) for their organisational efforts

A wide range of interests continues to be catered for by our diverse groups which are convened on a monthly basis – mostly, although some are fortnightly.

The book group has met regularly over the course of the past year and enjoyed lively discussions. Convenor Terry O’Keefe skilfully creates space for every voice to be heard and focuses the conversation on issues and themes arising from the text. Terry has led this group with great panache for a number of years now. In 2024 she has passed the baton to the very capable Kerry Franklin. Thanks to Terry for her service, and best wishes to Kerry for the new year.

Cards, table tennis and footy tipping have all been organised by the energetic Shane Mason this year.

Cards and table tennis have been convened fortnightly and while the numbers are still small, interest is sustained and growing. The footy tipping competition engaged a committed and focused group of members who were left in the dust by the eventual winner in 2023.

Cinephiles have been well served again, with Cate Thompson (Tuesdays) and Susan Bower (Wednesdays) each convening a group. From challenging (think The Old Oak and Amsterdam) to light and feel good (think Journey of Harold Fry and A Man Called Otto) the movies selected have supported lively discussion over dinner after the film. Thanks to Spike Sparkes and Julie Cookson for filling in as convenors from time to time across the year.

The coffee group has meet at least monthly across many venues in Docklands and the CBD. The unstructured nature of the meetings offers plenty of opportunity to chat and get to know other members. Coffee mornings have continued to be a great entrée to the club for prospective members as well. Thanks to Allison Hyslop and Cheryl Markham who have assisted Sue Hoile in managing this group.

Sue Hoile also convenes the mah-jong group, where she has been assisted by Jan Stewart and Elizabeth Markwell. There are typically 6 to 8 players so enough for several games to be running simultaneously. Skill levels continue to develop with experience.

The walking group has continued under Mel Gray’s leadership. Walks have explored a range of locales across Melbourne and always feature a coffee shop and absence of steep hills.It has been heartening to see that each month this year, a different walker has stepped up to plan, advertise and manage the walk

Likewise in the wine group, a diverse program across the year has been presented by a range of different presenters. The group has tasted wines from different regions in Australia as well as drops from Spain, and France. The group generally meets in the meeting room at Clarendon Towers but sometimes steps out to a commercial venue.

As a result of interest expressed in the survey of members last April a 10 pin bowling group was established in the second half of 2023. Judy Stinson and Elizabeth Markwell offered to convene the activity and with some research were able to locate a suitable venue which was available at suitable day and time. The group met several times last year and is off to a good start in 2024.

Cheryl Markham has been responsible for the club entering weekly trivia event at the Nixon Hotel.

We have up to three tables entering the event every week, thanks to Cheryl’s efforts.

Convenor Coral Lee Keep has decided to discontinue the Workshop at Makerspace group due to lack of numbers. Coral-lee notes that crafts tend to be solitary pursuits. Thank you for your effort anyway, Coral-lee.

We have inducted 14 new members across the year which has seen our membership grow to 80. At 70-80 members the Club is an excellent size in my view – big enough to support a range of activities and small enough for everyone to actually know every other member, at some level at least. Every new Probus year (which starts on April 1) we lose a few members due to changes in their circumstances and I expect that again this year. But the indicators are that the club is continuing to thrive.

We endeavour to keep members well informed. We do this via email, which is generated via ClubRunner. This email remains our primary source of communication with you, along with our website. The website is as up to date and fresh as the photos and reports on outings and activities that we receive from members and convenors. Your contributions have been very welcome this past year and going forward, I exhort you all to remember to send material to Mel the website manager.

This time last year, departing President Sue Hoile spoke about the importance of load sharing. I have returned to the same issue repeatedly throughout the year and in detail in opening the call for nominations for the new committee. It really relates to the sustainability of the club.

I have been delighted to see different names proposing events, leading walks, hosting wine tastings and taking a lead in monthly meetings this year. Everyone here has skills and ideas and talents that potentially enrich this club. This club ***IS*** you. I urge you all to seek opportunities to contribute your time and energy to serve this Club and its members. Leading by serving in this way brings with it many intrinsic rewards. I will leave that thought with you.

It’s time to say some thank yous

The club continues to enjoy a steady stream of good publicity thanks to our indefatigable life member, Tony Thomas. Tony is a skilled writer and capable photographer who, after retiring from the committee in 2022, has continued in the role of publicity officer. Tony please come forward and accept this token of appreciation for the work you do in support of this club which you helped establish.

Kathy Barnes works quietly behind the scenes to support our meetings. Kathy please come and accept this small thank you gift

Elizabeth Markwell, whose name you have heard several times in this report, has been the mainstay of our morning teas. Elizabeth please come and accept this gift.

Since moving from Zoom to face to face meetings Ray Duncan has been an utterly reliable meeting manager.

First to arrive. Setting up the ICT gear and sound. Sorting out the furniture. Liaising with the venue staff. Shepherding members to their seats. A key cog in the Bearbrass wheel, Ray please accept this small thank you gift.

Again, for as long as we have been able to have in-person meetings, Gaylene Duncan has been the smiling face meeting, greeting and registering attendees. Rain, hail or shine, Gaylene has been there. Thank you Gaylene. Please accept this small gift.

Your 2023-2024committee has done an amazing job. Every single person: Julie, Ray, Mel, Colleen, Sue, Coral-lee, Shane, Jan and Sheryl has made a contribution. And it’s definitely a case of the whole being more than the sum of the parts. Thankyou to each of you for your support. I have enjoyed working with you. Some of you are continuing, and others are not.

I would to thank retiring committee members Julie Cookson , Sheryl Tipton and Jan Stewart. Sheryl has been a willing worker, supporting a range of events and behind the scenes is a very caring Welfare Officer. Sheryl – thank you – please accept this gift.

Julie is another flexible contributor. She has chaired meetings in my absence and supported the organisation of many a lunch. Thank you Julie - please accept this gift.

For two years Jan Stewart has managed and overseen a busy, diverse and balanced program of events, outings and activities. She has planned and executed several highly successful overnight trips. And all with a warm smile and enthusiastic, can-do attitude. Thank you so much for ensuring this club offers such an amazingly stimulating program to its members. Please accept this token of our thanks.

Sometimes a legacy is left in stone and mortar. But other times a legacy is less tangible. It’s related to policies and guidelines and procedures for others to use for the greater good. It’s related to sharing of knowledge and expertise. I am speaking of course of the legacy of Mel Gray, who is also is stepping down from the Management Committee

Mel played a pivotal role in establishing the Club. He served as its Founding President for two consecutive years and led us through two years of COVID lockdowns and hardship. His term was extended from one year to two with the agreement of the members. Mel has subsequently served as Secretary for two years. Across these four years of leadership, Mel has been energetic in establishing policies and importantly, procedures, for every contingency. His attention to detail is forensic. His recall of this detail is formidable. His knowledge of all things Bearbrass is encyclopaedic. And his generosity in sharing his knowledge and skills in supporting and mentoring new convenors or MC members is unbounded.

No-one has made a greater contribution to this club than Mel, and the service he has rendered across 2020 – 2024 can only be described as outstanding.

At its meeting last week the Management Committee approved my proposal that Mel be awarded Life Membership and approved the mechanism to achieve that: that a special resolution be put to the members at the next meeting (ie this AGM on 12th March 2024) to confirm Mel as a Life Member of the Melbourne Bearbass Probus Club. That motion is on the slide before you and is seconded by Judy Stinson. I now put that motion.

Let the minutes record that the motion to award Mel Gray Life Membership of the Melbourne Bearbrass Probus Club was carried by acclamation.

In closing I would like to wish the incoming president Shane Mason and the new Management Committee the very best for the coming year. With such a strong group and such fabulous club members I am confident that Bearbass Probus has everything it needs to continue to thrive in 2024.

Dr Jillian de Araugo

President 2023 - 2024