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issue 7

Groundwork

winter 2008





From the Director

Lindy ALLEN

This issue will be the last one funded under the 2004-2008 Regional Arts Fund program which prioritised the support of sustainable cultural development in regional communities with a particular emphasis on Indigenous and isolated communities. Looking back over the seven issues we have created in the last four years, I'm struck by the momentum that seems to have built with the fund and with the projects that have been delivered with RAF support.

As our Regional Arts Development Officers expanded in number from two to seven, and they gained traction in their communities and regions, we have seen a number of benchmark projects take place.

You will read in the following pages about a number of events that would be at home anywhere on the world stage. *Fresh & Salty*, a RAV initiated project, was delivered in five different locations, driven in each by one of our RADOs, in partnership with a number of non-cultural organisations. As you will see from the photos, the results have been breathtaking. *Come and Have a Look at Yourself and Dug Out Canoe* were both initiatives of Indigenous organisations seeking to develop both traditional and contemporary skills in their communities – both projects have attracted wide interest and have had impacts well beyond their original intentions. In Nowa Nowa, a group of artists secured a derelict house and turned it into a fully stumped and roofed living art piece – they even managed to have their *Open for Inspection* listed on domain.com. In the Wimmera, agricultural shows turned to the arts, and the *Snuff Puppets* in particular, to help revitalise flagging enthusiasm and to repopulate their parades while the horses were all out having flu shots.

We wanted to pack this issue with as much information and inspiration as we could. If you are a non-metro artist, read all about websites and how you might use them to sell your work and lift your profile. If you are a performing artist, attend one of our *Small Stages* forums and see if you can interest volunteer presenters in your region in a mini-tour.

My thanks go to the editor of most previous *Groundworks*, Kate Gerritsen, who has helped us bring you the latest scoops, the best projects, exploring new ways of doing things and deconstructing projects to see if there is a lesson there for others who might want to do a similar thing. Kate is currently on parental leave following the safe arrival of daughter Edie (another stunning redhead!) Many thanks also to Georgie Sedgwick who is with us while Kate is away and has penned a number of the articles in this issue. Thanks also to all our guest writers for their generous contributions.

Enjoy the winter read!

IMPORTANT NOTE FOR INDIGENOUS READERS
Regional Arts Victoria respects Indigenous cultural protocol. To many communities, it is distressful and offensive to depict persons who have died. Indigenous communities are advised that this publication may contain such images.

Groundwork

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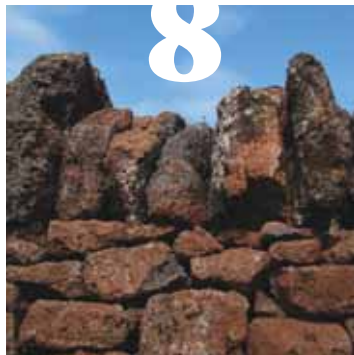
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Lindy ALLEN
Liz DUTHIE
Verity HIGGINS
Jo GRANT
Deb MILLIGAN
Marion MATTHEWS
Georgie SEDGWICK
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Groundwork7 CONTRIBUTORS

Andrea LANE

Andrea Lane is a member of the Nowa Nowa Community Development Group, a co-creator of the Nowa Nowa Nudes and the Gippsland Director on the RAV Board. Andrea and Gary Yelen (Red Tractor Art) are currently establishing an Artist Run Space as a result of the *Open for Inspection* project. That organisation has just been funded by Arts Victoria to create an artist-built mini golf course in Nowa Nowa.

Rob ROBSON

Rob Robson currently manages performing arts venues (Eastbank Centre and WestSide PAC, Mooroopna) for the Greater Shepparton. Prior to his current position, he was a teacher for the Victorian Education Department for 27 years. In 1998, he was instrumental in the establishment and development of the WestSide PAC facility for Mooroopna Secondary College. He was Artistic Director for the 2008 *SheppARTon Festival* and has been a Board Member of the Festival for 12 years and is currently Chair of the Victorian Association of Performing Arts Centres (VAPAC), a board member of Regional Arts Victoria. He has had success as a theatre director, designer, actor and writer. His third musical play, *The Soldier's Wife* premiered in 2004.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND LETTERS TO
THE EDITOR ARE WELCOME.

RAV News
winter 2008

Art at the Heart

By now you will all be aware that Regional Arts Australia's national biennial conference, *Art at the Heart*, will take place in Alice Springs over Fri 3 to Sun 4 October, 2008. If this is a destination you have been longing to visit but never had the time or the right excuse, you now have all you need to get to the heart! Early bird registration, from \$450, closes 15 July 2008. As with all previous RAA conferences, *Art at the Heart* will present a dynamic program of the best in regional arts performance and practice. The program will explore issues of national concern to the sector such as the role played by the arts in addressing wellbeing and sustainability in regional towns. Conference sessions will include panel discussions, skills development workshops, performances, exhibitions, installations and presentations from artists, arts administrators and arts workers from around the country. These conferences are now the largest arts gathering in the nation and well worth attending for the networking alone.

Full program details will be available by the time you read this so log on to www.artattheheart.com.au for more information and to register. See you there!

Launching RMIT Research into RAV's RADO Network

In late 2006, Regional Arts Victoria commissioned the Globalism Institute, part of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), to conduct an evaluation of its Regional Arts Development Officer Network. The purpose was to evaluate, for all key partners and stakeholders, the outcomes of sustained professional support of

arts and cultural development in regional communities as provided through the partnership model of the Regional Cultural Partnership Program.

RAV's Regional Cultural Partnership Program was implemented in late 2005 with seed funding from the Commonwealth Government's Regional Arts Fund and augmented by the State Government through Arts Victoria. With further support from eleven Local Government partners and three non-Government partner organisations, the program has delivered a network of seven Regional Arts Development Officers (RADOs) across the state. These positions are managed centrally by RAV and operate to a mutually agreed work plan designed to deliver on specific local outcomes.

The evaluation focussed on three regions where RADOs have been working and involved lengthy interviews with the RADOs themselves, participants in RADO initiated projects, and representatives of the regional organisations who have sponsored the work of the RADOs. Globalism Institute's Community Arts Project Manager, Dr Martin Mulligan worked with Project Researcher Pia Smith, to conduct the fieldwork and prepare the final reports on the findings.

The researchers found that RADOs provide local cohesion to community assistance available from the three levels of government and play an important role in consolidating networks across local government boundaries. Their relationship with a peak body external to their local partners assists them to make links with artists and networks from outside their own region and these links strengthen collaborations on projects or programs. RADOs are also critical in supporting and promoting innovative local product that can often surprise local audiences.

"You'll never be as pretty,
popular or happy as you
were in High School."
Kate McLennan in
Blackbird Productions'
Debutante Diaries.



Chair of Regional Arts Victoria, Mike Zafiropoulos said, "The last three years have seen the creation of a dynamic, responsive and highly effective state-wide team of officers. They have honed their skills in demanding roles and have built momentum that is now delivering solid gains to local communities. Their broader regions are also benefiting from increased economic activity."

The research paper, entitled *The Case for a Regional Arts Development Officer Network in Victoria – an evaluation of the Regional Cultural Partnership Program of Regional Arts Victoria*, is being launched in seven separate locations across regional Victoria in early July. To download your copy, please go to www.rav.net.au and follow the links.

RAV AGM, Showcase and Board member elections

For the first time in five years, RAV's AGM has been presented in conjunction with Showcase. This has enabled RAV to present a day-long performing arts market that not only meets the needs of its partners, VAPAC, but also provides important programming information for its many volunteer presenter members in regional Victoria. RAV hopes that over time, we will continue to build the number of RAV affiliates who come along to this premier event as it is the perfect opportunity to see the best productions on offer for touring in the subsequent 12-18 month period.

The AGM took place at 6pm on Saturday 24 May and the Board was able to announce the outcomes of the nomination and election process for four vacant positions. **Kaz Paton** from Apollo Bay Arts Council was returned to the Board in the newly created position of South-West Area Director. **Julie Millowick** from Daylesford Foto Biennale was elected unopposed to the position of North-West Area Director. **Erin Smith** from Allan's Walk Artists' Run Space was elected unopposed to the vacant General Director position and **Stephen Routledge** from Beechworth Arts Council was elected to the position of North-East Area Director.

Anyone who would like a copy of our 2007 Annual Report can visit our website and follow the links to download a copy: www.rav.net.au

Performing Arts DVD Sampler

Ever ahead of the pack when it comes to new technologies, our Arts Across Victoria Program Co-ordinator Kane Forbes has worked above and beyond the call of duty to put together on DVD format a sampler of productions that are suitable for touring to volunteer-managed venues. All productions are suitable for what is known in the touring world as 'one night stands' and will go out at a very affordable price. If you'd like to get a copy of this sampler, with video highlights from fabulous performers such as Sue Ingleton (*The First Step on a Tram is Hell*), Arte Kanela Flamenco, Blackbird Productions (*The Debutante Diaries*) and so much more!, call RAV on 03 9644 1800 or 1800 819 803 and we will post one out to you. AAV staff will work closely with anyone who would like to call on their services to support volunteer presenters to deliver performances in regional and remote communities.

RAV says farewell our longest serving RADO Liz Duthie

In what has been a significant year of change, RAV has said goodbye to Acting Program Manager of the arts2GO program, Hellene Workman, who returns to WA, AAV Marketing Officer Zoe Wall who has taken up a position at Monash University and Katie

Fay, who has left her role as Program Officer with arts2GO to return to full-time study. CCV Program Officer Keira McDonagh is leaving RAV to spend a year backpacking in exotic places. Kate Gerritsen, our hardworking Communications Manager and Editor of *Groundwork* has left to become a first-time mother and leaving for the same reason is our longest serving RADO, Liz Duthie.

In her almost six years as RAV's Regional Arts Development Officer in Swan Hill, Liz Duthie has worked consistently, patiently yet purposefully with local organisations and individuals to ensure that local aspirations can be fully and wonderfully realised. Determined to ensure her position could have maximum impact where it was most needed, Liz has targeted disadvantaged groups as a means of building community partnerships, enhancing skills and encouraging community participation. She has consistently demonstrated sensitivity and awareness of acute problems that face many residents related to issues such as relocation from a distant, non-English speaking country, drought and poverty and social disengagement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous sectors of the community and assisted community groups to create projects that helped alleviate some occasionally critical situations. Liz has the capacity to enthuse the right people with the right germ of an idea, assisting where required to ensure it gathers momentum and is realised in a way that feels right and makes a positive difference to that group and the broader community. We wish her and her husband Simon all the very best with their next adventures in life.

And we welcome new staff

To fill these roles, we welcome **Emma Cochran**, formerly of the MSO, to the role of Manager arts2GO and **Gemma Ward** to the role of arts2GO Program Officer. **Georgie Sedgwick**, formerly of Asialink, has taken on the role of Communications Co-ordinator while Kate Gerritsen is on leave, and **Lauren Presser** joins us from the Adelaide Fringe as AAV Marketing Officer. We will shortly be advertising for the role of Program Officer for Creative Communities Victoria.

BY Liz DUTHIE

Liz Duthie, RAV's Swan Hill RADO since 2001, provided overall project co-ordination and developed the suite of tools necessary to ensure successful delivery of the state-wide project.

Fresh & Salty: Project Overview

"WATER!" everyone yelled, when RAV's RADOs, caught in an early summer brainstorm, were asked to identify the current key issues for regional communities.

"WATER!" everyone yelled, when RAV's RADOs, caught in an early summer brainstorm, were asked to identify the current key issues for regional communities. This was the first trickle, from which has flowed the now mighty **Fresh & Salty** project, which has surged into the five regional communities of Wellington Shire, the Wimmera, South-West Victoria, Haddon in the Golden Plains and Ballarat.

In each community, the RADOs developed a project with local artists in response to a water issue and the opportunities they saw for cultural development in their communities. As a pool of projects, **Fresh & Salty** shows not only the deluge of talent which can be found in regional Victoria, but also the variety of water issues affecting the state, from the empty Lake Wendouree in Ballarat, to rising

salinity in the Wimmera River or the delicate ecological balance of the Haddon and Heyfield wetlands.

The project has provided mentorships for four regional artists by four artists with significant track records in the chosen medium in order to challenge, provoke and extend the practice of the mentorees. Ten regional artists in total were employed and 18 community organisations collaborated across the five projects.

Fresh & Salty provided a framework for collaborations between cultural and non-cultural organisations in regional Victoria, demonstrating the capacity of the arts to help communities deal with tough issues.

Importantly, the project left behind skills with a range of people involved and these are outlined opposite.

FRESH & SALTY WAS SEEDED WITH FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE THROUGH THE REGIONAL ARTS FUND, AN INITIATIVE OF THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT. EACH PROJECT SOURCED ADDITIONAL FUNDS TO SUPPORT LOCAL DELIVERY.

THE OUTCOMES

REGIONAL ARTS VICTORIA

The project allowed RAV to demonstrate its responsiveness to the needs and aspirations of the communities, cultural organisations and artists it represents and supports.

The project also enabled the organisation to extend the skills of its RADOs, which in turn enables them to provide greater and more targeted support to their communities.

RAV's REGIONAL ARTS DEVELOPMENT OFFICER (RADOs)

The RADOs were required to develop and implement all of the required paperwork, which when dealing with community organisations and a broad range of skilled and unskilled participants, needs to be comprehensive and thorough. All RADOs now have a solid working knowledge, which they can impart to others in their regions, of tools such as:

- Memoranda of Understanding
- Artists Contracts (including staged delivery linked to staged payments)
- Risk Management Strategies.

PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

Many partner organisations took the lead in ensuring they made the most of the opportunities presented by the collaboration. Wimmera Catchment Management Authority subsequently worked with project artist Dave Jones to create several 30 second Community Service Announcements for television and produced an education resource kit based on the project.

LEAD ARTISTS

Four Lead Artists received mentoring by artists with recognised expertise in the chosen medium and mode of delivery. In addition, they increased skills in community engagement.

COMMUNITY

Two of the projects directly engaged with Indigenous history, cultural organisations and artists and this has significantly lifted awareness and shifted perceptions within the local community. All projects provided a non-threatening forum within which participants could explore issues around our sustainable use of water. Locally, many new relationships were formed across cultural and non-cultural partnerships, strengthening existing networks and planting the seeds for further collaborations.

PARTICIPANTS

All participants were supported through workshops to develop their skills across a range of art forms. Those projects that involved Indigenous communities prioritised the development of a range of skills for young Kooris. A greatly enhanced knowledge of the cultural and environmental heritage of each project area was also an outcome of participation.

BY Verity HIGGINS

The Ballarat *Fresh & Salty* project was launched during National Water Week in October 2007. Environmental sculptor Michael Shiell worked with Indigenous artist Billy Blackall to create an ephemeral artwork on the dry bed of Lake Wendouree. They were assisted by members of the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative (BADAC) Youth Group. Sculptor Peter Blizzard acted as mentor.

FRESH & SALTY IS SUPPORTED BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT THROUGH THE REGIONAL ARTS FUND, THE MELBOURNE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION, CITY OF BALLARAT, THE BALLARAT AND DISTRICT ABORIGINAL CO-OPERATIVE AND KIRRI BARREET ABORIGINAL ART AND CULTURAL CENTRE.

Fresh&Salty: BALLARAT



Aerial view of the completed artwork
photo Bindi Cole

Lake Wendouree, as a gathering place, is a site rich in cultural heritage for Ballarat's Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Having dried out completely in 2006, it is also a strong icon of drought and climate change in the region. The artwork, designed to be aerially photographed, was developed through a series of workshops with the artists and the youth group and implemented as a feature of the *Arts in the Park Festival* in January 08.

I kick-started the project with a forum in October 2006 held at Kirrit Barreet Aboriginal Art Gallery. This was facilitated by State-wide *Fresh & Salty* Artistic Director, Donna Jackson. The workshops brought together representatives from water management organisations, Corangamite Catchment Management Authority, Central Highlands Water, City of Ballarat and local artists.

In my role as Ballarat RADO, I then presented the project concept for peer assessment at Regional Arts Victoria. I then applied myself to sourcing additional funding and developing all the required paperwork, including contracts, risk assessments and induction kits.

During fourth term 2007 I worked with the artists and Indigenous historian Dr Fred Cahir to deliver four workshops for the BADAC Youth group. One of Billy Blackall's drawings provided inspiration for the design that was ultimately chosen. Interestingly enough both Michael and Billy arrived at a final design meeting with almost identical drawings of three platypus.

Michael, assisted by volunteer Kerrie Roberts, worked long days through January preparing the site on the bed of the lake often in hot and difficult conditions. Working from a design grid, he drew the

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THE ARTISTS

Peter BLIZZARD is an internationally-renowned sculptor whose relationship to the bush dominates his work and life. He writes, "My sculpture is an ongoing investigation into ideas and responses to nature, the environment, landscape, and about the relationship of nature to the human spirit and culture." Peter works primarily in stone and wood and is the creator of the Memorial for Australia's ex-prisoners of War in Ballarat near Lake Wendouree.

Michael SHIELL grew up in farming country in the Western district of Victoria and draws his inspiration from the natural world. He studied at Ballarat University initially as a painter. In 2006 he was invited to exhibit at the Sparten Conference in Iceland. He is currently undertaking a PhD and working as a resident artist at the State Library.

Billy BLACKALL is a Yorta Yorta man. The long neck turtle is the totem for his clan. He says, "Through my artwork I try to portray the way in which my ancestors lived and I have these pictures in my mind of what life would have been like before colonisation. I decided a long time ago that my artwork was the best way to express my feelings and keep me connected to my culture." Billy is currently artist-in-residence at Kirrit Barreet, his many projects include working with school children gently sharing his culture. His drawing skills are outstanding and much admired.

outline into the lake bed with a hoe, mowing some internal areas with Billy for better definition. A base was set up at Ballarat Grammar's boatshed with catering, clothing (polo-shirts, boots and bucket hats) and equipment (barrows, shovels and rakes) for the 13 members of the BADAC youth group, three leaders and volunteer art student Ava Cormie, who all came on board at the end of January. This team spent ten days turning soil, raking fairy grass and barrowing clay to realise the design. It was hard yakka, the ground spongy and uneven, made doubly difficult because it was impossible from the ground to gauge the impact of the design as it took shape.

There was great excitement after about day six when preliminary aerial photographs were taken, by aerial photographer Gary Blake. The design was working superbly. Gary caught the excitement and later helped shift a few barrows of clay!

In this year of the Rudd government's historic apology to Indigenous Australians, the significance of working on Australia Day weekend to create a monumental Indigenous earth sculpture was not lost on the participants. One of the many interested people passing by, who dropped in on the project, said, "Seeing this image changes the way I think about Ballarat."

On Monday 28th January we all celebrated our hard work with a BBQ. Our wonderful caterer, Jo, who had given us delicious home-made pies and lamingtons on Australia Day, created a magnificent Platypus cake in honour of the project and the young people's hard work. After lunch we travelled to Ballarat Airfield and in groups of three, flew over the lake to see the result of all our hard work. One member of the youth group, when in the air and finally able to speak, said excitedly, "This is awesome, it is the best thing I have ever done."

Michael, Ava and I, returned that afternoon and the next day to barrow the last of the clay and clean up, exhausted but happy. When the





last barrow load was in place we lay down near the eyes of Platypus three and watched the sky.

Since January, 40,000 postcards of the image have been printed and distributed to Ballarat residents via the City of Ballarat's *My Ballarat* publication. The City of Ballarat has incorporated the image to create entrance signs acknowledging the traditional inhabitants, the Wathaurong. A launch of the image with an exhibition featuring the project and presentation event was held at Kirrit Barreet Aboriginal Art Gallery in April. Billy Blackall has been invited by a project officer from the City of Ballarat to advise on the design of a new playground for young children incorporating indigenous imagery (this may well be the platypus!).

LEFT & BELOW:
Local volunteers hard at work
photo Bindi Cole



BY JO GRANT

The South-West *Fresh and Salty* project was developed through a creative collaboration between Regional Arts Victoria, Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation and two local professional artists, Carmel Wallace and Vicki Couzens. The result is a permanent structure that engages a diverse range of visitors to the chosen site and, less tangibly, has created a positive optimism about connecting people and minimising isolation.

FRESH & SALTY WAS SEEDED WITH FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE THROUGH THE REGIONAL ARTS FUND, AN INITIATIVE OF THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT. AND SUPPORTED LOCALLY BY WINDA-MARA CORPORATION, GLENELG SHIRE, MOYNE SHIRE, GLENELG HOPKINS, PACIFIC HYDRO AND THE FOUNDATION FOR REGIONAL RENEWAL.

Fresh&Salty: SOUTH WEST



Artists Vicki Couzens and Carmel Wallace creating the sculpture

FACING PAGE:
TOP Sculpture detail

RIGHT:
L to R Vicki Couzens and Carmel Wallace

all photos Bindi Cole

"The sculpture is valuable to the Gunditjmara as it pays tribute to the traditional Aboriginal drystone work from our heritage and also provided the opportunity for the skills associated with stonework to be learnt by our young people".

Damien Bell, Chairman,
Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners
Aboriginal Corporation

The South West project presented an opportunity for two local artists to work together towards a common creative goal. Carmel Wallace is an artist living in Portland on the SW coast and is dedicated to making work in her local area and engaging her community in projects based on environment and the arts. Vicki Couzens is an Indigenous artist from Koroit near Port Fairy and has a dedication to communicating her culture through her work. The artists were keen to use the project to share their knowledge and skills.

"The *Fresh & Salty* project was great for bringing community together," Vicki Couzens said. "A diverse range of people participated in different ways, from helping to build the work to visiting and enjoying the open day and launch. For myself as an Aboriginal traditional owner artist, it was great for our mob to share our place and stories with others, building links, awareness and understandings between cultures."

The result of Vicki and Carmel's creative partnership was a strong project with a cultural environmental design relevant to both cultures.

Twelve months before construction began I worked with the artists through a series of meetings to discuss concept design and location for the

sculpture. Discussion influenced by the theme of 'water' and our preferred medium (stone) led us to an obvious partnership with Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation. Our relationship began with Damien Bell, the Manager of the Lake Condah Sustainable Development Project (LCSDP) and was supported throughout by Winda Mara, the umbrella Corporation. Winda Mara had recently acquired a piece of land near Tyrendarra titled 'Kurtonitj'. After spending an afternoon visiting relevant sites the artists found it impossible to rule out this location. There was a definite cultural presence on the land and significantly, the site is home to Indigenous cultural artefacts as well as a very old European stone wall running through the property. Being located on the Mount Eccles lava flow also ensured we had access to plenty of rocks which were the only materials used in construction of the sculpture.

The artists touched base several times in the year to develop a design that referenced both Indigenous and European uses of water in history. During this time we brought local dry stone waller Alistair Tune on board to direct the technical aspects of the sculpture which in design had developed into a 'dry stone wall' sculpture. Several meetings, discussions and research visits later we started building the sculpture in October 2007 and completed it with an unveiling and open day two months later. This major structure took twelve days over a month to complete, working with a team of approximately six people each day. During the week of the public unveiling and open day in December more than two hundred people from across the region visited the sculpture.

"The finished sculpture has become a focus and symbol for what is possible in terms of developing positive reciprocal relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people," Carmel said. "Viewing it leads to much more knowledge of the cultural history of the place."

The South West project sought to establish relationships with groups and individuals across the



whole South-West and Western District region. Those relationships were pivotal to promoting the project.

Our partnership with Lake Condah Sustainable Development Project gave us access to the environmental and cultural organisations they are aligned with. Winda Mara also provided important cultural advice to assist us in building these relationships. Winda Mara also provided valuable machinery and labour which was a very important contribution to the construction of the project on site.

Half way through the project we held a Dry Stone Walling workshop on site to offer the community a chance to learn the skill of dry stone walling as applied to a creative project. Participants came from across the region and included regional artists, teachers, dry stone wall enthusiasts and people interested in culture and environment. Afterwards they promoted the project in their local communities and some returned later to volunteer more time on the project.

Corangamite Arts, a community arts organisation in Camperdown, assisted us in promoting the project. In turn the project offered them the opportunity to learn from our process and develop their knowledge of coordinating major projects. Corangamite Arts hope to produce similar stone projects in their region.

Because my position is supported by both Moyne and Glenelg Shires, these partners were happy to support the project financially and by providing access to marketing resources. Through their networks this project reached a wider audience.

The South West sculpture project has become a feature of Winda Mara's Budj Bim Tours initiative. Visitors must be accompanied on site by a guide. For more information contact Winda Mara



by Deb MILLIGAN

Sero, a new contemporary public artwork, created by local artist Gillian Swanson, was given by Regional Arts Victoria to the Heyfield Wetlands Information Centre during a celebratory launch at Easter 2008.

FRESH & SALTY WAS SEEDED WITH FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE THROUGH THE REGIONAL ARTS FUND, AN INITIATIVE OF THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT. AND WAS SUPPORTED LOCALLY BY WELLINGTON SHIRE COUNCIL, SOUTHERN RURAL WATER, BENDIGO BANK - HEYFIELD COMMUNITY BANK BRANCH AND GIPPSLAND WATER.

Fresh&Salty: GIPPSLAND



Artist Gillian Swanson in front of her sculpture, *Sero*

FACING PAGE:
Sero detail
all photos Bindi Cole

The *Sero* team:

LEAD ARTIST:
Gillian Swanson

PROJECT MANAGER:
Deb Milligan

ARTISTIC ADVISOR:
Donna Jackson

STATEWIDE COORDINATOR:
Liz Duthie

ARTIST'S MENTOR:
Cameron Robbins

A striking 3 metre high white sculpture, *Sero* is an homage to the Swamp Sedge and is an abstraction of the utricles that hold its seed. This plant grows in the headwaters of the Macalister River in Gippsland and on the Major Mitchell Plateau in the west of the state, as well as Tasmania. It is listed as rare in Victoria as there are few known populations. *Sero* is Latin for latency, referring to the potential of the seed to germinate and create life, but needing water to do so.

"The seed is a metaphor for new life engendered – a symbol of growth, birth and regeneration. The two symbols, plants and water are linked; with water referencing the non-manifest and the seed standing for latency. The seed is the manifestation of life, they are as inseparable from water as they are from the sun," Gillian said.

Our symbolic seed, *Sero*, is now planted at the edge of the wetlands and will be a permanent symbol of the intrinsic power of water to create life.

In the year and a half that she was involved in the *Fresh and Salty* project, Gillian was almost overcome with the most elemental forces of nature. She lived with the threat of fire for two months, a huge front surrounding her house while she continually patrolled her property and neighbouring bushland. She was still putting out smouldering fires weeks after the front passed. Residents in nearby towns spent long months waiting for the fire front and a number of houses around Heyfield were lost. Later came huge floods, made much worse by the fact that the catchments had been so scoured of vegetation by the fires. But with the floods came the regrowth, the landscape was washed clean and is now incredibly green and vibrant. "Experiences like this lead to the strong desire of all the people involved

in this beautiful project about water, to create a potent symbol of regeneration, rebirth, growth and optimism," Gillian said.

Gillian explored many potential forms for the sculpture, taking each one through a full process from designing thumbnails, through researching a range of materials, creating small maquettes, then developing these into life size models to see how they sat in the landscape. Each design was subjected to budgetary, site, logistic and time considerations. Gill has succeeded in creating a work of power and beauty that speaks of the value of water and sits well with the site.

Donna Jackson, the Artistic Advisor for the state-wide project, assisted Gillian to rationalise the various designs and clarify her artistic vision. Throughout the project, Melbourne-based sculptor Cameron Robbins mentored Gillian in public art design and installation.

This is Gillian's first public art commission and the experience has extended her arts practice significantly.

The weight of materials was an issue that had to be taken into account as she lives in a fairly inaccessible area, where no trucks dare freight! Hence the need to create the sculpture from light weight materials, so it could be transported on a trailer or small truck. The sculpture was made in two halves and then attached to a steel armature. Gillian built a hot wire cutter to carve and shape the medium density foam core in the initial stages and her husband Martin constructed a special cradle that she used to work on and transport the sculpture.

Sero is now sitting by the water's edge in the wetlands and is lit by LED spotlights to give it a gentle golden blush at night.

As an adjunct to this project, a program of sculpture-making workshops was delivered to community groups in Meerlieu, Briagolong and Heyfield with the assistance of Gippsland Art Gallery, Sale. The aim of these workshops was to increase arts project management skills, and an



understanding of the processes involved in creating public art in small communities. Each community ended up working to produce a sculpture of their own.

In Briagolong, a contemporary abstract steel sculpture, a 'shrine to water' is being installed in Anzac Park, complementing the cenotaph. This has been a collaborative process with the local RSL. The design is of a Fibonacci spiral made of gravel, with rusted steel, reclaimed bridge beams, Indigenous plants and shining steel representing dry

earth, water and the flow of energy. It will be etched with the words, In every drop of water there is life.

In Meerlieu the group are creating a water-bird made of wire, four feet from tip to tail. The bird is being created from separate panels made by the participants, including the local school children, who have each made a woven wire feather for the bird.

In Heyfield, primary school students have created a temporary sculpture made of willow and ceramic tiles. The sculpture will remain

in the wetlands for up to 12 months, after which time the children will be able to take home their individual tiles.

Perhaps as a result of the fires and floods, all participants created work that demonstrated resilience and growth. Art that spoke about the way in which they want to move forward and that symbolises a shared future.

Who knows what amazing things will grow from the seeds we have planted here?

By Andrea LANE

Open for Inspection, an innovative installation project by the Nowa Nowa Development Group, took a derelict house and gave it to artists, film-makers and the general public to play with. With much love and creativity lavished upon it, the house is now a new major new tourist attraction.

NOWA NOWA Open for Inspection



Blind by Catherine Larkins
and Frances Harrison

photo Catherine Larkins

FACING PAGE
CLOCKWISE L to R:
Lacunary Cabinet by
Artist-in-Residence, Jade Pegler

photo Jade Pegler

Consumerites by Kate Shone

photo Jade Pegler

Easy Chair by Gary Yelen

photo Andrea Lane

Nowa Nowa, East Gippsland, had become (a little bit) famous for its seven years of *Nowa Nowa Nudes*. So it was a fairly brave decision to say 'no' to the Nudes in 2007 and deliver, in its stead, an entire year of exhausting, exhilarating, gobsmackingly good art in a completely different way.

The key to the year's work was (the rather cleverly* named) *Open for Inspection* - an inspired plan to convert a derelict home into a work of art.

Eh? Doesn't sound so special? Well. If there's one thing I've learned from my time

on the RAV Board, it's that a good project generally has many layers of interest that make the whole idea ... well ... 'sing'. So of course, there was a lot more to it, than what might, at first sound like (ho-hum) a 'nice' idea.

You probably need to know that Nowa Nowa is often labelled as amongst the nation's 'poorest' (in \$ terms). And yet, as a community/arts organisation we recognised that happiness and creativity - indeed lifestyle sustainability - is not measured by income and assets alone. And so we set about to reveal the many, many hidden pleasures - and satisfactions - of a more simple life - and, we hoped - show off this community's great talent in re-using, recycling, making-do.

I suppose the seed of this project came from absent-mindedly watching a late night SBS documentary - *The Gleaners and I* (*Les Glaneurs et la Glaneuse*) by Agnes Varda. A film that exposed us to the art of 'gleaning' on a new scale ... in a new light.

The more we looked around Nowa Nowa - the more we recognised it. A true artform. Everywhere, people making the most of what they had, making tractors parts out of found bits and pieces; caravans made out of old real estate signs (true!), art from junk, gardens grown from cuttings, beekeepers watching for box gums to flower, birdlovers recording songs, button-savers, sock-darners, tip-scroungers and op shop tragics (ah, that's me) - people living lives in tune with reality - a million miles from the unreal, disconnected ways of Melbourne living.

Around this time I also read a paper presented by Pamille Berg (Pamille Berg Consulting Pty Ltd) who spoke about the importance of public art growing from grass-root authenticity and about supporting artists

* 'Cleverly named', because it did help us get much appreciated support from local real estate agents - and use their ready-made signage to great effect.



to reveal the uniqueness of local communities. She spoke also of 'The Long Now' (a commitment to very long-term thinking) which set me off on another googling fervour.

And so the idea jelled into a clear and connected vision about employing our most exciting artists to work with the local community, to show off the value of quirkiness – in this increasingly bland, bland world – and beating our breasts about our (suddenly) fashionable (green) lifestyle.

The project evolved into 3 main elements.

1. THE HOME. *Open for Inspection* commissioned 15 of East Gippsland's best artists to re-create the house from locally found materials and memories.

2. THE FILM. *Precious Little*, produced by Malcolm McKinnon, telling the stories of 6 local gleaners, was the focal point of the home (running on the telly, in the kitchen) and one of the community's favourite bits (online at nowanowa.com)

3. And ultimately *The Long Now*. Our Weekend of Contentment – celebrating a life of consuming less – with music, Indigenous workshops and simple, low impact pleasures like petanque, walking, kayaking and eating!

The Nowa Nowa Home is the pièce de résistance and the lasting legacy of a year's work. It's a truly surprising work of art, prominently positioned on the Princes Highway. It has been an unexpected delight for every passing art lover.

The house itself was donated to the project when its owners discovered that it >



Blue Hose Flies on the Artists Trail
by Sara Bowers

photo Jade Pegler

Kingdom, John McKenzie

photo Andrea Lane

THE HOUSE COMPRISED:

Artist-in-residence Jade Pegler's *Lacunary Cabinet* made from old papers, patty pans, dressmaker's pattern paper, wire, threads and local beeswax.

Marcus Foley and Dore Stockhausen's *Mingling* – a scene-stealing multimedia installation amid 1000, painstakingly collected, painted and positioned used-toothbrushes.

Bruthen blacksmith and artist Gary Belskyj's *Burst and knocking pipes* in the laundry.

A mass of seething *Consumerites* created from twisted wire, champagne corks, bottle tops and stockmarket-report-wings by Kate Shone.

Josephine Jakobi's *Web-in-a-box* was created from her mother's long-abandoned knitting projects;

Neil Smith's *Con-sume* cabinet emphatically underscored the theme of the project.

Di Deppeler created the definitive 'throne' from recycled timbers

Gwenneth Poore created a Kitschen fantasy right down to her handmade blowflies.

Ruth Fitzclarence's fascination for aluminium pots, amber glass and op shop finds looms large.

Gary Yelen's *Easy Chair* is produced entirely from fast food wrappings and his re-constructed roadkill is a major crowd pleaser.

In the bedroom Heather Costigan produced an army of Nowa Nowa 'neighbours' to lay amongst while admiring the painstakingly produced ceiling mural *Kingdom* by John McKenzie.

And the signature work of the Home became the neon and awning installation produced collaboratively by Catherine Larkins and Frances Harrison – which still illuminates the town.



was in such a state of disrepair that it should probably be demolished. It had very little charm and few redeeming features apart from representing 'a fine artistic challenge' in a prominent location.

On the upside, disrepair meant a lack of sentimentality, and a willingness to let artists have their head – however creative, or destructive their work may prove to be. (East Gippsland Shire Council planners were particularly helpful in accommodating the project and providing us with a Temporary Planning Permit at no charge.)

A range of East Gippsland artists were targeted for the project with a broad call for Expressions of Interest. Interested artists were invited to a briefing session to walk through the house, and laugh together about the termite-ridden walls, the mouldy shower, the untouchable loo, a few of the colour schemes ... and was that lard dripping down the kitchen walls?

Undeterred, the artists all submitted sensational proposals. Nowa Nowa artist (and multi-multi-skilled handyman) Gary Yelen was the Artistic Director of the project who pulled together the whole shebang. Talking through ideas with each artist, negotiating their installation and preparing spaces, places, holes, electricians, materials and whatever else was needed to make things

work, adding up the costs and bringing it all in on budget. The creation of the Home was a well paced process. From EOIs, to proposals, to contracts and invoices and payments to final launch.

Monthly on-site meetings were a marvel of yakking, laughing, brainstorming, food sharing and a little art-making.

Thank goodness for technology. (Love it). Regular email progress reports, and our blog at openforinspection.blogspot.com were great tools for keeping everyone in the loop. (Our team being spread across a huge geographical region).

Mostly the artists were able to work independently off site, then increasingly onsite as opening night loomed and built up to the usual slightly more angsty pace.

East Gippsland Institute of TAFE Visual Arts Department were again rock-solid supporters of Nowa Nowa creating an exterior wall of stencil art as part of their Installation Module. (Nowa Nowa always comes alive when the TAFE crew arrives!). First year students collaborated on the wall, while several second year students installed their own projects in and around the house.

Thanks to some collaborative funding (with help from Wellington-based RADO, Deb Milligan and Creative Gippsland) we were also able to engage two artists-in-residence



Op Shop Kitschen by
Gwenneth Poore

photo Andrea Lane

and incorporate a fabulous independently-managed Indigenous demonstration of skills led by Robert Andy.

And so we Opened for Inspection – to wild enthusiasm and months of amazing feedback. The Guestbook is full of (almost) embarrassing praise and comparisons. Visitors return and bring their friends. Kids love it. Touring families have been rapt to discover such a family-friendly, high quality art stopover. School groups and U3A groups are still booking visits.

Schools are now creating week-long school excursions to Nowa Nowa where they can camp in town, near the Gorge or on Lake Tyers, visit the 'art house', watch the movie about our local legends, see our Nudes sculpture walk, learn & play petanque, walk and cycle the East Gippsland Rail Trail. It really has provided a unique and arty Nowa Nowa experience.

And now. Nowa Nowa has a permanent Arts Home. And a new Arts Group to 'live' in it. (And we've made the *Nowa Nowa Nudes* biennial – to keep the rest of the town happy too).

Further information:

nowanowa.com
openforinspection.blogspot.com
nowanowamade.com

by Marion MATTHEWS

What happens when you put together four rural towns and their agricultural shows, a community arts festival, five local community artists all with diverse skills, and an arts company that challenges the limitations of puppetry and performance? The answer is 24 extraordinarily large-scale farm yard puppets that toured and performed at four agricultural shows with a finale performance at Horsham's *Art is...festival*.

THE PROJECT WAS FUNDED THROUGH FESTIVALS AUSTRALIA, ARTS VICTORIA ARTIST IN RESIDENCE, AND THE SALVATION ARMY – OPERATION LIVING WATERS PROGRAM WITH ADDITIONAL FUNDING FROM ORGANISATIONS SUCH AS THE MELBOURNE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION.

Puppets on Show

SNUFF PUPPETS TEAM

Ian Pidd
Andy Freer
Rachel Joy
Nick Barlow
Nick Wilson
Suzanne Kalk

LOCAL ARTISTS

DIMBOOLA:
Mary French, Colleen Boats

HOPETOUN:
Nina Gould

ST ARNAUD:
Heather Brassington

HORSHAM:
Tina Fitzgerald,
Helen Blandford

FACING PAGE:
Doris the Cake Lady
poses with a local

Farmer Bill takes a walk with a
giant chicken
photos Marion Matthews

Melbourne-based puppet company Snuff Puppets

were commissioned by the *Art is...festival* in Horsham to work with the rural communities of Dimboola, Hopetoun, St Arnaud and Horsham and their agricultural shows. The aim was to develop a grande parade that would be a feature of the four agricultural shows with the puppets from all shows returning for the *Art is...festival* street parade in March 2008. The festival was keen to use the idea of the agricultural show parade, a practice that has mostly died out in rural towns, as a hook to revitalise community interest in the shows and help build community connection following a prolonged period of stress as a result of the ongoing drought.

Snuff Puppets were chosen as a suitable professional arts company to work on this project because of their unique approach: they directly challenge the limitations of puppetry and performance by producing work of extraordinary scope and epic proportions, both indoors and outdoors. Combining giant puppets, spectacular visual images, black humour and incisive satire, *Snuff Puppets* tackle contemporary issues with an old-fashioned and theatrical sensibility. Their commitment to creating performance works for non-traditional sites and audiences and their gung ho, hit and run, in-your-face, rude, hilarious, challenging and over-arching ability to have much fun were a great match for the desired outcomes of this project.

The concept received a lot of support from funding bodies and this enabled *Art is...festival* to employ local artists to work alongside the *Snuff Puppets*, which in turn attracted more community support and engagement than originally envisaged.

In total, over 100 volunteers worked with *Snuff Puppets* in four towns over a six-week period.

Snuff Puppets initially ran a master class session for local artists and key local volunteers. Equipped with a box of tools, bundles of cane and bamboo, rolls of fabric and glue guns, the four local artists set forth with the building process. Each town

group decided what animals they would build: a giant rooster and six chickens in Hopetoun, a farmer and three goats in Dimboola, a turkey in St Arnaud and the inimitable Dolores the cake lady, ducks and pigs in Horsham. *Snuff Puppets* visited each town for a weekend to work with the community and artists fine tuning the building processes and teaching people how to perform in the animals.

What was really exciting about the local building processes was that they engaged so many people from the community, and not always the usual suspects that come to arts events. In Horsham, a newly-arrived Turkish family got really involved in the making - father and daughter performing in the animal puppets and mother managing safety issues for the whole parade. In Dimboola it was the men, the stalwarts of the agricultural show committees, who became really involved in the puppet creation - particularly the fine tuning of the moving internal mechanisms of the puppets. In Hopetoun, a 62-year-old farmer performed in Wal the Rooster, and in Horsham a show committee member stepped forward at the last minute dressing up and entertaining the crowd as Dolores the Cake Lady with vibrant red hair and voluptuous cleavage.

Equine flu had placed a number of major restrictions on the shows - horses are a key part of many events - so in their absence the presence of the puppet characters proved to be a godsend. They became the centrepiece of a number of events and the undoubted stars of each local parade.

Together the four communities, the local artists and the *Snuffies* created 24 beautiful farm characters that were absolutely larger than life. The overwhelming enthusiasm from everyone involved was incredibly infectious and created a true sense of unity and pride. This became evident in the amount of local press coverage that the project received, with images of the puppets splashed across local papers in the four towns.

A highlight and very unexpected additional out-



come for the project was the invitation from the *Big West Festival* (Footscray) to perform at their opening night on the banks of the Maribyrnong River and the Salvation Army's *Walk for Social Justice*, through the streets of Melbourne's CBD and on to Federation Square.

The four agricultural shows have praised the project, and identified the puppets as a major highlight of each of their show programs, with most of the shows having the largest ever attendance at their respective shows. The conclusion of the project was the inclusion of the puppets in a street parade for the *Art is...festival* on an extremely hot March evening, through the streets of Horsham. Ian Pidd, artistic director of *Snuff Puppets*, returned to Horsham to develop a short play *The Farmer Wants a Wife* in which Doloris the Cake Lady finally falls in love with her four metre tall farmer Bill. The play also featured other puppet farm yard characters, and was performed in front of a very appreciative audience of over 2,000 people at the opening night of the *Art is...festival*.

Each community has retained ownership of the puppets they created. The individual communities now have the opportunity to utilise the puppets for their own purposes and have plans to include them in other local events. Several artists involved with the project have been commissioned to develop other puppet characters using the same methods for other community projects.



The engagement with a professional arts company has enabled the local communities to build their skills base. It has also given them the opportunity to explore artists' practices beyond what has been, and what they thought was, in their realm. *Puppets on Show* was a project that dreamed big. With good processes and management it was able to deliver an engaging and very different project to a number of rural communities.

By Georgie SEDGWICK

More and more artists are becoming aware of the important role a website can play in their career development, particularly for regionally based artists who live and work far from the critical mass of arts infrastructure in major metropolitan areas. It can be a case of out of sight out of mind, and the World Wide Web is one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to bridge that gap. Georgie Sedgwick takes a look at five artists' websites to find out what options are available for regionally-based artists to get their work on-line and front of mind.

Your Art Online: Getting Creative with the World Wide Web

Any artist can have a web presence these days

but exactly what form that presence will take requires some thorough research before jumping in. As a starting point, I spoke with five artists from a variety of disciplines about the ways in which they approached their sites' development and how they now use their websites as a tool to reach broader audiences, market their work, and establish new creative networks.

Sculptor Benjamin Gilbert works out of Yackandandah in regional Victoria and has long understood the importance of having a web presence to market his artwork. His website, Agency of Culture, has had three major iterations over the past eight years and he is currently working on a new version to go live in late 2008. Gilbert found his website has not been as successful from a direct sales perspective as he initially expected. It functions more effectively to service his existing clientele who wish to show others the work they have commissioned. This works to create a 'buzz' which often leads to further sales down the track. The site is also an excellent resource for curators and arts administrators needing to download Gilbert's portfolio for inclusion in funding applications. The professional look of his portfolio and ease of access via the website has helped to make these applications successful and enabled Gilbert's involvement in a number of arts projects over the years.

Gilbert's new website is being created with his client base in mind, something he felt was lacking in previous iterations. Many of his clients are over 50 and visually impaired so rather than focusing purely on the aesthetics of the site the developers have taken a more practical approach, employing fonts that are a minimum of 12 point and increasing the size of images. In doing so, they have had to ensure that the larger images do not increase the site's bandwidth which would make it difficult for people with a slow internet connection to upload them. This kind of highly customised redevelopment can cost thousands of dollars and consume

Pole-vaulters, Benjamin Gilbert & Rachid Sagadeev, stainless steel, 12m long x 6m high





a significant amount of time and energy. "Those who do take this more expensive route should select a designer that they feel they have a creative connection with, this will ensure that their work is represented as closely as possible to their vision" said Gilbert. His website has now become a vital part of his full-time business and he feels that its benefits far outweigh the amount of time and funds dedicated to its design and maintenance.

Not all artists consider their art-making a full-time business justifying such a large outlay of funds for website development. Visual artist Antonia Chaffey, whose work >

Artists' websites are fast becoming the first point of contact for art-enthusiasts, art-makers and art-movers and shakers. A trend that, if capitalised on by regional artists, could go a long way to bridging the gap between their art and their audience.



Monte Cristo Homestead, Australia's most haunted house. Image taken by Nathan Curnow as part of the Ghost poetry project

RIGHT: Graffiti from the haunted Picton Tunnel, image taken by Nathan Curnow as part of the Ghost poetry project



draws inspiration from the Victorian regional landscapes, is one such artist. She first decided to develop her own website because she did not have gallery representation and needed an inexpensive medium through which to make her work available on-line. She engaged the services of a friend and web designer to develop her site. The site attracts a minimal annual hosting fee of under \$180 per annum and she is charged at an hourly hour rate for any uploading of new work or amendments. Chaffey considers this a small investment relative to the benefits.

The benefits, as with Gilbert, are not from direct sales but in the site's effectiveness as a marketing tool capable of engaging people with her work. "Times have changed and curators and collectors no longer see galleries or studio visits as a first port of call, but more often prefer to view the work on-line in the first instance" said Chaffey. In fact, she recalls recently being laughed at by a prominent visual arts commentator when she mentioned

that she had not upgraded her website since 2006.

Chaffey also stresses the importance for artists, particularly visual artists, to have maximum input into how their work is to be presented on the site. "After years of putting my folio together I had a very keen eye for how best to present my work and I applied those same principles to my web design" she said. Chaffey wanted to let her images 'breathe' on the page, not be surrounded by extraneous captions, hyperlinks or graphic flourishes. For visual artists a website is essentially a showcase and it is not necessarily pertinent to provide every piece of background information. Chaffey deliberately kept other text-based information, such as essays about the work, to a minimum, understanding that the on-line experience is very different from other types of visual communication. Visitors to websites prefer short grabs of information and are unable to read as fast on a computer screen as they can in the printed media.

¹ Blog (an abridgment of the term web log) is a website, usually maintained by an individual, with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. (Source: www.wikipedia.org)

Other artists, like Golden plains-based author and Regional Arts Victoria staff member Robbi Neal, find the visual appeal of their site to be less important than its content. The ability to have access to and an understanding of the back-end functionality of the site was more of a priority to Neal and so she chose a do-it-yourself web hosting package to develop her site. The package costs around \$130 per annum and includes a site studio with design templates that make creating as well as updating the website very simple. The site studio includes facilities to create an online forum where interested readers can engage in a dialogue. This is particularly popular for writers of fantasy or science fiction where readers discuss not only the literary merit of the book but delve into the 'world' that has been created by the author. "However, having honest and unmoderated opinions on your site may not be the most-desirable thing from an author's point of view, particularly if it is highly critical, and many authors prefer to have more control over the content of their site" said Neal.

Her website has proven to be an invaluable tool in the promotion of her novels as well as her other literary-related activities. It has allowed Neal to establish a fan base, with interested readers able to obtain information about where her book is stocked or request a signed copy. Through the site she is able to publish reviews of her work, reader comments as well as personal messages, adding an extra dimension to the book which has helped to boost sales.

An even more inexpensive, but equally effective, alternative to the traditional website is the blog¹ Portland-based poet, Nathan Curnow, established his blog, Blog Eats Poet, after receiving an Australia Council grant in 2006 for his Ghost Poetry project. The project involved spending the night at the ten most haunted sites in Australia and writing a book of poetry based on those experiences. "It was a matter of necessity to create a blog for this project. I was working with communities in which I had no established networks and would more than likely never visit again and so I needed to find an economical medium through which those involved could stay in touch with the project's developments" said Curnow.

The blog acted as a touchstone for the project, facilitating an ongoing dialogue about the work being created and providing an invaluable promotional tool.

Curnow remains in contact with many of the people from these communities to this day through his blog and has been successful in attracting many more loyal site visitors

over the past two years. Although the Ghost Poetry project has now concluded, he continues to update his networks on current projects, providing links to recent articles and reviews of his work as well as up-coming events and information on other authors in his network. The beauty of blogs is that they are very simple to update and maintain and are in many cases free; users can be hosted like Curnow on a Bigpond site or publish a blog utilising the simpler Wordpress template. "However, if authors are using the blog purely as a networking device, it is better for them to have a Facebook account which has the advanced functionality and reach to do this more effectively". Curnow also advises artists to "Keep blogs business-like, and not fall into the trap of offering their work for free."



There are other options available for artists who would prefer a third party to take care of the management of their web presence. Websites such as gippslandarts.com have been developed to showcase the work of whole communities of artists who fall into this category. gippslandartists.com's creator and artist, Ingrid Thomas, finished full-time work and was looking to get in touch with what was happening in the arts in her region. She found it difficult to get a clear picture of the scene and was not networked into all the local arts communities. So she decided to set up an umbrella website that would act as a hub for information about arts activities in the Gippsland area. She promoted the site through her networks and eventually through word of mouth the site grew into a comprehensive resource for local, national and even international audiences.

In Gippsland the major tourist market consists of fishing enthusiasts and Thomas is keen to use the website to profile the region as a centre of arts and culture with an eye to attracting a different kind of tourist to the area. The site includes artists' profiles, images of their works, a list of current and up-coming events and an on-line newsletter. Contributing artists have their work uploaded to the site by Thomas for a minimal annual fee of \$50, making the exercise cost effective as well as low-tech. Although not many sales result directly from the site it functions effectively as an artists' directory for people to utilise when looking to engage artists in a particular project.

All these artists have approached the development of their websites in very different ways depending on their require-

ments and there is a lot that can be learned from what they got right and wrong during the process. Most pertinent is the need for artists to consider carefully who the end user of their website will be; will it be clients, curators, readers, colleagues, peers or themselves? They must also weigh up their capacity to maintain the site in relation to the return on their investment of time and money. Once these needs have been pinned down they can then begin the task of tailoring a website to accommodate them.

Artists' websites are fast becoming the first point of contact for art-enthusiasts, art-makers and art-movers and shakers. A trend that, if capitalised on by regional artists, could go a long way to bridging the gap between their art and their audience.

Elder - Mirna Mora Station, Christine Cochran, Acrylic and metal leaf on linen, 81x152cm

by Rob ROBSON

The tradition of canoe making in South-Eastern Australia has been revived in recent years in a number of communities in regional Victoria. This project, which took place in 2006 in the communities of Shepparton, Echuca, Heywood, Swan Hill and Ballarat, has had an ongoing ripple effect, prompting other projects and exhibitions. Bangerang Elder and community leader Uncle Sandy Atkinson acknowledges that the most important result, however, was the transmission of traditional skills to young people and their reconnection with the Elders.

THIS PROJECT WAS FUNDED BY COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT THROUGH THE REGIONAL ARTS FUND AND THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL, ARTS VICTORIA AND THE CITY OF MELBOURNE.

The Dug Out Canoe Project



Children at Cummeragunjah mission near Barmera in Victoria test out one of the canoes

"We all know how to make boomerangs and a lot of other things but we don't generally get around to making canoes and watercraft. These were very important to our tribes who lived on rivers, lakes and creeks."

Uncle John Sandy Atkinson

Uncle John Sandy Atkinson was born a Moidaban Man on the Cummeragunjah Mission in 1932. He is a well-known and respected Elder of the Koorie community and also an actively involved member of the Bangerang community. Uncle Sandy was the Chairman of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Arts Board of the Australia Council for the Arts, a Commissioner for the Aboriginal Development Commission and the first Indigenous person to serve on a UNESCO committee. A Rotarian and founder of the Shepparton Keeping Place and of the Rumbalara Medical Co-operative, he still maintains an active involvement in Aboriginal Affairs.

The Dug Out Canoe project arose out of a simple premise - it was time to pass on the skills of canoe making to young Indigenous people. "We all know how to make boomerangs and a lot of other things but we don't generally get around to making canoes and watercraft. These were very important to our tribes who lived on rivers, lakes and creeks," Uncle Sandy said.

Uncle Sandy, assisted by Neville Atkinson and nephew Peter Atkinson, led a series of workshops targeting participants from Shepparton, Echuca, Heywood, Swan Hill and Ballarat. Communities were asked to identify six to eight young people to participate, though some communities had more involvement and also enlisted the participation of other Elders. Those selected then participated in a three day workshop 'out bush' producing a dug-out canoe. Initially, the organisers hoped to pass on skills in bark canoe making as well as the dug-out canoe, but the bushfires in Victoria, accompanied by the drought, meant that the sap wasn't running during spring and the bark couldn't be lifted off the trees easily. The group camped out and were taught traditions of responsibility for the land and identification of significant sites as well as selection of appropriate trees for canoe making. Participants were given safety lessons in the use of chain-saws, metal hand tools and modern 'co-polymer' sealants to protect the timber once it was carved out.

In an interview with the Koori Mail about the project, Uncle Sandy said, "I wanted to show the world that we're not stuck back 200 years ago and we've moved on like everybody else. With modern technology, you'll be in the water a lot quicker."

He also acknowledges the skills they have learned from non-Aboriginal people who work in the timber industry, which were helpful in achieving the outcomes from each workshop. "Because everything around us has changed, we don't own the forests any more, we have to get permission from the Parks and Wildlife people. We've got to do all of those things and it's just as important as learning how to make a canoe."

Seven canoes were made as part of this project, but the outcomes have been far more wide-reaching than the organisers anticipated with broader public outcomes, informing and influencing Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences in the context of popular community celebrations and activities.



One of the canoes produced during the workshops was donated to the Dhurringile Prison (Murchison, VIC) where it is now on display in the new Indigenous area of the prison. Another was put on display at Wominjeka – Welcome Place at Federation Square during the Commonwealth Games in 2006 and was viewed by many local, national and international visitors. A canoe produced by the Heywood community during the workshops has been used in their community parade and is now on display at the Heywood Aboriginal Co-op (Winda Mara).

A smaller canoe was made by Uncle Sandy and Uncle Neville for a Melbourne Museum show, held at the same time as the Games. Titled *Carve*, the exhibition brought together artists in all forms of indigenous practice in woodcarving and sculpture from Canada, New Zealand and Australia. The artists provided demonstrations throughout the show and again a broad public gained an insight into the traditional Australian skills and their connection to cultural practice in other indigenous traditions.

In March 2007, four of the canoes made as part of the project were featured on the Yarra River at Birrarung Marr as part of the

Moomba Festival opening. Uncle Sandy provided narration as part of a visual presentation on large screens along the Yarra banks. Throughout the Moomba long weekend festivities, canoes were displayed at Artplay in Birrarung Marr and in Federation Square, while Uncle Sandy, assisted by Neville and Peter, again demonstrated the process of making a dug-out canoe.

In November 2007, an exhibition of canoes was opened at the Koorie Heritage Trust in Melbourne. Uncle Sandy featured in an accompanying multimedia display explaining the process of canoe making and celebrating the communities involved in reviving the traditions. The exhibition ran for ten weeks and had eight thousand visitors.

As a lasting legacy, the canoe making process and the experiences of the project participants have been documented using video, audio and photos and these have now been put into the archives of the Koorie Heritage Trust and will form the basis of resource materials for education programs.

TOP: Two newly carved dug-out canoes
RIGHT: Uncle Sandy Atkinson next to a scar tree from which a canoe has been cut
photos courtesy of Uncle Sandy Atkinson



by Keira McDONAGH

The Quick Response Grant category of the Regional Arts Fund provides small grants of up to \$1,000 for professional development and \$1,500 for small projects. The funding pool was designed to support opportunities that unexpectedly present themselves and to support small projects that might not meet the application requirements of other arts funding programs. *Riverdust*, an original play written by Colac resident David McKenzie, was produced in late 2007 as a means of engaging with younger actors. It is an excellent example of how a small injection of funds can make a big idea happen.

RIGHT:
Daniel Hall
plays the Crab Monster
in *Riverdust*.

photo Colac Players

BELOW LEFT:
Performers Bella Louby,
Declan Hall and
Imogen Louby
in *Riverdust*.

photo Colac Players

Riverdust



Amateur theatre company the Colac Players were formed in 1943 as a way to raise money for the war effort. Since then, the group has grown to include over seventy members and produce two plays annually. In recent years, one of the group's members, David McKenzie, had noticed a high incidence of alcohol abuse and alcohol-related violence among teenagers in their town – a problem he acknowledged was at least in part due to a lack of engaging social activities available within the area.

"I work for the local newspaper, *The Colac Herald*" explains David. "Through my job as a journalist I have had exposure to a myriad of stories about alcohol problems in Colac, especially among youth. Colac also has one of the state's highest levels of alcohol-related violence among teenagers. I also live close to the centre of town and often witnessed drunk youths in the streets on Friday and Saturday nights. It's not a pretty sight seeing a drunk group of kids in a park at midnight."

Around this time increasing numbers of young people were auditioning for roles in the Colac Players' productions yet the company were unable to offer roles to many of these young hopefuls because they were in direct competition with the more experienced performers who also auditioned.

The Colac Players decided to establish a Junior Colac Players theatre group, which would provide not only a stimulating activity for interested young people within the area but also the opportunity for participants to develop new skills and, through this, greater confidence. The Junior Colac Players aimed to attract young people between the ages of 13 and 19 interested in acting, design and theatre technology. Their first project would be the production and performance of an original play during the 07-08 summer period, a time when Colac slows down and there is not much for young people to do.

As luck would have it, David had written a work he thought might be suitable and he was interested in trying his hand at directing it for the Junior Players. "*Riverdust* is a dark fantasy which tells the story of a boy's quest to bring a magical river to life



and end a devastating drought," David explained. "Inspired by the Federation Drought, considered by many to be the worst in Australia's modern history, the play focuses on themes of drought, loss and family drama – all issues which have a huge impact on people living in and around Colac."

Despite having a committed team for the project and the resources of an experienced theatre company behind them, the group realised that they would need to source some additional funding if they were to get their project off the ground. Searching the internet, David discovered the Regional Arts Fund's Quick Response Grants. Having never applied for any funding previously, David admits that the group were daunted by the prospect and were a little overwhelmed by the application process.

In November 2007, David and his assistant director Rhonda Mahoney organised auditions for the project, unsure of the response which they would receive. It was overwhelming. About 25 young people turned up to the first session, forcing the pair to hurriedly photocopy extra copies of the script to use in the group audition. The talent displayed was also surprising. Rather than struggling to fill roles like they'd anticipated, the play was expanded to include roles for all that auditioned.

The young people involved began to take ownership of the show from the start. At the first rehearsal, two chorus members asked if they could design jewellery for the show. Their creations brought a new perspective to the project and a new dimension to the story line. One of these girls also volunteered to design the marketing material and other artwork for the show. "It was fantastic to have so much input into these stages of the creative process," David said. Another cast member gained the opportunity to develop his composition skills by writing and

performing original music for the show. Others came on board in other roles, such as lighting, set design, makeup and hair.

To assist the participants to get the most out of the experience, the Colac Otway Performing Arts and Cultural Centre (COPACC) organised a series of workshops based on the *Riverdust* theme as part of their school holiday program. Local artist Lyn Richardson and professional puppeteer Michele Fifer ran workshops in which they led the construction of a giant scorpion puppet, which became part of the play. COPACC's Kelvin Harman, a former actor with the State Theatre Company of South Australia as well as a senior lecturer in technical theatre at the Centre for Performing Arts in Adelaide, provided a 'theatre skills and terminology' workshop for cast members.

In addition to the skills development provided through workshops, 18 year old Tyson Graham was mentored by COPACC technician Tim Devine in the role of lighting technician. Tyson learned to set up the lighting and operate the equipment during performances. Tyson is now keen to work in the field professionally and is currently undertaking tertiary training in this area.

Riverdust attracted more than 20 new members to The Colac Players. These new members are the club's next generation. Their involvement in *Riverdust* means that The Colac Players now have more members with theatre experience who can become involved in the company's major adult productions. Since *Riverdust*, youths from the play have continued their involvement. One continues to design posters and promotional material for the Colac Players and another recently ran the lights for their major production for 2008. Another is a member of the general committee, two are studying

acting at university, and one is directing a school play.

The project also led to new friendships for cast members. They interacted with people in different year levels, from different friendships groups and from different schools. One of the teens approached David after the final show and thanked him for organising the project because she had become friends with people she never would have spoken to before. "I have been in the same class as Josh for two years and I've never spoken to him," she said. "Now we're best friends."

Having now completed the project David believes that the grant application process contributed to the project's success in that it forced the group to clarify the project's aims and map out how exactly these objectives would be achieved.

"The application process was instrumental in the project's final success, because it forced me to sit down and work out exactly how we were going to encourage young people to take part, how we were going to use our budget, and who would take responsibility for parts of the project." David explained. "The help and advice from RAV staff was also vital."

Riverdust's success in attracting new players and new audiences has strengthened the resolve of the company to continue to produce youth plays and other activities for young people. They plan to have workshops and theatre activities throughout the year, and have already started reading plays with the aim of choosing one to produce next summer. In this, David believes that *Riverdust* has achieved its aim of establishing a sustainable youth theatre group through the Colac Players. " *Riverdust* has demonstrated the fantastic work a community arts group can achieve with help from the Regional Arts Fund and Regional Arts Victoria."

By Liz DUTHIE

Come and Have a Look at Yourself was initiated by Sunraysia TAFE Koori Liaison Officer, Boondy Walsh, who enlisted the support of local RADO, Liz Duthie, to assist him in sourcing funding and helping him to successfully manage its various elements.

COME AND HAVE A LOOK AT YOURSELF WAS FUNDED BY THE REGIONAL ARTS FUND, AN INITIATIVE OF THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT SUPPORTING THE ARTS IN REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE AUSTRALIA AND THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT'S COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING PROGRAM.

Come and Have a Look at Yourself

Come and Have a Look at Yourself featured the work of nine students from the TAFE's Koori Unit supported by their teacher Mick Cullin and multimedia artist Kimba Thompson. The work, a powerful snapshot of the Koori community in Swan Hill in 2007, was exhibited at the Swan Hill Regional Art Gallery from November 2007 to January 2008.

"I have often heard negative comments from people about the Swan Hill Koori community," Boondy said, "both from Kooris and non-Kooris and sometimes from people who don't even live here, which is really sad. We wanted to give people a positive view of themselves and their community. These photos show that we're looking pretty good!"

Boondy also hoped that the project would engage students in learning a range of skills from photography to use of computers, project planning, community leadership and learning about their history. Students responded well, giving up weekends and holidays as they documented their community with great enthusiasm. They attended many local events and visited people in their homes, workplaces and down the street.

A Regional Arts Fund grant enabled Indigenous film-maker and photographer Kimba Thompson to provide specialist support to the students and teacher Mick Cullin during the project.

Kimba was also able to involve the group in *Pitcha This*, an ACMI state-wide project celebrating Indigenous identity, culture and land through the creation of positive images of Victorian Indigenous communities. Kimba worked alongside Indigenous photographer Wayne Quillam on the project, which marked the 50th anniversary of NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islanders Day of Celebration). Students took part in workshops and worked with Kimba to create digital stories. The resulting stories and images were exhibited at the Koorie Heritage Trust during NAIDOC Week 2007 and at a public viewing at ACMI, which was attended by several



Exhibition installation detail

RIGHT Students with
Minister Bachelor

FACING PAGE:
Exhibition installation view
photos Mike Cullin





Swan Hill students and TAFE staff. A very moving and widely attended local screening was also held at the Swan Hill Aboriginal Health Service.

A highlight of *Come and Have a Look at Yourself* was a visit by the Minister for Community Development, Peter Batchelor, who visited the students to witness the project first hand and later mentioned the project in Parliament as a fantastic example of community development.

Largely in black and white, the exhibition included over 160 photographs, some as large as 3m x 1.5m, others as small as a postcard. Family was a strong theme throughout the show. People of all ages were represented at school, at work, at home, at the footy or playing other sports, and relaxing with friends and family.

As comments from the exhibition's visitors book below demonstrate, the exhibition conveyed a strong and positive sense of the local Koori community:

"Great to see local people in the photographs, all ages depicted. Something positive on display." – Kyra and Bree, Kerang.

"Brilliant! It's nice to visualise a whole new perspective of our community. Innocent, engaging and alive. The students have done a great job and should be proud of their product. Well done!"
– Kerrie, Swan Hill.

"I love all the photos, they picture a vibrant and happy society."
– Nicole, Melbourne.

"The benefits of this project to the Indigenous and mainstream communities cannot be understated," Boondy said.
"It has strengthened the community's sense of identity and provided an opportunity for Koori people to document and present a more accurate view of who they are, their connections and relationships, where they work and live. Through this, mainstream communities will gain a more accurate and positive image of Indigenous communities."

"It has strengthened the community's sense of identity and provided an opportunity for Koori people to document and present a more accurate view of who they are, their connections and relationships, where they work and live."

Boondy Walsh

by Susan STRANO

Following the *Fresh & Salty* statewide project in 2007/2008 (see other stories in this issue) which worked with visual artists, the Creative Communities Victoria team at RAV was keen to work with the performing arts sector in regional Victoria. RAV has long recognised that performing arts practitioners often miss out when development programs are dreamed up. Small venues have found it difficult to access and afford performing arts touring shows to their towns. We wondered if these two problems might be put together to find a solution and, with help from Malthouse Theatre, created *Small Stages*.

Small Stages

Regional companies touring regionally

In developing a performing arts support program Regional Arts Victoria identified the sector's 'pillars' of sustainability as:

- Practitioner development
- Venue development
- Presenter development

We believe that all three pillars need building simultaneously. Facilities on their own are of little use without people (paid or unpaid) who feel empowered, having skills and networks to develop what they want to do. Performers and theatre makers need connections with suitable venues, a network of colleagues and the potential to tour their work. There are many terrific shows looking to tour regional Victoria, outside of the major performing arts venues. RAV's touring unit, Arts Across Victoria is also keen to support and develop the volunteer presenter sector.

Practitioner development (HotSPA)

January to May 2008

Following an Expressions of Interest process, six regionally-based performance ensembles received some assistance to develop a community-based work using the theme of water as an impetus for art making. These groups were then brought together at the Malthouse Theatre in May 2008 to share their works-in progress, discuss the works critically and explore issues surrounding touring. The groups were:

- Play at Being (Natimuk)
- Fiddlesticks Productions and the Drouin Old Butter Factory (Drouin)
- Punctum (Castlemaine)
- Kim Chalmers, Adam Hobbs and Sally Hederics (Mildura)
- Barking Owl Theatre (Castlemaine)
- Megan Beckwith (Bendigo)

Venue development

AAV's Kane Forbes has been developing a mechanism for gathering information in an audit of a small group of community halls. We have also been exploring connections with Creative Spaces (City of Melbourne and Arts Victoria), which has widened its online resource to include regional venues. This is still in the development stage.

Presenter development (Regional Forums)

August – October 2008

In July 2006, RAV conducted a pilot workshop *Nothing Happens by Magic* in Horsham aimed at encouraging networking among registered volunteer presenters in the immediate surrounding region. It was also designed to increase presenters' understanding of the touring environment and provided tips on audience development and appropriate marketing strategies. Based on the positive feedback from participants the workshop was very successful in delivering on its aims of supporting and encouraging networking and highlighted potential to further develop the volunteer presenter networks.

The volunteer presenter network in the Wimmera is now a viable concern with several tours per year and a group of presenters who meet and cooperate frequently.

Through *Small Stages*, RAV aims to connect people who manage performance venues of all sizes and will run eight forums across the state for regional organisations interested in conducting community events that involve the performing arts. Regional Arts Victoria, in association with some of its members, will present these one-day forums which will be open to people from a range of local arts groups, local government, festivals, local hall committees and more.



L to R Jeannie Haughton, Donna Jackson, John Romeril, Verity Higgins and Margaret O'Donnell at the Old Drouin Butter Factory

Megan Beckwith, *Insect*,
performed at Allan's Walk
photo Simone Bloomfield



Sat 2 August	Violet Town	The Parish
Sun 3 August	Beechworth	Beechworth Youth Centre
Sat 30 August	Maryborough	Masonic Lodge
Sun 31 August	Charlton	Charlton Valley Resort
Sat 13 September	Camperdown	Killara Centre, Camperdown
Sun 14 September	Torquay	Light Keepers Inn Motel
Sat 25 October	Mirboo North	The ARTSpit, Grandridge Brewery
Sun 26 October	Bruthen	Community Hall Supper Room

ALL FORUMS WILL BE 10am – 4pm
COST \$15 / \$10 for members of RAV affiliates.
PLEASE BOOK AT enquiry@rav.net.au

by Georgie SEDGWICK

Bibliophiles hunting for treasured
titles in the Clunes Town Hall.
photo Neil Newitt

Writers' festivals are emerging in regional communities as important cultural events that reflect what is quintessential about the people and the place from which they sprung. Georgie Sedgwick shines a spotlight on four very different Victorian writers' festival models to see how they are putting their towns on the cultural map.

Read All About It: Regional Writers' Festivals Take Hold

Literature is alive and well and thriving in regional Victoria and nowhere is this trend more visible than in the great variety of Writers' Festivals that are on offer across the state. The festivals cater to all kinds of bibliophiles, from readers and writers to publishers and performers. They operate on small and large budgets and have different drivers. Some are writer-focused offering workshops, networking opportunities and publishing advice. Others focus on promoting the work of local authors and there are those that prioritise the broadest possible community involvement. But one thing common to them all, that ensures their on-going success, is their vision of creating a festival with a distinctly local flavour. I spoke with representatives from four festivals that are doing just this.

Words In Winter – HEPBURN SHIRE

This August the Hepburn Shire plays host to the seventh annual Words in Winter Festival, celebrating the written word in all its forms. The festival originated in Daylesford but has extended its reach into the Hepburn Shire to include Clunes, Creswick and Trentham. The festival's main focus is engaging the local community with local shire-based artists through a highly accessible program of events held in cafes, halls, galleries, libraries, restaurants, wine bars, neighborhood centres and bookshops across the region. Although tailored mainly for the local population, the festival's varied and engaging program also attracts visitors from Melbourne and major Victorian regional centres such as Ballarat and Bendigo, making up around half of their audience.

The festival draws a varied and broad audience with popular events such as scrabble and crossword competitions; a fancy dress ball where guests attend dressed as their favorite author or character from a novel; and a series of writers' workshops. One of this year's workshops will be run by a locally-based writer and will instruct on the art of writing the bodice-ripping romance novel. The festival also seeks wherever possible to involve young writers and readers. This year the festival program will feature a book writing and illustrating competition for primary school students as well as a writing competition for students of Daylesford Secondary College.

The festival is run on an average annual budget of \$2-3,000, with significant in-kind support from local businesses and its large volunteer base. The festival itself has no paid administration, but rather a small committee made up of three core volunteers who work throughout the year on programming. The committee select from expressions of interest submitted by locals wanting to host literary-focused

events. Each selected venue or producer is expected to cover all costs associated with their particular event while the festival is responsible for public liability insurance, publicity and the provision of a printed festival program. The 32-page program is paid for by local advertisers with assistance from the Hepburn Shire.

The organisers have considered applying for funding from state government and philanthropic bodies to pay for administrative staff but feel that most of the funding would go to managing these funding relationships and ensuring compliance with them. Increased funding for administration would also change the festival's dynamic. "The model is successful because its decentralised organisational structure ensures locals feel a real ownership of the festival," said festival organiser Richard Perry. "We know our market and cater to it. We strive to keep ticket prices as low as possible, which means most speakers are not paid fees but the pay-off is that the festival is highly accessible to everyone in the community."

Victorian Regional Writers' Festival, BUNINYONG

The inaugural Victorian Regional Writers' Festival was held in Buninyong in June 2007. Chiefly organised by local author Robbi Neal, the event was based on the Varuna Writers' Centre LongLines consultation model that provides professional development and networking opportunities for regionally based writers. Originally, a Varuna program was to be held in the region but was limited to only 20 places. It was soon apparent to Neal that demand in the area for the program far exceeded supply and so she devised a one-day panel of industry experts to address this need.

Around 150 people attended the festival from regional Victoria as well as several writers' groups from New South Wales. The main aim of the festival was to offer pathways into publishing for attending writers, giving them access to publishers and editors that they may not normally come in contact with. "The event was programmed so that no panels ran concurrently, maximising opportunities for networking, which in the end was as valuable as the sessions themselves" said Neal. As a result of the festival a handful of writers were invited to attend master-classes at Varuna and one writer secured a literary agent. The positive outcomes and responses from attendees encouraged Neal to go ahead with planning for a 2008 festival, changing the format slightly to ensure attendees are supplied with a different set of resources.

The festival was successful in securing funding from a variety of sources including the Regional Arts Fund, administered by Regional Arts Victoria, Ballarat City Council, Harper & Collins and Hachette



Livre. The festival was promoted rigorously through their networks and Neal supplemented this by producing brochures that she distributed to writers' centres and groups across Victoria and inter-state. Neal hopes to secure their continued support for future festivals. "It is critical to the success of an event such as this to have in place partnerships with key people based on established relationships," Neal said. She also pointed out the importance of "programming a festival that is unique to that community, otherwise you risk competing for the same funding against people with similar ideas but with an established audience base and a demonstrated capacity to deliver a festival."

CLUNES: Back to Booktown

Back to Booktown in Clunes is an ambitious festival begun only two years ago but already attracting attendees from across the state in their thousands. For a community of only 800 people, that is an impressive achievement. Clunes is an historic gold town that boasts many heritage-listed and culturally significant buildings. During the festival, booksellers from across the country are invited to display their wares for sale in these buildings, transforming Clunes into a European-style booktown. There is also a program of high-profile author talks, in-conversations and readings. This year's event was covered by ABC radio national

and attracted 12,000 visitors from across the state.

The event committee, Creative Clunes, is comprised of eight members and modeled on the organisational structure of the Yackandandah Folk Festival whereby each member has a portfolio and they work with 'generals' to ensure its completion. In 2006 the committee received a small amount of funding to create a business plan and after extensive community consultation with the executives of over 30 local clubs and societies they devised the Back to Booktown festival format. "Meeting with the clubs' executives was not only an efficient way of undertaking community consultation, but we were also accessing the people in the community that are the 'doers' and have the capacity to lead their groups. These are important power bases and they need to be leveraged," said Tess Brady of Creative Clunes. And leveraged they were, the first festival in 2007 was supported by 200 local volunteers, one quarter of the town's population.

The festival received further funding from a variety of sources including state, local shire and local traders. The Copyright Agency Limited - under their cultural, professional development and publisher's career development funds - sponsored a session on young publishing for emerging publishers. The main source of festival

income however came from the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal which supports the development of community foundations that stimulate regional renewal in Victoria. "It's like weaving a tapestry," said Brady of the festival's complex funding matrix.

However, with funding comes accountability, and so the festival undergoes a thorough review process each year as a requirement of this funding. "The review is also important data for use when reapplying for funding; letting the community know we are listening to them and making sure we continue to refine the festival so that it is the right fit for the community," said Brady. "It is also important during the review process to listen to the 'knockers' because they slow you down, in the best sense of the word...making you question your motivations and any assumptions you have made about the community in which you are operating." Brady stressed the importance of not transposing other festival formats onto a community, but rather look at what is quintessential about that community and work upwards from there.

MILDURA Writers' Festival

The Mildura Writers' Festival was founded in 1994 by a small group of local poetry connoisseurs which included Stefano de Pieri and Donata Carrazza. Initially conceived >



as a night of poetry, the festival has grown to become one of the state's largest and most enduring writers' festivals, drawing visitors from around the country as well as internationally renowned writers. The festival is a unique model, marrying food, wine and literature over a four-day program of workshops, panels, readings and shared meals. Current Director, Helen Healy, describes it as a "festival for readers and writers, there are no publishers on panels or book launches and authors are required to stay the entire four days to eat, drink and engage with readers."

Over the festivals' 13-year history they have developed strong relationships with arts funding bodies, recently securing triennial funding from Arts Victoria as well as continued annual funding from the Australia Council for the Arts. The support from within the local community has similarly been immense; all local libraries and media sponsor the event including ABC radio which provides extensive live coverage. The festival has also enjoyed a long partnership with Latrobe University, who are not only festival patrons but are also actively involved in promoting and programming the festival. Each year they present a panel on ethics in Literature as well as offering the skills of their students to the volunteer team.

Local corporate sponsorship however, has been more difficult to attract recently as a result of the worsening drought and so the festival has had to look further afield for support. They sought the assistance of the Australian Business Arts Foundation (AbaF) to provide board training and governance as well as access to marketing mentors from their Advice Bank and are now well placed to attract philanthropic and corporate support. The festival has also engaged seasoned arts festival director Robyn Archer to mentor the festival committee this year and Healy will soon be undertaking an internship with the Melbourne Writer's Festival.

The Mildura Festival has been such a successful festival model because it has managed to sustain local interest with a programming philosophy that looks to expand community involvement at every opportunity. Over the years the festival has developed organically, responding to feedback from the local community and attendees and building on that to create a festival with a unique identity. "You need to have a point of difference. Otherwise, why travel to Mildura when you could see many of the same authors and more in Melbourne. It is about creating an experience," said Healy. These four festivals have not only been successful in providing regional writers and readers with invaluable professional development and networking opportunities, but also an expanding sense of community and identity. The festivals have been pitched just right for the communities in which they operate, addressing identified needs and building upon their distinctive characteristics to create a truly local flavour. What can be gleaned from these stories is that when creating a cultural event the *why* and the *who* for needs to come well before the *how*.

ABOVE: Book enthusiasts converse at the Daylesford Words in Winter Festival's bookstore

RIGHT: Mildura Reads 08 promotional image. Image courtesy the Mildura Writers' Festival

VICTORIAN WRITERS' CENTRE – RESOURCES FOR REGIONALLY-BASED WRITERS

For communities interested in leveraging funding for literary focused events and activities they can contact the Victorian Writers' centre (VWC). The centre receives funding from the Australia Council and Arts Victoria to support and develop writing activity in regional Victoria in the form of festivals, readings, workshop and seminars. However, the funding for these grants is restricted and may only be spent on writers' fees and travel costs and it is often necessary to seek additional funding sources. The VWC also offers advice on tutors, running workshops and other information to assist communities in organising their activity.

In addition to these services, the VWC offers membership at a discounted rate for regionally-based writers and a manuscript assessment service that can be accessed remotely. www.writers-centre.org



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Stencil work by Ellie-Rose
Hodge, student of East
Gippsland Institute of TAFE.
Part of a collaborative
installation project *Open for
Inspection* Nowa Nowa.
PHOTO Andrea Lane





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