

10th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

In March 2020, PNH was delighted to again welcome The Hon. Lisa Neville MP, who officially opened the House in 2019, to cut the cake for its 10th birthday, a celebration which was funded by a grant received from the City of Greater Geelong.

The 10-year growth and development of PNH is a tribute to 'community'. This was the overwhelming message delivered in the celebration speech below, written by long-time member Jenny Macaulay. Jenny has generously allowed her speech to be reproduced below.



"Some of you will remember the PNH in 2009 when we had just moved into the Masonic Lodge in Brown St and began our renovations which were funded by the City of Greater Geelong. However, many won't know what actually went on prior to that. The concept of a neighbourhood house was first documented in a council report in 1992.

In 2005, the Bellarine Strategic Plan identified the need for a NH in Portarlington and in 2007 the Community Building Initiative (CBI) was formed and a community meeting shortlisted a NH as a community project. (A ferry was also on that list.) A home was needed and this was a major challenge. Negotiations with the Senior Citizens failed, and our NH remained homeless. With the persistent work of a few people, in particular Lorraine Stokes and Sue Wilson, the PNH became an incorporated body and Port Snappers and the Canasta Group began meeting temporarily at the Senior Citz.

In late 2008, the Masonic Lodge suggested we became tenants of their building. The secretary of The Lodge at the time was Keith Oliver who has remained an active PNH member to this day. Lorraine and Sue worked tirelessly on the lease arrangements and after a year of meetings, the PNH finally had a home. Renovations began, a volunteer roster was set up and a small lending library was established. With donations from the Portarlington Golf Club Ladies, Port Arts Network and the Bendigo Bank, and assistance from Tony Meagher and Trevor Ahearn who rebuilt computers from a variety of sources, we were ready for an official opening, by Lisa Neville, on August 14, 2009. Two months later it was confirmed that we would receive funding for a co-ordinator for 10 hours per week.

In 2010, along came Julie Hyslop, our first co-ordinator. By the end of 2011, we had heating and cooling installed, upgraded computers and quite a number of volunteer tutors, office assistants and a librarian, as well as a committed committee of management. Our 'Shed' was constructed to allow for mosaic and other workshop activities. By 2012 our membership had grown to 350. The Portarlington Garden Club and Film Society moved under the PNH umbrella and grants allowed for new chairs and an improved audio-visual system. A community arts project had many groups participating in the mosaic seat ... the future positioning of which is still under negotiation.

(Note: this seat was re-located to outside the PNH offices in Parks Hall and a garden established around it by PNH volunteers in 2020.)

Most of you will be familiar with the following years. Just lots of amazing fun and opportunities to make friendships, be creative, be involved and supportive of others. We've had concerts, dances,

trivia nights and totally wild times with the Topp Twins, Dusty Springfield, Doris Day, the Navy Band, film afternoons, art shows and writers' festivals, as well as an amazing range of activities for children during the school holidays. With more tutors volunteering their time and skills, the activity choices grew and our co-ordinator hours - our only paid position within the organisation - more than doubled.

But then we outgrew our home: 600 members; facilities that did not comply with various standards, nor allow access for people with disabilities. Unable to apply for community grants to improve a privately owned building, the PNH was basically paralysed. With thanks to our committee and positive negotiations with Bellarine Bayside, the City of Greater Geelong ... and Lisa, here we are ... still with a few hurdles to cross ... but now a part of a HUB in the centre of town and accessible to all. We were sorry to lose Julie and our long-term president, Sue, but we are now with our new co-ordinator, new president and a fabulous outlook. You must admit, we are in a very good place."