



# Parkes Gathering a sensational success!

A COMPILATION REPORT BY LYNN ROGERS (PARKES COMMITTEE) & SONIA MUIR (RWN)

The Friday night market was a great way to kick-start the 20th NSW Rural Women's Gathering in Parkes. The atmosphere was buzzing as women perused the market bazaars buying crafts, clothing, accessories, goat products, household items and gourmet foods.

The night's agenda included wonderful interpretive dances by young boys from the regionally based Googar troupe and a roving fashion parade to whet the retail lovers' appetites.

Saturday morning provided an opportunity to celebrate where it all began with a lively presentation by Tottenham resident Fran Rowe who was in Parkes in 1991 at the first NSW Rural Women's Conference—a prelude to rural women's gatherings. This inaugural event identified a range of needs and concerns for women living in rural, remote and regional NSW and saw the birth of the Rural Women's Network.

Fran was named the NSW Premier's 2012 Woman of the Year for supporting and empowering Australia's agricultural sector during tough times and environmental disasters. Premier O'Farrell said, 'Her voice has influenced agricultural policy, legislation and assistance measures for farmers.'

In 1984 Fran established a voluntary rural financial counselling service for struggling farming families. Being a farmer she knew the difficulties farming families were facing, especially with drought and skyrocketing interest rates.

Fran experienced first hand how the 1980s rural crisis pushed rural women to reach out for help and become more engaged.

Her service became the basis for an employed counsellor model which has evolved into 95 paid counsellors across Australia.

She told us to, 'persevere, speak up and get your message to those with the power to do something about the problems faced by rural Australia.'

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Lana Mitchell proved to be a speaker with a passion for everything she does. Her childhood was spent amongst plants, gardens, agriculture and botany so a love of growing things was in her blood.

She pioneered a unique flannel flower breed called White Romance overcoming many hurdles—such as losing 2500 of her 3000 hydroponically grown plants. Not to be beaten, Lana approached a range of experts and restarted the business on her property at Gundaroo where she re-bloomed gaining momentum year by year.

In the earlier years Lana would load her ute and drive around Canberra peddling her flowers from florist to florist. It was during this time that she realised TAFE floristry qualifications did not include Australia's wild flowers, so in typical Lana

style she set out to work with curriculum writers and amend this anomaly.

Now her business, Back Creek Country, grows 7000 plants annually, yielding up to 30 000 stems which go to the Australian market, as well as overseas to the USA, Austria, Switzerland, Germany and Japan.

Lana is ready for her next phase and is leasing out her growing sheds to others so she can spend more time with her two children and expand her work with New Rural Industries Australia. She is truly an inspiring woman who can spot potential and turn it into a commercial reality.

Her take home message was to, 'never give up and use networking to find experts who will help you to overcome any difficulties you face.'

Troy Grant, Member for Dubbo performed the official opening—representing The Honourable Katrina Hodgkinson, Minister for Primary Industries. He acknowledged the strength of women in rural NSW and applauded their achievements.

Troy launched the 2012 *Hidden Treasures Honour Roll*, announced the launch of RWN's new project—Rural Women Connect and the Department of Primary Industries' \$30 000 sponsorship for the 2013 gathering being hosted by women from Scone on 25–27 October.

## Prize winners!

Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete the RWN Gathering Participant Data & Feedback Survey Form. Your comments and suggestions will help ensure the success of future Gatherings. Everyone who completed the survey was given the chance to win 1 of 4 special prize packs containing a selection of books. Congratulations to the following lucky winners: **Nina Crawford**, Forbes; **Sally Green**, Mandurama; **Heather McCarthy**, Dubbo; and **Chris Redman**, Gloucester.

Saturday afternoon we were treated to a range of women's stories and here are a few 'gems' to share:

**Anna Unger:** Dedication is the key. Believe in those who are your supporters. (Anna stayed at Peak Hill Central School for her senior years as she valued her dedicated teachers. She now lectures at University and works as a clinical pharmacist at Armidale Base Hospital).

**Danica Leys:** Keep searching until you find your place in the world. Study a related area if the area of your choice is out of reach—it will come within your reach eventually! Combine what you have, to get what you want. Use technology—Facebook, Twitter etc to meet others who are interested in you and what you have to offer. Great learning experiences are awaiting you in social media. (Danica combined her legal

qualifications with her love of agriculture when she found that neither satisfied her on their own and has co-created the Twitter community AgChatOz.)

**Corinne Annetts:** Even in adversity, if your dream is worth pursuing, keep going! (Corinne moved her goat herd from Tasmania to Uralla but found that all she had learnt in Tasmania didn't suit her new environment. She came from a 'clean green' farm to an area with diseased soil. After losses in the herd and shedding many tears, Corinne learned to seek advice, test her soil and keep trying different ways until she succeeded. Her goats milk Sunhill products are available online.)

**Stefanie Loader:** Being a woman in a man's world is very possible. The mining industry is looking for more women. Look out for scholarships that will help you with the costs of

study or overseas tours. Talk to successful women who will give you guidance and enhance your confidence. (Stefanie is General Manager of North Parkes Mines.)

**Jocellin Jansson:** Take advantage of the grants and scholarships that are available. The Royal Agricultural Society Foundation (RASf) provides philanthropic investment into rural NSW focusing on enhancing education for rural students and the availability of future skills.

All these women held the audience in the palms of their hands. Over 380 women (and a few men) listened attentively to every word and applauded wholeheartedly after each address, such as the magnitude of the messages delivered.

With 54 workshops on offer the decision to choose just two was indeed very difficult for each of the delegates. On the menu was

digital photography, making jewellery, creating fascinators, researching family trees, painting on silk or on canvas, yoga, cheese making, restoring furniture and learning how to 'fluff' your homes ... to name but a few.

The Indian Cooking workshop was popular and Kaylani Vontimitta and her husband Prakash also talked about India and the traditions associated with each dish. These relative newcomers to Parkes, arriving just 10 months ago have proved to be a wonderful addition to the community.

As an alternative to workshops some participants chose to tour the town or the beautiful gardens while others travelled to the museum or famous Dish Telescope. Free time was also an opportunity for women to wander the shops that stayed open over the weekend to cater for the visitors.



Students from Parkes High School played a key role in the gathering by volunteering to escort women to workshops at the School. These young people were wonderful ambassadors reinforcing the image of Parkes as a friendly hospitable community.

The Viva Las Vegas Extravaganza Gala Dinner on Saturday night brought out a plethora of Priscillas and people donning their 'glad rags' or dress-ups and getting into dancing to the Elvis and Tom Jones numbers. Rural women certainly know how to let their hair down and have a good time.

Sunday morning participants were treated to a free breakfast hosted by Rotary along with a yoga and

Pilates session in the park and an open air Ecumenical service conducted by Liesel Walters.

Jessica Rowe provided a refreshing highlight on Sunday and remarked on what a delight it was to be in the country. She also revealed the glee of sleeping in until 6 am rather than dragging herself out of bed at 4.30 am to be on set for the weekend Morning Sunrise TV program. She believes that having conversations and sharing stories is so important for women and read snippets from her book: *Love, Wisdom & Motherhood*—a collection of conversations with 11 women who were exceptionally honest about the obstacles, myths,

heartaches, realities and joys they experienced as mothers. As Jessica says, 'children are a great leveller bringing us down to earth and back to what really matters in life.'

The grand finale on Sunday was the handover to the Scone women who will host the 2013

Gathering and a drumming 'concert' which lifted the roof.

The organising committee is very grateful to the many volunteers who gave their time over the weekend in a variety of unusual jobs. Congratulations Parkes—you've done it again!

***In Australia alone, around 80 000 women are directly employed in agriculture. Whether it is working directly in the agricultural sector, donating their time to community organisations or organising natural resource management activities, Australia's rural women have proved time and again they are leaders of rural and regional Australia.*** SENATOR THE HON. JOE LUDWIG, MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES & FORESTRY

## Horsin' Around in the beautiful Upper Hunter

Mark your diary — 25, 26 & 27 October 2013 @ Scone

The Scone Women's Gathering Committee is hard at work organising the 21st celebration of this fabulous tradition. Here's just some of the highlights you can look forward to:

- Keynote address from **Robyn Pullman**—a very entertaining, insightful, talented and funny corporate communications specialist who has in more recent times moved to the bush to be with her partner. She will have some terrific take home messages for rural women;
- Fix up your fascinators and bring out your glad rags for Friday evening @ Scone Race Club. You will be welcomed by the Scone RSL Pipes and Drums, and weather permitting be treated to a live demonstration of equestrian vaulting and trick riding. Enjoy the breathtaking scenery whilst enjoying a complimentary glass of bubbly and sampling some sumptuous delights.
- Select from a host of workshops — too numerous and varied to mention here — but we promise there'll be something for everyone!
- Special tours including visits to:
  - Upper Hunter horse studs with world class facilities and famous stallions;

- Patrice Newell's biodynamic farm "Elmswood";
- Dr Judy White from the historic Belltrees property;
- Guided bushwalks to the amazing Burning Mountain; and
- Scone Equine Hospital—a world renowned equine surgical facility.

- Saturday evening Gathering Dinner featuring entertainment from The Scone Singers and a gorgeous ex-Scone High School female student who is ... well, that will be a surprise!
- Local market stalls.
- Sunday Ecumenical Service and free breakfast in the park.

Our Committee, volunteers and younger members of our community, including students from Scone High School and members of the Darley Flying Start Team will be on hand to ensure a warm welcome and a friendly face whenever you need some assistance, guidance or information. We look forward to seeing you in October!

**For more information visit: [www.upperhuntertourism.com.au](http://www.upperhuntertourism.com.au).**