

'Wander West to Wentworth'

NSW rural Women's Gathering – 29th – 31st October 2010

By Patty Byrnes, Rural Women's Council member, Pooncarrie



I wandered West Friday afternoon, crossing the Tuckers Creek and Darling River bridges adorned with big, bright bows and into the historic port town of Wentworth.

The town was a-buzz as over 400 ladies ventured to the South West of NSW for the 18th annual women's gathering weekend.



Even the Wentworth Club palm trees were 'dressed to impress'.

As I made my way to the registration desk I passed huge wool baskets filled with hessian lilies and poppies looked stunning and gave a hint of the pastoral history of our region using bountiful creativity.



'Tastes of Sunraysia' gave us time to have a chat and enjoy some pre-dinner drinks next to the Darling river before Dianne Pollard, Chair of the Wentworth Rural Women's Gathering Committee dressed in green welcomed everyone to the gathering.





White tablecloths with stenciled station names covered auditorium tables decorated with skeins of wool, knitting needles and grape 'dip tins' centre pieces filled with citrus to highlight the all important wool and horticultural industries of the region.

It didn't take long for women to get busy and start knitting!

Dozens of flying galahs encircled the auditorium walls and many 'flew' off to new homes with ladies on Sunday.



Friday night's entertainment showcased some of the energetic and very talented local artists, including singers Clancy Griffiths from Pan Ban Station and Holly Weinert.

Raywin Jamieson, the Merbein Guide Leader and past Sunraysia Region Leader, spoke of the important role Girl Guides have played throughout history.



'Stop the Clock Tappers' was great to watch and definitely showed us 'they've got rhythm'.

Their dance sessions were designed as a mature ladies exercise routine and developed into a troupe that regularly performs.

Members of the 'Little Havana Dance School' kept up the pace and energy when they performed intertwining salsa dance moves.



Desiree Baynes, a Bronze medal winner in the women's double trap at the Atlanta Olympics in 1996 and Gold medal winner in the women's trap pairs at the Melbourne Commonwealth Games, was born and raised in the Sunraysia.

She allowed us the privilege of holding her medals and to get a real insight into the Games experience.



Exercise classes were provided on Saturday and Sunday mornings on the banks of the Darling.



Saturday's program commenced with a moving welcome to country by Raeleen Wattata-Drummond who wished all her 'sisters' (women) a memorable weekend in Barkindji country. As a lasting memento Raeleen left a basket of beautiful individually hand painted gum leaves as a token of friendship.



Mayor, Marg Thomson welcomed visitors to the Wentworth Shire then Nerida Cullen, the Co-Chair of the NSW Rural Women's Council gave an overview into the role of the Council and the Rural Women's Network.



Keynote speaker Susan Chase was the South Australian Telstra Business Women of the Year 2009.

Susan gave us an insight into the running of a male-dominated power business and revealed how she overcame big hurdles to create a now very successful company.



The rain came down on Saturday but the enthusiasm kept on growing and didn't even stop the kayakers taking to the water and enjoying some of the more physical workshops on offer.



I learnt to colour a silk scarf and the skill of basket weaving.

To my surprise my basket is still looking like a basket and hasn't unraveled... yet anyway!

I also made a couple of necklaces and came away with plenty of ideas to revamp some of my more 'tired' jewelry.

There was so much variety in workshop choice and something for everyone.



Over 30 trade exhibits and 39 workshops operated over the weekend at the lovely Wentworth school and provided plenty for everyone to see and do.

Even the men had plenty to keep them engaged including listening to the speakers, going on tours and there was even a butchering demonstration on Sunday morning.

The rain eased in the afternoon and we had a couple of hours of free time to discover more of Wentworth, put our feet up and get ready to 'rock n roll' the night away.



The club served pre-dinner drinks and appetizers using local produce overlooking the ancient Darling River.

Special guests included Minister for Primary Industries The Hon Steve Whan MP.



Many of the ladies got into the spirit of Saturday night's theme and dressed in 1950's style.

Twenty eight sponsors mingled and chatted before moving into the auditorium for another night to remember.

Gathering decorator and artist in charge, Marg Whyte, again displayed her creative talents and imagination. Her 'emu' dinner place mats design original was raffled at the end of the Gathering.



Table centerpieces were huge bowls of large pink baubles and contrasting grey sprigs of saltbush. Who would have guessed that the beautiful baubles were spray painted paddy melons – the cropper's scourge.

The Minister officially opened the Gathering during the evening and announced \$42,500 of funding for next year's gathering.

He also launched the inaugural Hidden Treasures Honour Roll for 2010 acknowledging the efforts of NSW rural women volunteers.

Three of these special ladies were present at the dinner and were personally thanked by the Minister.



L to R 'Hidden Treasures' announced at the launch include Gathering committee member, Cheryl Vines of Curlwaa, Veronica Pansaru from Kingscliff and Carla Cowles from Mt Hope, Minister Whan.

A magnificent dinner featuring local lamb and chicken, Sunraysia wines and delicious sweets incorporating local fruit and nuts had taste buds working overtime.

What a night's entertainment that followed! I haven't laughed so much for years.

'Ratbagz – six young locals performed their very own rendition of the musical Grease.

Their 'Greece is da word' version provided entertainment that you would normally have to travel to the city to see. Who's got talent? They've got talent.



Sunday morning's big breakfast got us all off to a good start for the final round of workshops.

The Ecumenical Service was held in the beautiful old 1871 St John's Anglican Church, the first church erected on the banks of the Darling River.

The materials for the church were brought to the site by barge and include locally made bricks.

Gradually we wandered back to the Wentworth Club to leave a little something on the 'gate of remembrance', buy a last minute raffle ticket and prepare for home.

Brownyn Roberts, the final speaker gave a 'Lets Laugh' presentation and had us in raptures, wiggling our pointer fingers and learning the value of laughing for wellbeing.

Dianne Pollard gave a closing address and thanked her very dedicated, hard-working and well-traveled committee of 16 ladies and 40 volunteers for a mighty effort.

Di has now handed over the gathering candle nestled in local Perry Sandhill soil to Julie Lyford, President of the 2011 Gloucester rural Women's Gathering Committee dressed in lilac.

Julie introduced her committee members and invited us all to meet again at Gloucester fro 14-16 October 2011.

I left with a tear in my eye after saying goodbyes to new and old friends. It was a wonderful weekend.

Well done ladies!



Thank you to Lesley Barnes for extra photos