

# Editor's Comment:

## The value of volunteers

AN EXPERIENCED and well-paid government employee once said to me something along the lines of "Community committees are a waste of time. They never achieve anything".

I'm still not sure it was eye-popping (perhaps or just a bad week blow-off). Clearly, it was long past the time when such employees saw themselves as "public servants" but still, it does raise you think.

Meetings and committees can be hard graft and yes, it can sometimes feel like you're going around in circles, especially in this era of increased accountability. But what a small group of committed people can achieve in their "spare time" is truly remarkable, and if you add together all the little committees and the other volunteers who turn up when the doing needs to be done, then the results are mind-blowing.

In fact, it is volunteers who often deliver the things our communities need to function so that the private sector, and even government employees, can get on with their work.

Imagine our towns without children, without aged care, or without sporting brigades and SES. Imagine no bushfire clubs, RSL, arts groups, or services for our disabled residents, community

transport, meals on wheels, landcare, WRES, hospital auxiliary, children's charities, senior support and all the rest. Our communities would not be places worth living in.

According to the 2011 Census, 766 people or 24.1% of our district's population spent time doing unpaid voluntary work through an organisation or group in the previous 12 months.

The results do not include people under the age of 16, or those who perform individual acts of kindness and service of their own bat.

Unfortunately, the ABS says that this represents a decrease of 26 people\* since the 2006 census, so it will be interesting to see what the 2016 census reveals when the results are released.

In a small country town it is impossible to put a value on the contribution of volunteers. They are the rope, glue and wire that hold our communities together.

We could do without all sorts of government, but we could not survive without our volunteers.

But why so people do it?

Clearly it is not for want of something "better" to do. As we all know, the busiest people are also our most committed volunteers.

Apart from the satisfaction of helping out your community, there can be heaps of reasons to volunteer. Here's just a few to think about:

- Meet new people and make new friends
- To give back to, or get involved in, your community
- Experienced new challenges
- Raise awareness and support important community issues
- Help people or contribute to social change
- Learn new skills or gain experience in a variety of roles

Research has also found a significant correlation between volunteering and good health with reports showing that volunteers have:

- Longer lives
  - Lower rates of depression
  - Less incidence of heart disease
  - Higher functional ability
- National Volunteers Week is almost upon us.

Take the chance to get amongst it and connect with your community for some fun and rewarding times.

As for that government employee. He/she is still not enjoying the community where they serve.

## Biosecurity issues for Western Slopes Pipeline project

To the Editor,

APA noted with interest Ross McAlary's letter of 26 April regarding biosecurity concerns associated with the Western Slopes Pipeline project. We understand this is a key issue of concern for all landowners.

As the proponent of the project, APA is responsible for ensuring our activities both during initial field surveys and later during construction adhere to all legislative requirements and Government policy applicable to biosecurity and weed management matters. These issues are not unique to the Western Slopes Pipeline. Successful management of weed and other biosecurity matters is a responsibility we take very seriously on all of our projects and operational assets.

We expect to commence field survey work for the Western Slopes Pipeline project towards the middle of this year. In preparation for this work we are developing project specific weed management and biosecurity protocols which will apply to all proposed activities. The development of these protocols will involve direct liaison with relevant Local Land Services offices to seek their input and feedback.

During discussions with landowners prior to access opening, we will be

seeking assistance to identify any known areas of weed infestation or other biosecurity concerns. This consultation will inform the planning of our fieldwork and the weed management and biosecurity protocols to be followed on individual properties.

We also note Mr McAlary's concerns regarding matters of health and safety associated with past construction digging/excavation activities undertaken within a future pipeline easement. APA has over 15,000km<sup>2</sup> of transmission pipelines under active operation across the country and we regularly work with landowners to ensure that any ground disturbing activities are undertaken in a manner that keeps everybody safe. Where it is deemed necessary this includes APA representatives attending site while works are performed.

APA is committed to building positive long-term relationships with all landowners along the proposed Western Slopes Pipeline alignment. Mr McAlary or any other landowners who require further information about the project are encouraged to contact our project team or visit the APA / Western Slopes Pipeline website.

Jim Fieldsoe  
Access & Approvals Manager  
APA Group

## Part of Lindsay's Legacy

BY DON MCKENZIE

The legacy left behind with the passing of Lindsay Parsons is for all to see on the highway on the approaches to Coonamble.

In 1984 the Coonamble Road Committee made the decision to rebuild the rodeo complex when we were granted the Australian Championships to be held on the long weekend in June of 1986.

\$7000 worth of material made up of steel and cement was put into the complex and the whole thing was built with volunteer labour.

Lindsay was the self appointed chairman.

He talked people from all walks of life to donate some time to help build the complex. People from chemists to

farmers all learnt to cut, measure and weld steel as well as spray paint and do under the gear and bulbarge under the gear and many a coal lagger was enjoyed at the end of the day by some very funny looking and colourful people.

I had the pleasure and honour of being at Gungahlin the day that Lindsay cut out the figures for the sign on the highway.

Photos were projected onto a wall and with the help of daughter Lisa, the outline was traced onto tracing paper.

Lindsay then transferred the image onto half inch thick steel plates where Lindsay fired up the oxy and by hand

cut out the figures as you see them today.

The bronze rider on top of the sign is John Lundholm, the bull rider is Peter Burstonow and at the time of writing I am not sure who the other bronze rider is.

If you look please contact the writer or Coonamble Times.

Local artist Brian Campbell completed the sign by doing the paint work on it.

The sign has become an iconic image for Coonamble with travellers continually stopping to have their photographs taken in front of or over on it.

It is a part of the town's identity.

## Water for Combara?

Dear Editor,

A few months ago during a casual conversation with the Coonamble Shire Mayor, I mentioned the need for a reliable water source for the residents of Combara village.

I was shut down immediately with a comment along the lines of "that will never happen".

Well imagine my surprise when at 11.3 on page 7 of Council's Ordinary Meeting Minutes 12/4/17... Council are discussing bore baths at the raccourse at an estimated cost of \$570,000!

I'm sure that money could be better spent and would go a long way toward providing a more reliable water source for the residents and rate payers of Combara.

Do Council really think that is what our community needs? If so, they are VERY misguided.

Combara is growing and could continue to grow if access to water was not such an issue for most.

Sincerely  
Disgruntled Combara Rate Payer.  
name and address supplied.

## Independent press from coast to country



Rachael Vaughan, visiting reporter from News of the Area, with Coonamble Times editor, Lee O'Connor

PROVIDING more evidence that independent local newspapers are successfully reinventing themselves, your Editor recently had the pleasure of meeting up with an enthusiastic reporter from the Port Stephens area.

Rachael Vaughan works as a contributor to a growing business operating as News of the Area (NOTA).

Adrian, Rachael and their son Xavier spent a week in Coonamble, helping the recently-retired Mark and Debbie to settle back in.

publication that eventually went weekly.

During their growth phase across regional NSW, Rural Press purchased the NOTA in 1966.

It then became part of Australia's largest corporate media network when Fairfax merged with Rural Press around 2008.

In 2014, Fairfax decided to close the publication down, along with many other 'small town' papers.

Seeing an opportunity to revive the independent voice, the Nyalal Coast News of the Area commenced under its current owner and editor, Michael Wright, retaining the

business name which was never purchased by Rural Press or Fairfax.

"To set the publication on its new path and allow it to grow into other areas, we talked the News of the Area ahead to each smaller community served."

Mr Wright has since launched two new publications, adding Bay News Of The Area and Meadow & Tilgerry News Of The Area to the list.

The three papers have a combined circulation of 18,000 per week.

They cover a geographical area from Wilkanown in the south, to Bulandah in the north, and from Nelson Bay to Nodowie.

Eighteen people are employed as staff and contractors, to produce three newspapers, three social media sites, and a website.

"I write mainly for the Nodowie paper," says Rachael "and in for Myall Coast and Bay where needed. I started with the paper just under one year ago, and I love the position so much."

Rachael is positive about the future of the local independent press on the coast.

"As with all NOTA staff, she works remotely from wherever she is at the time, including visiting the in-laws in Coonamble, thanks to the internet."

"The online site provides a great opportunity for small papers like ours," said Rachael "you can use it in so many ways, but you have to use it."

She says, "Newspapers are an essential link in the community that online can't

replace. The online staff is just another tool to keep our communities informed."

"I was so pleased to see the Coonamble Times taking up this challenge. It's a very exciting time for your area."

Rachael is quite taken with Coonamble, but is unlikely to be relocating from the coast just yet.

"I love my community," she says "I love its people and I think it's a privilege to be able to report on all the great things in our area. I hope to be working here for a long time yet!"

### YOUR OPINIONS MATTER

Send letters to

edit@coonambletimes.com.au

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