

Annual Report 2019/2020

In presenting the Friends of Geelong Botanic Gardens (the Friends) 2019/2020 Annual Report, it is a privilege to reflect on how the Friends have worked towards fulfilling our purposes over this financial year. It is also an opportunity to express sincere appreciation of members who have assisted along the way and to acknowledge the contributions of the Friends.

Purpose of the Friends

- to act in partnership with Gardens Management and support Geelong Botanic Gardens and Eastern Park (the Gardens)
- to encourage community support and appreciation of Geelong Botanic Gardens
- to promote membership of the Friends and activities for the benefit of members
- to carry out activities to raise funds for the Friends and Geelong Botanic Gardens
- To act as Trustee of the Gift Fund

The Friends Gift Fund and Support of Geelong Botanic Gardens

Donations made to the Friends are received into the Gift Fund, of which the Friends are the Trustees. Committee works with Gardens Management to agree on appropriate projects the annual mandatory 4% dispersal of the Gift Fund to Geelong Botanic Gardens.

In 2019/2020 two events occurred that made the annual Gift Fund distribution challenging:

- the uncertainty of the position of the Director of Geelong Botanic Gardens deferred the renewal of the lapsed five-year Education Memorandum of Understanding with Geelong Botanic Gardens. This means that in this financial year no Gift Fund monies have been directed to the Geelong Botanic Gardens Education Program.
- the impact of restrictions by the covid-19 pandemic occurred at a critical time and limited the ability of contractors to work in the Gardens. The Friends' commitment to the restoration of the Hitchcock Fountain, scheduled to begin in March, could not commence. In June 2020 the Friends arranged to fund the project, fulfilling our 2019/'20 obligation. Commencement is anticipated in the next financial year.

The delayed restoration of the Furphy water tank also received a final payment from the Gift Fund to complete the project. Located adjacent to the Visitor Facility it is an impressive installation.

The substantial gift from the estate of John Norman Mann sits within the Gift Fund. Discussions with Gardens Management, due to commence in 2020 to consider a significant project that fits within the City's plans for the Gardens, have been deferred to 2020/'21.

In 2019/'20 the completion of the refurbished Walter Conservatory and construction of the new Visitor Facility in the Gardens have been eagerly welcomed by the Friends and the public. The Friends had previously committed to these projects and would like to acknowledge the contributions of Geelong Botanic Gardens Coordinator, Annette Zealley, who initiated these wonderful additions to the Gardens, and Acting Coordinator, Ashley Filipovski, for overseeing their completion.

The Friends would also like to acknowledge and thank members who have so generously donated to the Gift Fund, allowing the Friends to continue their practical support of Geelong Botanic Gardens.

Promotion of Geelong Botanic Gardens

In June 2019 the Friends were delighted to be named as a recipient of a Victorian Heritage Council award. One of this year's highlights was the presentation of the award in August 2019. The award was recognition of the Friends' outstanding promotion of the State Heritage Registered Geelong Botanic Gardens, over thirty-four years. It was a proud moment when Jayne Salmon, Annie McGeachy, Luanne Thornton, Kate Kirkhope and Allison Martland were presented with a framed certificate by Chair of the Heritage Council, Stuart McIntyre.

This prestigious award recognises the Friends who have worked to promote the heritage of the Gardens. Preserving the Gardens' historical stories through guiding, publications, fundraising and donations which assist restoration of the historic structures – all contribute to maintaining the heritage of Geelong Botanic Gardens for future generations. Congratulations to members past and present.

Membership of the Friends

Overall membership of the Friends has dropped to approximately 278 members at 30th June 2020, including a volunteer base of approximately 62 members. The impact of covid-19 on membership is significant, but we are confident that this is an anomaly and membership will increase as normality resumes. Retaining members and gaining new memberships will be a priority in the coming year.

With the demise of the Geelong Herb Society, our corporate membership continues to reduce. The Friends share the Meeting Room facilities with our three remaining corporate members: Geelong Field Naturalists; Geelong Orchid and Indoor Plant Club; Geelong Organic Gardeners.

Events and Fundraising

Although the year began with some outstanding events, the impact of covid-19 restrictions was felt keenly on the events and activities that contribute significantly to the Friends' operational and financial stability. From July 2019 these Friends' activities were very well attended:

- regular and booked guided walks, botanic art classes, weekly and seasonal Nursery sales
- movie night – “Greenfingers”
- train trip to the Melbourne Herbarium and visit to David and Shirley Johnsons' city garden
- Seniors' Week morning tea and guided walks
- Through the Garden Gates self-dive garden tour in Freshwater Creek/Moriac area
- 'Inspired by Nature 6' Botanic Art Exhibition
- Guest Speaker and supper evening with former GBG Director Ian Rogers
- Members' Christmas Drinks and Botanic Art Fair February 2020
- Ikebana workshop with Christopher James
- Guest Speaker and supper evening with Dr Fred Cahir

Unfortunately, the rest of the year's events and activities were cancelled from March 2020, including volunteering at Geelong Botanic Gardens. The cancellation of most of the 2020 events calendar was

so disappointing, but many will be re-scheduled in 2021. Many thanks to the Events team for a calendar full of engaging events and managing the disappointment of cancellations with grace.

The support from members and their understanding and patience when cancellations of events, volunteering and activities became necessary, has been greatly appreciated.

Volunteering

Providing opportunities for volunteering is a core element of the Friends. A wide range of volunteer groups cater for many interests and abilities. Interacting with the community, either as a Guide, propagating plants and selling to the public or working in select areas in the Gardens, volunteers help educate about, and engage community members with, Geelong Botanic Gardens.

The enthusiasm and regular contribution of the Friends' volunteers cannot be understated. Volunteer subcommittees are led by Coordinators, who liaise with Committee and Friends office staff. In 2019 we farewelled Jimmie Morrison as Perennial Border Coordinator at a morning tea, to honour Jimmie's significant contribution as a volunteer over more than thirty years. Sincere thanks to current Coordinators Gwen Anderson [Guides], Leanne Barnes and Roz Hill [Nursery], Ben Nunn [Perennial Border], Lyn Lang [Heritage Rose Garden], Luanne Thornton [Library] Kate Kirkhope [Events], Jane Laidlaw [Finance] and Judy Lavery [Botanic Art].

Volunteers assist at the many Friends events and functions, including community events which greatly increase the Friends' community reach. Participation in National Seniors' Week in 2019 doubled from 2018 and we look forward to rescheduling in 2021 the covid- cancelled Geelong Design Week and BGANZ National Botanic Gardens Day.

It is a credit to all that the frustration experienced due to the suspension of volunteering at the Gardens from March 2020 has not diminished the spirit of the volunteers, and it is gratifying to know that the Friends enjoy such positive and generous support.

Special Challenges in 2020

The Finance Subcommittee works with the Treasurer to make financial recommendations to the Friends' Committee of Management. The covid-19 situation in the last three and a half months of this financial year created a drop in the Friends' income. The loss of plant sales from the Friends Nursery and the cancellation and suspension of botanic art classes, combined with the cancellation of income-generating events, would have had a major impact. Fortunately, Federal Government assistance with the Job Keeper program and a variety of special grants, both local and State Government, were made available to not-for-profit groups such as the Friends. Jane Laidlaw [Friends Treasurer] was extremely successful in obtaining financial grants and grants to purchase equipment which would assist the Friends remain financially viable and operational. The Financial Report will cover these in detail.

The Friends would like to acknowledge the significant dedication and time given by Jane, who worked so diligently with staff and external agencies to minimise the impact of the enforced restrictions. The financial strength of our organisation is a testament to the work done by our current and former Friends Treasurers, who have put in place a solid financial foundation for the Friends.

Professional Development

When interacting with members and the public, in their role as advocates for the Gardens and the Friends, members need to maintain a high standard of training and knowledge.

During this financial year the Friends have supported or funded:

- five Guides to attend the biennial Guides Conference, held in Perth in November 2019.
- six volunteers to attend First Aid update training. Fully funded by the Friends, this training has been deferred to 2021 due to the covid-19 course cancellation in March. Approximately twelve volunteer first aiders have their qualifications updated on a rotational basis.
- three volunteers to update their Responsible Serving of Alcohol certificates.
- four members to attend a Botanic Gardens New Zealand and Australia (BGANZ) Network Meeting in Melbourne on 'Climate, Conservation, Collections, Community'

Geelong School of Botanical Art

The Friends' Geelong School of Botanical Art offers exceptional tuition from highly recognized botanic art tutors.

As a registered business governed by the Friends Committee, it is supported with recommendations from the GSBA subcommittee. The financial benefit to the Friends is variable but the School is a unique and highly valued aspect of the Friends. Class cancellations due to covid-19 and other contributing costs have had an impact in 2020.

The engagement of Nikki Coates to design the school's first logo produced an excellent and much-admired result. The beautiful depiction of a ginkgo leaf from the iconic heritage listed tree in the Gardens represents the Geelong School of Botanical Art wonderfully. Congratulations to the School and to Nikki for her skill and sensitive interpretation.

For twelve months Convener Judy Lavery and Administration Officer Tracey Tilbury worked with the sub-committee and tutors, organising the school's sixth biennial art exhibition, 'Inspired by Nature', held in August 2019 at the Deakin Waterfront exhibition space. Opened by Gordon Morrison, former Director of Ballarat Art Gallery, it was a successful showcase of outstanding artworks from the school's tutors and students. Congratulations to all involved in this outstanding exhibition, which represented the school and tutors so wonderfully well.

The botanic art merchandise sale, held at the Friends' 2019 Christmas Drinks and Art Fair, again showcased the extraordinary talents of some of the students and tutors of the Friends' botanical art school.

Sadly, all face to face botanic art classes were cancelled in March 2020 due to covid-19 regulations. The Friends would like to express gratitude for the patience and understanding of tutors and students during this disappointing time. We acknowledge the excellence of the courses and the expertise of our tutors and sincerely thank them for their commitment to the Geelong School of Botanical Art.

Special Acknowledgement

The Friends Committee of Management has striven to maintain a strong, resourceful and engaging organisation, responding to the needs of its members and supporting Geelong Botanic Gardens. Special thanks, particularly during the period of covid-19 restrictions, to the Committee and the

Friends office staff, who remained employed and continued working alone at the office for such an extended period. Monthly Zoom meetings were initiated, to enable everyone to remain in touch and continue to administer the Friends' affairs remotely.

In what suddenly became a challenging year it is with admiration that we can reflect on how quickly and effectively the Friends rose to the challenges. Learning new skills to enable the Friends to remain viable and relevant has been critically important.

The financial, education and social achievements of the first eight months stood us in good stead for the more difficult times, but the Friends have fared well mainly because of the support and dedication of the members of Friends of Geelong Botanic Gardens.

Sincere thanks and best wishes to all who have contributed, no matter how big or small a part, to another successful and memorable year for the Friends.

Allison Martland

President FGBG