

Presidents Report

In my report last year I noted that the numbers of volunteers were down, our finances were in poor shape and we had reluctantly had to advise Claire van Loon Sim that we couldn't renew her contract. I think it was fair to say that the committee all felt rather gloomy about our prospects. I am pleased to report that 2013 has been a very positive year for the Friends. This has been made possible by the efforts of all our volunteers, committee members and garden staff.

Our finances have improved steadily due mainly to plant sales, membership fees and income received from meeting and greeting cruise ship visitors. We are not by any means well endowed with funds but we are not so close to being down to our last few dollars, which is very reassuring. It is good to have a few dollars in the bank that we can draw on if we need to.

Our volunteer team has also grown considerably since this time last year. We now have a very healthy number of wonderful volunteers who are making a great contribution to the Information Centre. Louise continues to ably lead this team and gives countless hours of her time to keep everything ticking along smoothly. Thank you to you all for your generous support of the garden. We greatly appreciate your enthusiasm and effort.

The volunteers have continued to meet and greet cruise ship visitors to the garden, with another busy season almost over for another year. I reported last year that the committee hoped to extend the meet and greet service to more formal tours. Thanks to the efforts of Annette Riley and her new team of tour guides this has come to fruition. A new team of guides has been trained and are ready and available to provide tours to the public. Tours are available each day a cruise ship is in town and during weekends. So far the numbers of people requesting tours has not been large but we are hopeful that as word gets around the numbers will increase. So please tell your friends and family that tours are available, the cost is very reasonable at \$7 per head. Bookings can be made either at the Information Centre in the Octagon or at the Information Centre.

Our regular plant sales were successful once again thanks to the members of the propagation group, the garden staff and the support of local businesses who donated plants or had a stall.

The development plans for the upper garden are progressing steadily but more slowly than we would have hoped. Resource consent was required for the new buildings and the submission period for the application has recently closed. It is likely that a hearing will need to be held and we are hopeful that this will proceed quickly and without too much contention.

The Friends have once again organised a successful series of talks in the garden on Sunday afternoons. Thanks go to Louise for doing the majority of the organising of these events and to all the speakers who gave their time.

The 150th celebrations are underway and 2013 is going to be very busy year for the Garden. Copies of the calendar of events were recently posted or emailed to members so please keep an eye out for what is coming up next.

We are planning a celebratory dinner on Satd 29th June, the day before the actual birthday, at which we will be auctioning some botanical art work by Audrey Eagle and some rare plants. We also hope to have a speaker at the dinner. Funds raised at the dinner will be used to support the ongoing development of the garden.

On the 30th June, which is the actual anniversary of the founding of the Garden, we will be unveiling a commemorative sculpture, which will be located in the lower garden between the duck pond and the café. The design of the sculpture is not complete yet but what we have seen so far looks very attractive.

For Rhododendron Day we are planning a spring festival. In the morning will be the traditional plant sale and in the afternoon there will be a concert in the bandstand and fun activities for families and children. The spring festival will also mark the opening of the international botanic gardens congress, which is to be held in Dunedin. This event will bring many overseas visitors to the Garden and the city and will provide a wonderful opportunity for us to show off our Garden to the world.

All of these events take a lot of time to organise. I would like to acknowledge the huge efforts that the Garden staff makes to support these activities, very often out of work hours. Thanks to you all.

I would also like to thank my fellow committee members who have all worked hard during the year to get the Friends back onto a sounder and more positive footing. Special thanks to Louise and Annette for their efforts in the Information Centre and with establishing the garden tours. Unfortunately two of our committee members are standing down from the committee this year, Faye Shilling and Menno Kluiters. Thank you for all your support and help during your time on the committee and we hope that we will continue to see you out and about in the Garden.

This year will be challenging but with the team we have on board I am sure it will be very successful and that we can continue to build on the successes and progress that we made during 2012.

Thank you all for coming this evening and for your ongoing support.