

PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL BOARD REPORT 2018/19

It is hard to believe that it is a year since I took on the Presidency of the Rotary Club of Sydney in July 2018. Yet, when I referred to my notes, I noticed that I have written 44 letters on a fairly regular basis to all our members, and these notes reflect the wide range of activities in which we have engaged.

My report is not a record of a President's achievements, but reflects the achievements of the whole club in our Rotary year. We are eagerly looking forward to the meetings that lie ahead of us under the leadership of our new President, Barbara Ward, and the new committees.

We have endeavoured to do things a little differently in terms of meetings and I consider it to be important to be prepared to try new patterns and ventures together. The introduction of breakfast meetings and more casual opportunities to meet and talk have been a mark of this attempt to bring freshness to the club. We have seen really high attendances at some of the new style of meetings.

All of this has been matched by a strong team of speakers, among them were Nick Farr-Jones AM, Dr Simon Longstaff AO, Ann Sherry AO, Dr Ian Pollard, Leigh Hatcher, Mike Baird, Dr Keith Suter AM, Mark Scott AO, Ross Greenwood, Warren Mundine AO, Diane Smith-Gander, Graeme Cowan and Sandra Chipchase. It has been good to see many of our own members engaged in leading the meetings – and I recall one of our own members, Shirley Randell AO, when she led our thinking around International Women's Day.

As I reflect on this year's meetings, I mention the Consular Lunch in particular which was wonderfully organised, as was the Citizenship Ceremony. Who could forget the wonderful address by Associate Professor Munjed Al Munderis, a leading orthopaedic surgeon. His story was not only moving, but also helped us to see the quality of some of those people who have become Australian citizens, often arriving in Australia through difficult circumstances and then, subsequently, making an outstanding contribution. These events reflected the importance of the club's engagement in the wider community. We would need to add to these meetings the Police Awards Dinner (and the splendid work of John Given OAM) and the continued support for District activities in the traditional Rotary way. Additionally, our ANZAC Day Barbecue brought people together to work for good not only in fundraising, but also in community engagement on that important day in our Australian calendar. Our Peacebuilding Group moves from strength to strength.

Before I refer to this year's club project, it is worthy of note that the ongoing success of the Burrumbuttock Hay Runners is helping to make a real difference in the lives of people in drought-stricken areas of Northern NSW and Queensland. Geoff Willbow continues to help maintain this work, but it has been good to see Roger Xie taking on some responsibility. There are many other activities in which the club has been involved and we are grateful for the commitment of members of such quality who help to deliver such programs. If I had the time I would want to affirm the Mega-Swim, Vision Beyond AUS, City2Surf, and other Rotary Foundation activities. Incidentally, the Vivid Sydney Cruise had more attending this year than ever before – another well-organised fellowship activity.

The club expresses its commitment to District and, during the year, we have welcomed at our meetings Past District Governor, Sue Hayward, as well as the enthusiastic Dianne North, our new

District Governor. Sydney Rotary Club continues to play an active role in the District and I have every reason to believe this will continue.

Regarding the President's Project this year, we recognised that this would be the last President's Project, prior to the enormous Centenary Celebrations of 2021. I am grateful to all who supported our Rotary *Building Resilience* project, which has brought to the forefront of people's minds the importance of Suicide Awareness. In addition to a training evening in September, we held a Consultation Day in February with major contributors being Wally Lewis, Andrew Rochford, Graeme Cowan and Christine Morgan. This event focused upon suicide and also the broader issue of mental health. I was grateful to my own people from Wesley Mission who helped to contribute to that day, which was not primarily about fundraising, but a genuine attempt to bring the whole theme to people's attention. In terms of fundraising, we had a wonderful *Cabaret with the Chefs* event held at the City Tatts. I am grateful to all who helped to make these events a success, both in terms of fundraising and in raising awareness. The project was supported by Rotary International and, amongst many activities, a DVD has been produced, which will be used in schools across Australia and centres upon helping young people to be alert of the challenges of mental health and suicide, especially in the realm of cyber bullying.

I conclude by making two short, but I hope significant, comments: Firstly, I want to acknowledge the five people who I recognised with Paul Harris Fellowship Awards at our *Cocktail Evening* at Sydney Town Hall – Shane Herbert, David Hirsch, Barbara Ward, Paul Wenham and Tony Benner. All who received awards were deeply appreciative, but equally recognised the contribution that Rotary has made to their lives.

Finally, I want to thank everyone who has helped to make my year a meaningful one. Some of the work carried out by our people, such as our Treasurer, Membership Secretary, Sergeant-at-Arms and Front of House generally, often goes unrecognised, but I want to express my appreciation to each of them. It is also pleasing that Glenn Stafford has taken on the responsibility of Club Secretary. For a substantial time, I had to manage without a Secretary and Glenn's arrival into this role is most welcome and will make all the difference moving forward.

As I began, I offered the thought that my year would be one that leads into the special program encompassing the three years of our Centenary. I am confident that this will be a very positive contribution that the Rotary Club of Sydney, in partnership with our friends in the Rotary Clubs of Melbourne, Auckland and Wellington, will make in both affirming what Rotary is and, in partnership with UNICEF, bringing real and lasting medical support across the Pacific. I met with the President of the Rotary Club of Melbourne on three occasions during the year, helping to give energy and meaning to our special relationship. It was interesting during my final week as President of the Rotary Club of Sydney, I was in the Kingdom of Tonga which is one of the countries to benefit from our Centenary project – *Give Every Child a Future* - a bold ambition to immunise 100,000 children across nine Pacific Island countries.

My year began with a splendid handover – and recently concluded with another equally splendid meeting as a new year began with enthusiasm. It has been a joy and a privilege to serve and I offer my support for the future.

Keith V Garner, AM
Immediate Past-President, Rotary Club of Sydney

15 July 2019