

# International Women's Day

## An extraordinary day in March

By Sonia Muir, RWN Coordinator

My clothes carry a lingering mothball aroma as I dress proudly this warm autumn Dubbo morning. My skirt is a length of rough black woollen fabric with gold and white designs made by my grandmother and secured by a hand woven belt. A delicate white blouse intricately embroidered with red and silver cross stitching does not betray her calloused village hands. At this special International Women's Day\* event I want to proclaim my rural Romanian heritage.

I join 750 women entering the RSL club auditorium. Over half left home in this morning's darkness to catch a free bus and will return in the black of night. A sea of heads chat with neighbours, scan the room for friends or look with anticipation at a row of empty chairs waiting to host our speakers on stage.

**Natalie Bramble** (my joint MC) and I each take a deep breath. I move to the microphone and with a trembling voice begin the day.

**Bubby Towney**, a local elder, welcomes us warmly to Wiradjuri land followed by the **Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald**. He tells us how this event celebrates women's achievements while also acknowledging the important roles rural women play within families, communities and to the overall fabric of Australian life. He pays tribute to many amazing women attending the event:

**'Kate Schwager**, the winner of the 2006 NSW Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) Rural Women's Award, runs a cotton and wheat share farming operation outside Wee Waa with her family and coordinates Australia's largest Network of Women in Cotton. She established the Wee Waa Inc website to help promote her region's agriculture and tourism and the local businesses and community groups it supports.

**'Eleanor Cook**, the 2007 Rural Women's Award winner, is the editor of the local Coolah newspaper and helps run the family

farm. She is establishing a community-managed trust model where individuals, families and businesses can bequeath funds tax-free to their community. Ten years ago Eleanor helped establish Coolah's District Development Group which has secured \$1.5 million in funding for a range of tourism, sporting and cultural services for the town.

**'Kim Goldsmith** lives on a farm near Dubbo and has drawn on her creative spirit and journalistic skills to help her get through the current drought. She established the Fresh Arts group and has seen it become a vibrant, supportive and professional organisation.

**'Maggie Gordon** lives on a grazing property near Trangie. She can often be heard on the radio performing her poems and has published much of her writing. In 2004 her musical *Eureka* was performed in Melbourne. She spends endless hours on the roadside droving sheep, which provides her time to think and write.



Deborah Lee (NSW DPI), Mahboba Rawi, guest speaker (Mahboba's Promise), Natalie Bramble (Women Out West) & Robyn Moore (guest speaker)

**'Marie Russell** lives in the outback on a property near Tilpa and spends many hours travelling to attend meetings and contribute to her community. She sits on a number of national, state and local boards.

**'Liz Tourle** and her husband have a sixth generation 1100 acre wool and cropping property near Dubbo. 'Oxley Downs' was the setting for the television series 'Outback House'. The Tourles bought the series buildings, which were to be demolished, and are developing an off-farm/on-farm business for special events and educational experiences.

**'Jenny Croft** lives on a property at Spring Ridge and works as a Drought Support Worker (DSW) providing personal support, information and referrals to appropriate services. **Tania Chesworth** and **Jan Bruce** are also DSWs working to supplement farming incomes. They are typical of so many rural women who often travel thousands of kilometres to be involved in agri-politics, community activities and engage in work off-farm.

These are just a few examples of women here today but I know each and every one of you has a story to tell.'

The day continues as we share journeys that take us from the parched gardens of Trangie to the streets of Afghanistan, finishing up in our own backyards.

**Amanda Ferrari** and **Kerri Kerin** both share their passion for family and the desire to make a difference in their community. We laugh at their transformations into *real* farming women and hear about the Macquarie Matrons fundraising group and their development of the Desperate Gardenwives manual.

**Mahboba Rawi** humbly takes the centre stage dressed in a white veil. She talks about poverty in Afghanistan and we feel blessed to have been born in The West. Mahboba touches our hearts with her

compassion and generosity. How many of us would sell our jewellery, carpets and furniture to fund those less fortunate and start an international aid agency? We learn how one person is making a difference. She connects us woman to woman and the veil no longer symbolises an ominous religious barrier. Peace begins in that room as we swarm to buy her book and learn more about Mahboba's Promise.

**Robyn Moore** sings the Spray and Wipe jingle and we nod in recognition of a voice so well-known across Australia. She ignites in us the inner clown. We laugh together and feel uplifted. We learn the importance of loving ourselves. We go home determined to be 'tired and hungry', 'tired and grateful' or 'tired and loving', but never again to be 'tired and grumpy'. We realise we can do so much to create harmony and rekindle magic in our relationships.

We grab our lunch, sit in huddles and continue conversations. I feel my personal inspiration meter shoot off the scale as the day comes to a close, albeit too soon.

I will sleep soundly tonight knowing something special happened today and remember the words of Robyn's alter ego – Blinky Bill... 'Just being me' is EXTRAORDINARY! ■

A special thank you to our partners: NSW Department of Primary Industries Drought Program; Women Out West; NSW Premier's Department Office for Women; and the local bus coordinators who helped make it possible for rural women from far and wide to participate in this special event. A total of \$842 was raised for drought from stallholders and donations given on the day.

**For information about Mahboba's Promise go to: [www.mahbobaspromise.org](http://www.mahbobaspromise.org)**

*\*International Women's Day is acknowledged globally every year on March 8 to celebrate women's gains and bring attention to gender issues that still face communities all over the world.*

## special thanks...

*Thank you for a inspirational day. It was truly a marvellous occasion and it was fun meeting so many women from across the State.*

*Everyone I spoke with over lunch had complimentary things to say about the guest speakers and I don't think I have laughed so much for a long, long time.*

*We all enjoyed the delicious lunch – what a great variety of beautifully prepared salad boxes with all sorts of interesting goodies inside! The venue was spacious, excellent audio facilities, and the best of amenities.*

*Clearly, everyone had done a great deal of work to ensure the day was a treat for us all. My only disappointment was that it passed far too quickly.*

*Thank you so much for the opportunity to attend this very memorable day. Well done, you really excelled yourselves.*

*~ Rhoma Hale, Molong*

*Thank you for such a great day. It was overwhelming – when I walked away from the Dubbo RSL yesterday I felt instantly lonely. To be part of such a lovely group of like-minded women is a rarity, and to sit and listen to you all speak was humbling.*

*I enjoyed the chats in the toot, the chats in the tea line, the chats when we were only meant to be stretching and the good cheer whilst having our lunch. I would like to find a different word to 'networking' as it doesn't properly define the rapport and security you have in such a gathering.*

*~ Liz Tourle, Dubbo*

*What a wonderful day. I enjoyed hearing all the speakers and found myself writing up many pages of words spoken by the women. It was inspiring to hear their accounts of life, through hardships and achievements.*

*On our return to West Wyalong by bus, we stopped at Forbes McDonalds for a break – two other buses had the same idea – well, McDonalds had an onslaught of women in the store and the atmosphere was magic – all these happy, smiling faces.*

*~ Ellen Williams, Ungarie*





# Cooking communities

By Rebel Black, Lightning Ridge

There are two things I am passionate about, food and my community. In fact, they are not dissimilar in their embodiment and the feeling that I get from both.

As a cook, I am not much of a recipe follower, though I collect recipe books and read them avidly for inspiration and knowledge – I prefer the try and taste method.

However, when it comes to baking, following a recipe becomes crucial – particularly, I have found, when baking bread.

It is very easy to get a loaf of bread wrong – too much kneading will leave it loose and it will sink, not enough and it will be like eating a brick.

In a sense, it is much the same with community development. When applying the ‘try and taste’ method in a community, as in cooking, there is greater margin for error – for every stunning outcome, there are equally as many failures.

But, if you carefully follow the rules (the Method) you are more likely to achieve a result – which is not to say that a little extra tasting can’t go a long way to improve a recipe – or find a new creation!

The trick is that community development relies on people – who by their nature are much less malleable than a bag of flour or a kilo of fillet steak!

## THE METHOD

Start with the end in mind. When you start cooking you usually have a vision of what you want the outcome to be. If you are following a recipe in a book, there is usually a picture of the finished product, a visual reminder of the desired outcome. If you do not start with this vision, visual or otherwise, you are more likely to end up with an ordinary or disastrous meal.

The same applies in communities – setting goals and having a clear vision is crucial to avoid ending up with a less desirable outcome, or, worse, no outcome at all.

## PLANNING

Planning to cook is not imperative, but it helps enormously. There is nothing worse than scanning a recipe and getting half way through cooking it, only to realise that you don’t have that one crucial ingredient that cannot be substituted – and the shops are shut, or you live 50 km from town! Community development is the same. A carefully laid-out plan that enables the reader and the enactors

to understand clearly the objectives, processes and end result will mean that the implementation is a lot smoother. Having said that, there must also be flexibility in the plan – as already stated, people are not always as easy to adapt as food ingredients!

## RECIPES

There is no point reinventing the wheel! People who write cook books do so because they have skill and have spent many years perfecting their art and have test kitchens in which to try and fail and try again – the result of which is the recipe for novices to follow.

There are so many fantastic community-based projects out there that are documented and have similar outcomes or goals to those of many other communities who may be just starting out. If we use the evidence, projects, ideas and strategies of those who have gone before us and tap into the extensive networks available, we have everything to learn from other communities’ successes and failures!

## GREAT INGREDIENTS

In order to achieve great results in the culinary arts, it is imperative to have wonderful fresh ingredients: all the TV chefs say so! In the community



## Welcome to Coonamble!

Anyone who has moved to a new place knows how sometimes it can be hard to fit in and make new friends, but for people new to the Coonamble district this could not be farther from the truth.

Each year the town of Coonamble, situated in north-west NSW, holds a ‘Welcome to Coonamble Dinner’ for anyone new to town. It is a great opportunity to meet members of the community and to find what services

development scenario the same rule applies and, in this instance, I believe the ingredients are the people – every community has them!

### Ingredients

Below is my take on the Community Bread ingredients!

■ **Flour** (the foundation builders) – these people are the backbone of the community, those who are always on hand to join the new committee and who work tirelessly for the good of the collective and form the foundation for the dough.

■ **Butter** (the light touch) – these people are crucial as they add that little something extra to projects and make them more fun or more effective, and make the dough just right.

■ **Yeast** (the ideas of men and women) – these are the people who – if provided with the correct amount of guidance – come up with the splendid project ideas or ways to move forward, but if not started, will leave the bread heavy.

■ **Sugar and salt** (the structuralists) – these people are crucial to the success of the community. They provide the structure from which all other ingredients can work, they are the planners, the reporters, the submission writers and the strategists. Without these ingredients the dough lacks body and will fall apart in the final cooking.

■ **Warm water** (the encouragers) – these are the people who provide the final push to the rest of the ingredients and ensure the dough rises.

### PATIENCE AND PERSISTENCE

You won't always get it right the first time – even with a recipe. I cannot count how many times I have had unhappy cooking experiences where the result didn't end up as I envisioned (though sometimes my expectations are too high) – the same can be said for community development. However, the key is not to give up at the first flop. It is from our failures that we learn and grow: it just takes time and action!

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### COMMITMENT AND PASSION

An uncommitted cook will always create mediocre food while a passionate foodie will create an environment in which eating a meal is an act that is savoured and delighted in, rather than being an everyday necessity. Community development must also be undertaken with the same commitment and passion. More often than not community development is a labour of love and its intensity requires 100% commitment if the results are to be visionary and long lasting.

There is no one-size-fits-all recipe for success in cooking, or in community – everyone has different tastes, expectations and requirements.

However, there is an art in baking a loaf of bread – a science that no one can deny. A few simple ingredients, combined in the right way, with the correct amount of kneading and cooking, will result in the perfect loaf. Community development is also both an art and a science. It is a matter of deciphering the recipe, finding the ingredients (people) and applying the method.

Happy cooking! ■

### RED EARTH'S DAWNING

Silhouetted sunrise  
Of ever lightening skies  
Gentle tree breeze  
With dancing gum leaves  
Calling songs  
Of the waking birds  
This chorus belongs  
To the early morning earth.

Peace of the universe  
As all of nature wakes  
Before the blistering sun  
On this red soil bakes.  
The dawn of this day  
Breaks through this way  
As this land gently opens its eyes.

The promise of light  
Delivered from each night  
Rolls in its magical way  
As the morning shadows lift  
In life's wondrous gift  
This earth begins its newest day.

© GEMMA RIDLEY, WAGGA WAGGA

and activities are available in and around Coonamble.

The dinner is organised by a committee made up of most community groups in town. Each year a particular group chairs the meeting. Invitations are sent to any new residents in the area that have arrived in the last 12 months. There is usually a good turn-out of new teachers, new council staff, and others new to Coonamble.

The aim of the dinner is to let people know the variety of things that there are to see and do in the community.

The whole evening is free and each community group takes charge of a particular part of the night. Representatives from sporting and social clubs are also on hand to let the new residents know how they can get involved.

The dinners have been hugely successful and are now a regular fixture on the Coonamble event calendar. In 2006 the dinner celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and the way things are going they'll be around for many years to come! ■

# Your community – your future

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Administered by the NSW Department of State and Regional Development (DSRD), the Main Street Small Towns Program and Towns and Villages Futures Program help communities find a new direction based on their unique strengths.

The programs are designed to improve the general business climate and benefit the broader community.

The Main Street Small Towns Program is available to localities with a population greater than 2000. It aims to increase business and economic activity and to foster a commitment from local government for economic development.

The Towns and Villages Futures Program works to stimulate economic growth and create a positive environment for business in communities with a population of less than 2000. Local council involvement is encouraged.

Applications are invited from sponsoring organisations such as chambers of commerce or local councils on behalf of their community.

## HELP FOR COMMUNITIES

1. Funding is available to support communities in the strategic planning process. This usually involves planning workshops facilitated by one of the Department's community economic development managers or a consultant chosen by the community. These workshops help the community identify projects that will increase local economic activity.

2. Funding is also available under these programs for: economic development officer's or co-ordinator's salaries (Main Street Small Towns Program only); skills training for co-ordinators and committee members; business retention and expansion surveys; business marketing workshops; reviewing and updating an existing community strategic plan; business development projects; developing and strengthening business networks; events and tourism projects (if not funded by

Tourism NSW); marketing and promotion.

3. Networking and skills development support is available through the Statewide Community Economic Development Conference, regional forums and regional tours of communities organised by DSRD. The Department's regional network of community economic development managers provide ongoing advice and information. A series of self help modules to assist practitioners is available at: [www.regionalcommunities.nsw.gov.au](http://www.regionalcommunities.nsw.gov.au)

## WHAT COMMUNITIES HAVE ACHIEVED

Each year more than 70 regional communities access these programs to increase business activity and lift the profile and morale of their towns.

Program participants leverage funds through partnerships with different levels of government, local organisations and businesses. Projects typically create employment, generate additional income and attract visitors to these communities.

To address local industry skill shortages Cessnock Hospitality Industry Preparation Scheme has created a pathway for unemployed people to gain work placements with local businesses, training, mentoring and access to community services.

Brunswick Heads continues to build its family friendly reputation with its 'Simple Pleasures' marketing campaign. Moruya's 'Make it in Moruya' customer loyalty campaign has attracted strong support from local businesses and residents.

Communities being bypassed through highway upgrades such as Bulahdelah have marketed their natural assets, outdoor activities and unique businesses in their visitor promotion campaigns. Local businesses have participated in workshops to hone their business and marketing skills.

Volunteers in Gulargambone transformed their Old Picture Theatre into the vibrant 2828 Centre. It boasts a tourist information centre, arts and produce outlet, cinema,

award-winning café, library and a function centre. Ideas for a range of souvenirs were brainstormed in local workshops. These workshops also initiated the production of the corrugated iron galah sculptures now scattered throughout the village and along all roads into Gulargambone. The corrugated iron galah sculptures and some souvenirs now produced locally are for sale through local outlets including the 2828 Centre.

Outback Beds Inc, a network of accommodation providers, has developed a business and marketing plan and undertaken promotional activities. Shellharbour and Wollongong City Councils are enhancing the skills of start-up and home-based businesses by hosting monthly networking meetings and mini expos twice yearly.

Over 300 people attended the first Organic Livestock Conference in Balranald in the Murray Region to assist and encourage pastoralists to establish a viable organic lamb industry. St Clements Retreat at Galong in the South East Region has promoted their restored and expanded conference facilities through brochures and their website to increase usage of the facility.

Kyogle, Mayfield, Hamilton, Charlestown and Karuah prepared town marketing plans and have developed their own branding and complementary marketing kits for use by local businesses.

Tourism strategies for Gwydir and Parkes shires have been developed by the local councils. Warrumbungle Shire Council has prepared an economic development and tourism plan for their local government area.

The history and aspects of life today in Kurri Kurri and the surrounding villages are depicted through over 35 murals covering the buildings in the town centre and in the villages. Bus tours to view the murals bring up to 150 visitors into these communities each week generating income for local businesses.