

Walking trail studies have been undertaken by Nimbin and Uki. Paterson in the Hunter Region is promoting their heritage walking trail by the river near their village centre. Gloucester, also in the Hunter Region, promotes their local farm gate trail on the www.essentiallybarrington.com.au website.

Numerous local councils such as Richmond Valley, Young, Shellharbour, Cabonne, Dungog, Great Lakes, Nambucca, Murray, Coolamon and Inverell have continued to employ their economic development officers on a permanent basis after the conclusion of DSRD funding assistance for the positions.

Lake Macquarie Council has developed a business prospectus.

Batlow in the Riverina Region and Dalgety in the Australian Capital Region both employed an events co-ordinator to

professionally enhance existing events and introduce new community events.

Numerous new festivals identified in community strategic plans have been funded over a number of years and their viability enhanced, including Speed on Tweed at Murwillumbah, Tullamore Irish Festival, Old Bar Festival, Nosh on the Namoi at Narrabri, Coolamon on Display and Collector Pumpkin Festival.

The inaugural Inverell on Display expo attracted over 80 exhibitors and 5,500 people and is now being run biannually. Morpeth Wedding Expo, initially focused on the promotion of historic Morpeth as a wedding location, has grown to incorporate the promotion of the broader Maitland area as a romantic and wedding location. A co-operative marketing campaign by Thredbo businesses

– Thredbo Weddings Brand – has attracted over 70 weddings in 12 months.

HOW TO HELP YOUR COMMUNITY

For application forms and more information about the Main Street Small Towns Program and Towns and Villages Futures Program, Ph: 02 9338 6719, Email: dsrdced@business.nsw.gov.au or go to: www.regionalcommunities.nsw.gov.au

***There's plenty of intelligence
in the world, but the courage
to do things differently is in
short supply.***

MARILYN VOS SAVANT



Building for our future

Ardlethan is a rural service town of 450 people situated in the heart of the Riverina. Located at the intersection of the Newell and Burley Griffin Highways, Ardlethan is famous as the birthplace of the Kelpie Dog breed developed by Jack Gleeson, a manager at Bolero Station in the 1870s. Battered by several years of drought and the closure of the town's major employer, the Ardlethan Tin Mine, one might expect that such a community would lie down and wait for a miracle. But not Ardlethan!

When the Ardlethan community was also faced with the threat of losing its

only preschool, the whole community commenced a crusade. Young and old, from churches to football clubs, the community combined not only to keep their preschool, but to develop a precinct that combined a preschool, health and aged care facilities and a community centre. The Centre was to be named the Mullins Centre in honour of Father Tom Mullins, Ardlethan's first parish priest whose record of heroism won him a Military Cross in World War 1, but, more importantly, who was loved and admired by the whole of the Ardlethan community.

A wonderful partnership was created with the community and its local Council, followed quickly by a donation of a significant package of land from the Catholic Church. The Committee got to work – fundraising over \$55,000 through an auction, the achievement of a small grant from Graincorp and the mighty 'Raffle Brigade' which did the rounds at every local sporting event and social gathering for the next three years. Then came the 'biggie' in the successful securing of a \$200,000 grant from the

NSW Department of Community Services.

All the hard work and headache quickly disappeared when builders commenced work last week. The new facility will house a new Preschool, including new toilets, kitchen, office/admin and storerooms; as well as a new Community Centre. Of course, the community hasn't finished yet and aims to continue to improve and develop these facilities in their small rural town. On completion of this stage, the Mullins Centre Committee and Coolamon Shire Council are now researching the feasibility of building a set of aged care units and landscaping the whole precinct.

The Committee's adopted motto 'Building for our Future' supports its community's belief in the need to challenge its predicaments and vigorously work to ensure that its residents have the facilities and services needed to enhance and maintain its community wellbeing.

Bring back the shed



COL MINOGUE, PHOTO COURTESY OF MENSHEDES AUSTRALIA

The growing problems with men's health, isolation, loneliness and depression are now looming as major health issues in Australia. Men's Sheds can play a significant and practical role in addressing these and other men's issues and at the same time act as a catalyst in stimulating communities economic activities.

What is a Men's Shed?

A Men's Shed is a place to meet and develop new friends and mateship, have fun and do practical things. Currently there are 200 Men's Sheds operating throughout Australia, with 80 per cent of these located in non-metropolitan areas.

Men's Sheds offer better health, improved lifestyle, job opportunity, skills development and economic activity and are an inexpensive alternative to government programs dealing with men's health issues.

Men's Sheds also help to address issues of isolation and loneliness faced by men going through a transition. They may be young or old, with

or without a partner, and be differently abled.

Men's Sheds capture and pass on skills and craftsmanship which would otherwise be lost in a community.

Why we need Men's Sheds

The expansion of Men's Sheds in rural and regional communities has been an important initiative in dealing with the current drought and fires and their impact on health. They provide an acceptable outlet and information source for men who may not seek help. And some are making money for their community.

While men often have their own shed or workshop, this can lead to further isolation and withdrawal from family and community life. The Mensheds Australia movement uses the concept of work and problem solving in a shed together with meeting and solving these problems with others. Mensheds Australia is working towards helping Men's Sheds become valued and sustainable assets in their communities.

A successful example is the Armidale Men's Shed, which was established by taking over an existing timber and joinery business. Building financial sustainability was the first task. Membership is now around 50 and business earnings are rising. It features the development of skills in using wood, as well as being a social place for men with a common interest in wood. It is a place to help men through building technical,

social and workplace skills and restoring confidence. It is also an incubator of new businesses linked to working with timber.

'Women naturally recognise the need for such meetings and working together, but it has taken the development of Mensheds Australia to show men how they can benefit from getting together with others,' said Peter Sergeant, Managing Director of Mensheds Australia.

'Secret men's business, grumpy old men and other such sayings are used to typify the plight of men, particularly in rural and remote areas. They signal an underlying problem in dealing with men's health. It is secret because most people do not understand what men are facing in rural and remote areas, and they are grumpy because no one seems to care and there seem to be no answers.

'As remoteness increases and town size decreases, involvement in networks and community activities becomes a critical part of adult learning as well as of social, family and economic wellbeing. Most men want learning provided in informal, practical group settings, locally and on-site through organisations in which they feel comfortable. Men generally learn best by doing and through practice in familiar situations, through organisations and people they know and trust.'

Community Benefits

Men's Sheds provide many significant benefits for communities including:

an increase in economic activity through job creation; improved productivity of older people; reduction of youth unemployment; improvement of men's health and well-being; retention of skills and the development of new skills; increase in tourism activity; more opportunities to attract community resources and funding; low cost development of heritage, tourism and other community projects; and

recognition of older men's skills and knowledge, giving them a strong sense of worth.

Moving forward, together

Mensheds Australia's vision is that every community in Australia will have a men's shed to: address the issues of men's health; engage men including the elderly, differently-abled, youth, Indigenous, veterans and other groups, to specifically

address isolation, loneliness and depression; support the social interaction of men in transitional periods (e.g. redundancy, bereavement, retirement, ill-health, divorce, relocation, respite care); and share, disseminate and preserve skills and interests that are relevant to the community. ■

For help establishing a Men's Shed in your community or help to keep your existing

Men's Shed going, go to:
www.mensheds.com.au,
email: info@mensheds.com.au
or Ph: 02 8213 8699.

The world needs dreamers and the world needs doers. But above all, the world needs dreamers who do.

SARAH BAN BREATHNACH

RAIN FROM NOWHERE

His cattle didn't get a bid, they were fairly bloody poor,
What was he going to do? He couldn't feed them anymore,
The dams were all but dry, hay was thirteen bucks a bale,
Last month's talk of rain was just a fairytale.

His credit had run out, no chance to pay what's owed,
Bad thoughts ran through his head as he drove down Gully Road.
'Geez, Great Grandad bought the place back in 1898,
'Now I'm such a useless bastard, I'll have to shut the gate.

'Can't support my wife and kids, not like dad and those before,
'Crikey, Grandma kept it going while Pop fought in the war.'
With depression now his master, he abandoned what was right,
There's no place in life for failures, he'd end it all tonight.

There were still some things to do, he'd have to shoot the cattle first,
Of all the jobs he'd ever done, that would be the worst.
He'd have a shower, watch the news, then they'd all sit down for tea
Read his kids a bedtime story, watch some more TV,

Kiss his wife goodnight, say he was off to shoot some roos
Then in a paddock far away he'd blow away the blues.
But he drove in the gate and stopped – as he always had
To check the roadside mailbox – and found a letter from his Dad.

Now his dad was not a writer, Mum did all the cards and mail
But he knew the style from the notebooks that he used at cattle sales.
He sensed the nature of its contents, felt moisture in his eyes,
Just the fact his dad had written was enough to make him cry.

'Son, I know it's bloody tough, it's a cruel and twisted game,
This life upon the land when you're screaming out for rain,
There's no candle in the darkness, not a single speck of light.
But don't let the demon get you, you have to do what's right.

'I don't know what's in your head but push the bad thoughts well away.
See, you'll always have your family at the back end of the day;
You have to talk to someone, and yes I know I rarely did.
But you have to think about Fiona and think about the kids.

'I'm worried about you son, you haven't rung for quite a while,
I know the road you're on 'cause I've walked every bloody mile.
The date? December 7 back in 1983,
Behind the shed I had the shotgun rested in the brigalow tree.

'See, I'd borrowed way too much to buy the Johnson place;
Then it didn't rain for years and we got bombed by interest rates.
The bank was at the door, I didn't think I had a choice,
I began to squeeze the trigger – that's when I heard your voice.

'You said "Where are you Daddy? It's time to play our game
I've got Squatter all set up, you might get General Rain."
It really was that close, you're the one that stopped me son,
And you're the one that taught me there's no answer in a gun.

'Just remember people love you, good friends won't let you down.
Look, you might have to swallow pride and get a job in town,
Just 'til things come good, son, you've always got a choice.
And when you get this letter ring me, 'cause I'd love to hear your voice.'

Well he cried and laughed and shook his head then put the truck in gear,
Shut his eyes and hugged his dad in a vision that was clear.
Dropped the cattle at the yards, put the truck away,
Filled the troughs the best he could and fed his last ten bales of hay.

Then he strode towards the homestead, shoulders back and head held high,
He still knew the road was tough but there was purpose in his eye.
He called for his wife and children, who'd lived through all his pain,
Hugs said more than words – he'd come back to them again.

They talked of silver linings, how good times always follow bad,
Then he walked towards the phone, picked it up and rang his Dad.
And while the kids set up Squatter, he hugged his wife again,
Then they heard the roll of thunder and they smelt the smell of rain.

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NEED HELP? – BEYOND BLUE: 1300 224 636
IT'S A PHONE – THE SALVATION ARMY: 02 9331 2000
CALL AWAY – LIFELINE: 13 11 14

What makes a community group excellent?

By Rhonda Galbally, CEO, Our Community. (Website: www.ourcommunity.com.au)

In an old Indian tale six blind men were once sent out to evaluate an elephant.

One, feeling at the flank, said, 'The elephant is like a wall. We should evaluate it on such measures as support, strength and insulation properties.'

Another felt the tail, and said, 'As the elephant is very like a rope, we should be looking at tensile strength and length/weight ratio.'

The man at the ear said, 'The elephant is very much like a fan so the appropriate measures are air speed and power use.'

Well, you can fill the rest of it in yourself, making the point that it's difficult to agree on measures without a clear picture of the nature and purpose of the thing you're trying to evaluate.

Community groups are like the elephant in the Indian tale – it's hard to define what makes a good one unless you first define the context.

You can't use the usual measures because community groups are removed from the one universally agreed measure of success in our society – profit. Making more money than last year may be a good sign for a community group, or it may not – the point is, it's not the main game.

So how about judging the worth of a community group by how well it's achieving its own goals? Even this can be difficult, because there's so much good a community group does anyway even when it's totally ineffectual at what it's actually been set up to do.

Is the value of a community sports group to be judged on where it finishes on the ladder at the end of the season, or is it more to do with how included and healthy and happy the group members feel? Should a community theatre group be judged on the quality of its performances, or on how much fun the members have in staging the show?

Community groups can make people feel happy, accepted, involved, included, valued, supported, and healthier, even if they're not actually achieving the things they were set up to do.

In fact, it's these other things, these things many people consider to be secondary – the building of social cohesion, the development of resilience – that are actually the things that are of greatest value to individuals and to the community.

That's why we've put in place the Australian Community Idol competition, a program designed to root out those great groups that are quietly (or indeed noisily) going about the job of building a better world, not by what they do so much as how they do it.

The program, which is held each year with the support of Westpac and in conjunction with the annual 'Communities in Control Conference', honours those groups that star

in the areas that really count:

1. Promoting accessibility and equal participation

by opening their arms to all people in the community – for example, people with disabilities, people from disadvantaged areas, people from Indigenous or multicultural backgrounds, or other under-represented members of the public;

2. Building a dynamic, forward-thinking Board or Committee of Management,

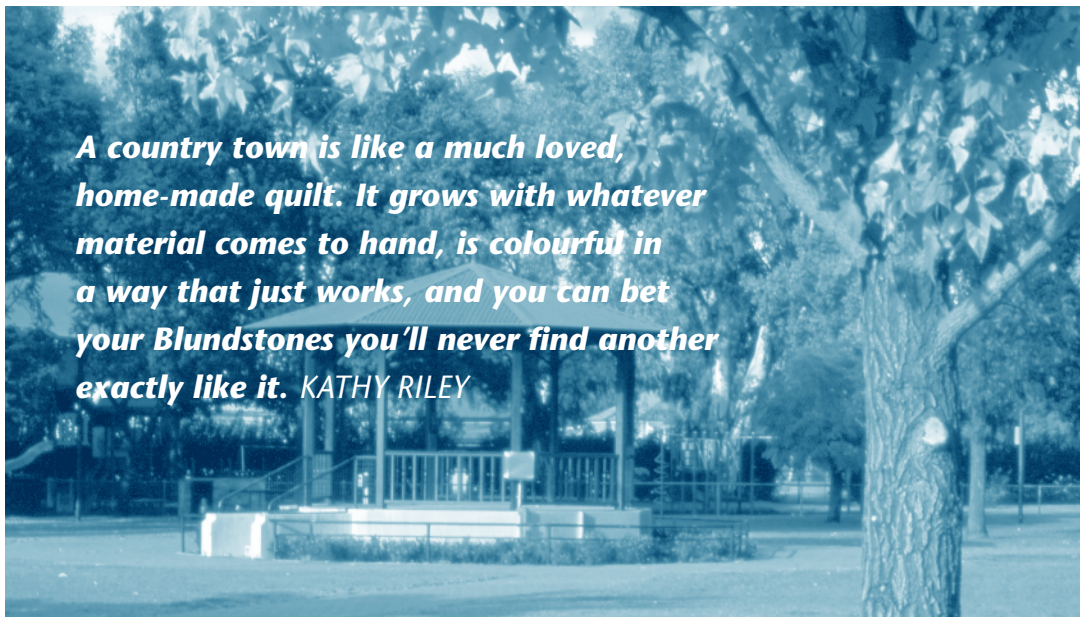
one that's representative of all stakeholders, including service users and local business, and that has undertaken to promote the group's financial health, to manage risk, and to promote innovation;

**Double
pass give
away**

Country Web has a double registration for the 2007 Communities in Control Conference to give away to one lucky reader. To be in the running, simply write to us and tell us what you believe makes a community group successful.

Entries must be received by 5 pm Wednesday 16 May.
Fax to: 02 6391 3650, Email: allison.priest@dpi.nsw.gov.au, or mail to: The Editor, RWN, Locked Bag 21, Orange 2800.

Registration is for the winner and a friend and includes the three days of the conference – June 3, 4 and 5 (Sunday is a pre-conference skills day on Marketing, and Monday and Tuesday are the full conference). If the winner is aged under 27 they can come along to the Youth Forum on the Wednesday morning as well. Full value of the prize is \$990 (or \$1080 if attending the youth forum).



A country town is like a much loved, home-made quilt. It grows with whatever material comes to hand, is colourful in a way that just works, and you can bet your Blundstones you'll never find another exactly like it. KATHY RILEY

Don't argue – discuss!

By John Maxwell

Discussions can be healthy, since they have the potential to build relationships and result in a 'win' for everyone. On the other hand, arguments are rarely good. Why? They are forceful attempts to change another person's point of view, and thus result in a 'winner' and a 'loser'. Arguments always cause some damage, even if you 'win', so the next time you find yourself involved in a conflict of opinion use these guidelines to make it a **discussion** – resolving the issue while building the relationship.

■ **Welcome the disagreement.** The other person may have a perspective you haven't considered so be thankful for it. Maybe this is your chance to be corrected before making a mistake.

■ **Distrust your first inclination to defend yourself.** Defensiveness is often a natural reaction, but be careful – when you justify yourself, it's hard to change your position later on. Plus, you'll miss the benefit of the other person's ideas.

■ **Control your temper.** Getting angry always makes communication harder, not easier. So calm down before you blow your top.

■ **Listen first.** Give your 'opponent' a chance to talk. Don't defend or debate. Build bridges of understanding, not barriers of misunderstanding.

■ **Look for areas of agreement.** Focus on areas where you both agree. This establishes common ground, helping you find a solution that works for both of you.

■ **Be honest.** Look for areas where you can admit error, then do it. This reduces their defensiveness.

■ **Agree to think over the other person's ideas.** Tell the person that you will consider their point of view and actually do it. They may be right after all.

■ **Thank them sincerely for their desire to help.** Most people who take time to disagree with you are interested in positive results, the same as you are. Welcome that.

■ **Postpone action so you can both think through the problem.** If need be, suggest another meeting. To prepare, ask yourself some hard questions about your 'side' and focus on a mutually beneficial solution.

■ **Be willing to agree to disagree.** Sometimes you may need to accept your difference of opinion and move on. Be flexible whenever possible. Follow Thomas Jefferson's advice: *'In matters of principle, stand like a rock; in matters of taste, swim with the current.'*

WHAT MAKES A COMMUNITY GROUP EXCELLENT: CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

3. Pursuing excellence in fundraising by sharing the fundraising burden within the group, broadening the fundraising base, and developing and implementing innovative fundraising ideas; and

4. Showing leadership and advocacy, by being prepared to stand up for the cause.

I'd love every community organisation in Australia to strive for excellence in all of those four areas, and I'd encourage any group that has already done so to tell us about it by putting in a Community Idol nomination, which you can do by going to:

ourcommunity.com.au/idol

And if you want to see the short-listed organisations make their case for the mantle of 2007 Australian Community Idol, and learn more about how community organisations contribute to health and wellbeing, you can do so at the 2007 Communities in Control Conference – Australia's biggest and most beloved community conference; the place where local and international speakers come together with 1500 community delegates to listen, debate, network, exchange tips and strategies, recharge, and celebrate community excellence.

I look forward to seeing you there! (BYO elephants.) ■

Our Community is a world-leading social enterprise that provides support and resources for Australia's 700,000 community groups. For more information about OurCommunity go to: www.ourcommunity.com.au
The 2007 Communities in Control Conference will be held from 3-5 June 2007 in Melbourne. For full details, including the Conference Program & Registration Form and/or to register online, go to: ourcommunity.com.au/cic2007

GRANTS & FUNDING

FRRR SMALL GRANTS FOR SMALL RURAL COMMUNITIES

Provides funding (up to \$5000) to not-for-profit organisations for projects and activities that offer clear public benefit for communities living in small rural and remote locations in Australia, contributing to their development in social and community welfare, economic, environmental, health, education or cultural areas. Applications from communities with a population of 10,000 or less will receive priority. To be eligible, projects must be for a charitable purpose. Next round closes 30 September 2007.

Ph: 1800 170 020

Email: info@frrr.org.au

Website: www.frrr.org.au



INDIGENOUS SMALL BUSINESS FUND

Provides funding to Indigenous community-based organisations to help Indigenous people learn about business, develop good business skills and expand their businesses. Funding is available to: identify and develop Indigenous business opportunities; help Indigenous people start businesses; give advice or support services to Indigenous small business people; develop the skills of Indigenous business people including management, marketing, and networking.

Ph: 1802 102

www.workplace.gov.au/isbf