

President's Report for the 2014 U3A Sapphire Coast AGM

Welcome to everyone, and thank you for supporting your U3A by attending the AGM today.

It hardly seems that 12 months has passed since I last stood before a U3A AGM, but I am assured that indeed they have. During that time, there have been some significant changes within our U3A.

This AGM is operating under our new Constitution, and I once again thank the many people that contributed to this extremely important piece of work. The new Constitution gives the Committee, course leaders and members a vastly better framework under which to operate, with greater clarity, less contradiction and more guidance than its predecessor.

The format of our newsletter has improved, and for anyone who doesn't believe this, ask yourself a simple question. Would you rather see my President's message or photos on the front page? Our thanks to Narelle Sheridan for all her hard work.

Our visibility within the region has increased, thanks to Elle Millstead's publicity and the very successful exhibition at the RSL. I have also had the opportunity to talk about what U3A has to offer to groups such as the Bega Valley Shire Council, Candelo Probus, Merimbula View and the Parkinson's Support Group.

Within the Committee, the availability and quality of financial information has improved thanks to the diligence and professionalism of our Treasurer Jennie Smith.

The quantity and quality of our courses is at an all-time high. 47 courses and 9 one offs for 2014 Term 1 gives us ample evidence of the dedication of course leaders and the hard work of Jenny Johnston, Trish Goodwin and their Sub-committee.

Another piece of evidence to support the case for the quality of our courses is that our membership has increased. By October 2013 we had 524 financial members, up from 423 the year before. 92 new members have joined since October last year. My thanks to Pat McKay for maintaining and improving our member records.

The Centre here has also undergone changes. The photos you see on the wall behind you have greatly enhanced the ambiance of our venue. And thanks to Gwen Vearing (and her 'silent' partner Brian), everything here is better organised and problems are quickly solved.

We have also worked on the development of roles and responsibilities' statements for members of the Committee and a number of U3A policies and procedures, which you can find on the wikispace. These documents will assist members to better understand how things work and who they should talk to about issues they may have.

While there have been changes, many important aspects of our U3A remain the same.

Once again our U3A has been well served by a competent, hard working Committee and I thank them all, on behalf of members, for their efforts. In particular, I would like to thank Sue Birks for her work on grants and for supporting me throughout the year, particularly when I found myself needing to attend to other priorities with a sick mother in November and a son getting married on a boat in the Caribbean in December. And, at the risk of being accused of nepotism, I would like to thank Sue for her excellent work as Secretary and for all her help and support throughout the year.

For those Committee members coming back for another year, thank you. For new Committee members elected later in this AGM, welcome and I'm sure you will find the Committee work as rewarding as I have. For Committee members who are leaving (Jenny Johnston, Trish Goodwin and Narelle Sheridan), my best wishes and thank you for your contribution. A particular mention for Trish, who has simultaneously achieved 5 years as a Committee member and 10 years as a course leader. An outstanding achievement!

The wikispace has continued to provide members and visitors with valuable information about our U3A, and I thank Liz Sweaney and Colin Gould for their ongoing efforts in this area.

Our U3A remains committed to providing learning opportunities in a supportive environment across a broad range of subject areas. In fact, I have a strong belief that our U3A offers a better range of courses than any other U3A that I have seen, and that we have a balance of courses that is lacking in other areas.

We also paid homage to the social needs of our members, and I remember with particular fondness the Christmas in July and the Mystery Bus Trip. Our thanks to Lynne McMillan and Anne Smith and all their helpers for these wonderful events. The Expo and the event at Mandeni, both organised by the previous Committee under the astute leadership of Judith Reid, were also highlights.

Looking forward, our U3A has some challenges in the coming year.

We have secured the Centre for another year, but I remain concerned that we have not been able to enter into a longer term arrangement. Without another option, our negotiating position with our landlord remains tenuous.

Our ability to communicate with our members outside of the newsletter is problematic, and is something we will try to address this year. Emails are a means of delivering information in a timely and inexpensive way that is not labour intensive, and therefore is something that could be used to greater effect in the future. Many of you would have (eventually) received the agenda for this AGM via email, and that saved us over \$300 in postage, as well as savings in paper and people's time. Our records indicate that almost 80% of members have an email address.

Being limited to paper or face to face meetings has also reduced the effectiveness of consultation with members, whether it be about proposed new courses, U3A policy (for example, consultation about the new Constitution was limited), social events or community events. The wikispace is of some help here but we can and should do more.

While I have held discussions with the Bega Valley Shire Council, it remains a concern that their level of assistance to us does not match our contribution to the community. Whether it be some sort of access to facilities at the old Tura Beach Tavern across the parking lot, sharing of other Council resources or some other form of assistance, I believe there is more the Council can do for us. After all, there are over 12,500 people over 55 years of age in the Bega Valley, and by 2026 almost 50% of people in the Valley will be over 55.

Talking to people in Bega (most recently the Parkinsons' Support Group) has again highlighted that our presence outside of our Tura Beach/Merimbula home area is not as great as it could be. We have some ideas about additional courses in Tathra, but more could be done.

In closing, I would like to express my thanks to Margaret Clay, who has been our Public Officer for many years. Margaret has been unwell and she knew that her illness would prevent her from fulfilling her role to the same high standard that she has achieved previously. On that basis she gave me her resignation as from this AGM, which I reluctantly accepted. Margaret is currently recovering from a serious operation. I understand that the operation went as well as could be expected and that she is making progress. I am sure that I am expressing the views of all of you in wishing her all the best and a speedy recovery. The Committee will appoint and announce a new Public Officer soon.

John Mikus

President

Barry Smith – profile

Barry moved to the Far South Coast after a family tragedy, taking early retirement from his long term job as a technician with the PMG/Telecom.

Barry has been a volunteer guide at Eden Killer Whale Museum for over 10 years. He is also on the executive panel of the Museum's management committee, and on the curatorial committee. He is an expert on the history of whaling, and particularly the killer whales of Twofold Bay.

U3A Annual General Meeting 2014

Membership Registrar report

There was a good rollup at Registration Day in January, and a steady stream of renewals and new memberships have been processed since then. I expect more will keep drifting in throughout the year. By October 2013 there were 524 financial members to the end of 2013, up from 423 the year before.

Currently, Sapphire Coast U3A has 471 members financial to the end of 2014. Of these, 371 (or about 78%) have an email address recorded.

Since October last year, 92 new members have joined, however, 143 are currently 'lapsed', i.e. were financial to last year but have not yet renewed. (109 of these have an email address). This is not counting 16 members who have either moved away or otherwise indicated they no longer wish to be members.

All in all, we seem to have a strong membership base which is tending to growth.

Pat McKay

5 March 2014