

MBC CLUBHOUSE 10th ANNIVERSARY SPEECH

I'm here today to give you an insider's view of how we came to build our own Clubhouse. Since many of you have joined after 2012 you might not know that prior to that the Club operated mainly out of the many local licenced clubs. Before every session the tables and playing equipment had to be taken out of specially fitted out cupboards, then put away afterwards. It was not possible to operate a computer system or store a dealing machine so members had to deal the cards before every session and Directors had to manually score the completed results by entering the results into their own computers via a website developed by one of our members. The Licenced Clubs could arbitrarily cancel sessions if they had another function or they could put us into a room with distracting noises or some other negative feature, like outside the toilets. It was only possible to run classes at limited times and the number of sessions held was also limited.

The first member to spell out the advantages of owning our own Clubhouse was the late Martin Egging, the President, in 2000. Fast forward 5 years and a Building Sub Committee was formed to pursue how this could be achieved. In August 2005 a Special General Meeting passed a motion to increase playing fees and commence a fundraising program. Previously making a profit on things like the annual Congress or game fees was frowned upon, now we had a Social Committee to run functions. Cost cutting measures such as limiting the amount of prize money for Congress winners were put in place and extra sessions introduced to increase revenue. A Finance Sub Committee worked on a Business Plan and the Management Committee actively looked at potential clubhouse venues.

Unexpectedly in 2008 a property in Lorn came up for sale and the Committee put in an offer however, much to our disappointment, the deal fell through. At this point I became President and faced with yet another change of venue I decided we should redouble our efforts to get our own Clubhouse. In April 2010 Fay Smith, the Treasurer, and I approached the Council to see if it was willing to give us land, however that proved fruitless. Again, unexpectedly I spotted this block for sale next to the highway, which, although it was in a flood zone, was also zoned for recreational use, and was going cheaply - \$120,000. I showed it to the Committee who gave it the thumbs up. From that point on things really took off. Ted Day and I negotiated with the vendor to bring the price down to \$80,000, although with Council fees etc that blew out to \$100,000; Graham Johnson, the architect son of our member Ted, drew up plans for the Clubhouse which conformed to the Council's requirements re heritage and flood; and queries re noise from passing trains were answered after a visit to ARTEC. At our August 2010 AGM Bruce Atkinson gave a persuasive presentation to members outlining how we were to achieve our goal and the consequent motions were overwhelmingly accepted.

Bruce offered to put in for a Community Building Partnership Grant for \$100,000 and he and I commenced working on the Construction Certificate and Development Application to support it. As the grant decision approached, the Committee decided I should visit Frank Terenzi, our local MP, to put a face to MBC and show him that we were ready to go. He was very impressed at our level of organisation and that we had never applied for a grant before. We held our breaths.

Meanwhile our Social Committee continued their fundraising efforts enthusiastically. We held Bunnings BBQ's; members opened up their homes for Melbourne Cup parties* Wendy Rissler & myself; Christmas in Julys * Fay Smith; Movie nights* June Fry; delivering phone books* Gary

Parsons, Pam Woodage, myself plus other teams while Mim Officer stored the 20,000 books in her garage; Congress catering led by Kay Kennedy; raffles It was this spirit of pulling together for a common cause that cemented the ethos of MBC as being The Friendly Bridge Club.

Just before Christmas 2010 I received the best present ever, a phone call from Frank telling me that we that we had secured the grant. Of course, this was just the beginning of the hard slog. Bruce worked on the CC and I worked on the DA and we were very pleased when Maitland Council approved them quickly without alteration. Bruce offered to be the Project Manager and commenced the building side while I started to plan the paint colours, landscaping etc . Fay and I did the rounds of the banks and building societies to get a loan and Jill Parsons took on the admin of the grant application. Ric Fry did our legal work. Except for the modest fee our architect charged everything was done gratis and saved the Club thousands.

Building the Clubhouse was a massive achievement and I want to thank my Committee over this time. Although it required a huge effort for us, it was a very fulfilling time for me and done in an atmosphere of friendship and cooperation. Our meetings were held in various cafes around town and followed a format of arrival at 11am, look at the menu and order for 12, conduct our business for an hour then lunch over a glass of wine. Off to bridge by 12.45. How good was that!

Fay was our financial guru who developed the budget and cash flow strategy and who oversaw a massive fundraising drive to pay \$11,000 for our air con system. She was also our social guru who was a whizz at organising our social events. Jill as Secretary administered our grant applications and did all the secretarial tasks associated with the project so professionally. She and Gary also did the board dealing at home on the newly acquired machine.

The other Committee members, John Wilko, the late Gwen Garlick, John Kennedy our Auditor, Christine Chandler our Masterpoint Secretary, and Ted Day, Richard Crickmore and Jenny Swanson all played an integral part in the project.

Once the Clubhouse was built we were lucky to receive Christine's old kitchen which some of our handymen installed, while others did the painting and the myriad of tasks needed to fit out the hall. The ladies led by Pam Woodage had working bees to make the tablecloths, and a gardening crew spent back breaking days planting out all the shrubs for what was then a native garden.

Our official Opening on July 22 was a day of tremendous celebration for members. Not only of achievement but also a feeling that we had done what so many had doubted over the years. I can remember one comment that we were such a small club that we couldn't possibly do it (and that was from someone from an even smaller club!). We need to thank Martin Eggins and subsequent Presidents for their persistence in chasing what sometimes seemed like an impossible dream and I am still pinching myself that the final steps were taken on my watch. It meant that once MBC finally had a home it could move into the next era of prosperity and expansion which you are all enjoying now.

Lastly I want to thank Ruth Perris who, following up on a suggestion one post-Bridge Friday lunch, has managed to pull together this celebration for nearly 70 people. And all despite floods and a tummy bug!

Thank you. Helen Scott