

Mildura Chamber of Commerce – Presidents Report
For the financial year 2006/2007



MILDURA
CHAMBER of
COMMERCE INC.

Promoting Business Excellence

It is with much pleasure that I submit the annual President's report of the Mildura Chamber of Commerce for the 2006/2007.

This year has been a year of consolidation for the Chamber, with the current committee making some difficult decisions about the Chamber moving forward.

Firstly the Business Excellence Awards - As many of you would be aware the very successful BEA's have grown significantly over the past few years. The number of categories, the judging program and the awards night itself requires massive amounts of time and resources to organise, which for a volunteer organisation like the Chamber was difficult to sustain. The appointment of a project officer to run the BEA's certainly allowed the awards to be run in a more professional manner, however also eroded any profit for the Chamber. This was a position that the current committee felt was unsustainable for the Chamber.

After discussions with MRCC, SMEDB and MT, we successfully negotiated for SMEDB to join with MT to continue the BEA's into the future. With SMEDB and MT having full time paid resources I believe that this is a great outcome and will enable the BEA's to be taken to the next level of excellence.

Chamber Constitution – the constitution of the MCC was sadly out of date and required a considerable amount of work, particularly around membership. The changes thus far have been made in 2 stages, the first of which were ratified at a special general meeting. These changes are being discussed further tonight so I won't go into too much detail, except to say that these constitutional changes will allow the chamber to continue moving forward into the future.

We moved to a new look website, with the assistance of Integrating Technology, Mildura. The Chamber's vision and mission are clearly articulated and we have the ability to be able to easily add content items such as discussion papers and other information flyers for distribution to our membership base. The Echoes newsletter was also re-introduced and is now distributed via the website. The website has been very favourably received.

The committee also conducted a complete review of its capabilities, role and function, looking at what it is able to achieve as a member based business that is at this point solely reliant on membership subscriptions for its income. Clearly the one thing that the Chamber is able to do well is advocate on behalf of business. With this in mind we set forth with a new and clear message – that we are Mildura's peak independent body representing the Mildura Business Community. A policy framework was adopted to give direction and context around the issues that the Chamber was able to tackle, with numerous occasions where the Chamber has been consulted for its opinion. We also introduced discussion papers to our members via the website. These papers have been deliberately designed to stimulate discussion and facilitate change, again a role which the chamber can be actively pursuing to raise its profile.

So in all we have had a fairly rigorous agenda of change and renewal over the last 12 months. Perhaps this rigorous agenda accounts for some of the changes in the committee. Several positions became vacant through the year. We received resignations from Majella Ballard, Kingsley Lang (our treasurer) who was transferred to Geelong, Chris Parham, Jon McNaught and Kaye Demmery who resigned due to work commitments. These people were replaced with Marina Durban, and Steve Petschel, two new committee members who are making active and valuable contributions to the team.

And of course the one addition to the team has been our paid executive officer – John Fitzgibbon. John has been a tremendous asset to the Chamber, and I have enjoyed working with him immensely.

And so what of the future - The Chamber has been in discussions with VECCI, and is set to become an agent for VECCI enabling us as a Chamber to deliver a range of co-branded membership services to Mildura businesses. This is an exciting initiative that will enhance the Chambers reputation as well as give it great access to a very well resourced organisation in VECCI, to deliver a greater range of services to our members.

Through our associations with Sunraysia Institute of TAFE we are looking to relocate the Chamber Offices to a more suitable location that will give us a street presence. This will also greatly assist with the delivery of the VECCI agency services. SIOT have available serviced offices in the CBD which would be highly suitable, and provide great facilities for the Chambers operations. The signing of the agency agreement with VECCI should make this a cost neutral decision given that the Chamber will be receiving revenue from VECCI membership renewals, as well as from its own membership subscriptions.

There will be challenges for the Chamber moving forward, not the least of which is the Chamber's financial position. The BEA's have taken their toll on the Chambers finances, along with the decline in membership revenue due to the previous decisions to suspend memberships in an attempt to rebuild the membership base.

The committee has addressed the issues around the financial position and the finances are now heading in the right direction with membership revenue now flowing again, and expenses having been well and truly curtailed. The Chamber model that is now in place is a very cost effective model, concentrating on what can be achieved from a much reduced revenue stream that is sufficient to cover with the most significant expense, the employment of the executive officer.

If the Chamber wishes to expand its operations in the future it will need to significantly bolster its membership base, and/or supplement its income with additional revenue streams from grants, or other activities. This will be a challenge for the new committee, and requires the committee to be people focussed, actively networking and continually striving to get more businesses to support the Chamber as it strives to actively advocate on their behalf.

For me personally, tonight signals the end of my term as President, and the end of my time on the committee, as I have informed the committee that I will not be seeking re-election. I look back over

what has been achieved over the past 2 years of my presidency, and I can now say that I feel satisfied with the results, and I am ready to step aside and let someone else continue on in the role.

Can I once again make special mention of John Fitzgibbon and the tremendous support that he has been for me in my role as President? I will miss our long coffees and lunches over at Grinders, as we built empires and solved the problems of the world. I'm sure however that whoever is the new President will be able to settle into the role quickly, and confidently with John there guide them along the way.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to be your President. The role of President is challenging, but is a great leadership training ground for anyone who is seeking to take a more active role within the Mildura community, and I look forward to watching what I hope will be the Chamber's continued growth into the future.