



## **OPEN GARDENS CANBERRA PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2016**

It is with a great sense of satisfaction that I present to you the first President's Report of Open Gardens Canberra Incorporated. I am very disappointed that I am not well enough to attend this first Annual General Meeting of Open Gardens Canberra.

I am sure Geoff will do justice to my report.

By any measure Open Gardens Canberra has been enormously successful in its first year of operation. We have grown from 29 members on 7 May 2015, the day before we became an incorporated association, to 388 members at the end of our first financial year, and we currently have 510 members.

In our first gardens season, we have opened 14 gardens to members and the public. Visitor numbers at private gardens have typically ranged from 250 to nearly 400 adults. We have also had pleasing numbers of children visiting our open gardens - they are the gardeners of the future!

Of course, the Treasurer's Report will detail our financial success. I will just summarise: we have gone from a pre-incorporation bank balance of \$550 to around \$11,000 by 31 March 2016.

However, for me the most important indicator of our success is the buzz that I sense at open gardens, that tells me we have truly created a community of garden lovers. Garden visitors are getting to know each other: they stop to chat with whoever happens to be close by and they share their thoughts about the garden, their favourite plants, previous gardens they have visited, their own gardens, and they share their gardening tips. As President I have received many emails thanking me and the committee. To quote just two:

*Thank you for this great contribution to our community wellbeing.*

*Wow! Good on you for pushing thru with this, Shirley!*

However setting up a totally new organisation has been a challenge. Most members won't be aware of the early history of Open Gardens Canberra so I'm taking this opportunity to share, very briefly, how it all started.

In November 2014 I started developing the concept of Open Gardens Canberra and a few friends and colleagues made suggestions. On 8 January 2015 the Office of Regulatory Services approved reservation of the name Open Gardens Canberra and I had more than 50 active supporters and nearly 200 people on my email lists. I kept busy designing letterheads, contacting all the garden clubs in Canberra, writing to Open Gardens Australia garden owners, emailing garden designers and selecting gardens. I gatecrashed the Open Gardens Australia Plant Fair at Lanyon and slipped more than 500 flyers on car windscreens in the Lanyon carpark. I also took the opportunity to spread the word about Open Gardens Canberra to as many people as possible, especially the media. By the end of March 2015, Open Gardens Canberra had all of five members and several hundred more flyers to take to our first public appearance – the ACT Government's Connect & Participate EXPO at the Old Bus

Depot Markets on 28 March 2015. Four volunteers helped out at the EXPO and we were busy!

In April 2015 I started running membership campaigns. Who remembers my nightmare about the long queue of people waiting to join Open Gardens Canberra at our first garden? That was the July campaign when our website had just become live. The email had tempting photos of Peter and Lyn's garden that opened on 28-29 November 2015, and a garden in Wamboin that I expect will be opening in March 2017. In July, we were also on Facebook, we had 46 members, two gardens had withdrawn from opening in 2015 and I had found one more on the garden selection roller-coaster. But I am getting ahead of myself.

The really big event for Open Gardens Canberra was becoming an incorporated association. First we needed a Constitution or set of Rules. The Rules were written by me with very helpful comments and additions from Brian Tetlow, our Honorary Solicitor, and a handful of people from my email lists (at that stage numbering well over 300). Brian gave me the basic structure for a formal Flying Motion and I am very proud of the elegant sub-Rule I then created. Seven people attended our Inaugural Meeting on 5 May 2015, passed the Rules with minor amendments, elected a committee, appointed a Public Officer, and on 8 May the Office of Regulatory Services approved the establishment of Open Gardens Canberra Incorporated.

People were finding our website, the media were finding me, and organisations such as Marymead, the Ainslie School P&C and the National Trust ACT were approaching us and offering promotional opportunities. Open Gardens Canberra was ready to move from idea to reality.

The four months between incorporation and our first garden opening on 26-27 September 2015 were hectic. From our temporary online presence for Open Gardens Canberra on my own website, we had our own website ready in July. We did everything from chasing mystery payments, running more membership campaigns, getting into Twitter, promoting OGC via other associations, apologising to members for late sending of membership cards, inducting garden volunteers and developing a preliminary privacy policy, through to buying cash boxes. Dealing with spam membership applications on our website provided me with some light relief – they usually have somewhat creative names such as sombershed and comfortablefu.

Finally our first garden, Burrumul in Weetangera, was agreed on 17 August and our first Calendar of Open Gardens for 2015-16 was sent out to members on 14 September. Just in time.

From then until the end of November, the committee and all our volunteers were fully occupied with garden openings. Somehow we managed to take time out for a General Meeting of members on 27 October to pass a Special Resolution amending our Rules to simplify our procedures for accepting new members.

By November I had to take time out to set up and learn how to use Mailchimp for sending out emails. Both my personal and Open Gardens Canberra email addresses were being regarded as spammers in the internet world – simply because I was sending out more than 200 emails a day. At that time, we had two email lists each with about 350 addressees. My first Mailchimp email took 2½ hours to prepare and send – fortunately it gets easier.

Meanwhile Open Gardens Canberra continued to be noticed by the world at large: the Diggers Club invited us to attend a celebration of its partnership with Heritage Nursery. Visitor numbers at open gardens continued to increase.

My report is already far too long so I will assure you it is nearly at an end. I am not going to talk about our open gardens because they have already spoken for themselves and you have all enjoyed them.

Instead, before I finish I want to thank the many, many people who have helped Open Gardens Canberra achieve such success in our first year. Because it's our first year I would love to mention everyone by name, but I'm quite sure I would accidentally leave someone out.

First our garden owners – Carolan Marstin, Janine Hunstone, Else Wynen, Christie Gascoyne, Tom Baker, Tim Woodburn, Peter and Lyn Woodbury, Lorraine and Geoff Corner, Jennie and Chris Curtis, Trevor Fuller and Greg McGuirk, Natalie Maras, and Carol Kemp. Without you and your passion for your gardens, there would be no Open Gardens Canberra!

Opening the Railway Park Community Garden and the Queanbeyan Sensory Garden gave us the opportunity to take small steps towards achieving our objective of supporting charitable organisations. Thank you Katrina Willis and other members of the Queanbeyan Sustainability Group, and the Queanbeyan City Council for their support of our opening of the Sensory Garden. Publicising the Sensory Garden also gave us the opportunity to promote the work of local artists such as Dianna Quiggin, Jack Waring-Dallwitz, Kim Bowman, and Alan Neal.

Members who helped at open gardens and other events have also been essential to the success of Open Gardens Canberra. Ange McNeilly did an amazing job coordinating garden volunteers for all 14 of our open gardens – thank you, Ange! And thank you, all our garden helpers. There really are too many garden helpers for me to mention you all, so I'll limit myself to the real stalwarts Sanya Ritchie, Colette Taylor, Barbara and Peter Hamburger, Ann and Chris Lord, Beverley Ray, Christine Gascoyne, Elizabeth Morrison, Geoff Corner, Johanna Gross, Lyn Woodbury, Patricia Woolcock, Pearl Moyseyenko, and Tom Baker.

You will notice that several of these names appear several times in this report. Ann and Chris Lord have done a sterling job coordinating the distribution of flyers about open gardens. Many new members have first heard of Open Gardens Canberra through a flyer they saw at the National Arboretum, at nurseries, in a coffee shop, or at the ACT Tourism shopfront or the many other interesting places our volunteers take flyers to. Thank you Ann and Chris, and the rest of the volunteers: Ange McNeilly, Antonia Chadwick, Barbara Conroy, Carolyn Le Couteur, Cheryl Birks, Clare Walton, Deborah Hamilton, Frank Doyle, Graeme Mayo, Gwen Pauletto, Janet Russell, Karen Schelbach, Karen Winders, Linda Beveridge, Linda Roberts, Lyn and Peter Woodbury, Lyn Mills, Maggie-Anne Coffison, Mary Boyle, Mia Fox, Moko Eade, Nikki Lucas, Pearl Moyseyenko, Robyn Gibbons, Rosemary Blemings, Rosemary Thomas, Rosslyn Wiley, Sanya Ritchie, Shay Manners, Sheree Minehan, Shirley Wilton, Sophie Hennessy, Sue Abbott, Sue Chambers, and Susan Cechet.

Then there are the people who have offered help in other ways:

- Christine Gascoyne as a garden selector,
- Tom Baker who put up a lot of road signs all over Canberra and Queanbeyan, and also donated a large number of timber stakes to attach the signs to,
- Geoff Corner and Peter Woodbury who have also put up a lot of road signs,
- Peter and Lyn Woodbury who donated parking signs to us,
- Darryl Seto, our very helpful and reliable website developer, and

- all the others I have accidentally left out.

I also want to thank the media for the great publicity they have given us over the past year. City News has been particularly wonderful - thank you Kathryn Vukovljak, photographer Andrew Finch and editor Ian Meikle. The Gardening Gurus on 2CC have also been great supporters, keen to mention all our gardens on their Saturday and Sunday morning program. Thank you Paulene Cairnduff and Keith Colls.

ABC Radio 666 has also interviewed most of our garden owners on their Saturday morning gardening program. Thank you Greg Bayliss, Graham Williams and their producers. And last but not least, Helen Young from *The Australian* persisted in following me up, in spite of my busy-ness, and she gave us excellent coverage of a number of gardens.

This Annual General Meeting tonight and most of our meetings in the past 15 months have been held here, at the Hellenic Club in the City. Thank you Jo Ashcroft and all the staff who have made us welcome and given our meetings a business-like venue.

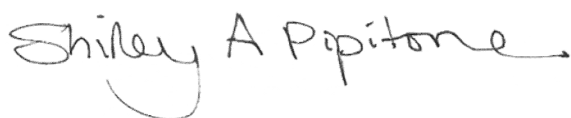
Finally, I thank all our committee members. Every one of you has been invaluable in getting Open Gardens Canberra up and running. Words escape me so I will just list you all in alphabetical order of first names: Ange McNeilly, Aviva Cameron, Brian Tetlow, Elizabeth Morrison, Gabrielle Sheen, Geoff Corner, Julie McCarron-Benson, Maki Koyama, Nikki Lucas, Rebecca Lucas, Sheree Minehan, and Tom Baker. Anyone who has helped at an open garden knows my preference for listing people by first name!

Not surprisingly 2015-16 has been a difficult year for the Open Gardens Canberra committee. Running an existing organisation is never easy, but starting an association from scratch is certainly challenging. The Open Gardens Canberra committee has had only five to seven members at any time during the past year and that has been our major challenge.

Being totally passionate and committed to the open gardens movement, I voluntarily took on far too much work and unfortunately my health suffered in the process. It's clearly far too demanding for one person to do most of the publicity work, almost all the garden selection, all the photography and design, all the website publishing, most of the membership role, maintaining all email lists (about 800 addressees), as well as being the newsletter editor and the Public Officer. That left little time for being just the President and no time at all for the rest of my life.

I'm not complaining - I loved it! I am so sorry I can't be here with you tonight to share the celebration. This coming year I am planning to take the advice of a dear friend: "Be gentle to yourself."

For the coming year and into the future, Open Gardens Canberra needs a committee with all eleven positions filled. I look forward to watching my baby grow and flourish!



Shirley Pipitone  
Founding President