

October | November 2013

50something

AUSTRALIA'S WIDEST CIRCULATING OVER-50S MAGAZINE

Spring Racing

Shelley Hancox's Tips

The Italian Foodie Obsession

Bill Granger Explains It

No Man's Land

Venturing into Siberia

Work-Life Balance

Requesting Flexible Hours

Pulling Together

Sickness & Your Relationship

Renée Geyer

Inspired by Big Band Swing

**Could your
home do with
a \$15,000
makeover?**



09135421NS

Take out a home insurance policy with National Seniors Insurance for your chance to win

Look around your home and there are probably things you'd like to change - a new kitchen, television, lighting or perhaps that perfect sofa. With National Seniors home insurance you could be in the running to win \$15,000 to spend towards a home makeover from selected stores¹. And there's more, with five \$1,000 home improvement runner-up prizes up for grabs too. Simply take out a new home insurance policy by 29 November 2013 for your chance to win.

For the right home insurance at the right price National Seniors Insurance has you covered. We offer new for old replacement and a No Claim Bonus of up to 30%^{2,3}. And with the chance to win a home makeover, your home could look better than ever before.

**Get
protected**

Call or visit our website for a competitive quote today.

1300 50 50 99

nationalseniorsinsurance.com.au/makeover

**National Seniors
Insurance**

Promotion runs 01/10/13 – 29/11/13. Prize drawn 17/12/13 at Allianz, Lvl 13, 2 Market St Sydney. Winner's name published in The Australian 19/12/13. Authorised under NSW Permit No: LTPS/13/05118, ACT Permit No: ACT TP 13/02566, SA Licence No: T13/1207, VIC Permit No: 13/1665. Full terms and conditions available at allianz.com.au/prize. 1. \$15,000 available in vouchers to spend at the winner's discretion from one or more of the following stores: Freedom Furniture, Bunnings, Harvey Norman and Domayne. 2. Minimum premiums may apply. Any discounts/entitlements only apply to the extent any minimum premium is not reached. If you are eligible for more than one, we also apply each of them in a predetermined order to the premium (excluding taxes and government charges) as reduced by any prior applied discounts/entitlements. Discounts may not be applied to any flood component of the premium (if applicable). 3. To qualify for the maximum No Claim Bonus of 30%, customers must have had no claims in the preceding five years for Home policies or three years for Landlord policies. However, customers who have had up to two claims may still qualify for reduced No Claim Bonus. National Seniors Australia, ABN 89 050 523 003, AR 282736 arranges this insurance as an agent for the insurer Allianz Australia Insurance Limited ABN 15 000 122 850 AFSL No 234708. Before making a decision, please consider the Product Disclosure Statement available from National Seniors Insurance.

HEALTH

LANDLORD

TRAVEL

CAR

LIFE

CARAVAN

BOAT

50something

AUSTRALIA'S WIDEST CIRCULATING OVER-50S MAGAZINE



18 Still on Track Singer Renée Geyer talks drugs, earthquakes and living to 100 with Rosemary Desmond.

20 In Sickness & In Health

When one of you gets sick your relationship deepens and strengthens, writes Sandra Kimball.

23 Freedom to Play Workers have the right to request flexible hours. But your boss can say no, warns Kirinya Khamson.

26 Piano Man Rosemary Desmond catches up with unconventional music genius David Helfgott.

29 Agony Planner Struggling with super, pensions or property investments? Finance expert, Colin Lewis, has the answers.

31 Pill Warning Consumers are being told to weigh up the pros and cons of anticoagulants recently listed on the PBS.

First Up

9 Letters

12 News

14 Executive Diary

16 Campaigns

Epicurean

33 Books & Movies

35 Top Shelf A surf board shaped by big wave rider Greg Noll takes centre stage in a new exhibition.

36 The Italian Way Bill Granger explores an endless foodie fascination with all things Italian.

40 No Man's Land Even the Russians don't go East. Not that it matters to our intrepid reporter Tom E Muller.

Time Out

43 Tech Spec Maintaining your computer hardware.

46 Sport Shelley Hancox's spring racing tips.

48 Crossword

50 The Last Word

26



Cover Renée Geyer settles into a groove.

38



36

40





On the Letters page this issue a couple of readers register their dismay over the August/September election survey results which identified the economy and abolishing the carbon tax as top priorities. "What about future generations? Are we really so self-centred?" one reader asks. Another says the group's growing political focus is a turn-off. In our defence, as the once-in-every-three-year election special, the August/September magazine sought to put older Australians on the national agenda at a time when politicians traditionally hand out sweeteners. These letters are the basis for some good debate. How much do you value

National Seniors' lobbying role? An increase in the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card income limits, the first in 11 years (page 16), is a result of that lobbying. Are the over-50s asking for too much? Should our focus be more intergenerational? Should *50 something* be a politics-free zone? We'd love to hear your thoughts. For those of you who'd rather go to Siberia than talk politics, your wish is our command. On page 40, intrepid traveller Tom Muller ventures into the bleak but fascinating Russian Far East. It is a place, he says, that even the Russians won't visit. For something a little more genteel, Bill Granger

shares the charms of Southern Italy and a gorgeous ricotta cheesecake on page 36. Finally, if home is where your heart is, don't despair. On page 46, Shelley Hancox shares her spring racing tips for a long, lazy afternoon in front of the TV. Politics or not, hopefully we've got you covered.

Sarah Saunders
Email 50something@nationalseniors.com.au

contributors



Thomas E. Muller is Australia's second most travelled person, according to the world travel rankings on www.MostTraveledPeople.com. The 74-year-old retired professor and National Seniors life member now explores the far reaches of the Earth to encourage seniors to do the same. His adventures are featured on www.KnowYourEarth.net



Sandra Kimball has worked in mental health for over 20 years as a therapist, writer and educator. Sandra runs couples retreats in Northern New South Wales and is the author of the book *Relationships in Our 50's, 60's and Beyond – How Yours Can Survive and Thrive*. Find her book at www.mylifechange.com.au



Shelley Hancox, principal of Hancox Bloodstock, has been racing and managing horses for 30 years. Her lifelong interest in thoroughbreds has led her into the racing media as a journalist, broadcaster, tipster, strapper, work and race rider, trainer, breeder, buyer, seller and, since 1988, as one of Australasia's leading racehorse syndicators.



David Burnett is an international art curator at the Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art. Recent exhibitions he has worked on include *21st Century: Art in the First Decade*; *Surrealism: The Poetry of Dreams*; *Paris and Matisse: Drawing Life*; *Portrait of Spain: Masterpieces from the Prado*; and *California Design 1930 – 1965: Living in a Modern Way*.



Rosemary Desmond is a member of the National Seniors public affairs team. Originally from New Zealand, Rosemary has lived and worked in Australia for over 30 years, most of that time as a journalist for Australian Associated Press in Sydney and in Brisbane.



Kirinya Khamson is an associate at Brisbane firm CRH Law. She advises employers and employees on a wide range of issues including contract drafting and interpretation, grievance and disciplinary procedures, termination and redundancy, discrimination and compliance with industrial instruments. See more at <http://www.crhlaw.com.au/>

Publisher

National Seniors Australia
A.B.N. 89 050 523 003
ISSN 1835-5404

Editor

Sarah Saunders
s.saunders@nationalseniors.com.au

National Advertising Manager

Mark Smith
m.smith@nationalseniors.com.au

National Office

Level 18
215 Adelaide Street
Brisbane Q 4000

Phone: 07 3233 9191

Fax: 07 3211 9339

www.nationalseniors.com.au

Editorial and Advertising

The Publisher reserves the right to accept or reject any editorial or advertising matter. The Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts, art or photographs. Information was correct at time of going to press. No part of this magazine may be reproduced, reprinted or otherwise duplicated without written permission of the Publisher. Opinions and views expressed in articles and advertisements in *50 something* do not necessarily reflect those of the Publisher. *50 something* is published six times a year by National Seniors Australia and is distributed to members throughout Australia.

Printed by Horizon Media

National Seniors
Australia

As the season of new life and green shoots is upon us, so a fresh era of government commences. Congratulations to Prime Minister Tony Abbott in achieving the highest office in the land.

Coinciding with spring, all await the changes that a new government can be expected to provide. The Prime Minister has a mandate to seek change in a number of policy areas. Mr Abbott has also indicated an emphasis on exploring improvements to fundamentals such as the financial system and increasing productivity to support the future national economic outlook. These will have significant long term implications and by coincidence were key elements identified in our surveys of members and the over-50s generally.

Mr Abbott comes with an evident appreciation of the role and the impact that he and his government can have on the lives of his fellow Australians. This is a crucial balance particularly in the context of structural change. National Seniors looks forward to being part of the debate on behalf of the over-50s.

Without dwelling on the election, I want to acknowledge the sterling support of members, activists, branches and zone leaders for the National Seniors election activities. In a challenging environment, political candidates, leaders and the media heard the voice of the over-50s in local forums across the country.

Similarly, I recognise the efforts of our small band of staff who relentlessly made the most of the opportunity the election provided to advance the interests of the over-50s.

At the forums I spoke about the various ways this mission was supported – our branches provide it through their regular gatherings and the strength of the social opportunities they provide. Our policy groups and activists support the work with their submissions and advocacy, particularly at the state level. All are important, all have a place.

Your say on constitution changes

In the spirit of green shoots, proposals are being finalised for changes to the National Seniors constitution. These will be considered at the November AGM. The proposals seek to improve opportunities for members to be involved and provide more equity in representation on key bodies such as the National Council and a new Policy Congress which will be a key source for policy advice to the board. The changes will also include significant 'house-keeping changes' to the constitution. Details of the changes are available on the website or by contacting the company secretary at g.trollip@nationalseniors.com.au

Whether in advancing our cause in the public debate or in refining our own structures, we seek to do so with the optimism and passion of spring. ■



Michael O'Neill
CEO National Seniors Australia

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The twenty first Annual General Meeting of National Seniors Australia Ltd will commence at 12 noon at the Novotel Brisbane, 200 Creek Street, Brisbane on Monday 25 November 2013.

Business

1. To confirm the minutes of the 2012 Annual General Meeting.
2. To receive and consider the financial report, including the directors' declaration, for the year ended 30 June 2013 and the related directors' report and auditors' report.
3. To appoint the auditors and fix their remuneration.
4. To elect Directors.

As the longest-serving Board members, the following Directors are due to resign and offer themselves for re-election:

Mr David Carvosso

Mr Peter Miller

5. To receive and answer questions raised by members present or received via mail by the Secretary. Such mail to be received no later than 7 days prior to the meeting date of the AGM.
6. To deal with any other business which may be brought forward in accordance with the Constitution and the Corporations Act 2001.
7. To receive and consider the new Constitution of National Seniors Australia.

The meeting will be followed by a light lunch at 12.30 pm.

For catering purposes, please advise **Gail Lawrence** by

Friday 15 November 2013 of your attendance, by email g.lawrence@nationalseniors.com.au or phone **(07) 3233 9189**.

Be
heard

National Seniors
Australia



Survey sent to members

The National Seniors research arm, the Productive Ageing Centre, is currently conducting its annual Social Survey. Mailed to a sample of members, the survey is used to understand the experiences, intentions and attitudes of the over-50s across areas ranging from employment to health. The survey is voluntary. However, by completing it you will help National Seniors better represent the needs of all older Australians to government.

cover story

Songstress
Renée Geyer talks
earthquakes, drugs
and living to 100 with
Rosemary Desmond.

Back *on* Track

Renée Geyer's distinctive soulful voice has seduced music fans since the seventies. With 25 albums under her belt, Renée, 60, says her latest, *Swing*, owes its inspiration to the big band sounds of Count Basie and Frank Sinatra, with tracks including *My Funny Valentine* and *Fly Me to the Moon*. There are also reworked versions of her own hits *Say I Love You* and *It's a Man's Man's World*.

Ill health and personal demons behind her, Renee has emerged as one of the greatest Australian singers of all time.

I understand your father was strict, academically-minded and had a taste for classical music. So what drew you to R & B?

My father just passed away in January and so I've dedicated this album to him. He was going to be 93 in October. We locked horns a lot because we had similar personalities. I only got close to him at the end of his days and I regret that.

He used to sing in synagogues in Budapest when he was seven years old. I always knew he was musical and he was definitely a classical music lover. He was kind of funny in an Archie Bunker-y way and would say things like "Of all the rubbish that is out there nowadays, my daughter's rubbish is the best rubbish of all that rubbish"...except 'rubbish' was not the word, it was rubbish starting with a "sh".

Where does your husky voice come from?

I don't know. My mother is from Czechoslovakia and I'm a white girl and I'm Jewish. I had relatives who were cantors in synagogues. But I really have no idea. I don't think anybody who has a particular talent in any artistic way knows where it comes from.

You went to live in the US in 1976.

Why did the black radio stations stop playing your Australian hit song *Heading in the Right Direction*?

I actually recorded that song in Australia. It was picked up and played pretty much across all of the east coast (of the US). But it was before we finished the album cover and the advice to me was "do not put yourself on the cover" because back in those days, things were segregated and black people played 'black' music. It was a silly business decision and they were right...we should have just left it and let them really fall in love with the

voice and then it might have been a different story.

Why did you come back to Australia?

The (LA) earthquake in 1994 was a really big one and it freaked me out. It took them half an hour to get my cat out from between the toilet cistern and the wall. I'll never forget it: everything that wasn't in the dishwasher shattered in that 30 or 40 seconds. Most women over there sleep with bras on in case they have to get up and be outside in the middle of the night! The 'big one' hasn't happened in LA yet and I didn't want to be there when it does, so I ended up going to New York within a week of that earthquake and I lived there for another year before I came back to Australia. When the *Difficult Woman* album came out, I had to come back to Australia to promote it. And I realised I'm most comfortable in Australia, that I get looked after well here, people know who I am and my lifestyle is good.

Why was your album called 'Difficult Woman'?

One of the songs that singer Paul Kelly wrote for me was *Difficult Woman*. When I heard the title it was rather a shock but when you look at the lyrics they are rather beautiful and it's more about complicated than difficult and I really like that. Paul has written and still writes songs for me and I'm very lucky to get songs from him.

We are good pals and that is why he does the duet on my album.

In your autobiography, *Confessions of a Difficult Woman*, you said you had used heroin...

I've never quite been an 'addict' but in the early days I experimented with everything. I don't know many people from the seventies who didn't experiment at some point with something. There is no more emphasis on that particular drug than there would have been on grass, or hash or speed or acid. I tried everything but never had a heroin 'habit'. I tried it a few times in my youth and I'm lucky I escaped from all that pretty much unscathed.

You've also been named as the seventh greatest Australian singer of all time in a list headed by John Farnham...

When John Farnham rang me up to tell me the news, I said 'Seventh! You're joking aren't you? At least one or two!' I was only half joking but when I looked at the list I thought 'Oh my God. Kate Ceberano is not even on the list! Tina Arena, with all due respect to her, I don't think she's the third greatest singer in this whole country. You cannot have a competition in art because everyone is different. I don't take any of it seriously. One man's horrible noise is another man's dream music.'

You once sang the Liberal Party's theme song "Turn on the Lights" for the 1975 election campaign...

My manager, who was obviously a die-hard Liberal back then, said they had approached us and they were paying us this amount of money. The importance of it didn't dawn on me then but it certainly did after I did it. That was a very hard lesson because my shows dwindled down from full houses to half houses that's how much of an impact it made. My main audiences – especially back then – were Labor supporters. I don't go out and lobby for anybody because I think there is good and bad in every party.

You had breast cancer. Are you well now?

About three years ago I had breast cancer and if you are lucky you get to a point where they call it remission that's the state that I'm in now. But I have tests often and I'm due for one pretty soon.

Have you ever been married?

I have but I don't talk about my personal life because it's no-one's business. Yes I have been married a few times and that is all I have to say.

Your latest album *Swing* is a little different. What made you decide to do it?

Many singers have done this type of album but I thought I had something to offer that was a maybe little different from the others. But don't think I've changed direction. It's still the same kind of music I always do. It's just with a lot of horns.

Do you see retirement in the near future?

As long as I can breathe and think and hum... I can't see it. I turned 60 in September, so I'm doing all right for an old girl. I don't get sick a lot so I've no reason to stop. I regret that that is my age because it means that I have less time than I thought I normally would have had. But I might live to 100. Wouldn't that be great: bugging people until I'm 100? ■

Every voice counts.

Refer a friend and receive a \$10 WISH card*.

If you know friends or relatives who would enjoy the benefits of being a National Seniors member, then do them a favour - suggest they join National Seniors today! With over 200,000 members Australia wide, National Seniors is the largest not-for-profit organisation representing the over 50s to government. Not only do we provide an independent voice for senior Australians, we also offer our members a great range of benefits and services too.

These include:

- ☒ Exclusive offers with our Member Benefits program – from discounted dining to saving on shopping including up to 5% on groceries and petrol.
- ☒ Subscription to our bi-monthly magazine, *50 something*, packed with informative lifestyle articles.
- ☒ Comprehensive range of affordable insurance products, many with bonus offers for members.
- ☒ Exclusive member offer on nib health insurance.
- ☒ Savings on tours, cruises and package holidays with National Seniors Travel.
- ☒ A network of 150 community branches all across Australia.
- ☒ Access to world class research.



Include your member number below so we can send you a \$10 WISH gift card.*

Referring member no. _____

PERSONAL DETAILS

☐ Mr ☐ Mrs ☐ Miss ☐ Ms ☐ Dr Date of birth ____ / ____ / ____

First name _____

Last name _____

Address _____

Suburb _____ State _____ Postcode _____

Phone _____ Mobile _____

Email _____

JOINT MEMBER DETAILS

☐ Mr ☐ Mrs ☐ Miss ☐ Ms ☐ Dr Date of birth ____ / ____ / ____

First name _____

Last name _____

Phone _____ Mobile _____

Email _____

Declaration and important Privacy Statement: National Seniors Australia respects your privacy and is committed to protecting your personal information. You can view the full details of our privacy statement at nationalseniors.com.au

National Seniors Australia - ABN 89 050 523 003. *One card per single or joint membership referral.

☐ I would like my nearest National Seniors branch to contact me.

☐ I do not want to receive information about special offers from National Seniors.

MEMBERSHIP AND PAYMENT DETAILS

1 YEAR ☐ Single \$40** ☐ Joint \$50** 2 YEAR ☐ Single \$65 ☐ Joint \$80

3 YEAR ☐ Single \$95 ☐ Joint \$120 Lifetime ☐ Single \$430 ☐ Joint \$570

**includes a one-off \$5 joining fee.

☐ Cheque/money order payable to National Seniors Australia.

☐ Please charge my card: ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard
(1.5% Visa and Mastercard surcharge applies)

Card no:

Expiry ____ / ____

Cardholder's Name _____

Cardholder's Signature _____

Please return this coupon with payment to:

National Seniors Australia
GPO Box 1450
Brisbane QLD 4001

**Be
heard**

National Seniors
Australia

Call **1300 76 50 50** or visit **nationalseniors.com.au**

nib Health Cover for National Seniors Members

We all have different health care needs, particularly as we get older. nib health cover recognises this with options specifically designed for over 50s.



Cover for the important things

Like heart related procedures and surgery, and joint replacements



Don't pay for the things you no longer need

Excludes pregnancy and birth related services

**SPECIAL
MEMBER
OFFER**

Join any combined nib Hospital and Extras cover to receive:



An ongoing 6% discount on your premiums when you pay by direct debit from a cheque or savings account



Plus you'll receive 30 days of health cover on us[^]
(conditions apply)

Switching funds?

We'll recognise all waiting periods already served with your current fund so you can claim straight away.*

Call now on **1300 50 50 96** or visit **nationalseniors.com.au/nib** for health cover designed for over 50s.



National Seniors

Australia

nib it's worth it

nib health insurance is promoted by National Seniors Australia Ltd ABN 89 050 523 003 as an authorised representative of nib health funds limited ABN 83 000 124 381. Offer applies to National Seniors Australia members. Information given is based on nib Top Hospital No Pregnancy cover. The 6% discount on your annual premium applies to direct debit payment from a cheque or savings account only, excludes direct debit from a credit card account. *30 days on us offer applies to new customers who join any hospital and extras package. You must pay the first 31 days of your premium and we will pay for the next 30 days of your premium. ^Waiting periods apply for services not covered by current fund. Any existing limits used and waiting periods served with your current health fund will be carried across to your new nib policy. Offer excludes OSHC and Overseas Visitor covers. Conditions apply, please call 1300 50 50 96 or visit www.nationalseniors.com.au nib325205_0313

Members Price: \$1,150*
Non Members Price: \$1,187*
MEMBERS SAVE \$37
Departs: Multiple departures
Flight offer available



The Ghan and Indian Pacific Rail Journeys

Embark on one of the world's great all-inclusive rail journeys with Great Southern Rail. Your package includes off train excursions, standard on-board beverages, meals and more. Book a Platinum or Gold Service fare aboard The Ghan or Indian Pacific before 31 December 2013 and we'll include your airfares and up to three nights' accommodation free.

Members Price: \$13,745*
Non Members Price: \$14,495*
MEMBERS SAVE \$750
Departs: Multiple departures
Flights additional



11 Night Great Australian Aircruise

Combine the best of outback Australia with a taste of the tropics on a Great Australian Aircruise with Bill Peach Journeys. From the remote majesty of Uluru (Ayers Rock) to the wetland splendour of Kakadu National Park, this is the journey of a lifetime. Travel by private Embraer Jet, stay in the finest accommodation and enjoy fine dining along the way.

Members Price: \$12,950*
Non Members Price: \$14,200*
MEMBERS SAVE \$1,250
Departs: 3 Nov 2013
International flights additional



24 Night The Treasures of South America

Join Contours on an experience of a lifetime as you journey through the heart and soul of South America. Experience regions rich in history, spectacular landscapes and the intriguing cultures that make up the tapestry of this extraordinary continent including the Amazon, Machu Picchu, the Andes and much more. Escorted by Steve and Ann Gaunt.

Members Price: \$3,179*
Non Members Price: \$3,229*
MEMBERS SAVE \$50
Departs: 31 Aug 2014
Flights additional



20 Night South Pacific and Papua New Guinea

Departing from Sydney or Brisbane cruise the tropics aboard Dawn Princess with Princess Cruises. Visit the remote islands of Papua New Guinea and experience their fascinating culture and traditions, following this necklace of islands to the Solomon Islands capital of Honiara. Continue to Luganville and superb Champagne Bay, then to Vila and Noumea before returning to Sydney.

*Starting prices per person twin share and were correct at the time of printing but may fluctuate. Bookings are only confirmed with a deposit and are subject to availability at time of payment.

Members Price: \$4,995*
Non Members Price: \$5,150*
MEMBERS SAVE \$155
Departs: Multiple departures
Flights additional



17 Night Best of New Zealand

Experience New Zealand's jaw dropping landscapes and major attractions on an 18 day guided expedition with AAT Kings. Explore the north and south islands including the Bay of Islands, Auckland, Rotorua, Christchurch and more. Experience the unique Maori culture, cruise on the Milford Sound and discover Franz Josef Glacier in all it's glory.

Members Price: \$1,064*
Non Members Price: \$1,099*
MEMBERS SAVE \$35
Departs: Daily
Flights additional



5 Night Spectacular Sydney & Harbour

Enjoy a memorable holiday with Holiday Special Packages staying in cosmopolitan Darling Harbour, discover Sydney and its southern beaches, cruise on the harbour and visit the surrounding regions of the iconic Blue Mountains and Hunter Valley. Colonial history, stunning architecture, superb waterways and friendly people epitomise the vibrance of this spectacular city.

Members Price: \$5,500*
Non Members Price: \$5,675*
MEMBERS SAVE \$175
Departs: Multiple departures
Flights additional



17 Night Rockies Panorama and Alaska Cruise

Board the Rocky Mountaineer train and journey through British Columbia and Alberta. Arrive in Jasper for spectacular views of Maligne Canyon and Athabasca Glacier on the Columbia Icefield. Visit Surprise Corner in Banff and the Butchart Gardens in Victoria. Explore the glacier-carved fjords and rugged islands with an extraordinary Inside Passage Alaskan cruise with Trafalgar.

Members Price: \$10,085*
Non Members Price: \$10,395*
MEMBERS SAVE \$310
Departs: Multiple departures
International flights additional



20 Night Magnificent Europe – Paris to Prague

This 21 day journey of discovery with APT begins with three indulgent nights in Paris and concludes with three romantic nights in Prague, a vibrant cultural hub. In between, cruise the tranquil waters of the Rhine, Main and Danube rivers from Amsterdam and Budapest stopping on the way to explore the quaint towns, historical cities and castle ruins along the riverside.

**Call us for a full itinerary on these
tours or visit our website.**

1300 88 37 50
nationalseniorstravel.com.au

National Seniors
 Travel

The Last Word

time out

I was recently invited by a former colleague and National Seniors member to visit a factory unit in Perth's northern suburbs. The premises contained a workshop, manned entirely by volunteers, which produces wheelchairs for kids overseas. The volunteers, both men and women, regularly commit to working in the production, assembly and packaging of these wheelchairs.

Wheelchairs For Kids (WFK) was started in 1998 by the Rotary Club of Scarborough and supported by the Christian Brothers. The wheelchairs at that time were manufactured almost entirely from disused bicycle parts. In the initial year, 120 wheelchairs were produced. Now, production hits around 300 per month.

This workshop of volunteers (not one person receives a salary) has produced 25, 813 wheelchairs to July this year. These have been distributed to 76 countries around the world with the major recipients being Vietnam (5677), Iraq (2288), Sri Lanka (2204) and Papua New Guinea (1697). The wheelchairs find their way to countries less well known including Burkina Faso, Belarus, Moldova, Kiribati and places such as Chernobyl, Salitaga and Savusavu.

Many of the wheelchairs go to war-ravaged countries where children have suffered severe injury or lost limbs from landmines. Others go to countries where disabled children have little if any support from medical services.

The first model made of used bicycle parts, timber and plastic seats has been replaced with the latest model, approved by the World Health Organisation. The workshop proudly displays on one end wall, all nine models that have been developed and sent overseas since the start of the enterprise.

The three wheel design of the latest model allows the wheelchair to be used over a variety of terrains. Many wheelchairs go to very small villages with few, if any roads or pathways. The chair is also fully adjustable to suit the unique requirements of each child and comes with tray table, head/trunk supports and safety harness.

A packaging company provides the boxes specifically designed to fit the disassembled chairs and, as a nice touch, each chair is packed with a knitted blanket and soft toy. The wheelchairs are assembled at the receiving end and adjusted to the needs of the child by therapists frequently attached to aid programs.

Approximately 150 men and women, all seniors, volunteer various periods of time to work in the workshop manufacturing and assembling the wheelchairs. Many more people are involved outside the workshop in a voluntary capacity, knitting the blankets, making the soft toys, sewing the covers for the padded seats and arm rests and a variety of other tasks. In all, there are around 1000 volunteers involved in this charitable enterprise.

I was really taken by the spirit of giving and enjoyment evident in the volunteers. The stacked boxes of wheelchairs ready to be loaded into shipping containers was tangible evidence of the value from the half-a-day-a-week or more of voluntary work. Some volunteers were utilising previous employment skills in operating machinery while others have developed new skills as a result of working there.

None of this would be possible without the generosity of Rotary Clubs, schools, suppliers of goods and services and personal donations. I was heartened that 100 cents of every dollar given to this cause, together with every hour of labour provided by the volunteers, makes its way in the form of a wheelchair to someone in need. This cannot be said for many of our aid programs.

The wheelchairs give disabled children dignity. Where previously the child had to be carried if they ventured outside, they can now attend school, get to medical treatment and even play with other children.

This visit demonstrated to me how the generosity of giving combined with the volunteering of seniors can make a real difference.

To read more about this go to www.wheelchairsforkids.org.

David Carvosso
Chairman National Seniors