

## President's Report to 2017 Annual General Meeting

As I finish my first year as President of U3A Sapphire Coast, there is much to reflect upon. As with any year there have been some highs and some lows, but all in all our U3A is continuing to go from strength to strength.

2016 was a year that saw us consolidate our move online, both for managing our membership records and for managing our extensive Program. This move has not been without its challenges, but I must congratulate all our members for bearing with us, even those who have, for whatever reason, had difficulty accessing the new way of doing things. It has been a steep learning curve for many, including some members of our Committee, but the pay-off is already evident with more time available for our volunteers to concentrate on supporting and developing our organisation rather than spending time on mundane administrative tasks.

Moving online has also meant that we can respond in a much more timely manner to offers of new courses and events. Whereas previously we were constrained by only being able to get information to our members on a term by term basis through a newsletter, we can now advise our members almost instantly by email about vacancies in existing courses and events, and about new opportunities as they open up. A great example of this is our Seniors Festival event coming up next month – final details were only bedded down a few weeks ago and it had not been included in our Program for Term 1. With the ability to get to our members instantly this event was booked out within 10 days of going online, and because it is managed online it is easy to offer any cancellations to those on a waiting list. This was not possible (or it took up an inordinate amount of time to manage) when we had to do things the “old way”. However, we understand that we still need to make sure that all our members can fully participate in our U3A even if they do not have computer access, so we have kept in place existing “off-line” ways for members to book into courses and events, and for our Course Leaders to manage their classes. This will continue into the foreseeable future – there should be no reason for anyone to feel that they can no longer be a member simply because of our new technology.

Our membership seems to have stabilised at around 500 over the last couple of years. We tend to lose about 100 members at renewal time, but this is offset by a similar number joining for the first time every year. 500 members makes us the largest single community-based group in the Bega Valley, which is a matter of pride especially because we are an all-volunteer organisation with no ongoing outside funding. Our size and success is purely down to the wonderful work of our volunteers – our Management Committee, our Program Sub-committee and most importantly (because without them there would be no purpose for U3A) our Course Leaders.

Over the past year we have offered over 50 different Courses and 24 “One-off” events. This year is shaping up to be even better, as new members with new skills and interests join U3A and embrace the concept of “shared learning”.

Some of our Course Leaders offer only the occasional class or talk, but others continue year after year. I would particularly like to acknowledge those who

have retired(!) from offering their long-running Courses: Ceri Brown, who hosting a singing group for many years in her home; Don and Judy Varney, who pounded the local pavements with their walking group most Fridays; and Bruce Cameron, who led many of us through a journey of exploring Western Philosophy but has now handed the reins on to others.

Although by any measure we are all part of a successful and strong community organisation, there are always challenges ahead. The greatest challenge is finding members who are prepared to do that bit more than simply attending courses and events. We are now entering our third year in a row where at the AGM there are fewer nominations for Committee positions than there are positions available. It's true that being on a Committee is not for everyone, but surely from amongst our membership of 500 we should be able to find more than a handful with the skills and interest in keeping our U3A going. I would therefore ask each and every member to at least consider putting something back into our organisation.

The easiest pathway to finding out where you can best contribute is by joining our Program Sub-Committee. The PSC is the "engine room" of U3A, and coordinates the when, where and how of our varied Program. I can commend involvement from personal experience – you don't need a background in education, and there is plenty of enjoyment and scope for creativeness in putting together an event or assisting a Course Leader, along with the satisfaction of knowing that all our members really appreciate your efforts in putting together the wonderful Program that we offer them each term. If you are interested, simply contact any member of the Committee or PSC – details are on our website.

This brings me to the final part of my Report. Apart from thanking our dedicated Course Leaders on behalf of all our members, I would also like to thank all those who work, usually behind the scenes, to keep our Program organised and our administration ticking along. As well as those of us who are continuing into 2017 as either Committee or PSC members, I would like to give a special mention to those who have stood down after some years of Committee service to enjoy a well-deserved break. These people include Pat McKay, who spent 6 years on the Committee as the Membership Registrar and most recently as Secretary, Judy Raymond, who was one of our quiet achievers on the PSC, and Thea Talbot, who not only helped on the PSC but combined this with offering (and continues to offer) her Chi Kung and Yoga classes to our members for four sessions a week every term.

So, congratulations to all our members for having the sense to be part of this great group – I certainly believe that U3A is a fantastic way of making sure that our "Third Age" is stimulating, productive and full of fun!

Ian Robertson  
President  
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