

Today we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the official opening of our village and I have been asked to say a few words about the very early days of what was then called The Netherlands Retirement Village Association of Qld. In preparing this talk, a lot of data came to hand, a lot of data has been lost over those years some has been saved and you can see that over there. In particular The Dutch Australian Cultural Centre has come to the rescue with articles which had appeared in the now defunct Dutch Australian Weekly. For the rest I had to rely on my personal recollections which may well vary, at least to some degree with other personal recollections.

You may know or have heard of the Australian singer-songwriter Paul Kelly. One of his songs has the title

“FROM LITTLE THINGS, BIG THINGS GROW”

That title of course states the obvious we can see it all around us but I would like to give just ONE example – an acorn about 1cm in size and with a potential to grow into an oak tree at least 12 meter tall . I like to relate that title to our village.

One of my earliest recollections - I was asked to open our first bank account in the name of the Association and I recall that it was with the Westpac Bank at 127 Creek Street in the CBD. Why there you may ask ... only because that was also the address of my office. I can recall the amount banked - \$105 perhaps some donations but mostly the few dollars Thea Jonkers made by selling the coffee and biscuits at our frequent meetings.

Precious little really ... say 100 Dollars is a drop in the ocean in the scheme of things to come. And look at it now 3 decades later a magnificent village with a near new care facility and many independent living units perhaps, in monetary terms I guess 60 Million Dollars give or take a few millions.

FROM LITTLE THINGS - BIG THINGS GROW.

But how did it all start? Well, different people will have different recollections but I recall a couple of things. In the early 80s, 1982 I think, we formed a Federation of Dutch Clubs, an umbrella organisation, so the various clubs could work in unison which up to that point was not always the case. Most if not all clubs became members as well as may other organisations, groups, church groups, committees and more. The better part of the Dutch community I would say.

During monthly meetings the presidents of the member clubs started to talk more and more about a dutch retirement village for our community. NSW and Victoria already had so why not in Qld?.

THE FEDERATION IN MY VIEW PLAYED A CRITICAL ROLE IN THE FORMATION OF THE RETIREMENT VILLAGE ASSOCIATION

I FOUND an annual report of the Federation, sadly undated, but possibly around 1985. This report stated among other things...

"We as a Federation, the combined clubs in and around Brisbane, must get our act together, we must act now and do everything possible to get an organisation going, be this by way of an active sub-committee, be this by way of an independent association, an organisation to look after the needs of the aged in the Dutch community.

12th February meeting 1986 M Jonkers moved the motion.

Not long after that, the Federation, with approval of its members, established an interim committee which had the task of doing research and find out if there was a need, a desire and possibility to build a Dutch village. A number of well attended public meetings took place and this committee, chaired by Martin Jonkers, came to the conclusion that there was a need and enthusiastic support for a village. The next step was to establish the Netherlands Retirement Village Association which was formally founded in June 1986. I have searched high and low to find out who were the members of that very first committee but I can recollect only two Martin and myself. Perhaps also Mr J Boon, Karin Hendriks, Bob Haks.

We had many meetings, talked with people from down south who had experience in this field but progress was very slow initially but once we found a suitable site there was rapid progress. 62 Collingwood Road was it, but how on earth are we going to come up with \$160,000. I do not recall our bank balance but it was nowhere near the required amount. A brilliant proposal ... let us

issue debentures at \$1000 each. We organised a special meeting to explain the debentures and at the end of the afternoon we had \$20,000 by way of sales and pledges. A good start. And now Karin Hendriks came to the fore by selling a large number of debentures and together with some funds from the Netherlands we settled on time and were the proud owners of a suitable site. That year 1988 I think we held our second AGM for the first time on our own land. I have the minutes of that meeting

The Board had appointed Jake de Vries as our architect. He was instructed to design the complex in a Dutch style, and the building project started in earnest and by late 1990 the first residents moved in. At about the same time we obtained a grant from the Federal Government in excess of 1.3 million dollars (about 5 million in today's money) enabling us to build some 30 hostel units and the central building. The grant was conditional upon us providing a number of hostel units free of charge to financially disadvantaged people. Additional units were built and the village was completed by November 1991.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Very early in the process, the Board realised the importance of community support. Without that support we could not succeed. Let me Quote from

We had that support from the Dutch community in the form of the Federation.

The Federation of Dutch Clubs organised annual balls for a number of years with all proceeds going to the village association. There were lots of sponsors including the Dutch airline KLM who donated airfares to the Netherlands, that company also donated the large oil painting now at the main entrance. We remember the

late Tom Schoon and his team for organising the great evenings and Rick Coles the then KLM Qld manager for their generous sponsorship. At the 1988 so called Expo City Koninginne Ball I had the pleasure of presenting a cheque for \$4,000 to the president of the retirement village Martin Jonkers. In today's terms that would be about \$17,500 if my present value calculations are correct. Not a bad profit for the one evening.

The individual clubs organised events and often the Association was the beneficiary. The Festival Committee chaired by the late Jan van Zandwijk donated the swimming pool complex which is still in use today. That group also largely funded the purchase of a bus and more. Other supporters include the architect Jake de Vries who designed and donated the stained glass window above the main entrance.

A few years later, the late Hans Zwijnenberg handed me a cheque for \$10,000, a contribution towards an emergency monitoring system for the village.

And the list goes on and I apologize to those supporters I have not mentioned but there were many and your support much appreciated.

A very supportive Dutch consulate, going back to the early eighties, with Mr Graeme Morris as the dutch consul..... Managing Director of a prominent law firm, Morris, fletcher and Cross But I think the powers to be in the Netherlands decided that we should have Dutch people as consul and we had career consuls for a period followed by Mr Casper Kuiper as the long serving and popular honorary Consul. The late Mrs Roberta Kuiper was a board member for a number of years.

I must say that over the years the Federation and our Association had a good relationship with the Dutch consuls and I think we would have received full support from the consulate when we made a special request to the Ambassador. I shall refer to that again later.

I have mentioned the importance of community support and I should relate two occasions that will stay with me for a long time. In late 2001 the adjoining parcel of land was offered for sale. Of course we jumped at it as it would give us land to build a much needed nursing home and additional independent living units. Price \$900,000 which of course we did not have. One day in the office I was talking to the then manager and in comes one of our members with a chequebook in his hands. His words.... "Write out 9 cheques for \$100,000 each and I shall sign them". We sold the units readily and repaid this large sum without any problems. I don't know if I can name him but the name up on that building <POINT> would give you a clue.

Another Dutch man who owns and operates a quarry in the Redlands area came to one of our building committee meetings and said " Call me if you are in need of a million dollars to complete the project". We managed without taking up that most generous offer.

At the main entrance to the village there is a plaque saying "THIS VILLAGE BECAME A REALITY WITH THE SUPPORT FROM THE QLD. DUTCH COMMUNITY" and the plaque lists the names of the men who made it a reality and please join me in remembering them for the great work, their deep commitment and determination to make it a reality. Let me list those board members :

Martin Jonkers, President

Jan Boon, Treasurer/secretary

Joop Viervyzer member

Tom Schoon member

Lou Rijsdijk, member

Henk Bakker, member

Yours truly, vice president

It truly saddens me that all but one are no longer with us.

But on a happier note let us thank their wives who are still with us and here today. We thank you Thea Jonkers for being the private chauffeur on the very numerous trips to Birkdale. We thank you Henny Boon, Henny Bakker and my wife Johanna for the support you gave your husbands.

Although not on the Board but very much part of getting the village established and being the honorary secretary for a long time was the one and only Karin Hendricks. A big thank you.

Yes we now have a truly magnificent village especially with the latest addition, the Jan Scholtes care facility and we can be proud of what we, the Dutch Community, have achieved for the benefit of not just the Dutch but also the wider community. Julie can tell us but I think there are numerous different nationalities in the care. But what goes on inside the 4 walls of the care facility is so much more important. As a frequent visitor to Mollee House, the dementia specific unit, I can assure you that our elders receive high

quality care. We are indeed blessed with the current expert management and care staff headed by Julie Baker. My doctor.....

We the independent residents are also blessed to have Vicky on staff to look after us. She does a great job.

I read from the recent newsletter - Dinner with Vicky has been an innovation and is being enjoyed by those attending. But you have to make an appointment to dine with the Dame.

And that brings me to the day that we mark the opening of Prins Willem Alexander Village 30 years ago and I remember that on that day a large crowd was in attendance incl. the Dutch Ambassador to Australia. The request I referred to earlier in my talk was materialised when the ambassador surprised Martin Jonkers by awarding him the Medal of the Order of Oranje Nassau, one of the highest awards in the Dutch Honour system, for his significant contributions and being the driving force in establishing this great village. A reward well deserved and possibly a first for Queensland.

Martin had retired from his successful business and could afford to spend a lot of time to the project. His expertise in many areas was a tremendous help.

Indispensable is a word to say - absolutely necessary ????
perhaps no but without Martin it would have meant that the task would have been a whole lot harder, a whole lot dearer and a whole lot longer to complete. So, yes Martin was the right man at the right place and at the right time. Yes, absolutely the right man to lead the team.

But I think he would be the first person to acknowledge the support and general assistance of his Board members and others.

SO IN THE END IT WAS A TEAM EFFORT.

At the end of 1996, Martin retired as president, he asked me to take over the presidency. A hard act to follow but someone had to do it.

In conclusion, let me also say that over the entire period the Village has been blessed with long serving Board members and excellent financial management. In this regard, I note that the first or one of the first donations to the village was ONE DOLLAR in January 1986 and that dollar we still have, framed and displayed in DE SOOS.

FROM LITTLE THINGS, BIG THINGS GROW

I must add that as at the relevant date, November 1991 the village was completed without any bank assistance by way of an overdraft or mortgage. Debt free !!!!!

One of those long serving board members is Henk Mollee, easily the longest-serving president of the Association, and I would think he would still be in that position but for the merger.

Henk took over from me to be the president and now he will take over from me again this time to continue the story of our great village.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your attendance and Please make Henk feel welcome.