

Speech for John Crichton's Funeral 20 February 2023

by Jenny Pemberton-Webb, Place Manager City of Greater Dandenong.

John Crichton

8/2/2023 (aged 91)

It is an honour to share stories and memories of John Crichton with you today.

My parents knew John and his wife Helen, in fact dad played baseball with John when they were younger so the name 'Johny Crichton' had popped up many times in my family home.

I work at the City of Greater Dandenong and with my career spanning 30 years I have had the privilege of being a friend of John's and others of his generation, who laid the foundations of community, in Dandenong's most defining decades, since the 1950's.

When John and I met, he knowing everything Dandenong and me a fresh naive Council arts gallery co-ordinator, the baseball connection to dad allowed us to immediately click.

John frequently attended opening nights at the Walker Street Gallery, I'd bump into him when he was volunteering at Heritage Hill, he would offer to help out at all sorts of events and would casually pop in to see me at the old Firestation arts centre to make sure everything was going along okay, and to make sure the ghost wasn't bothering me.

His greeting was always the same "Hello Dear"

John's name would frequently come up in the local paper, he had his finger on the pulse because he sought people out, he asked questions and he gathered information. Marg Stork from the Dandenong Journal would attribute snippets of community news to him and I'm pretty sure he and Mike Morris the editor of the Examiner Newspaper exchanged notes at the Albion Hotel on many an occasion.

You could always take John Crichton on face value, he didn't have an agenda, he was honest, well connected, he showed up and wasn't looking for accolades.

John was however recognised for his lifelong involvement in Dandenong with an Australia Day Award in 2012 when he was named Non-Resident of the Year.

John Kelly (former Mayor) filled out the nomination form providing a fitting description of John Crichton and why he is so valued in this city. The nomination reads.....

John has been a City of Greater Dandenong volunteer for many, many years. He has worked with the staff on the Dandenong Walking Tours since 2007. During the tours he provides stories about the life and times of Dandenong with lots of gossip and tid bits ranging from stories about the first apparent bomb ever being blown up in McCrae Street to the ghost which he has seen in the old Dandenong Town Hall clock tower.

John has a keen interest in the arts and gives his time generously always a smile and quick wit. John has been a key part of the success of Councils Ambassador Program since its inception in 2005. He volunteers for every ambassador duty he is able to do even when he has his own health problems. John is a true ambassador for the City of Greater Dandenong in every sense.

John was a board member on the former Dandenong Festival of Music and Art for Youth. He is also involved in the RSL and Council's Heritage Hill tourist attraction.

He is a member of the Dandenong Agricultural and Pastoral Society, works on different committees including sponsorship for the Dandenong Show and only recently gave the role of official bar tender for the launch and the three days of the Show to a younger man, after 30+years. John is also well known at the Albion Hotel by staff and patrons who respect him and he has donated a painting of the original hotel for their history wall.

John is known around town as Mr Dandenong and he is truly a peoples man. He has been around Dandenong all his life although not actually born in Dandenong. He knows just about everyone and their sister, brother, mother or father. He has the memory of an elephant and continues his daily walk from home on the outskirts of Dandenong into its centre strutting around as if he was 35 years old.

A further summary within Councils records supporting his nomination states;
Mr John Crichton of Hallam.

- He played baseball from 1946 with the Scots Church Presbyterian team, he also played for Dandy A and Springvale and with the Presbyterian Lions and the Springvale Lions. He was a baseball umpire and treasurer of the Dandenong Baseball Association for 25 years. He also ran the Dandenong Amateur and Oakleigh Athletics Associations and played social tennis at the Norby Tennis Club and the Yarra Falls Court.
- President for 8 years and life member of the Dandenong Festival of Music and Art for Youth.
- President of the committee of management of the Dandenong Day Nursery and Dandenong Family Day Care Centre.
- President of the Dandenong community youth movement and a member of the Dandenong Youth Festival committee.
- Past committee member and President of the Dandenong Agricultural and Pastoral Show committee.
- Member of the Heritage Hill committee.
- Life member of the Dandenong Apex Club.

The letter, from the Council Mayor and CEO, giving John Crichton his Australia Day Award opens with...

Dear John, there is no one more deserving. You are Dandenong through and through and have lived in this city for much of your life. While you now live just outside Greater Dandenong, we have no doubt where your heart is and you are still known widely as Mr Dandenong.

After a number of paragraphs the letter closes with....

John – you have been a crucial part of Dandenong and you are a true gentleman who is dearly loved by all who know and meet you. You have enriched the lives of everyone who has come into contact with you through the many volunteering activities you have undertaken in Greater Dandenong. On behalf of the Greater Dandenong Community, we thank and congratulate you for your tireless work.

Funerals have a way of reminding us that the little things count, John Crichton focused on the little things.

The City's archives have records of letters and Council minutes and John Crichton's name regularly appeared.

2010 - Thank you for submitting your questions at the Ordinary Council meeting held on 27 April.

Your question relating to parking on the west side of Lonsdale Street, Dandenong has been referred..... your question relating to advertising signage at Dandenong Park regarding events in Dandenong has been referredand your question relating to installing a barbeque at Greaves Reserve has been referred..... They will investigate these matters and advise you accordingly in writing.

Also in 2010 - Thank you for submitting a question at the Ordinary Council meeting held in relation to community signage and events in Greater Dandenong. Council appreciates your concern on this matter and has developed a plan to introduce nine community signs placed strategically around the municipality to inform the community and residents about upcoming events and activities

The location of the community signs are;

- Springvale Road;
- Burden Park, Springvale;
- Parkmore Shopping Centre, Keysborough;
- Greaves Reserve, Dandenong;
- Princes Highway and Dandenong Park;
- corner of Clow Street and Stud Road, Dandenong;
- Dandenong Market;
- Heatherton Road, Dandenong North; and

- Mons Parade and Heatherton Road, Noble Park.

Planning for the community signs is well underway and they will be in place by June 2010. Thank you again for your concern.

2010 – Thank you for your question raised at the 27 April Council Meeting regarding concerns about construction workers, parking vehicles all day on the west side of Lonsdale Street and the associated impact on local businesses.

And in 2013 a hand written letter to Council from John -

I read with interest your article in The City monthly magazine in particular the article about the town hall clock. I have been associated with various groups in Dandenong for over 60 years and by my records the clock was installed in 1933.....the letter continues for many paragraphs and then states On several occasions I have carried a box of bayonet globes up the tower and changed the globes by hand, quite a feat.

While the Dandenong Festival of Music and Art for Youth was in operation, I had the privilege to have a master key and was highly respected and often referred to as "the unofficial hall keeper", whilst the festival had use of the whole hall.

And a few weeks later.....

Further to my letter regarding the clock in the tower of the Dandenong Town Hall I have the pleasure in informing you that after looking through copies of the Journal I came across the following.....the letter states various facts about community events to raise funds for the clock face, the company who constructed it and the official opening in 1934..... and then his letter continues....I trust this information will correct the article in The City magazine I remain a lover of Dandenong over many years and am a proud of my involvement in many aspects of our city.

So today we say thank you to John Crichton

Committee Member

Volunteer

President

Bar Tender

Lover of Dandenong

Life Member

Letter Writer

Ambassador

Unofficial hall keeper

for caring about all the little things in Dandenong.

Jenny Pemberton-Webb