



RVIB Carols by Candlelight draws near



Australia's favourite Christmas tradition, RVIB Carols by Candlelight, is fast approaching and will again be held at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl on Christmas Eve.

For 66 years RVIB Carols by Candlelight has been a treasured part of the Australian culture - and a proud chapter in the history of the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind.

More than 30,000 people annually join in the festivities at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl and millions across Australia watch the live telecast presented on the Nine Network.

The event is co-ordinated by RVIB and raises funds to help children and adults who are blind or vision impaired. Proceeds from ticket sales, candle sales, merchandise sales and donations make this event the biggest fundraising activity on our calendar.

RVIB Carols by Candlelight attracts Australia's finest performers, who join corporate sponsors and supporters,

community groups and volunteers to make this event a huge success.

A few of the artists already announced to perform at this year's Carols, hosted by Ray Martin, include HI-5, Marina Prior and Dennis Walter.

The launch of Carols will be held on 9 December at Federation Square. See some of your favourite stars and Santa!

The event will be broadcast live by sponsors, the Nine Network and Radio 3AW and Magic 693, on Wednesday, 24 December from 9.00pm.

Further details about the event can be found online at www.rvibcarolsbycandlelight.com.au and tickets are available from November 8 through Ticketmaster7 on 136 100.



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RVIB

> Vision: To be the leading provider of services, resources and information which enable people who are blind or vision impaired to maximise their independence and quality of life.

Message from CEO Doug Kent

Welcome to the final edition of RVIB News for 2003. It's been another busy 12-months for our organisation and there have been numerous highlights and achievements that we can all look back on and be proud of.



Over the past year we awarded Further Education Bursaries to nine budding students, commenced a history project to formally document RVIB's past, gained compliance as an Adult Community and Further Education Provider and honoured some of our longest serving supporters at a luncheon at Government House.

Another moment that remains vivid in my mind is the image of children parading at the opening ceremony of the Southern Cross Games last December.

Hosted by the RVIB School in Burwood, the games saw children from across Australia and the Pacific Ocean region come together for a week of competition and cultural programs. More than 130 children who are blind and vision impaired, including teams from Fiji and Samoa, competed for gold - but it was the life experience and the opportunity for the children to mix with other children facing the same challenges that made the event so special for everyone.

Then, in February, we had the launch of our Felix Braille Book

project at the Royal Melbourne Zoo - many of you would have read about it in the pages of RVIB News. Felix is making picture books available for the first time to young children who are blind or vision impaired and is another tremendous example of the creativity and expertise of our staff and volunteers.

Children who are blind or vision impaired are now able to hear and feel their favourite bedtime stories and the response, from all over Australia, has been overwhelming. We're hoping that with ongoing funding we'll soon be able to see the orange Felix borrowing bags traveling beyond our Victorian borders to give children all over this nation the opportunity to enjoy the picture books we all love.

RVIB is a strong and relevant charity because there will always be a need for the services we provide and that need is growing at a faster rate than ever before.

Many of you will already be aware that RVIB, along with the Royal Blind Society of NSW and the Vision Australia Foundation, has been researching the feasibility of forming a national blindness agency. The signing of a Heads of Agreement in June was a major step forward for all of us.

There were a number of reasons for exploring this avenue, but essentially our exploration stems from a desire to identify what is best for our clients, today,

tomorrow and in 20 years time. I see RVIB as a legacy of the Victorians who have recognised the importance and value of what we offer. We rely on support from the community and, in return, we provide peace of mind and support to thousands of Victorians who would otherwise have nowhere to turn.

One client recently said that RVIB was his lifeline. He said that we gave him back his life at a time when he thought losing his sight meant he couldn't succeed. These are the types of people we help, who we assist and who we will continue to be there for.

The work of RVIB is collaborative. We can only achieve what we do for our clients each year with the combined dedication and hard work of our staff, supporters, volunteers, clients, sponsors and donors.

On behalf of everyone at RVIB I would like to thank you for your continued support and I wish you and your families a safe and happy Christmas. If you would like to visit us please call to arrange a time.

Dr Douglas M Kent
Chief Executive Officer
RVIB

Teaching with heart...



▲ Children enjoying playtime at RVIB School in Burwood

Garry Stinchcombe is quick to point out that he's a teacher first and then a person who is blind, but the RVIB School veteran also knows that there are advantages he brings to the role when it comes to identifying with his students.

The 46 year old began teaching at the RVIB School in 1985 and says that despite the demanding nature of the role he has always found it rewarding.

“There are challenges for any teacher with a vision impairment, but the potential benefits and positive outcomes for students, parents, staff and school are considerable,” Garry says.

Garry's affiliation with RVIB traces back to when he attended the school in Burwood as a youngster and he recognises the circle he has formed by returning.

“I've gone from student to teacher and it's very satisfying to be following in the footsteps of the teachers who inspired me.”

“There were four teachers with vision impairments working at the school when I started my schooling in 1965 and they were all excellent mentors, teachers and adults who I could relate to and aspire to be like.”

Since returning to RVIB in a teaching capacity Garry has worked as a classroom teacher in both the middle and senior schools, coordinated and developed a school to community transition program for school leavers and coordinated the support skills and residential training programs.

He has also worked as a visiting teacher on a sessional basis, taught as a specialist Braille and adaptive technology teacher, is currently working as the special courses teacher and is the deputy manager of RVIB Education Services.

Whilst Garry acknowledges that he has a first-hand understanding of what it means to live with blindness he's careful to avoid teaching only from his own experiences.

“Too often, people see all blind or vision impaired people as the same, but in reality we all have a very different way of approaching something or managing.”

“Even though I've got a lot of experience as a person with a vision impairment, I have to make sure that I'm not just applying my understanding of vision impairment and being sensitive to this notion is very important.”

“I don't tell the kids they all have to be like Garry Stinchcombe. I want them to be what they want to be and to feel comfortable with whatever choices they make in life.”

Garry says that in the time he's been at the RVIB School he's witnessed some of the most creative and innovative people tailoring education to the needs of students who are blind.

“We're here because there's a need, albeit a niche need, and our strength is that we offer specialist things. So much of education today is moving towards a generalist area but we've always had specialist teachers in art, music therapy and sport.”

“Anyone can provide education, but not everyone can provide a good quality of education and whilst we're very fortunate to have a great visiting teaching service in Victoria, it's vital that we can keep providing what we do here at RVIB Burwood.”

Reflecting on his role, Garry says that he tries not to be all things to his students, but is aware of the benefits that his presence can have.

“It's very empowering for the children to be able to see what a person who is vision impaired can achieve. For them to see me in a good job, using technology and married with two children can be very encouraging.”

“Sometimes a student will come to me and say, 'I want to be a teacher' and I say, 'be a teacher, be who you want to be, but be realistic and practical about it and, above all, be honest with yourself’.”

For Sight Week helps to break the barriers

Spreading the message that blindness is no barrier to success was the main aim of the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind's (RVIB) *For Sight Week*, held in September.

For Sight Week, a statewide campaign, was opened at the Royal Botanic Gardens and kick started a week of events and activities designed to educate Victorians on the abilities and achievements of people who are blind or vision impaired.

RVIB Chief Executive Officer, Dr Doug Kent, said that whilst *For Sight Week* was primarily about recognising the achievements of those who strive for their dreams with remarkable commitment every day, it was also about instructing all Victorians on the part that they can play in making our State more accessible to people who are blind or vision impaired.

"More than 150,000 Victorians are blind or vision impairment and all have a vision of independence. They can all contribute to the workforce, raise families, even go whale watching or climb mountains if they choose to do so," Dr Kent said.



▲ Singers Lauren Hayes (left) and Amanda Forbes at RVIB's High Tea at the Windsor Hotel.

"The notion that people who are blind or vision impaired are reliant on others and limited by circumstance is a thing of the past. All our clients are wonderful examples of determination and human spirit."

To recognise this spirit, six RVIB and Vision Australia clients were awarded during the presentation of the inaugural *For Sight Week Achievement Awards*. The awards recognised the personal accomplishments and community contributions of people who are blind or vision impaired.

Awards were presented to six inspirational Victorians for excellence in the fields of art and entertainment, business and enterprise, sport and recreation, adaptive technology and community service. A final award was presented to the most outstanding nominee.

The award recipients in each category are:
Outstanding personal achievement - **Robyn McKenzie**; Adaptive Technology - **Nick Allan**; Business and Enterprise - **Jude Welsh**; Sport and Recreation - **Hazel Hockley**; Community Service - **Sue Adam** and; Arts and Entertainment - **Barb Williams**.

Recipient of the award for outstanding personal achievement, RVIB Employment Consultant, Robyn McKenzie, was delighted with the recognition saying that it was an absolute honour to be singled out.



▲ *For Sight Week Outstanding Personal Achievement Award* winner Robyn McKenzie

"Peer recognition is more meaningful to me than any other kind because your peers are people who know you on a more familiar basis," Robyn said.

"I've always been a great advocate for self awareness. The more self aware you are the more comfortable you should be with your abilities and limitations, which makes it easier to develop strategies to overcome any barriers."

Each award recipient was presented with a framed certificate and prize. Channel Nine, Qantas, Pulsedata, Quantum Technology and Just Jeans kindly donated prizes.

Guest speakers at the launch included RVIB board member and managing director of Draffin-Inwel, Don Draffin, and Paralympic gold medallists Lachlan Jones and Russell Short. Channel Nine *Postcards* presenter, Salliane Deckert was wonderful in her role as MC.

Other events and activities during the week included three days of vision screening in the Bourke Street Mall and High Tea at The Windsor Hotel.



A collection of photographic works taken sight unseen

In the tradition of "Proof", the 1991 Jocelyn Moorhouse-directed feature film about a blind photographer, comes **4Sight** - an exhibition of photographic works taken by Victorians who are vision impaired.

Conceived by Monash University graphic design honours student, Chris Yuen, and established in collaboration with RVIB, 4Sight is a unique photographic collection.

Each work, documenting an element in the life of the photographer, is thought provoking and a personal representation of a world captured sight unseen.

Project coordinator Chris Yuen says that 4Sight is significant because it offered participants the opportunity to explore a mode of art they may not traditionally engage in.

"The photographers didn't need to let their vision impairment get in the way of producing art. By participating in the 4Sight project, contributors engaged in a form of artistic expression and personal reflection that translated into some fascinating results."

4Sight will be exhibited at the 4Cats Gallery (269 Johnston Street, Abbotsford) from 21 October to 1 November 2003. Gold coin donation proceeds from the exhibition and sale of photographs will go to RVIB.

4Sight is a disability friendly exhibition.

For more information contact Chris Yuen on 0413 308 303 or Michelle Bourke, RVIB Public Relations on (03) 9522 5230 or 0209 881 295.

Monk visits world-class blindness facility



▲ Venerable Quang Hanh was impressed with RVIB's leading range of adaptive technology

A Vietnamese Buddhist Monk visited RVIB's Training, Technology and Employment Services' in October as part of his nation-wide tour of leading blindness agencies.

During his visit to Melbourne, Venerable Quang Hanh inspected RVIB's range of adaptive technology products for people who are blind or vision impaired. He also investigated best practices in providing services to the blind or vision impaired community.

Venerable Quang Hanh hopes to use knowledge gained from the tour to improve services to people who are blind or vision impaired in Vietnam.

"The people of Vietnam are in desperate need of equipment and services. My visit has enhanced my knowledge of the services that can be provided for people who are blind or vision impaired and I am grateful to RVIB for letting me visit their facilities," Venerable Quang Hanh said.

RVIB's adaptive technology division, VisTech Solutions, exhibits state-of-the-art products for people who are blind or vision impaired.

Sharon Boling, General Manager of RVIB Training, Technology and Employment Services, says the impact that this technology makes on the lives of people who are blind or vision impaired is enormous.

"It was a great opportunity for Venerable Quang Hanh to see the latest, most innovative equipment available," Ms Boling said.

Some of the products VisTech had on display included CCTVs with virtual reality glasses, screen reading packages, braille note takers and voice activated note takers.

After his Victorian visit Venerable Quang Hanh continued his journey to other states as part of his week-long Australian tour. The Buddhist community of Melbourne sponsored his visit.



RVIB Annual Report 2002/2003

The 2002/2003 RVIB Annual Report is now available. You can download a copy from the RVIB website - www.rvib.org.au - or call RVIB on (03) 9522 5243.

'Beyond Blue', Depression awareness forum



▲ RVIB's Employment Services team at the Beyond Blue forum recently.

The employment services team were guests of the local member for Prahran, Mr Tony Lupton MLA, at a recent forum addressing the issues of depression in the community.

One-in-five Australians suffer from depression at some stage of their life. The Depression Awareness Research Project is a major action research project developing, delivering and evaluating an intensive community-based approach to increasing community awareness and understanding of depression.

The project, conducted between 2001 and 2004, is an initiative of the Mental Health Research Institute in collaboration with *beyond blue*, the national depression initiative.

The evening was highly informative and gave RVIB staff a basis and understanding of how to work with people who are blind or vision impaired that are also experiencing depression. Mr Lupton is delighted to be involved with RVIB and pledged his support to people who are blind or vision impaired.

For more information about our Employment Services please call Robert Allan on (03) 9520 5555.

World Sight Day

By Dr Mark Medownick, Founder/Director, Medownick Laser Clinic at Epworth Medical Centre.

World Sight Day was observed on 9 October 2003 and focused on spreading a message about prevention and the treatment of eye disease.

In Australia, 60,000 people are blind and 400,000 have poor vision, but while these figures are daunting, half of all cases of blindness and 70% of vision impairments can be either treated or avoided.

An estimated 250,000 Australians have an eye condition known as glaucoma. Glaucoma damages the optic nerve that connects the eye to the brain and this is usually associated with an increase in the pressure inside the eye. The field of vision is affected, eventually leading

to tunnel vision. It is usually painless but, if untreated, glaucoma can lead to blindness.

One person in ten will develop glaucoma later in life. Some cases are genetic and a family history increases the risk of glaucoma by as much as four times. Sadly, half of all cases of glaucoma are not diagnosed. Glaucoma cannot be cured but, if detected early and treated effectively, loss of vision can be prevented or delayed. People over 50 years of age and those with a family history need regular eye examinations.



Health update

Effects of solar radiation on the eye

The sun emits ultraviolet radiation (UV), which can cause damage to the eye including cataracts, macular degeneration, solar retinitis, pterygium, eyelid cancer and corneal dystrophies.

There are two types of solar radiation - direct and scattered, both of which are damaging to the eye. Read the tips opposite to minimise risk of sun damage to your eyes.

Tips for eye care:

- Wear sunglasses that meet AS 1067 standards
- Buy sunglasses that wrap around
- Wear sunglasses in the middle of the day if outdoors as radiation levels are raised by up to 70 per cent during this time
- Expensive sunglasses don't necessarily provide adequate protection
- Wear sunglasses even if you wear contact lenses with UV protection, as they do not protect the entire eye



RVIB

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