

What the club has achieved, future priorities

By Grahame Hellyer

LAST month a strategic planning workshop was run for the club Management Committee by Alan Hodges and myself. Thirteen members of the committee attended. Our President, Anne Murray, was keen for the committee to look at what we have achieved since the Strategic Plan was produced, and at what we needed to concentrate on for the next year.

In introducing the strategic planning segment, Anne spoke of her particular priorities:

- Strengthening and developing strategic partnerships between the club and such areas as ACT Government, business and community organisations.
- Reinvigorate the sub-committee structure within the club to involve more members, to ensure sound forward planning and to strengthen management within the club.
- Pursue upgrade of facilities through completion of Stage 1 of the master plan, but also exploring redevelopment option proposals by developers.
- Generate additional income through fundraising and promotion of "Friends of Woden Seniors".

It was clear that the club had achieved a lot in a few years through the efforts of members and the office managers, and with the help of Government grants. In particular the internal and external appearance has improved (within structural limitations) as well as club office equipment and some of the electrical/mechanical and security systems which we probably don't notice. The workshop did not look at further facilities matters as the two sub-committees handling maintenance and the future development are managing well.

In examining the original 24 objectives of the Strategic Plan it was

decided that areas which needed effort were:

- (a) The Activities Sub-committee needs to be formed, in particular to look at new activities for current members as well as to appeal to new members, to look at partnerships where necessary to extend the range of activities, and to improve the flow of information to the various activity groups.
- (b) The objective stated as "Develop annual campaigns to promote membership, activities and services and to raise club profile" needs serious effort to make the community more aware of the club and what it offers seniors (Maureen Hickman will play a major role here).
- (c) The objectives related to financial

management improvement are about to be implemented through introduction of the MYOB financial software (thanks to Heike Elvers) and the Financial Sub-committee is also being reinvigorated (with Heike as Chair).
(d) A Risk Management Plan needs to be developed for the club.
(e) It was clear that success hinged on Objective 17 which required the formation of effective sub-committees to manage improvements to the club, its image in the community and its activities.

If you are enjoying your activities in the club you might like to consider whether you could spare a little time and effort to join one of the sub-committees. The more people involved the less each individual has to do!

Club members honoured at Cup lunch

THE Melbourne Cup lunch has become one of the club's most popular events of the year, and this year's event lived up to high expectations, with a splendid lunch, well-organised sweeps, and fancy hats.

Members were also able to congratulate fellow members who received National Day for Older Australians awards, presented by Gary Humphries, Senator for the ACT. Recipients included: *Elizabeth Halfnights* - Elizabeth teaches Tai Chi at the club, and has done so for the past 20 years. She is highly respected for her work in the ACT, contributing to the welfare of the general community. For instance, she has a "magic tin", into which people make donations that are passed on to worthy charities. Thousands of dollars have been raised in this way. She is also Woden Seniors' star seller of raffle tickets. Elizabeth is a fine squash player and, with her partner John, a regular sequence dancer.

Ron Barnes - Ron, along with his late wife Win, has been a stalwart member of the club over many years. Ron remains a devoted member of the Baptist Church, as was Win. Ron has a beautiful singing voice, and is a

regular soloist for Woden Senior Singers, bringing joy to people in the ACT community.

Margaret Wright - Margaret is Musical Director of the U3A Recorder Orchestra, whose members are part of our organisation. Under Margaret's tutelage, the orchestra has reached a high standard, worthy of national recognition. Margaret's generous empathetic personality has contributed to a warm, friendly atmosphere within the club.

Myra Hickey - Myra has been a member of the club for more than 25 years. She was on the Management Committee for 10 years and was Public Officer for nine years. Myra has a deep concern for the welfare of all members of the organisation. She is a creative person, whose craft work has contributed to many fund raising activities.

Gail Guiliano - Gail has been Secretary of the Management Committee for three years. She is strongly committed to the work, and works hard to achieve positive outcomes. Gail is a member of Woden Senior Singers, the Queanbeyan Players, and the Square Dancers Association. She is also the greatest pikelet cook!!!

Your editor's reflections on the AGM

By Dennis Blewett

THIS year's Annual General Meeting provided me, at least, with confusing messages. Gone was the optimism evident at the 2006 AGM, when we approved Stage 1 (which we hoped would be completed by Christmas 2007) of a three-part development. At that time membership and activities participation rates were increasing; and there were optimistic forecasts of substantial revenue from fund-raising activities.

So, this year it was disappointing to learn that membership has stalled, fewer people are taking part in activities, and the club's financial position is such that the committee felt it prudent to put development plans on hold. There is, too, the practical consideration that the club may yet realise its development ambitions as a result of dealing with the private sector, as other clubs in Canberra have done, without having to borrow money. There are many problems to overcome before this can happen, but clearly possibilities need to be fully explored (see the President's message, page 3).

Members at the AGM listened, with increasing impatience it has to be said, to guest speaker Ross McKay, from the Chief Minister's Department. Mr McKay assured us of the ACT Government's continuing goodwill, and said that it would look favourably on any dealings the club might enter into with the private sector. He added, almost as an afterthought, that the club should not expect significant allocation of funds from the Government. Clearly the Government did not regard social and recreational activities for seniors as a priority. Mr McKay - who is a public servant, not a politician - was imprudent enough to suggest that things could change only when seniors spoke, and voted, collectively. It was a thought that had already occurred to some of us.

It was pointed out, from the floor, that local governments elsewhere in Australia *did* fund recreational activities for older people. Readers

may remember that *Meridian* said some time ago that in making proper provision for older people a government was contributing to maintaining good health, thereby reducing demand for health, welfare and counselling services. Governments, *Meridian* said, should regard seniors' clubs as valuable allies, not as an irritant and a drain on resources.

However, perhaps it is appropriate - and fair to the Government - to ask whether the club *does* play the important role in seniors' lives that it claims to do? To be viable, a club such as the one we envisage would need to attract members throughout the day, and evening. At present club activities encourage little inter-relationship between groups narrowly focused on their own activities. For the most part, groups do their own thing, participants enjoy the company of those they do it with, and then they quickly leave. Three or four times a year members do mix - the Melbourne Cup and Christmas lunches, the annual fete, concerts, but that's it. And that is why Stage 1 appeared such a promising proposition, encompassing as it did a bright, attractive room with comfortable seating that it was hoped would encourage people to sit, and pass the time with other members.

Well, we won't know, for a while at least, how successful it would be. Therein (as *I* see it) lies the dilemma. We are saying to the ACT Government that, were we to have facilities such as those we envisage, we would (a) attract more members, and (b) members would come to the club in greater numbers, and stay longer, taking advantage of what the club has to offer. But the fact remains that a positive response from the Government would be an act of faith. It would be up to members to justify it. Would we?

The Management Committee and the Activities Sub-committee, in particular, give considerable thought to considering what would attract members to the club. And to activities outside the club. Lunches, discussions and debates, theatre and cinema trips, coach trips, golf days? How active are our members? How much can they afford? A major consideration is that other clubs do these things, and have the resources to do them well. Can Woden Seniors compete? Should it attempt to do so?

RESIDENTIAL REAL ESTATE

Selling/buying transaction

By Marcia Delander and Noel Lane

THE aim of the following explanation of the process of selling/buying a residential property is to provide a framework in which the seller and buyer can proceed with the transaction with a clear understanding of the process.

In broad terms, the decisions of parties to a real estate transaction are guided not only by the relevant legal requirements but also by their business and ethical standards.

Under the Agents Regulation 2003, the agent must tell the seller of a property of all offers of purchase until the exchange of contracts takes place, with two exceptions: first, the seller has instructed the agent otherwise, and second, bids made at auction.

When a seller of a property receives an offer from a prospective buyer, the seller can accept the offer, make a counter offer, or reject it outright. Once the seller agrees to sell at a certain price, there is an agreement - for the seller to sell and the buyer to buy. In the normal course this agreement leads to the deposit being paid and the exchange of contracts for the sale under which the parties become bound to the transaction. At an agreed subsequent date the balance of the purchase price is paid and the lease passed to the representative of the buyer. Then the buyer becomes the new owner.

What happens when a prospective buyer makes an offer when an agreement to sell is in place and before exchange of contracts? The agent must present the offer to the seller. Under the legal arrangements the seller has the option of accepting or rejecting the offer. However, applying principled business standards or ethical principles the seller might rule out considering an offer received after acceptance of an earlier offer.

Difficulties that might arise from those considerations can be minimised if the agent, after consultation with the seller, clearly explains to prospective buyers the arrangements that will apply in processing offers, acceptance, and agreement to sell.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Strategic planning day, and 'Friends of Woden Seniors'

One of the most important days of the year for the future of the club was a Strategic Planning Day held on Thursday 25 October, attended by the Management Committee.

Grahame Hellyer (committee member) and Alan Hodges (member) conducted the day. Grahame and Alan were our professional consultants when we formulated our Strategic Plan.

As members will recall, the club signed off on its Strategic Plan on 21 February 2004, and so it was timely to examine what has gone well, what needs attention, and the priorities we need to address.

Issues raised included the need to reactivate the sub-committee structure, the significance of strategic partnerships, and the facility upgrade.

We still have the Master Plan implementation as a very high priority but are awaiting the outcome of our application for funding to the ACT

Government before considering applying for a bank loan.

In the meantime we have a comprehensive plan to develop a program called "Friends of Woden Seniors" (you will read in this *Meridian* of two positive results of this initiative) and major fund raising. This will include a magical dinner and theatre production called the "Baby Boomers Review" to take place at the Southern Cross Club on Friday and Saturday evenings, 4 and 5 April next year, and a matinee on Sunday 6 April. This show is being organised by professional personnel, including Linda Tregoaring and Lucy Birmingham.

Major fund raising initiatives such as the "Friends" can be a powerful resources boom for us.

I wonder whether members have considered direct donations, which are tax deductible, to the club? Or, indeed, legacies through their wills? Worth considering, I would have thought.

The Management Committee is most appreciative of the contribution to the "Friends" program made by Noel Lane, who you will have met through *Meridian*. Noel is a professional real estate agent who, since first advertising in *Meridian*, has joined the club as a member, and has been most helpful, in particular working with me to identify and inspire businesses and individuals to participate in the "Friends" program.

Moving on, we had a splendid Melbourne Cup lunch on Tuesday 6 November. It was a great day, with lots of fun, laughter, delicious food and drink, and sparkling entertainment provided by the ACT Chordsmen, always a favourite with members.

I especially thank Maureen Hickman, who did a superb job as coordinator, Harley Berwick, and other members of the Management Committee. And, of course, the indefatigable and ever-enthusiastic David Temple. David said something about going to the race track, but didn't protest too much when we said we needed him at the club. Sensational, David.

I hope lots of members and friends will come to our Christmas party on Monday 4 December, at 12.30pm.

Best wishes to you all. Have a lovely Christmas, and may 2008 be a great year for all of us.

Anne Murray

FROM DAVID TEMPLE'S DESK

Hiring revenue, parking, bus trips

You may have noticed that over the weeks leading up to the Federal election we've had some fee-paying "guests" from the Australian Electoral Commission. They hired the veranda area, which made the club \$2500. *Very* sensational.

On the note of sensational things around the club, you all would have seen our new sign in our car park. Cars will be towed away if they are illegally parked so, since we put the sign up, the car park seems to be a little less crowded. I am doing my best to "finger" a car for towing away, but haven't got one yet. I'd hate it to be yours, so please make sure *your* parking permit is clearly visible. If I *do* put a warning notice on your car, please contact me at once.

We are now running buses on the first Monday of the month and we are going to all fun and different places. Give me a call to find out where the next one is going.

You may have noticed that the club is now getting the *Canberra Times* Monday to Friday. The paper is located in the library, so feel free to come in, make yourself a cuppa, and read it. On the subject of the library please remember that it is a *lending* library. If you borrow a book, please return it. And if you take a book from the shelves, and decide *not* to borrow it, please put it back where you found it.

Thank you to members who donate books. Don't forget the club's library when you decide to dispose of your old books. Any books that our librarian decides are not suitable for the library will be put on sale at the annual fete.

On a personal note, since the last edition of *Meridian* I've had the flu, competed in the City2Surf and the MS fun run, and taken part in the Rotary speaking challenge, doing well in all of them. I also completed my Certificate 3 in Fitness, and I am 26 on 26 November. In January I am going to Queensland to see my friends and my Mum. So there. Thought you'd all want to know! *Sensational!*

Have a sensational Christmas, and see you all in 2008.

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Eventful life of Thredbo's Golden Girl

By Dennis Blewett

BRIDGE players know "Sasha" to be a gracious lady of modest demeanour, with a welcoming smile for her opponents. Some players know that she skied for Czechoslovakia, representing her country at the Olympic Games. Others do not.

Recently Sasha Nekvapil was invited to Thredbo, in the Snowy Mountains, to take part in celebrations to mark the Australian ski capital's fiftieth anniversary. She took part in a fashion parade, modelling 1950s skiwear, and was named Thredbo's "golden girl". For Sasha was not only a champion skier, but also, with her husband Karel, a long-time instructor and proprietor of Sasha's Lodge at Thredbo.

Sasha arrived in Australia in December 1950, fleeing Europe when, after surviving Nazi occupation, she, Karel, and her brother Frank found "liberation" under the Soviet Union little better. Their flight from Czechoslovakia reads like a Hollywood film script, but more of that later.

Playing the word association game, "snow" brings to Sasha's mind firstly an image of herself as a six-year-old with four-year-old Frank, in layers of winter clothing, sitting together at the kitchen table of their home in Prague. Outside it is dark, and Sasha remembers sharing with Frank a sense of exhilaration from playing in the snow.

Fast-forward six years, and Sasha recalls holidaying at Krkonose with her family, who had rented a ski lodge. She remembers her German instructor, and the excitement of being taught rudimentary skiing technique.

Three years later, and 15-year-old Sasha is allowed to go with two older cousins - both of whom were to become Czechoslovakian champions - and her friend Jirina and Jirina's brother on another skiing holiday. "Jirina was better than me", says Sasha, "but we were equally daring - people closed their eyes in horror! - and in my first race I finished third".

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Before World War Two put an end to competitive skiing, Sasha was to go to Norway to represent her country at the World University Championships, but then came six years of Occupation.

Those years Sasha remembers as a time of hopelessness, deprivation, curfews, the need for travel permits, the need for vigilance, the constant fear of "being taken away" for some perceived offence, and gradually an emerging hope that Germany would be defeated and "normality" return. Sasha's father had died before the war, and her mother assumed control of the family's artificial flower-making business, until she too died before the war ended. Prevented from continuing with her education, Sasha worked in the family business.

The war over, Sasha married, setting up home in Karel's hometown, Brno, capital of Moravia, and returning to university, where she studied languages and physical education. She also found herself representing her country again, finishing second at Zermatt against strong international competition.



Sasha, competing at Thredbo, September 1990

"Everyone who finished received a watch", she says. "I still have mine, although I can't find anyone who can repair it for me".

In 1946, and again in 1947 and 1948, Sasha was Czechoslovakian women's champion. At this point she and Karel thought it was time to put skiing aside for a while to start a family, but the national ski association thought there were more important matters to attend to, such as the forthcoming Olympic Games. So it



Czechoslovakian women's champion, 1947

was that Karel, as a team official, accompanied Sasha to St Moritz, Switzerland, for the 1948 Winter Games. Having finished first and second against strong international competition directly before the Games, Sasha had her sights set on a medal, but she had to settle for fourth in the combined slalom.

"We had talented skiers", she says, "but we were under-prepared. We had an Austrian coach for one week only. He had a few slalom gates erected on top of Galzig, and our preparation was basically walking up the mountain and skiing down it. The men fared a little better with their preparation, but not much. When we got to the Games, we found other teams were far ahead of us in important matters, such as waxing skis. Attention to detail is the difference between winning and finishing outside the top three".

A year later Sasha was no longer in the national team. In February 1949 the Communist Party assumed control of Czechoslovakia, and Sasha, Karel and Frank decided to flee the country. The way they did so was, as foreshadowed, the stuff of movies. Karel and Frank made a night-time dash across frozen Stankovsky Lake, on the Czechoslovakia-Austria border, on cross-country skis and after many heart-stopping moments reached St Anton, in the French zone of Austria.

Meanwhile Sasha, who had been competing at Grindewald, in Switzerland, as a member of the Czechoslovakian women's team, told her team leader when they arrived at Zurich to take a train home, that she would not

be returning. "I felt sorry for her, and feared that she would try to pull me on to the train if given the opportunity", Sasha says.

"I had confided in two friends, and they threw my suitcases out of the train as it pulled away. I had four fur coats in them, and the plan was to sell the coats to raise enough money to survive when Karel and Frantisek joined me in Zurich".

In fact this part of the plan came unstuck as Karel and Frank were unable to obtain visas to travel from St Anton to Zurich, so Sasha, who had been staying at the home of a Swiss girlfriend, had to go to St Anton to be reunited with them. At the end of May 1949 the three of them made their way to Brussels, where Karel's brother, Jan, lived, and Jan (who was manager of a night club) got Karel a job washing dishes. It was while Sasha and Karel were living in Belgium that their son, Michel-Francois, was born.

Stateless persons, Sasha and Karel, their baby boy and Frank were not allowed to stay in Belgium, and they sought visas to go to Australia, Canada and the United States, finally settling on Australia. So it was that

they arrived in Melbourne in 1950, just in time to celebrate Christmas. Frank got a job in an artificial flowers business, and Karel worked in a number of jobs, including hospitality and welding.

But it was their reputation and skill as skiers that provided Sasha and Karel with opportunity in Australia. Frank found a job in the snow fields first, and then Sasha and Karel became managers and instructors at a ski club at Mount Buller, in the Victorian Alps, before moving to Charlottes Pass for the next seven years, where Sasha coached Australian representative teams. At the end of that time Sasha and Karel made a momentous decision.

They borrowed money they could ill-afford to repay had they failed, and built a small hotel, which they called Sasha's Lodge, at Thredbo. So successful were they that within a year they added a small apartment house next door, and then a sportswear shop. Sasha's Sportswear was to become very successful, skiers being attracted to the latest snow fashions that Sasha imported from leading European fashion houses.

It was hard work, although Sasha

still found time to ski on the Thredbo slopes, and eventually take part in national and international events there, with considerable success. The twenty-one years they lived at Thredbo were rewarding and happy ones, and at the end of that time they moved to a small farm halfway between Thredbo and Jindabyne, visiting Thredbo to ski and visit Frank who, although retired, continues to live there.

Karel died in 1992, after four years of invalidity, and Sasha moved to Canberra to be with her family. She is 88 now, and a great grandmother, but she still skis, although "very carefully".

"I have never regretted that my life has revolved around skiing", she says, "and neither has my brother Frank. Skiing gave Karel to me, and Michel, and four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, and lots of happiness".

Sasha joined Woden Seniors about ten years ago and plays bridge regularly. She recently returned from Europe where she visited friends in France and Czechoslovakia. Within a week of returning to Australia, she visited Thredbo, to once again experience the exhilaration of downhill skiing.

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Historic violin returned to maker

In 1961 21-year-old Margaret Wright, well-known at the club as recorder teacher and conductor, went to A. E. Smith's, in Sydney, to trade in her father's violin and up-grade to a better one. The one she bought, for £30, had been made in 1954, the first by Harry Vatiliotis, who was apprenticed to Smith.

Margaret says modestly that her violin playing was "never much chop", and her playing was confined to being a member of amateur groups "off and on", so she kept the violin throughout the years rather than continuing to "upgrade", as she originally intended. Nor did she learn that it was Vatiliotis' first violin until she went to Sydney to see him having watched, in 1999, an ABC documentary "The Little Box That Sings", featuring Vatiliotis, by then a renowned violin maker.

Stringed instruments have maker's name, date and place of origin inscribed, and Vatiliotis was delighted when it became apparent that Margaret's violin was his first, and he was very anxious to obtain it. He offered Margaret a new violin in exchange, and Margaret agreed, although she said she would keep her violin for another year, to "give it a good playing", before letting it go.

However, shortly afterwards Margaret and husband Paul hastened to Dublin following a serious accident to their son. They stayed for six months while their son recovered in hospital, and then followed years of rehabilitation. So it was not until 2005 that Margaret phoned Vatiliotis to say she was ready to return his violin. Vatiliotis said he would make a new one for Margaret, and recently asked her to choose from two.

So, on Thursday 11 October, Vatiliotis celebrated the return of his violin in style, inviting ABC TV cameras, fellow musicians and teachers, and a film maker and producer to lunch, followed by a memorable afternoon of music making.

Margaret was invited to choose between Stradivari and Guarneri copies (Vatiliotis uses the templates of these masters), and she opted for the Strad. It came with a certificate stating that Margaret now owns his violin number 609.

On the certificate Vatiliotis wrote: *Thank you Margaret for letting me have my baby back. I shall cherish it for the rest of my life, after which it shall be passed on to the Powerhouse Museum, together with my last one.*

APG/Priceline deal to benefit club

Club members currently enjoy a 10% discount when shopping at Australian Pharmacy Group pharmacies (Coolman Court, Erindale, Lanyon and Manuka) and at Priceline Pharmacy, Woden. This discount applies to all purchases, excluding prescriptions and Diabetes Australia transactions.

Under an agreement reached between APG/Priceline and Woden

Seniors, club members will show a card (to be produced by APG/Priceline for each member) at the tills, not receive their discount, but APG/Priceline will then quarterly donate the value of 12% of these purchases to the Woden Seniors development fund.

APG/Priceline will produce the cards (size and weight of a credit card) and mail them to all members with an explanatory letter.

The scheme is expected to begin early in the New Year.

President Anne Murray said the scheme provided members with an opportunity to make an important contribution to the club's development ambitions.

"The club is delighted to enter into this arrangement with the Australian Pharmacy Group and Priceline", she said. "They have a well-deserved reputation for their professional service and quality products at highly competitive prices".

FRIENDS OF THE CLUB Chinese medicine generous offer

By Noel Lane

As reported elsewhere in *Meridian*, President Anne Murray has been leading the way in recent weeks seeking the support of businesses and individuals. The objective of "Friends of Woden Seniors" is to foster goodwill and contributions of funds and other resources, particularly to implement the club's master plan.

The nearby Capital Health Centre of Traditional Chinese Medicine immediately made the decision to support us and has already made a generous offer based on the provision of their services to Woden Seniors. This offer could lead to early cash flow into the club's funds.

Capital Health Centre has offered members 20 health packages, each consisting of a consultation, Chinese massage and acupuncture, for \$100 a package. There is scope to arrange with the Centre for variations to this package to better suit individual needs.

After the services have been provided and paid for, the Centre will donate the full amount of these fees to the club. This offer provides potential for the club to receive \$2,000 (\$100 x 20).

In order for the club to reap the full benefits of valuable support that Friends offer, it will be necessary in some cases for members to participate as customers. It is intended that the various opportunities that are arranged with Friends will enable members to participate with either no or little extra cost to themselves.

The aim will be for our Friends to achieve their objectives in the arrangements, likely with some sacrifice; for members to receive appropriate rewards for their outlays, perhaps with a small sacrifice; and for the club to achieve its objectives.

It seems clear that we will be able to confidently proceed with development plans if members act collectively and enthusiastically.

Members who would like to contribute to the success of the Capital Health Centre's offer are asked to obtain a voucher from the club's office, mention the voucher when they phone for an appointment, and present it when they attend the Centre.

Members make this work!

Heavenly Pavarotti

Pavarotti knocks on the Pearly Gates.

St Peter opens them and says "Oh Luciano, it's you. Come on in - squeeze through".

Pavarotti says, "I have a letter from the Pope for you".

St Peter opens it up and reads it. "Here's that tenor I owe you".

Boom, boom!

MP3, iPods: What *are* they? What do they *do*? Do *I* need one?

By *Grahame Hellyer*

MP3, iPods, what are all those people listening to?

We see them walking around with headphones in their ears or on their heads – our kids, grandkids, commuters, joggers. We see and hear about mp3 and iPods everywhere. What's it all about?

Most of us remember when the Walkman came in. A small tape cassette player with headphones plugged in. People copied their records or CDs (or their friends') onto the cassette and could then have music wherever they went. The cassettes lasted about 20 minutes per side and then played the other side (actually different tracks on the same side) a total of about 40 minutes. It was difficult to find a track in the middle of the tape but they were a revolution at the time.

What is different with the new players? Well, the following are a few differences.

Size. A player half the size of a matchbox can hold up to 40 hours of music! *Convenience.* You can jump to individual songs, or movements, in seconds and the player will, usually, show you the title of the track currently playing.

Battery life. As there is no tape to move (in some cases there are no moving parts, in others a tiny spinning disc) smaller batteries can be used and last much longer.

Transfer. The music is first stored on a computer and the music you want on the player can be transferred in a very short time with just a few clicks – much quicker than recording to a tape.

What are they? To clarify a couple of things, firstly an 'iPod' is just the Apple brand of mp3 player, so the generic name is actually 'mp3 player'. Secondly, mp3 players don't just play mp3!

Old vinyl records and tapes stored music in a form which in some way resembled the form of the sound waves which were being recorded. If a sound lasted a minute the record or tape ran for a minute to play that sound. With 'digital' sound the shape of the sound wave is measured many times a second and the measurements stored as numbers. On mp3 players this "digitised" music can be stored electronically in a very compact form. A simple rule of thumb I use is that one hour of music takes about 50 megabytes (Mb) of storage. (No one has to know what a Mb is – it just

refers to the number of numbers which have to be stored.) 1000 Mb make a Gigabyte (Gb). If you can remember that then you can understand the capacity of mp3 players. An mp3 player may be advertised as 1 Gb (1000 Mb), ie it will hold about 20 hours, or 20 CDs worth of music (20 hrs x 50 Mb per hour = 1000 Mb). A 40Gb player (still only the size of a cigarette packet) can hold 800 hours of music or 800 CDs!

Most MP3 players have a small window to show the name of the track playing. Some have a large window and will show photos, so you can store your photos on them as well as your music. The ones with large windows will also store and play videos!

The players with smaller capacities store the numbers in solid electronic memory, ie there are no moving parts – you can jump around without disturbing the music. The ones with larger capacity use a small spinning disc for storage so they are more susceptible to interruption - and use more power. Most players, but not iPods for some strange reason, have an FM radio built in.

Why has "iPod" become almost a generic term for these players – like "Hoover" for a vacuum cleaner? Apple designs very stylish players which caught the public's fancy early on. Because so many were sold lots of other manufacturers made accessories just for iPods which made them even more popular. The strange thing is that reviewers generally regard some

other brands as better music players and, as noted above, other brands generally give you a radio as well.

One final, confusing, point: when the sound wave is stored in digital form there are various formulae used to compact it. Some are proprietary and manufacturers have to pay to incorporate them into their players. These include "mp3" and "WMA", the Microsoft designed system. Others, less common, are free to anyone and include the strangely named "Ogg Vorbis". I only mention these because you will see them on the player specs. If you copy a CD on a Windows based computer it will automatically copy it in WMA format. If you then copy it to an mp3 player the "mp3" player will actually be playing WMA!! The user generally doesn't have to worry as the player normally sorts out the format automatically.

Do you need one? Well, if you do a lot of chores outdoors or move around the house a lot, or go jogging or walking, then it is an easy way to hear your music uninterrupted. They will also play through your car radio with a small attachment. Besides they will also store and play programs from Radio National such as the *Health Report* or *All in the Mind* which you can "download" from the ABC web site as "podcasts" (perhaps more on that in later issues.) We find that on long car trips the Radio National programs help to pass the time. I actually find I use the radio function on my tiny player more than the mp3 tracks but they are handy to have when there is nothing interesting on the radio. It makes the time pass more quickly when doing tedious jobs!

Gary, meet David. David, Gary Humphries



Gary Humphries, seeking to retain his Senate seat, met David Temple at the club.

Love of music common bond

By Helen Morris

On Friday 14 September, in the Olympus Room at the Hellenic Club, the U3A held its culminating event after two days of talks and excursions to celebrate 21 years in the ACT.

This was a concert to demonstrate the musical skills being learned and enjoyed in retirement.

As Woden Seniors' members may know, there are several musical groups besides the Woden Senior Singers who rehearse in the club.

Each Wednesday there are the sounds of recorders issuing forth from 11.30 until 4pm. The first group consists of beginners - seniors who wish they had learnt to read music and to play an instrument when they were young. As so often happens, there was no money, then later, no time for lessons.

So for the last ten years, retired teacher Margaret Wright has volunteered her skills to anyone who wishes to learn, and the results can be heard each week in the different groups representing the different skill levels. The beginners are followed by the intermediate group, who have been learning for a year or two.

The orchestra of 50 players meets

at 2pm and they play on a range of recorder sizes. It is not well known that there are 8 sizes, ranging from a tiny 6 inch long garklein to the deep and sonorous basses, great basses and contra bass. We think this is possibly the only recorder orchestra consisting of only senior players in Australia, if not in the world.

The music played covers many styles and periods - from Renaissance to Baroque and contemporary.

Two instrumental groups meet at the club each Saturday morning.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR An overwhelming moral dilemma

Congratulations, Dennis Blewett, on your article (*Meridian* August 2007) on euthanasia. It was well written (no surprise there) and conveyed both sides of an argument that is normally only approached from an emotional standpoint.

It is a never-ending argument, and why wouldn't it be? We are considering an act that is totally irreversible.

I have had close friends and relatives who have died painful or drawn-out declines (sometimes both), and most of them would have welcomed a speedy end; sometimes to end their

The Casuarina Winds, directed by clarinettist Salli Chmura, is followed by the U3A Symphony Orchestra, which rehearses from 10-12 midday. Members are a mixture of people who have kept playing their instruments all their lives, those who have recently decided to take their old violin or flute out from under the bed and brush up their skills, and those brave souls who have decided in retirement to learn a new skill - playing a musical instrument!

suffering, sometimes to rejoin previous loved ones (and again, sometimes both).

As a member of Carers ACT I see the anguish of those who love and care for the sufferers, as well as those who suffer. My own view is that I too would wish to avoid prolonged suffering, but I wonder if I would have the courage (assuming I had the means) to actually take my own life before my suffering reached an intolerable level.

There is, too, the fear that I would "botch" the attempt, and make things worse. And then there is the moral question that I am sure we all ask at the moment of death: am I committing a sin?

I always enjoy your articles; this one was one of your very best.

DAVID GRIFFITHS



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