

Australian Tidy Towns 2011 Program Report

Community: LITHGOW NSW **Date judged:** 24 & 25 November 2010
Population: approx 12 000
Organising Group/s: LITHGOW Tidy Towns Committee (LITC)
in partnership with LITHGOW City Council (LCC)
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COMMUNITY ACTION/ PARTNERSHIPS

LITHGOW continues its dedication and consistent commitment to the Tidy Towns program.

LITHGOW's dynamic Tidy Towns Committee has been active in coordinating a broad range of projects since the 1980's winning numerous awards along the way.

LITHGOW boasts numerous Olympians and Commonwealth champions with one of their most famous, Marjorie Jackson, the LITHGOW Flash, is encapsulated in a statue in the CBD's well designed and busy, Cook Street Plaza.

The high participation rate of numerous groups in improvement programs and activities is impressive. From service clubs to community groups to individuals caring for and maintaining their city.

LITHGOW's Tidy Towns Committee which besides initiating their own projects, plays a supporting role for numerous other voluntary groups and their initiatives within the community.

Live Well LITHGOW is a healthy lifestyle initiative which is co-sponsored by LITHGOW City Council and Sydney West Area Health Service, is aimed at encouraging the community to live healthier lifestyles. The Live Well LITHGOW Challenge and festival has successfully engaged with the local community through a range of activities and developed partnerships with a host of groups.

The Greater LITHGOW Arts Council has developed a partnership with Delta Electricity over numerous years to recognise cultural achievement in the LITHGOW Local Government area. Awards are presented for excellence in performance, competition or promotion of the Arts each year.

Partnerships between Council, service clubs, environmental and community groups are outstanding and ensure a sustainable future for residents and the numerous tourists who visit LITHGOW each year.

LITTER PREVENTION

LITHGOW's Tidy Towns Committee has developed a strategic approach to litter management after realising highways were not safe places for volunteers. After negotiations with Council and RTA responsibility now lies with them to ensure areas leading into LITHGOW are free from litter.

LITHGOW is now relatively free of litter with the community self managing litter removal together with residents taking greater responsibility for picking up litter on their daily walks.

Tidy Towns members also get actively involved in regular cleans up of areas in and around LITHGOW.

Clean Up Australia Day continues to be a highlight to encourage LITHGOW's residents to participate in helping to keep the community free of litter. Extensive voluntary involvement ensures a strong partnership continues between the community and Council.

RESOURCE RECOVERY & WASTE MANAGEMENT

Resource recovery initiatives are a feature of LITHGOW's commitment to effective waste management. A broad range of waste minimisation initiatives are in place and accepted by the community with result being an overall reduction of waste to landfill.

Besides a broad range of other materials collected via a kerbside system, green waste collections are also offered to residents. The mulched waste is mixed with bio solids and reused as compost within the city's parks and gardens.

LITHGOW Council has been removing discarded bitumen from the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) as they re-construct their highways. It is mixed with gravel and used as road base on rural roads.

Over 100 000 tonnes of bitumen was recovered the past year with the community welcoming the 100% recycled product which is sustainable and ongoing.

LITHGOW's waste management approach aims at sustainable practices in waste reuse, avoidance and resource recovery. The development of the city's landfill and recycling facility will enable the community to be involved in the separation of a broad range of waste materials.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION & INNOVATION

LITHGOW Council is proactive in encouraging and promoting environmental conservation and is involved in many projects throughout the community. Council also encourages the high level of volunteer support, engaging with numerous community volunteers.

A major attraction for LITHGOW is the surrounding escarpment and its native vegetation. The hills were denuded by chemical fallout from smelters, belching heavy industry chimney stacks and coal burning from home heating appliances. These polluting industries gradually closed and the last coal mine within the urban area closed in the late 80's.

Areas were replanted under Tidy Towns initiatives with trees propagated from the LITHGOW Community Nursery.

The bush swamps in and around LITHGOW, in particular the Newnes Plateau Shrub, is a unique vegetation community and is protected as they are listed as endangered.

As a result, extensive community and government coordinated efforts are cooperatively managing the threats of human and feral animal intervention. Vast areas are being restored and the active Swampwatch network engages the community in monitoring any damage, etc within the swamp system.

LITHGOW's Community Nursery, a Tidy Towns initiative, is a voluntary organisation with a part time horticulturist, and a group of volunteers, have collected local seed, raised and sold over 600 000 plants over the past ten years. The plants are making a remarkable difference to the environment in and around the LITHGOW district.

WATER CONSERVATION

The community is aware of the need for effective water conservation and have accepted water restrictions during drought to proactively manage water resources.

Clarence Colliery, in dewatering their underground coal mine, treats and pumps to their adjacent reservoir. Depending on their own needs, up to 5 ML daily can be released into Farmers Creek above the water treatment plant. Currently 1.5ML is being released effectively drought proofing LITHGOW through the very severe drought period with some restrictions being imposed.

Local Emirates Wolgan Valley Resort and Spa, the first 6 star luxury resort in Australia, harvests all the stormwater required for their needs. The resort's wastewater initiatives are the first approved private water recycling scheme in New South Wales. Wastewater from the recycling plant is of such a high quality that it can be used around the resort for irrigating gardens, lawns and recreation areas.

Numerous community organisations and businesses are involved in a host of water conservation projects including installation of rainwater tanks, water saving devices together with water reuse and recycling initiatives.

ENERGY INNOVATION

Local corporate organisation, Delta Electricity is trialling the burning of Mallee timber pellets in its furnaces to reduce greenhouse gases. Their goal is to reduce use of coal by 20%. Trees are grown in the district and pelletised. Mallee trees are also having a positive effect on salinity in the district. Road transport to the power station is reduced also assisting to cut back emissions.

Geo-thermal heating is used at the LITHGOW Community Hospital with water heated in underground pipes. Less energy is used to top up the heated water for patient's showers, etc and to heat the hospital during winter. Auto light control infra red movement detectors also assist with saving electricity use.

LITHGOW open air swimming pool is heated through renewable energy use using water pipes on the kiosk roof. A community group undertook the project in partnership with Council.

HERITAGE & CULTURE

Maintaining LITHGOW's proud heritage is important to residents. Heritage restoration is a major priority with many fine examples of the preservation of cultural and historic features.

LITHGOW City Council has worked closely with their community and generated phenomenal interest in a new heritage trail entitled 'Furnace Fire & Forge'. The trail reinforces LITHGOW's importance as a focus for coal mining, minerals processing, manufacturing and railway heritage. The trail's educational initiatives effectively connect the community with its rich history.

The iron industry was established in LITHGOW in 1875 when a blast furnace was erected to manufacture pig iron. By 1900 LITHGOW had produced the first steel manufactured in Australia.

LITHGOW celebrates its cultural heritage through numerous annual events and festivals. The Ironfest has established itself as a major heritage celebration and attracts up to 15 000 visitors celebrating 18th Century battles, jousting and lots more.

Numerous historic facilities recently celebrated their Centenaries including the opening of the railway tunnels, Smalls Arms Factory Museum, Eskbank House, State Mine and Railway Heritage Park.

Many heritage buildings have been restored including the Union Theatre, Station Master's residence, Eskbank House, Theatre Royal, Union Building, State Mine and Railway Heritage Park and more. The world famous Zig Zag Railway operates daily and carries approximately 75 000 passengers each year.

YOUNG LEGENDS

Environmental education programs are a key element within LITHGOW's education system.

LITHGOW's schools have an ongoing commitment to environmental care as well as visual improvement programs. From recycling programs to litter reduction approaches and planting programs, the city's students continue to learn about ways to reduce their impact on the local environment for a sustainable future.

Transition from school to work education programs assists with addressing binge drinking among young people, reduces boredom amongst people through provision of better services as well as providing scholarships for young people.

The LITHGOW City Band and the Pipe Band encourages and teaches young people to play instruments.

LITHGOW is a sporting town and has numerous young people playing hockey, soccer, footbath and netball each week.

SUGGESTIONS

If not already in place, LITHGOW's great achievement as being New South Wales' Tidiest Town for 2011 could be promoted on Council letterheads, envelopes, etc. Local businesses and tourism operators could also be encouraged to market the city's great achievement.

LITHGOW's well established school system is available for a formal network of teachers to share ideas, initiatives and improvements at regular meetings. If not already in place, a school rep(s) may also be advantageous as a member of the Tidy Towns Committee.

LITHGOW's Swampwatch program engages the community in monitoring damage, etc within the swamp system. The project provides an ideal opportunity to interpret initiatives through well designed signs to share the great commitment of volunteers in partnership with the broad network of stakeholders.

Keep Australia Beautiful's Clean Site program's educational resources are available to assist with raising the building and construction industry's awareness of the need to build in harmony with the environment. The program in particular focuses on stormwater pollution prevention and resource recovery onsite.

Congratulations to everyone involved in the LITHGOW's Tidy Towns program and associated community action projects.

Good luck with future initiatives in helping to keep your part of Australia sustainable.

*Dick Olesinski
National Tidy Towns judge*