

Australian Tidy Towns 2011 Program Report

Town/Community: STANTHORPE Qld **Date judged:** 6 & 7 October 2010

Population: approx 5 300

Organisers: Southern Downs Regional Council (SDRC) in partnership with the community

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COMMUNITY ACTION/ PARTNERSHIPS

Situated in Queensland's Granite Belt, west of Brisbane, the region is home to an extensive horticultural and agricultural industry which includes award-winning wine and viticultural sectors.

The STANTHORPE community has a strong history of partnerships with community, environmental, cultural and sporting programs.

Welcoming street scaping is a feature throughout the central business district with modern approaches to interpreting the area's strong heritage, which included being Queensland's greatest tin producer.

Southern Downs Regional Council (SDRC) works in partnership with the community to ensure that homes and gardens are tidy and maintained. The SDRC ensures that approaches to the city, including signs and features, public parks, gardens and sporting areas and median strips are well tendered.

Council takes pride in the beautification and presentation of community assets providing major benefits to residents and tourists.

Council has also developed a Community Engagement Strategy and is carrying out a round of consultations with smaller communities across the region over a 12 month period. STANTHORPE certainly provides a living example/model of a community working together for a sustainable future.

Improvements throughout the community would not have been possible without the support of Council, sponsors and grant providers. Notable examples of successful partnerships include:

- ClimateSmart Living Communities Program: Partnership between Ergon Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency and Council.
- ClimateSmart Home Service Program: Partnership with the Queensland Government.
- STANTHORPE Water Assessment and Monitoring Project: Partnership with Granite Borders Landcare, Department of Environment and Resource Management, Queensland Murray Darling Committee and Council.
- Land for Wildlife Program: Voluntary program that encourages and assists landholders to provide for wildlife on their properties.
- Rare Wildflower Consortium: Council works with wildflower enthusiasts to maintain and improve wildflower ecosystems through increased awareness and improved management.

LITTER PREVENTION

Many STANTHORPE residents are familiar with the sight of a 78-year-old man collecting litter from his motorised scooter around the streets and parks of STANTHORPE.

William Snow is the epitome of community pride and spirit. Rising early each morning to start his rounds, he works his way up towards town and through the carparks ensuring the town remains picture perfect for residents and visitors alike.

Due to the location of STANTHORPE's Resource Recovery and Transfer Station site and large disposal area, wind blown litter had been an issue for many years and was required to be remedied under the EPA licence that Council holds.

Working with a local company, Netpro, a canopy was installed over the disposal area, which is able to be moved and repaired when required. The canopy has significantly reduced the amount of litter on and off site, removed the need for litter patrols, marked decrease in complaints and has also reduced the number of birds scavenging on the litter.

RESOURCE RECOVERY & WASTE MANAGEMENT

STANTHORPE's Resource Recovery program has achieved important milestones that have improved waste management throughout the community.

These include the opening of a new Resource Recovery and Transfer Station, introduction of kerbside recycling and installation of a Litter Canopy.

The centre is operated successfully by staff of the Endeavour Foundation. Through extensive consultation and consideration, the facility was designed to improve and increase recycling and recovery of resources.

Before the centre was operational, the only items that were recycled were green waste, scrap metal and vehicle oil.

Now green waste, all types of metal, glass, vehicle oil, plastics, cardboard, items for resale and recently, T-tape and plastic wrap from local farmers are recycled. Previously these items were sent to landfill.

In conjunction with the kerbside recycling, educational materials were introduced to educate residents for the commencement of the system on what can and cannot be recycled. Waste educators also visit schools to educate students about recycling.

ENVIRONMENTAL INNOVATION & PROTECTION

Heritage Park is STANTHORPE's most recent park development with Bushcare volunteers ensuring the park's environmental welfare is maintained and enhanced.

The natural bush section of the park was overgrown with invasive weeds, and due to this degraded state was becoming a dumping ground for rubbish. Initially, the Bushcare group concentrated on rubbish and removal, in partnership with Council.

Focus then shifted to an area which was highly infested with honeysuckle and blackberry. Weeds were so thick that access to the area was severely restricted.

Bushcare volunteers have used minimum amount of herbicide, mainly in the initial removal of blackberry. Methods used included cutting and painting by hand rather than spraying, to minimise any environmental damage.

The Park's creek area is a water monitoring site for SWAMP, the STANTHORPE Water Assessment Monitoring Project. Samples are taken bi-monthly and tested for chemical properties, nutrients and pesticides. The data collected is used to help identify trends over time, distinguish quality from degraded areas and provide links with land managers towards the long-term sustainable use of land in the area. The other major project outcome is community education regarding the impact of human activities on water quality.

Even though the work is far from completed, Heritage Park has regained much of its natural beauty and appeal. Although it is well used, litter is rarely a problem any more. A great example of a successful partnership between community and Council.

WATER CONSERVATION

Council has recognised the importance of substituting potable water with another 'fit for purpose' source. Since 2004 all waste water from the STANTHORPE Water Treatment Plant has been recycled for beneficial use.

Currently 19%, a total of 338 megalitres of recycled water is used to irrigate the town's golf course, several sporting ovals and cemetery grounds.

The other 81% is used by local farmers on a variety of horticultural crops. The recycled water is delivered onto the sporting grounds and cemetery via underground sprinkler systems which are set to maximise the effectiveness of the water delivered.

ENERGY INNOVATION

The ClimateSmart Living Communities Program is a partnership between Ergon Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Southern Downs Regional Council and aims to deliver energy conservation awareness to the local STANTHORPE community.

The program aims to demonstrate how the adoption of energy conservation behaviours can lead to a more sustainable community.

As a result of the program, regional communities are more aware of the impact their energy use has on the environment, and what they can do to make positive changes.

A two kilowatt solar photovoltaic system has been donated by Ergon Energy and installed on the roof of the STANTHORPE Library and Art Gallery building.

Through a monitor in the library, people can see the amount of electricity generated from the sun and how many tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions have been saved. This has been a useful tool in demonstrating how energy efficiency can be achieved.

HERITAGE & CULTURE

STANTHORPE & District Historical Museum is home to more than 20 000 items. It consists of 10 locally-historic and significant buildings, one of which is the original Council Chambers building. The buildings preserve the extensive variety of items collected, which for the area's population size is remarkable.

Collections include Indigenous artefacts, history from the mining industry to a prosperous fruit and viticulture industry, the beginning of tourism, the Italian influence which has formed the area into what it is today, an extensive military influence, exhibits which demonstrate the resourcefulness of the bush community and lots more.

Jean Harslett, a local historian, has researched the district for over 50 years. She is responsible for an exhibit comprising over 16 000 photographs as well as research into local families and the development of the region. The photographic collection is regarded as one of the best historical collections in Queensland.

There are 200 members and 19 volunteers who devotedly care for the collections and keep STANTHORPE's history alive for future generations.

YOUNG LEGENDS

Council has a partnership with Community Development Services Inc (CDS) to jointly deliver a Youth Council project. STANTHORPE's Young Delegates are in their second year of operation and have been actively involved in a number of events and projects that benefit young people and the wider community.

STANTHORPE has a range of programs and strategies in place to support and promote youth initiative through environmental education programs.

Council's School Waste Education Program is designed for schools in the region. Classroom presentations on waste, recycling and related topics provide an opportunity to explore everyday issues associated with managing waste. The presentations bring to life waste collection and processing and explain the environmental, economic and social benefits of recycling and reducing waste.

Students discover what the recyclable materials are, what it means to recycle and how they can become better recyclers to care for their environment.

They learn how packaging has a big influence on the amount of waste produced and how, with careful shopping, it can be dramatically reduced.

Students investigate what organic waste is, they learn the 'how to' of composting or worm farming and the benefits of this for the environment.

Students also identify the impacts of litter and recommended ways that they can create a cleaner environment with positive litter behaviours.

SUGGESTIONS

STANTHORPE's great success as being Queensland's Tidiest Town 2010 is able to be promoted on local business materials as well as Council correspondence to share the community's achievement and hopefully derive benefits from increased visitation and subsequent economic opportunities.

Council may consider establishing or facilitating an Australian Association of Environmental Education (AAEE) network through the current educational system. An AAEE initiative may complement a consistent approach to environmental education in the region.

If not already in place, 'Adopt-a-' programs are an effective method of encouraging schools, community groups or service organisations to take 'ownership' of public facilities or sites around the city. Examples could include looking after a verge or maintaining a park or cleaning part of a highway to provide long-standing benefits to the community and a saving in Council resources.

Heritage Park is STANTHORPE's 'model' park development. The project is an ideal opportunity to interpret initiatives through well designed signs to share the great commitment of community volunteers in partnership with Council.

Congratulations to everyone involved in the STANTHORPE's Tidy Towns and associated community action programs.

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

*Dick Olesinski
National Tidy Towns judge*