

Australian Tidy Towns 2012 Program Report

Town/Community: MOUNT GAMBIER SA **Date judged:** 5 December 2011

Population: approx 26 000

Organisers: City of MOUNT GAMBIER in partnership with the general community

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COMMUNITY ACTION/ PARTNERSHIPS

MOUNT GAMBIER's long and successful tradition continues for over 30 years in the state and national Tidy Towns Sustainable Communities program with Council and community involved in numerous partnerships associated with ensuring the City's sustainability.

The Tidy Towns program provides an opportunity to showcase the many examples of where people have come together, in schools, workplaces and community groups, to build a future that is more sustainable.

Notable example of community partnerships is the Hayes Crescent Reserve redevelopment project which began in January 2010. It was initially an idea of the Limestone Coast Crime Prevention Section of SA Police, as a way of building positive social interaction between residents and building community spirit.

The project is fostering a sense of inclusion, participation and pride, not only within the Hayes Crescent community, but also the wider community. All residents of Hayes Crescent and surrounding streets will benefit from the redevelopment of the reserve, not only from a physical sense but also from the sense of community spirit and pride. A key aspect of the project encourages social interaction.

For the first time in 2010, the Chamber of Commerce awards night included an 'Environment and Sustainability' award category, which is jointly sponsored by Zero Waste SA and the City of MOUNT GAMBIER. In 2011, 18 businesses nominated for the awards. The award is a great way of showcasing the sustainability achievements of local leaders and to inspire the broader business community.

A diverse range of community events occur throughout the year, providing people with the opportunity to come together, share, learn from each other and celebrate.

Council has adopted its new Strategic Management Plan providing vision for the City beyond 2015. Broad community consultation resulted in over 50 submissions from interested community members.

MOUNT GAMBIER's 'Men's Shed' has been building bird boxes for local conservation projects throughout the region. The shed provides an avenue for learning, peer support and social contact.

LITTER PREVENTION

Positive litter control strategies and the community's commitment to keeping MOUNT GAMBIER litter free are more than evident throughout the city.

MOUNT GAMBIER residents, community groups and schools regularly participate in Clean Up Australia Day. Council provided a dedicated rubbish pick-up service for participating schools and Council's CEO personally greeted participating individuals and community groups on the day.

Timely removal of graffiti continues to be a high priority for Council. Bedford Industries provide a rapid response to graffiti removal on Council's behalf and have developed significant expertise in dealing with graffiti found on a variety of surfaces. Bedford Industries also provide a frequent litter pick up program on major roads within the City and in the 2010/11 financial year, 202 hours were spent picking up litter.

The City of MOUNT GAMBIER's Bevy Benefits program provides dedicated recycling bins (with 'hi-top' bin lids and signage) for use at major events held throughout the year. This project, made possible by Keep Australia Beautiful funding, raises community awareness about sustainable waste management, provides options for people to recycle at community events and diverts waste from landfill. The program also provides young people with hands-on experience in litter reduction and recycling.

RESOURCE RECOVERY & WASTE MANAGEMENT

A broad range of resource recovery initiatives are the key MOUNT GAMBIER's commitment to reducing impact on landfill facilities.

Bin-it and Bedford Industries provide hard waste recycling services and work in partnership with the City of MOUNT GAMBIER to promote increased uptake of recycling services by residents and businesses. This initiative helps keep hard waste out of landfill and educates the community about local hard waste recycling options available. A comprehensive campaign to promote recycling has been developed using a range of promotional mediums.

The City of MOUNT GAMBIER is also actively supporting other councils in the South East to provide comprehensive waste and recycling services for their communities.

Upgrades at the City's waste transfer centre have assisted residents to recycle better. Initiatives include:

- New signs, purchased with the assistance of Zero Waste SA, clearly indicate the segregation of recyclables for users. Signs use bright colours to distinguish different types of recyclables and waste streams.
- Dedicated bins are in place for the recycling of paper and cardboard and plastics. This is in addition to the current facilities available for segregation of general refuse and recycling of an extensive range of materials.
- Non-inert hard waste, often generated in home renovations, refurbishments and on building sites, is sent to recyclers. Council ensures that air conditioners and fridges are sent to recyclers who degas prior to recycling.
- Two large bins have been built to hold and transport e-waste for recycling. Each month the centre receives approx 4 tonne of e-waste. These bins enable bulky e-waste to be transported to Adelaide recyclers more efficiently.
- A dedicated bin for recycling of metal is positioned onsite with proceeds going to Bedford Industries, supporting employment of people with disabilities.

Over the last few years the City of MOUNT GAMBIER has successfully reduced the quantities of waste going to landfill; reducing waste to landfill from 14 448 tonne in 2005 to 9 106 tonne in 2010.

ENVIRONMENTAL INNOVATION & PROTECTION

Various stakeholders are working together with Council to improve biodiversity in the City Centre. Invasive pest species have been removed and replaced with shade trees and native indigenous species of grasses. The plantings provide habitat, have low water requirements and are a visually attractive extension to the landscaping standard established at the new library car park.

The Southern NRM group is providing information sessions for people new to living in country allotments. The sessions are tailored towards people owning or thinking of buying small acreage. They include information on pasture establishment, weed control, pest management, fencing, animal husbandry and farm planning.

The City of MOUNT GAMBIER actively encouraged people to contribute to the KESAB Tidy Towns Sustainable Communities submission process through articles in the local newspaper, radio interviews and through the creation of a blog page on Council's website. The submission was sent to 50 community groups, schools, businesses and agencies as a way of sharing local knowledge and celebrating the innovative programs underway in the community.

Restoration work at the Valley Lake Conservation Park aims to improve habitat by establishing endemic flora and native vegetation for the eventual reintroduction of native fauna that have disappeared from the region. This has been a partnership between a number of community groups, schools and agencies.

The Valley Lake Conservation Park Native Fish Breeding program aims to build the numbers of two endangered native fish local to the region. The project involves transforming ponds in the park to be suitable for local native fish, which are nationally threatened and in decline.

The Lower South East Threatened Flora working group brings together state and local government and interested community members, to work on projects which protect and preserve threatened flora and

habitats, native vegetation and biodiversity. They are currently investigating the development of public gardens featuring endangered flora and bush tucker, amongst other projects that raise community awareness of biodiversity in the local region.

The City of MOUNT GAMBIER is becoming more sustainable and is working with consultants to undertake a ground breaking organisational learning project. Three teams of staff, involving 25 employees from across the organisation, are looking at how Council can become more sustainable in the way it uses resources. Council is auditing its use of water and energy and reviewing its waste management practices. Staff are developing skills and competencies in sustainable decision making. Seven staff initiated projects have been funded by Council for completion in 2011/12 with a total investment by Council of \$38 000.

WATER CONSERVATION

MOUNT GAMBIER is literally a City built on water. It sits upon aquifers which feed the Blue Lake, source of MOUNT GAMBIER's drinking water. Stormwater from the City feeds into these aquifers via drainage bores. A number of techniques are used to improve the quality of stormwater prior to aquifer recharge, eg, CDS units (gross pollutant traps), silt pits and reed beds with native indigenous grasses are used throughout the City and passing captured stormwater through these filtration systems helps to protect and conserve the quality of water in aquifers, for use by future generations.

Council has undertaken a number of initiatives to save water in the irrigation of public parks, gardens and recreational reserves. It has developed an irrigation policy which specifies performance targets for the allocation of water for use at different sites. Council has worked closely with the clubs who manage Council owned grounds to reduce water use. Water use has reduced from over 231 000kL in 2006/07 to 116 000kL in 2009/10.

The Blue Lake Management Committee, SA Water and the *Border Watch* newspaper work together to publically display use of Lake water by residents and businesses. Each month a graph is printed in the *Border Watch*, which shows monthly City water use and a comparison with the previous year's use.

The City of MOUNT GAMBIER is involved in the SA Government's *Water for Good* initiative. Council has promoted the program with displays during the Library's Environment month and provided residents, businesses and community groups with WaterWise kits.

Rainwater captured from the Library and Civic Centre, as well as runoff from the carpark, is directed to artificial wetlands which purify the water prior to aquifer recharge. A series of swales and a sediment removal pond are planted with native indigenous reeds and grasses which aid the filtration process.

A local vehicle dealership has installed rainwater tanks with a capacity of 88 000 litres. This project was embarked upon to complement a new car wash system which operates using over 80% recycled water. The water tanks also service their workshop toilet facility.

ENERGY INNOVATION

Energy efficiency is a core design element of the City's new Main Corner redevelopment. Centrepiece is a living green wall – a feature that not only captures the imagination but helps to regulate the internal building temperature. The building also feature numerous environmentally sensitive design features.

The Library has introduced a new free bicycle hire service which promotes sustainable transport and creates active workplaces. The City of MOUNT GAMBIER is expanding its bike path network and has completed a number of substantial projects, partly funded by the State Government.

Community Action for Sustainability is a community-based action group which has a vision to '*promote a sustainable life where we co-exist in a harmonious way with our environment without threatening either humanity or other living things on our planet*'. The group undertakes a number of activities to raise awareness in the community about energy efficiency and climate change.

'Share the Drive' is state and local government partnership which promotes carpooling amongst young people travelling between the South East and Adelaide. It aims to reduce CO2 emissions and encourage rest stops to relieve fatigue.

TAFESA MOUNT GAMBIER Campus has incorporated a number of energy efficient technologies into its campus site. T10 fluorescent globes have been exchanged to more energy efficient T5 globes (a total of over 2 500 light fittings), installed automatic switch off timers in low use areas and incorporated passive solar features and renewable energy technologies into a new building constructed on site.

The TAFESA Campus has also developed a training complex to train students in the installation of solar cells and wind turbines. The complex meets an important regional need, as the South East of SA and Western Victoria has been earmarked as a future growth area for the development of renewable energy expertise which includes the development of solar, wind, wave and geothermal technologies.

The City of MOUNT GAMBIER is committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions and as part of this program and has conducted energy efficiency audits on Council buildings and is investigating the installation of solar systems on Council properties.

HERITAGE & CULTURE

The City of MOUNT GAMBIER Heritage Committee recently celebrated its 20th Anniversary. This Committee has played an important role in advising Council on the development of policies to conserve and promote natural, built, cultural and indigenous heritage within the City.

Previously, the Heritage Committee assisted in the installation of sixteen heritage bollards around the City centre. The heritage bollards were an idea suggested by students from the McDonald Park Primary School and initiated by the Heritage Committee and Council. Given the success of the bollards, the Heritage Committee recently initiated the installation of a second stage of heritage bollards.

The Old MOUNT GAMBIER Gaol is currently being refurbished to provide a unique accommodation and entertainment venue. It is the only historical gaol providing tourist accommodation in Australia. Current owners have formed a partnership with local schools to provide an opportunity for disengaged students to be involved in renovation works, including replanting and landscaping of gardens that are in keeping with the historical significance of the site.

In reconciliation week the deep spiritual connection indigenous people have with this land is celebrated by a walk around the Blue Lake. Over 800 people participated in the walk this year. During reconciliation week the Blue Lake is known by its aboriginal name Waawor.

Pangula Mannamurna Aboriginal Health Centre also hosted Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Mick Gooda with workshops held on proposed options for recognition and reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.

The 'Memories in a Suitcase' sculpture project was created as part of the celebration of the contribution of migrants to the MOUNT GAMBIER community, in particular post-war migrants. Silvo Apponyi was commissioned to create a large scale granite sculpture shaped as a suitcase. The suitcase was an icon selected by the community that represented their journeys from across the globe to Australia.

YOUNG LEGENDS

Students at the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden, at McDonald Park Primary School cook and eat food they have grown themselves; and with the support of kitchen manager, Jen McCourt, try new recipes, new foods and gain an appreciation of local produce available in the South East.

Mulga Street Primary School is a KESAB Wipe Out Waste (WOW) school which recycles and reuses a wide range of waste streams including paper, cardboard, food scraps, glass, plastic, mobile phones, batteries and printer cartridges. Food scraps are utilised in the school's worm farms, classroom bokashi bins, go in the composting chambers for the vegetable garden or are fed to the school's chooks. In year five, students nominate to become 'Waste Watch Warriors' and sit on the schools Sustainability Committee, for the next three years. This is a significant commitment to working collaboratively with school leadership, grounds caretakers and parents to improve the environmental performance of the school.

MOUNT GAMBIER is a community surrounded by farmlands with agriculture/horticulture major local industries. Providing the next generation of farmers skills in effective land management, including sustainable management of water, is an important part of protecting local natural resources. Grant High School is expanding its Agriculture Science program to provide more diverse hands-on learning

experiences including learning about water saving irrigation techniques, sustainable land management, soil health and animal husbandry.

Grant High School offers the Doorways to Construction hands-on course designed to develop practical skills and work ethic, which are both needed when undertaking an apprenticeship in the building trades. Students complete 4 weeks Work Experience across the year in building trade areas of their choice working alongside trained tradespeople they work on construction of a transportable house as well as community based construction projects.

The MOUNT GAMBIER City Youth Advisory Committee, or YAC, is a group of young people aged 12-25 years, who meet on a monthly basis and represent their local community on youth needs, issues and concerns. The Committee continues in its aims to promote a positive image of young people, through interaction with Council as a 'youth voice' and the facilitation of activities, events and forums.

The South East Environmental Educators Working Group provides support, resources and curriculum for teachers educating young people about the environment across the region.

SUGGESTIONS

To further encourage beautification programs already in place in MOUNT GAMBIER, opportunities become available to further encourage business and industry to add native landscaping in and around facilities. New developments obviously require landscaping to be implemented, so it would be a great opportunity to encourage existing business and industry sites.

Council obviously commits extensive resources to protecting aquifers which feed into the Blue Lake and part of the City's water supply. Council may also consider applying resources into monitoring public utilities who undertake projects within the City that have a great potential to pollute waterways, eg, road surfacing, etc.

Congratulations to everyone involved in the MOUNT GAMBIER's Tidy Towns Sustainable Communities 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*