

HUNTERS HILL DAY 2019

Celebrating Hunters Hill Municipality – our community, history and heritage

Woolwich Pier Hotel – Wednesday 31 July 2019

Speech of Mark Bennett - Mayor of Hunters Hill – “A Stronger Community”

We have all of the attributes to build an even stronger community here in Hunters Hill over the next 5 years.

However, we'll need to set long term goals - to ensure that we do build a stronger community.

We live in a wonderful location, with a strong sense of community.

And when I read the Local Newspaper this morning, I was reminded that despite our differences on important issues, we are still able to maintain our relationships and interact in a respectful manner, for the good of our residents.

So, what makes a strong community?

The Psychological research says amongst other things, a sense of community is built upon:

- Shared Values;
- Shared History;
- Challenges faced together: and,
- Proximity.

Certainly we fit this model.

Our Social Support networks are very important, as they protect both our Psychological and Physical health:

- Clubs;
- Volunteer groups;
- Churches;
- Meeting places; and,
- Community groups.

All help to maintain a strong community.

However, the storm clouds are gathering.

Some of these clouds will threaten Australia as well as our local community:

- The world is experiencing some instability, our major trading partner and our major defence partner are part of this and we may be forced to choose;
- Substance abuse is widespread – there have been major drug seizures on our doorstep, in Top Ryde and Macquarie Park;
- Recent NSW Ministry of Health data – indicates a very high use of highly addictive drugs at youth events;
- Youth unemployment is far too high;
- Graduates are taking 4 years on average, to find a full-time job;
- Last year we exported over 40 million tons of waste. Some overseas governments have now said - no more!;
- Our indigenous population is desperately in need of our help, particularly in Health and Education and we have the distinction of being the only Commonwealth nation not to have signed a treaty with its indigenous peoples: and also,
- Social isolation is endemic.

It's Social Isolation that I draw your attention to this evening; this will be our next Public Health epidemic. The impact is on the Economy and on our Mental and Physical health.

Unusually, it's now impacting upon - very young to the very old residents here in Hunters Hill.

Many things are adding to the Social Isolation – here's just a few:

- Working from home;
- Underemployment;
- Online banking;
- Online shopping;
- Online entertainment;
- Online friends; and,
- Online dating.

Finding ways to connect people “face to face” is a challenge we must accept and address.

Finding more effective and meaningful ways to connect people will be our challenge, if we are to build an even stronger community.

In 2018 The British Government appointed a Minister to deal with this issue!

However, this isn't something we can outsource to State or Federal Government.

In parts of Europe and Scandinavia - many communities are vertically integrated to a far greater extent than Australia. We need to learn some lessons and quickly.

And I'll finish as I started, we have all the attributes to build an even stronger community here in Hunters Hill over the next 5 years.

Social Isolation - is a public health issue!

Building a Stronger Community will rely on our awareness and ability to build community Connections deliberately not accidentally.

I know we can do it!

Mark Bennett – Mayor of Hunters Hill

Mark has been a resident of Hunters Hill for 34 years, a councillor since 2012 and the popularly elected Mayor since 2017.

A registered Psychologist with an interest in the area of Chronic Illness his career spans the private enterprise and the tertiary education sectors.

Mark and his wife Lydia have found their sense of place, right here in Hunters Hill.