

Gladstone Saiki Sister City Advisory Committee

President's Report 2021

In this 25th Anniversary Year of the signing of the Declaration of Friendship, the Gladstone Saiki Sister City Advisory Committee Members have magnificently risen to the challenge of adapting and innovating. The Covid-19 pandemic has created difficulties but the enthusiasm and expertise of the Committee Members and Council Officers have ensured that the relationship between the Gladstone Region and Saiki City has not faltered. The Committee has worked as a team and it is my privilege to thank all of the members for their constructive involvement and dedication. They all genuinely deserve the public recognition they have received this year as volunteers in the Gladstone Region.

Pandemic restrictions in both Australia and Japan effectively stopped face to face contact. There were no Mayoral Visits, Student Exchanges or Citizen trips. The books in the Annual Exchange could only be delivered at a second attempt because of postal restrictions in Japan. We did not have a stall at the Multicultural Festival because of uncertainties surrounding the event and the availability of volunteers. Activities at the Gladstone Regional Art Gallery and Museum had restrictions placed upon them. This year, more than ever, we have been aware of the tremendous and on-going support provided by the Mayor, Councillor Matt Burnett, and the Gladstone Regional Council.

Undaunted, Committee Members and Council Officers adapted. An updated communication strategy and website have been devised, facilitating better communication and information distribution. We were delighted to see the new roadside Gladstone Saiki Sister City Friendship signs. Mayor to Mayor greetings and invitations have been sent and received. At the Gladstone Regional Art Gallery and Museum the very popular Children's Day became Children's Days and kits were sent to schools unable to attend. Their Celebrate Australia Primary School Art Competition, Saiki Children's Art Competition and Saiki Images Photographic Exhibition were successfully celebrated thanks to the wonders of the postal service, modern technology and printers. The Curator, Cameron Curd, and the staff and volunteers at the Gladstone Regional Art Gallery and Museum cannot be praised too highly for their vision and enthusiasm in maintaining the profile of the Sister City relationship.

The predominant focus this year was to reaffirm our commitment and friendship as we celebrated the 25th Anniversary on 4 September. The celebration required innovation as well as adaptation, with a multi-faceted program. The creation of a video of the Gladstone Region, with Japanese subtitles, is a visual reminder to our friends in Saiki that we continue to share our region with them. The purchase of a bonsai tree and plaque, to be housed in the Bonsai House at the Tondoon Botanic Gardens, is a lasting, living connection between us. I acknowledge the expertise and commitment of Barry Meiring and the staff at the Tondoon Botanic Gardens. In addition, the Shorebirds Art Installation outside the City Hall in Goondoon Street, demonstrates that if those little birds can make the journey from the Gladstone Region to Japan, then we also will be able to once again meet in person.

It is the hallmark of a strong committee that there are also many ideas in the pipeline. Several focus upon the Tondoon Botanic Gardens, including highlighting the Japanese Gardens with the possibility of additional informative displays, the engagement of a sculptor from the Saiki Region and the installation of a traditional bamboo tipping water feature, a tsukubai. During the year, we quickly

settled into our new meeting venue in the Philip Street Community and Families Precinct. This new, exciting complex symbolizes the enthusiasm with which we face our future friendship with Saiki City.

In general, it has been a difficult year for everyone, largely because of the restrictions associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. In my introductory paragraph, I wrote that the relationship between the Gladstone Region and Saiki City had not faltered. Having reviewed the last year while writing this President's Report, I need to expand on that statement. The relationship has done much more than not falter. It has positively grown during the adaptations and it has definitely blossomed during the innovations.

I reflect upon the past year with sincere gratitude and look forward to next year with great optimism.

Wendy Marsh
President
18 November 2021