

## HOPE comes of Age

by Michele Smith, 27 June 2016

On the 14<sup>th</sup> November, not-for-profit environmental organisation, HOPE (Householders' Options to Protect the Environment) celebrates its twenty-first birthday. It's an impressive milestone for a group with such a modest beginning.

It started with an informal talk to commemorate World Environment Day at an adult education centre in Mansfield, Victoria in 1988. The speaker, Janet MacKenzie, had no idea that her speech, which she called HOPE, would initiate an explosion of support that would eventually blossom into HOPE Australia.

Janet's message to those concerned about the growing global environmental crisis was simple – ordinary people can make a difference by utilising their own unique talents to raise public awareness. By creating a network of interested supporters and by initiating individual and group actions to solve local environmental problems, society's attitude to the environment will be transformed.

Out of this concept was born HOPE's slogan – **“Think Globally – Act Locally.”**

The vision and values of HOPE certainly resonated with many people, so that within a relatively short time, some 80 branches of the organisation were established in Victoria alone. It was apparent that HOPE was here to stay. To formalise its existence, it then became necessary to establish a charter. The HOPE Generator, another brainchild of founder, Janet MacKenzie, not only provides the charter but also supplies information sheets, contacts and resources to give ordinary people the options they need to lessen their impact on the environment.

MacKenzie sums it up in the HOPE Generator: “... everyone can do something, no matter how small. Maybe tomorrow they'll do more.”

This maxim was firmly planted in the mind of Frank Ondrus when he and his wife, Mary, moved from Shepparton, Victoria to Toowoomba, Queensland in 1993. Firmly convinced of the valuable contribution that HOPE could make to a sustainable future, Frank established a HOPE branch in Toowoomba in September 1993.

He gathered a small band of loyal volunteers around him and, together, they worked tirelessly to expand their membership. Through their efforts, HOPE gradually began to mushroom in popularity throughout the state.

Over the past sixteen years, their achievements have been nothing short of remarkable.

For seven years they were associated with the Toowoomba Regional Environmental Council (TREC) with membership on the committee for World Environment Day and regular participation in various events. Through the generosity of the *Chronicle*, enabling HOPE to provide a weekly column in the *Downs' Star*, the organisation was able to disseminate information about its activities and provide environmental information to the general public. They acquired membership to the Queensland Conversation Council and established a website through GreenNet Australia, managed by David Shipp and later, Stephen Warburton.

According to Frank Ondrus, “We pounced on opportunities that presented themselves and then did them when no one else would.” In this way, they acquired project funding, resource grants and more recognition as a viable environmental organisation.

Some of the funding allowed the publication of the *Ecology Audit* booklet in 1999. Four years in the making, it was the result of the hard work of Sandra Lackie, Christine MacGillivray, Mary Ondrus and Sue Pechey and, with the help of Stephanie Crundwell, was released as a second edition in 2005.

The HOPE newsletter, edited by Robyn Whale, and, more recently, the E:news bulletin were also the results of the funding, and, through them, HOPE's message reached more people with a resultant explosion of membership and supporters.

In 2000, HOPE Victoria asked the Toowoomba branch to take over the running of the organisation, and, since then, it has gone from strength to strength, receiving its Incorporation as HOPE Australia in 2007. Frank's position changed from convenor to president.

Part of its success is due to its networking, an essential component in the realisation of HOPE's vision. It is linked to almost 30 environmental agencies through its MSP program (Mutual Support Partnership) and has numerous links to government agencies as well. “It is important to maintain good relations with our partners.

We can promote the environment by tapping into our layer of agencies,” Ondrus explained. “And we are mindful of a good rapport with government agencies (because this gives us) access to resources.”

There is no doubt that Frank Ondrus has been the driving force behind the success of HOPE Australia. He has nurtured the organisation from the beginning and has been relentless in the pursuit of funding and support. The ensuing projects that the organisation has taken on have been prodigious and include the Organics Expo (2002), Biodiversity Expo (2003), Earth Charter Forum (2006), Keep Qld GM Free (2006) and Walk Against Warming (2007). Its biggest project thus far is the promotion of the State government’s Low Carbon Diet program which is its current project and a real feather in HOPE’s already impressive cap.

HOPE’s future looks very bright with many projects on the drawing-board. Its continued success still relies on the support of its many volunteers and more volunteers are always needed.

You can help HOPE celebrate its twenty-one years of achievements by going along to Laurel Bank Park Pergola (Herries St side) at 11.30 am on the Saturday, 14<sup>th</sup> November. There will be a short AGM followed by a sausage sizzle birthday lunch. Bring your own chairs, drinks and any special dietary requirements. RSVP by the 6<sup>th</sup> November by calling Miriam on 07 4639 5030 or Frank on 07 4639 2135.

By lending your support, you, too, can make a difference.

*Think Globally – Act Locally.*