

We The People
Program 300 June 25, 2018
We the People 300 The Gold Coast Regional Botanic Gardens



Good Day to you. There is a hidden gem on the Gold Coast which locals and visitors are finally discovering. It's a place to escape and learn and to be inspired. It's available to everyone and it's free. Sound interesting, well it should be because it's the Gold Coast Regional Botanic Gardens in Benowa, right here on the Gold Coast. Political correctness hasn't struck there yet and birds and animals come and go without trouble and you can smell the sweet scent of blossoms and breathe in fresh oxygen-rich air thanks to the myriad of plants and trees.

This year heralds the 20th anniversary of **Friends of the Gardens** the champions of environment and the bush, ever eager to contribute. Starting as a small group of advocates in 1998 they convinced Council to invest in infrastructure and support the Gardens. This army of passionate volunteers stay the course year after year in building a working botanic park and in preserving about 50 species of rare and endangered regional plants. The land was made available through donation by the Rosser family who purchased the land in 1923 with their daughter Gene still keeping an eye on this remarkable asset. In 1860 the land was used to grow cotton then later sugar cane with steamers picking up the harvest and taking it to the mill. In 1919 the land was subdivided into small holdings and the Rosser family acquired one of the blocks and later donated about three quarters of this holding to the people of the Gold Coast in Council's care. Not something you would do today with this Council. I have spoken with a very enthusiastic Kate Heffernan at length and Kate is quick to include so many others who have worked over the last 20 years to see these wonderful botanic gardens grow. Far too many people for me to mention but let's highlight Kate's husband Alan Donaldson and Peter and Lynette Reilly for their organisational contribution and Peter's work in the Herbarium. Shelly Kelly a vital all rounder and Guide coordinator, president of 10 years Nick Bloor and current President Alex Jakimoff. There are so many others and all should feel a tremendous sense of pride in leading this, a lasting and worthwhile legacy in a hard concrete Gold Coast. All up it represents 32 hectares of glorious gardens and conservation and so much of it accomplished by selfless volunteers **who gave 19,000 volunteer hours last year alone.**

On site there are a myriad of things to see and do representing the 54 eco systems in this region. The herbarium dries and catalogues plants and flowers for study while another team maintain a climate-watch program as part of a national initiative. Rana Baguley oversees the educational aspects of the botanic gardens and arranges interaction with schools and their curricula. There is a place to buy plants and reference material or join a planting program and leave your mark for the next generation. Take a walk through various identified eco types and appreciate what life is really all about and why we must respect and honour the natural environment and the miraculous part plants play in this world. A botanic garden is an institution holding documented collections of living plants for the purposes of scientific research, conservation, display and education. The Friends of the Botanic Garden are the people who made all this happen and the Gardens are a living collection based on plants grouped for scientific, education and conservation purposes and displayed in a designed landscape. They are divided into living precincts and zones. In keeping with the intent of the Master Plan, the principal themes in the collection directly relate to the display of regional plant species. These are intended to complement but do not attempt to recreate the botanic and ecological elements of the existing natural environments, parks and open spaces of the region. A lot has been accomplished in twenty years and the dedicated effort of so many wonderful people brings the promise of a bright future. If we cannot live with nature in all its glory then we will disappear from the earth forever. **Albert Einstein said "Look deep into nature and then you will understand everything better"** and he was right.

Until next time this is Kent Bayley