



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

LORT SMITH RECEPTION

Tuesday 7th May 2019

Lady Southey AC, Patron, Lort Smith Animal Hospital

Ms Barbara Pesel, President, Lort Smith Animal Hospital

Ms Fiona Webster, Chief Executive Officer

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Four Legged Friends

First, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their Elders past and present and to any Elders here with us this afternoon.

Tony and I are delighted to welcome you here to Government House to celebrate the important work of the Lort Smith Animal Hospital.

Lort Smith cares for animals – and for people.

As you well know, your Animal Hospital, Adoption Centre and Community Outreach services are all directed to your mission to improve the health and happiness of animals **and** the people who care for them.

Like so many of our important institutions in this State, yours was founded by a strong woman.

That observation, I assure you, is not just the biased view of the first female Governor of our State. It is based on the number of occasions – time and time again, in fact - when we see that we owe so much to the vision, grit and determination of outstanding women, many well ahead of their time.

Louisa Lort Smith was such a woman.

It was through her hard work that the land and funding was obtained to enable The Lort Smith-Lyle Hospital for Sick and Injured Animals, (as it was then called), to open in April 1936.

The vision was that the hospital would provide a place where people with limited financial resources could obtain veterinary treatment for their animals. And where not only the suffering of ill and injured animals could be reduced, but also the anxiety, pain and grief of the people who had to accompany their animals for treatment.

I have read that, although Mrs Lort Smith was soft-hearted when it came to animals, she was a hard-headed business manager and fearless advocate, associated with almost every animal welfare deputation to successive Victorian governments. And it is said of her that *'When she got up to speak everyone listened'*.

Well, that's what it took for her to help create a great legacy.

Since the Hospital first opened its doors in 1936, it has cared for more than one million animals, and found homes for some 200,000 pets.

It is now Australia's largest animal hospital.

Of course, across the decades, Lort Smith has greatly expanded its work and reach.

May I single out the Pet Therapy Program, celebrating its important 30 year milestone this year. What great comfort and relief it provides to people experiencing illness, adversity and loneliness, as volunteers take their dogs to hospitals and residential care services across Melbourne.

We are fortunate enough to host four beautiful Pet Therapy dogs today. Tony and I look forward to meeting them shortly.

Every strand of the work you do is true to your mission. You are kind and caring to animals. And you are mindful of how so many people - but in particular those who are marginalised by society or experiencing disadvantage – find an extraordinary amount of comfort in animals.

You often help to smooth the hard edges of loneliness, anxiety or grief. Or to make someone feel safer or more secure.

Thank you to everyone involved in Lort Smith. Thank you to the more than 60 vets, almost 100 vet nurses, and all who dedicate their working lives to the organisation.

Thank you to the generous donors, philanthropists and corporate sponsors who generously support that work.

And thank you to the more than 400 volunteers, who provide sheltering and foster services, help in the Pet Therapy Program and in the Adoption Centre.

Finally, may I acknowledge the vision and leadership of your Board under the stewardship of President Barbara Pesel, and the hard work of your staff led by CEO Fiona Webster.

Congratulations on all that you achieve, and please enjoy your time with us today.