



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

OLD COLONISTS' ASSOCIATION 150TH ANNIVERSARY RECEPTION

Tuesday 23rd July 2019

Mr Kevin Neville, President, Old Colonists Association of Victoria and **Members of Council**

Mr Phillip Wohlers, CEO, Old Colonists Association of Victoria

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

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 to Government House to celebrate 150 years of the Old Colonists' Association.

Even as I say that, I am struck by the extraordinary achievement. That any community organisation can survive across a century and a half, let alone maintain its good work through all those decades, is truly something to celebrate.

It is the more extraordinary when you reflect on Victoria in 1869.

The Colony of Victoria had only achieved self-government in 1855.

Due to the Gold Rush, the Colony's population had recently grown from 100,000 to 540,000 in just a decade. And, although gold had brought extraordinary wealth to the colony, it had also brought much social upheaval and significant economic woes in some quarters.

It was against that backdrop that the first meeting of what became known as the Old Colonists' Association of Victoria was held on 11 May 1869.

In this role, I often encounter some of our State's older community groups that were founded here in this House, or perhaps in the Town Hall, or in Queen's Hall, or some other significant civic building. This group held their first meeting at the Menzies Hotel!

At the heart of their charter was the intent to assist necessitous 'old Colonists' by loan or otherwise. To that end, the first homes to help older folks in need with secure and affordable housing were prepared.

It is interesting to look back over the organisation's history and to see how, although the context has changed, the broader vision has not.

Today, the Old Colonists' Association of Victoria still provides independent living, assisted living and aged care for Victorians in need.

Never has it been more important. We are living longer than ever before. The life expectancy of Australians is 5th amongst 35 OECD countries. And Victorians are no exception, with people over the age of 80 now the fastest growing age group. (I know we have at least one centenarian with us today. A warm welcome to Mr Don Simpson).

We know that the demands to support older Victorians will only increase. And we know of increases in homelessness amongst, for example, single older women.

What impresses about this organisation is that no matter how many years have now passed, and no matter how society has dramatically changed, not only has your good work continued, but it has certain hallmarks that have simply transcended the decades.

You continue as a not-for-profit provider. The cornerstone of your approach is to provide a continuum of care from independent living, to assisted living and then through to aged care. How proud you can be of your continued growth. This year you will open a further 81 independent living units for couples and singles.

And, today, just as in the beginning, so much is achieved due to the generosity of philanthropists, donors and volunteers.

May I thank you for all the work that you do.

In addition to caring for your residents, you contribute to industry leadership and advocacy in a range of areas including aged care workforce, public housing, end of life care, and aged care funding.

You also deliver staff training and welcome students from La Trobe University on nursing placements.

And importantly for us all into the future, you are investigating the potential role virtual reality might play in the wellbeing of older Victorians.

Thank you to Mr Kevin Neville, President and Council members, Life Governors, senior staff, donors and supporters. I know we have staff members here who have been with the organisation across decades.

I mentioned the volunteers. They range in age from 20 years to those of you in your 90's. You are involved in many aspects of the village, including activities for residents, gardening and assisting residents at appointments. How delightful that almost half of the volunteers are themselves village residents.

What a happy community!

Finally, I note that the connection of the Association with Governors of Victoria has spanned almost the entire 150 years.

I am proud that, as your Patron, the connection continues, and that I am able to say 'Congratulations' and 'Happy 150th Birthday'.