

A Brief History of the Toowoomba Bridge Club

The Toowoomba Bridge Club Inc. was established in 1982 with the amalgamation of three Bridge Clubs, the Downs Club, the City Club and the Toowoomba Bridge Club (which had held its inaugural meeting on the 26th October, 1959 making it one of the oldest Bridge Clubs in Queensland.) The original club house was built on land owned by the Toowoomba City Council at 69 Water Street, Toowoomba.

The Change

The Council had given the Club a 30-year lease and the expectation of members was that the Lease would be renewed at its conclusion.

However in 1989, the land was rezoned and the Club was informed that their Lease would not be renewed after 2012. Although the Club explored the possibility of buying land, they had only recently become debt free after paying for the original club house and it simply wasn't a feasible option.

The Journey to Build a New Clubhouse

In 1996 with Jackie Henderson as President, the first building committee comprising Rita Caldwell, Pam Gebbett, Marlene Stanley, Noni McCay and Glenys Clift as Chair was established to find an alternate site for a new building. The initial approaches to Council met with little success, however with perseverance and over time, a majority of Councillors led by Bruce Hinchliffe took up our cause and in 2003 an application was made for land in Stuart Street which adjoined Horn Park. This was followed by 6 months of negotiations with Parks & Recreation about what trees we could not touch and the area to be used for parking. The lease was approved by a full council meeting in November 2003. In March 2004– at a Special General Meeting of the Toowoomba Bridge Club, the members unanimously voted to accept Council's offer of a lease on 55 Stuart Street. Our Building Fund totalled \$108,000. Little did we know at this stage that the project was ultimately going to cost well over \$700,000. Which is probably just as well, because we would have given up straight away.

In 2004, various Committees were set up - a Finance Committee headed by Henry Eastment; a Planning Committee comprising Ray Moore, Maurice Josey and Chris Snook; a Fundraising Committee headed by Edwin Willey. Lee Hore took responsibility for looking after the fund-raising finances

The application for Planning Approval was lodged in January 2005 and during the next five months there was a small group of very vocal opponents in the community who tried to make life as difficult as possible for us using the media. The Council meeting was, to say the least, very interesting and for us at the time, quite suspenseful as we honestly didn't know which way it would go. Geoff Tyrrell, President of the Amputee Families Support Group who are sharing the building spoke on behalf of his group, Glenys Clift spoke on behalf of the Club, the opponents were allowed their say.

But in the end it came down to Mayor Dianne Thorley and Councillors Sue Englart, Graham Barron, Regina Albion, Michelle Alroe, Keith Beer, Lyle Shelton and Michelle Schneider who all voted in favour of the project. Planning Approval was officially granted on 18th July, 2005 with the condition that the project be completed within 4 years. The Building Committee had been set up in April 2005 comprising Col Blackley, Ivy Dahler, Chris Snook, Henry Eastment, Pam Gebbett, Lee Hore and Glenys Clift as Chair. However over the next 18 months, this Committee grew like topsy to include Will Higgins, Ray Moore, Doreen Woods, Peg Alcock, Edwin Willey, Bruce Hinchliffe, Judith Higgins all contributing different degrees of expertise.

In February 2006, Ray Moore was appointed Project Manager with Will Higgins and Col Blackley assisting him. Pam Gebbett and Doreen Wood were given responsibility for fixtures and fittings, Bruce Hinchliffe to liaise with both the Amputee Support Group and the Council and Judith Higgins to assist Col Blackley with landscaping.

With the announcement on the 1st July 2006 that we had qualified for a grant from the Department of Sport & Recreation for \$214,965.00 the project assumed a reality. The QBA and the ABF had also pledged \$30,000 each in loans. However, just as important were the members who pledged the club a total of \$105,000 in loans and the amount raised in fund raising (over \$100,000.00) by all our members. Another \$47,000 was secured from the Community Benefit Fund and Jupiters for fixtures and fittings and The Toowoomba City Council were generous in giving us community grants to cover fees, outside roadworks and supplying fill for the site. Added onto this, was the pledge made by Clive Berghofer to donate the air conditioning and do the earthworks. As a thank you to Clive, we have made him Patron of our Club. The final outcome was that we were able to pay back all members loans by October 2007.

The Club was extremely fortunate in the calibre of members who comprised the Project Management Team headed by Ray Moore. All three, Ray, Col and Will donated hundreds of hours of their own time ensuring deadlines were met and problems sorted.

By the middle of June, the building was complete and the club had its first landscaping working bee. An opening date was set for the 14th July, 2007. Prior to opening day, the club had a second landscaping working bee and finished all the gardens. Judith Higgins, Lise Boyce, Liz Kane and Barbara Gill had done the ground work and purchased all the plants. Ray Moore commented that during his career as a town planner, he has never seen another club in Toowoomba put the same member's effort and time into their initial landscaping. It was truly fantastic –thanks to all those who participated.

Col Blackley and Ralph Geddes virtually worked non-stop during the last week and everything was moved from Water Street on the 12th July via trailers and utes owned by Col Blackley, Joe Geiger, John Clift, Alan Woods, Robbie Stevenson and Vickie Yates.

Opening Day - Saturday 14th July 2007

Over 130 people attended the opening day and the atmosphere was one of excitement and delighted surprise. Mayor Dianne Thorley gave a wonderful speech and Clive, as Patron, was also invited to speak

Mary McConachy who was in charge of catering, said she was just overwhelmed by the amount of wonderful food donated by the members. After the initial speeches, lunch was served and Mary and her band of helpers made it look as though serving lunch to 130 people was an everyday event.

Chris Snook then took charge of organising the bridge and ran three different movements simultaneously. Glenys Clift was subsequently awarded an Honorary Life Membership by the Club in recognition of the work she had done over the previous 11 years towards this project.

Presidents of the Toowoomba Bridge Club

1982-1983 David Edwards

1983-1984 Bruce Meakins

1984-1988 Phil Dobney

1988-1992 Val Buchanan

1992-1996 Vi Vella

1996-2000 Jackie Henderson

2000-2002 Pam Gebbett

2002-2004 Marlene Stanley

2004-2007 Glenys Clift

2007-2008 Henry Eastment

2008-2011 Chris Snook

2011-2012 Floyd Wilson

2012-2014 Chris Snook

2014-2015 Keith Jenkin

2015-2016 Henry Eastment

2016-2018 Denise Hartwig