Speech

Address By

His Excellency Major General Michael Jeffery AC CVO MC
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

On the occasion of

A reception to mark the 75th anniversary of Apex Australia

Admiralty House, Sydney
9 March 2006

- Mr Bruce Kelman, National President, Apex Australia
- Mr Tony Peters, Chairman, Apex Foundation
- Life Governors and District Governors
- Corporate Sponsors
- Ladies and gentlemen

Good evening everyone. Marlena and I are delighted to welcome you here to honour three-quarters of a century of selfless community work by Apex.

We should be especially proud of Apex as a home grown success story.

It is impossible to calculate how many Australians have benefited from the decision by three young men in Geelong - Ewen Laird, Langham Proud and John Buchan - to form a ‘Young Business Men’s Club’ which was officially named Apex seventy five years ago tomorrow.

Within twelve months of that initial idea, five clubs had been formed, a constitution agreed, and Ewen Laird’s logo had been adopted – the yellow and red triangle with its three sides representing service, citizenship and fellowship.

The name Apex was chosen to represent the height of ambition, in the most noble of contexts. The rays represent the rising generations of youth and the word ‘Australia’ on the logo recognises the national origins of Apex.

What a challenge it must have been to found an organisation based on the ideals of service, at a time when Australia and the world faced the dark clouds of the 1930s depression?

The Apex creed of service has stood the test of time, as have the other elements of the Apex charter.

For example, Apexians strive to develop citizenship, to provide a means of forming enduring friendships, to render altruistic service and build better communities, and to promote international understanding. I can think of no more worthier ideals.

The first project in the service of the nation was the donation, in 1935, of a pedal wireless and truck to that other remarkable Australian organisation, the Royal Flying Doctor Service – no mean feat in difficult financial times. Two years later the organisation was instrumental in initiating a “free milk for school children” scheme.

The war saw nearly all Apexians in uniform, but by 1946, Apex was back in action as a prime mover in the campaign for mass screening for the eradication of tuberculosis in Australia.

The five decades since the end of World War Two have seen an extraordinary record of achievement. Apexian initiatives included the formation of the Civilian Widows’ Association, the first Guide Dogs for the Blind Training Centre, and magnificent fund raising efforts for medical research into diabetes, children’s cancer, mental health and craniofacial surgery.
Apex also has a proud history of aid for the disabled and in migrant sponsorship. Apex built and managed a chalet in the snow for underprivileged children, set up Foundation 41 for foetal research from conception to birth, made major contributions to blood donation campaigns, drug education, “Clean Up Australia”, and the “Our Drive and Survive” road campaign.

The list is long and impressive, including the provision of numerous community facilities. As Tony Peters mentioned in a letter to me, there is barely a town in the country that does not have a park, pool or playground donated by Apex.

Reflecting on this extraordinary history of community work – all voluntary, and calculated at more than 500 million hours since the organisation was founded – I was interested in how Apex has so frequently been ‘ahead of its time’ and how often it has stepped in to fill a gap.

In 1968, when the problem of Autism was barely recognised, Apexians walked around Australia to raise funds to establish the Research Foundation for Autism. A more recent initiative is the development and funding of the “Twin Loss Awareness” kit to help medical professionals and twin loss families understand the unique needs in this tragic situation. The kit, initiated in 2003 by the Apex Club of Murray Bridge in South Australia, has been successful in filling a void in bereavement care, which is itself a recognised mental health issue.

The Twin Loss kit is an example of the grassroots involvement of Apexians - an idea from a local club fulfilling a national need.

Your encouragement of youth is of special interest to me. For young people, Apex is unique because of its youthful membership base, ensuring a special outlook on youth issues. This is reflected in the service you have extended to the Fine Arts through scholarships that give young Australian singers the chance to perform in competition in Vienna.

It is a guiding theme inspiring the work of your Apex Foundation. As noted in the Apex Foundation slogan, “Heart of a community, Hope of a nation”, the main beneficiaries of your work are Australian children.

Ladies and gentlemen. We have entered an era where voluntary work all too infrequently receives the recognition it deserves. Anniversaries such as yours help remind the community of the enormous value of voluntary work. As your literature notes, an organisation like Apex has its rewards in encouraging friendships that last a lifetime, ‘cemented through the fun and banter that accompanies the toil; friendships that come from mixing with fellow members from all walks of life, and from being part of a youthful and spirited group.’

In conclusion, may I turn to the words of the great Doctor Jonas Salk who developed a vaccine to prevent polio. He observed: “that wanting to do something for humankind is part of our nature, and part of an ancestral heritage. That’s how we got to be where we are, through people who performed or functioned that way, or had that drive, or the desire or ambition, which I look upon as a natural phenomenon. Some people are constructive, if you like; and it results in positive contributions.”

Ladies and gentlemen. Marlena and I greatly respect and support your work, and we extend to you our encouragement and thanks for your commitment. Congratulations on seventy five years of enriching Australian lives. Long may Apex continue to do so.

All the best for your year of celebration.

Thank you.