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COVER PHOTO: Virtuoso violinist, Daniel Bernard Roumain (DBR), will perform with DJ Scientific and the queen of Haitian song, Emeline Michel, during Ten Days on the Island

Photography by Julia Cervantes
Wow, where did the year go? It doesn’t seem that long ago since we welcomed 2010 - the Year of Women in Local Government in our March edition of LGAT News and already the year is drawing to a close. Fortunately, the many initiatives set in motion to increase the level of female representation within the sector will not conclude at the year’s end. With the October launch of the WomenCan campaign, a year ahead of the 2011 Local Government Elections, the momentum is set to continue into the future. To cap off the year of Women in Local Government, PHD student, Cherie Hawkins, explores some of the barriers to female representation within the sector in her article, Role Conflict and the Perception of Women in Politics, on page 18. An interview with Flinders Council Mayor Carol Cox, on page 6, also concludes a series of interviews with female mayors from across the state who have shared their personal perspectives and insights on how the leadership experience has been for them.

Looking ahead to 2011, it is pleasing to welcome back Ten Days on the Island, from 25 March to 5 April. With 232 performances at 58 events in 111 venues across 62 Tasmanian locations, the sixth Ten Days program promises to be the biggest yet! Council support has been instrumental to enabling the growth of this iconic international event and ultimately, it is the communities themselves that stand to benefit by being a part of this exciting initiative. Find out more on page 46 and be sure to book your tickets early.

For those councils and organisations who aim to make staff retention a greater priority, on page 28 you will find the first of a series of articles on the subject by TasCOSS Development Officer, Elida Meadows. Her first article focuses on workplace stress and provides some useful suggestions and examples as to how employers can recognise the signs of stress in the workplace and help address the issue to achieve a more stable, enjoyable and efficient workforce.

On behalf of LGAT management and staff, the team at Nova Design and Print, and Advertising Media and Associates, I wish our members, associates, readers, editorial contributors and advertisers a safe and enjoyable Christmas season. We look forward to seeing you again in the New Year.

STEPHANIE WATSON
Editor
I have had the very fortunate recent experience of travelling the length of the country with my wife, son and his family. It is not something which we all get the opportunity to do but I found the experience liberating and refreshing to look at the world through the eyes of others. What we have tended to take for granted over our many years of existence is transformed through the eyes of grandchildren. They understand and accept change more readily, and with more enthusiasm, than those of us that have been around for a little while.

I witnessed major storms and flooding that occurred in places that had never experienced it in the past, lamenting the challenges that would face the local councils that had to deal with the recovery effort and the adjustments that the displaced and disaffected people would have to make. My grandchildren saw the same hardship but also the beauty that these events brought in terms of the waterways and wildlife. I saw the challenges of the change, they wanted to see the opportunity.

I recently attended the opening of a conference where the theme related to the “dust finally settling”. It was a Local Government conference with overtones to the post water and sewerage era. While accepting that there should be reflection after major change and upheaval, I couldn’t help but think and then relate to the audience that while the dust is settling, it only remains that way until the next storm comes along. While there are no major storms on the Local Government horizon at the moment, there are a number of matters to deal with that will create quite a bit of dust and a fair bit of wind. That is the nature of Local Government. The dust comes and the dust goes, but it does keep on coming.

Communities don’t tend to celebrate the efforts that councils have made in making their place a better one. They are generally very pleased that the council has listened and got on with the job of improvement but once that is done, there are plenty of more things to fix. Planning reform, the present review of valuation and taxation, the recently announced parliamentary inquiry into water and sewerage reform, constitutional recognition and waste management funding are just some of the matters we are grappling with at the moment. And when we fix those, there will be others to take their place.

Indeed, the Premier’s recent Local Government Reform announcement provides the opportunity for a fresh look at how we do what we do and why we do it. It will require resources, it will require effort and it will require commitment, but it can potentially deliver significantly improved outcomes for communities. We might need to change. The State Government might need to change. The community won’t care. It just wants things to be better and that will be our challenge.

And so, as I reflect on my recent voyage and witness the speed of change to which my grandchildren have become so accustomed and accepting, I think that perhaps even at my age I can acknowledge that not only is change inevitable, it is ongoing. The important thing is to understand why it is happening and to work diligently to influence that change for the better.

The dust may settle but it never stops coming. We just hope that sometimes we get the opportunity to bask in the sun for just a little while before the winds bring more dust.

Does Dust Ever Really Settle?

BARRY EASTHER OAM, PRESIDENT
Local Government Association of Tasmania

I recently attended the opening of a conference where the theme related to the “dust finally settling”. It was a Local Government conference with overtones to the post water and sewerage era. While accepting that there should be reflection after major change and upheaval, I couldn’t help but think and then relate to the audience that while the dust is settling, it only remains that way until the next storm comes along. While there are no major storms on the Local Government horizon at the moment, there are a number of matters to deal with that will create quite a bit of dust and a fair bit of wind. That is the nature of Local Government. The dust comes and the dust goes, but it does keep on coming.

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At the time of writing, the independent report of the consultants commissioned to review Tasmania’s present rating and valuation arrangements is pending release for public consultation.

It’s not so much a revelation but a good, hard look at what works here and elsewhere, and what doesn’t work particularly well. The review resulted from ongoing concerns around the impact of valuations, the significant shifts in land prices and a range of practical issues relating to rating that appeared to prevent councils from reducing the shocks of valuation while seeking to provide equity across their rate base.

So is there a solution on the horizon? Whatever the outcome, the biggest challenge will be transitioning from one arrangement to another. Nobody will want to be any worse off than they presently are, be they residents, business owners or farmers. The options on the table allow for a series of outcomes at the valuation end but the translation to rating effort is determined by the tools that are available and how councils use them.

There are many in the community who would prefer a total user charge outcome, others want consistency across council areas, while most would prefer to just pay less. There will be calls for intensive modelling so that everybody can understand the particular implications of the future valuation and rating arrangements on their specific property. This is unlikely to be possible to any great degree although the principles associated with the techniques and tools should allow for some broad calculations and demonstration of impacts.

Tools that prevent spikes in valuation impacts and frequency of valuations are likely to be seen as highly desirable but there is still much work to be done. The independent report is just that. It raises issues, it describes practices here and elsewhere but stops short of proposing the definitive answer. It will be important for all in Local Government and those affected by valuation and rating to take the time to absorb the contents of the report and make detailed and considered inputs to the consultation process.

It is unlikely that there will be universal agreement on any particular aspect of the report but it will be important that everyone has their input.

In the event of major change, there will be a reasonably lengthy lead time until implementation. This will be necessary to have legislation in place and to train and educate elected members and council officers in the various tools and techniques that will be available. There will also be a need for a strong community education program. One of the key issues on embarking on this project was to improve the understanding of the community of the rating process.

The reform treadmill does not end but this one is extremely important, and it is imperative that we get it right.
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