

TIME AND TIME AGAIN

In a bid to capture moments to cast into the new millennium, Altona City Rotary Club member, Geoff Burnnard brought his vision of a time capsule to life. His aim was to create something so meaningful it would engage an entire community.

Almost 25 years ago, around 12,000 children and 100 adults from Hobsons Bay municipality, contributed messages about their lives to a massive time capsule. The project was the result of a highly successful collaboration between Altona City Rotary Club and Altona City Rotaract Club (a Service club for young people aged 18-30), in conjunction with Hobsons Bay Council. Together, they strengthened community ties and encouraged a sense of belonging to the city's history. Involving the community in a collaborative hands-on project, fostered a sense of unity, which was even more special given the rich multicultural mix.

On Australia Day 2000, the capsule was buried below the earth's surface at the pinnacle of what is now Truganina Park and inaugurated by then Hobsons Bay Mayor, Dick Murdoch.

The project began enthusiastically in 1998 and it took two years to create the 12-tonne concrete vault and capsules and organise for messages to be gathered from children from the 32 primary and high schools in the municipality. In addition, families, community leaders, and local businesses were also invited to participate. The late Altona City Rotarian, Peter Whinney, worked alongside Leonie Duane, mechanical engineer and then President of the Altona City Rotaract Club to co-design the physical facilities.

"A lot of thinking and reflection was involved in the process of developing the capsule because it was to be launched at the start of a new millennium," said Leonie Duane. "At the time, the wider society was both looking back and wondering about the future. There was a feeling of optimism and hope as we planned the project."

Importantly, it was a great example of council, Rotary and Rotaract serving side by side professionally and socially as they worked for the community. It provided an environment where knowledge could be shared and Rotaractors could benefit from Rotarians' experience in fundraising and publicity.

Every aspect of the project was successful. Rotarians contributed according to their individual expertise. Engineers from Rotary and Rotaract produced the innovative capsule design, and ensured its efficient construction and installation. Rotaractors managed the information technology side including creating a historical database and website.

Hobsons Bay Council fully endorsed the project and provided a financial contribution. Construction materials and equipment were either donated or discounted by sponsoring companies, and local businesses, who also provided promotion and sponsorship. Envelopes to carry messages for the future were sold and distributed by various service groups and sporting organizations, and local newspapers and radio stations provided extensive media coverage of the event, which also helped raise the profile of Rotary and Rotaract.

Participants became Time Lords who would speak to their future selves a quarter of a century later via a choice of different sized envelopes costing \$5 or \$15. Corporates and organisations paid \$100 and school children participated for free. 'For the Future' was the children's theme, which prompted them to write something about their worlds. Adults were encouraged to include social and economic factors into their messages.

“The project had a strong youth focus, and is a legacy for young people. We were thrilled to have all the Hobsons Bay schools involved,” says Leonie.

Money raised was placed in trust for the ongoing needs of the project as well as to fund an achievement award for young people living in the city of Hobsons Bay. The three recipients received \$1000 each to pursue excellence in their respective fields. This enabled one young woman to travel to England to pursue her interest in ballet, a young man to further his sign writing skills in South Australia, and another to develop fine woodworking skills.

At the time of the project the Hobsons Bay area, consisting of 14 suburbs, was expanding. This endeavour was part of a wider plan to foster the unique qualities and beauty of the coastal area. The 40-hectare park site, which was once the site of a local tip, would become not only a place for communities and families to gather, but a tourist destination.

The time capsule site offers sweeping views from Melbourne city, Port Phillip Bay and Cheetham Wetlands, to the You Yangs. It’s watched over by the Time Beacon, a statue created by artist Cameron Robbins. The enigmatic piece reflects magnetic fields, exploding stars, whirlpools of nature, radio dishes and audio speakers. Signifying listening and projecting devices, it symbolises hearing and relaying nature and cultures of the past, present and future.

Since the installation of the time capsule, much has changed in Hobson’s Bay. Truganina Park went from a wasteland to become the home of diverse and abundant landscapes, grass fields, wildlife conservation and recreational areas.

For eons, time capsules have proffered insights for future generations. Artefacts and documents are buried all over the world in tombs, crevices and caves. Now, as the 25-year mark draws near, preparations are under way to open the vault and discover its secrets. The contents of the capsule will be removed prior to 26 January 2025 and the messages will become cultural artefacts. Plans are being made for a curated display in the municipality so we can all look back and appreciate what has been achieved.



Mount Truganina in 2024 with the Time Beacon overlooking the Millennium Time Capsule site