 **Landcare Broken Hill Inc**

***Greening the Hill Mk2***

ABC Radio interview No.55 – 10th June 2020

**Commemorative Trees Program**

**Landcare Broken Hill has a new initiative to canvass with the Broken Hill community: Commemorative Trees.**

How often have we sat down on a park bench in one of Australia’s Botanic Gardens or other public park and noticed that on the seat there’s a small brass plaque that discreetly states: “This seat is in memory of my beloved Bill/Jane …… who loved this park/garden”. Many of us will remember that moving love scene in the Elgin Park Gardens in the film *Notting Hill*, when Julia Roberts and Hugh Grant sat on a garden seat and she read the words of a plaque on it.

How often have we entered an historic town somewhere in country Australia, passing along an avenue of trees, finding that the avenue is an Avenue of Honour and that each tree has a small commemorative plaque with the name of a fallen soldier. (In fact, wasn’t there once a line of trees on the Silverton Road from the outskirts of Broken Hill that was a memorial to Broken Hill servicemen and women). The tradition is said to have originated in the Goldfields region of Central Victoria and is now an important part of Australian culture.

Indeed, for the Centenary of the ANZAC Gallipoli Landings in November 2018, there was a national project launched to document, preserve, promote and reinstate the original Avenues of Honour and to establish new commemorative trees. There are dozens of towns around Australia that have such Avenues of Honour. I’m certainly aware that on the embankment behind the War Memorial cenotaph in Memorial Oval there are still growing a few remnant specimens of the Lone Pine from Gallipoli, reminding us of the connection.

Recently Landcare Broken Hill was approached by a family wishing to donate so that a memorial planting could be made in memory of a departed loved one. That family’s thoughtfulness will mean that at a location to be chosen in Broken Hill a perpetual reminder, a living memorial, will be created. Arrangements are still to be worked out.

This approach has caused Landcare Broken Hill to reflect on the opportunity that such generosity might create not only for such families, but also for Broken Hill as a whole. So we resolved at our Executive Meeting last week to set up a Commemorative Tree program. We hope that via this initiative we will see Broken Hill progressively planted, meeting the objectives of ***Greening the Hill Mk2***.

**Liaising with the public authorities**

We will be approaching Broken Hill City Council and other public land managers to work out appropriate arrangements. Needless to say, the locations for memorial trees and plantings will need to be carefully determined. It should not be too difficult. In such discussions, we will be proposing that certain areas, such as a number of streets, be identified as preferred planting locations.

**Expert advice from Landcare**

Landcare Broken Hill will offer its expert advice on tree choice, as there’s no point in planting a memorial tree only to see it die a few months later because it was an inappropriate tree specie, unable to cope with our harsh Broken Hill climate, specifically our usual shortage of water and our extremely hot summers.

We would also give advice on the best times to plant such trees and the best ways to plant. Although the Landcare volunteers would be responsible for overseeing each planting proposal, our Committee has agreed to encourage family members of the departed loved-one to actually become involved in the physical planting exercise. We think that psychologically it will engender a greater feeling of connectiveness if the family are actually involved.

**Care and maintenance**

As for care and maintenance after the planting, we will be exploring various options with Council. It may be a street community team might form to look after a newly planted tree or avenue. Its early days, so we’ll explore all options.

Further, looking forward, because there will be a family or group with an emotional attachment to the tree or trees planted, there is every chance that that the family or group will wish to keep a watching eye on “their” tree or trees, thereby providing greater assurance that the trees will survive.

**Discreet and tasteful plaques**

As for the plaques, something discreet and unobtrusive would be best, keeping in mind that the heritage values of nationally listed Broken Hill. It may be our local artists might have thoughts on the design of the plaques, perhaps identifying a unique design approach.

We would work with local suppliers of memorials and plaques to devise a relatively standard, yet stylish, approach to the plaques.

**Retrievable record of the memorial/commemoration essential**

We propose to create a range of means by which memorial plantings can be easily identified so that the memory of, say, the departed loved one is capable of being retrieved. A special Landcare Broken Hill certificate, setting out the details, the commemorative words and GPS location data would be offered. On our website, we would create a listing with all appropriate details. We intend to approach the Broken Hill Historical Society and the Broken Hill Family History Centre to interest them in keeping matching information of each memorial. In each case, the family could prepare an appropriate obituary which could be retained linked to the memorial tree/avenue planting detail.

**Pet memorial garden/avenue a possibility**

Another example: I’ve walked through a public park in the USA where all the trees and shrubs were identified as being in memory of deceased pets of the community. The pet owners effectively sponsored the creation and ongoing maintenance of the public park making a donation in memory of their departed loved pet. Is this an idea worth adopting in Broken Hill?

**Need not be a memorial: tree planting might be to mark a celebration of an anniversary**

An extension of this Commemorative Tree Program might be to encourage the thought of a **tree being planting to mark the birth of a new baby**. The tree would thereafter be associated with the child as it grows. This extension idea would be more appropriate for private gardens, so that child grows up knowing that the tree planted in the front yard when he/she was born was in honour of its birth. Landcare Broken Hill could offer a range of suitable trees and plants and give advice on its planting and maintenance.

A further extension of the idea, might be to **celebrate a major anniversary or event in the town** by creating a commemorative garden, park or avenue. As an example: with Broken Hill High School’s special anniversary this year, (Centenary?), knowing that the main celebrations have had to be cancelled or deferred due to COVID-19, what about planting out an area in the School grounds as its Centenary Commemorative Shade Garden or plant out an avenue of trees along a major school pathway or entrance and designate it, the Centenary Commemorative Avenue.

Every social club, every football club and every community group will have milestones to celebrate and commemorate. If an organisation has contributed to Broken Hill for decades, they deserve to be acknowledged. What better way for these organisations to acknowledge their founders and long-standing volunteers, but to have are area planted out, a street beautified with new trees or a ‘signature’ tree planted out to mark their special anniversary?

**There is no limit to the possibilities.**

Landcare Broken Hill is calling for the community to let us know whether they’d be interested in such a new program. Do they have any suggestions? As I’ve said, we’re in early days putting the proposal together. So good ideas are always welcome.

Reflecting on this new initiative, it could prove to be a wonderful way of creating additional interest in the town: with every commemorative tree a story; with every memorial avenue, a wealth of inspiring memories.

**Progressively it could be a really positive way of underpinning the financial cost of *Greening the Hill Mk2*, thereby assisting Landcare Broken Hill to achieve its vision**.

**Landcare Broken Hill’s public meetings have been cancelled for the foreseeable future due to COVID-19.**

**All Landcare Broken Hill’s on-the-ground projects have been deferred until further notice, although ‘backroom’ planning and preparation continues.**

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