

The remote outback town

Thanks to a grant from the
of Wilcannia hasn't been
 Regional Arts Fund, three
the subject of too many
 artists-in-residence programs at
good news stories in the
 the Wilcannia Arts Centre last
papers lately, but since
 year have brought a new lease of
the new arts centre
 life and activity to the town.
opened last year there's
been plenty to celebrate.

by ANNETTE EASSIE

the wilcannia renaiss

WHEN WEST DARLING ARTS BROUGHT ARTISTS BADGER BATES, Geoff DeMain and Peter McGlinchey to work in Wilcannia, the response from the local community far exceeded all expectations.

But it has not been an easy road — and many times it seemed as if the dream of a thriving arts centre in Wilcannia would remain just that! In this remote, isolated and predominantly Indigenous — Paakantji — community, with a proportionally high number of the population identifying as artists or pursuing some form of art practice, the need to support, nurture and sustain local arts and artists has long been recognised by West Darling Arts' Regional Arts Development Officer, James Giddey.

Arts activities happened from time to time, a workshop here and there, but there was no continuity and no time to foster art and its inherent value to its community. James recognised that a long term approach needed to be adopted and a solid infrastructure developed — securing a suitable and 'user-friendly' art space as well as a 'support team' who would manage the space, coordinate its programs and tend to those crucial areas of administration and, of course, funding.

Just over three years ago the Wilcannia Arts group, a sub-committee of the West Darling Regional Arts Board, was born and highly successful workshops held with artists Geoff DeMain and Peter McGlinchey through funding from the Regional Arts NSW Country Arts Support Program (CASP) and the Waste 2 Art projects. The art space followed soon after when an old fibro, 'bit like an old CWA,' shed with a tin roof was noticed to be empty. The building belonged to the Uniting Church and the timing coincided with the arrival of the 'Flying Padre', Reverend John Blair (so-called because



L-R Badger Bates, Leatta Hunter, Jonathon Whyman, Vicki Dutton and Bonita Kennedy at the opening of the Wilcannia exhibition, at the Geo Centre, Broken Hill, 10 March 2007. Photo: Boris Hlavica

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April

28 – 29 April

Baerami Bush Dance and Campout
 Traditional acoustic music and dancing in Baerami Hall, Wollombi National Park, DENMAN Tel 02 6571 1208

28 – 20 April

Ironfest An arts festival with a metal twist: World Jousting Championships, medieval | colonial re-enactments, live music, stalls, metalwork displays & workshops, LITHGOW Showgrounds Tel 02 6353 1638 Website www.ironfest.com.au (see p.21)

28 April – 20 May

My Family & Other Animals
 Solo exhibition of paintings by Nicole Vandersteegen. Raglan Galley COOMA Tel 02 6452 3377

Until 29 April

Mental Health Nurses
 From 1895 to the present day, at Kenmore Hospital Museum, GOULBURN, Sat & Sun 10am–4pm. Contact Tel 02 4827 3412

