

Country Arts Support Program 2006 grants announced

THE REGIONAL ARTS NSW COUNTRY ARTS SUPPORT PROGRAM will this year provide grants for over 130 new arts projects in communities across regional and rural New South Wales.

The program provides funding for artists' fees for locally initiated projects, with the key aims of fostering cultural diversity, providing access to arts activities for small communities, encouraging communities to work together on cultural projects and ensuring that regional and rural areas have an artistic voice.

Grants of between \$300 and \$3,000 are provided from a total pool of \$200,000 which is devolved to Regional Arts NSW from the NSW Ministry for the Arts. Recommendations on funding are made locally, by regional CASP assessment panels coordinated by the Regional Arts Development Offices (RADOs). Applications from local government areas not serviced by a Regional Arts Board (RAB) are assessed by the State CASP assessment panel which meets in Sydney to approve the final allocations.

This year there was a total of 211 applications received for the program and 132 grants have been approved.

There was a large proportion of applications for skills development and festivals, with a high number of proposals for projects involving young people, and a significant proportion of high quality proposals for Indigenous arts and cultural projects.

CASP funding is sometimes the only support for cultural projects in remote areas. In other instances, the funding provides an essential component of a budget provided in partnership with other organisations including local government and other community service organisations.

Artforms and events included in the 2006 list are: festivals, public art works, tours of plays, exhibitions and music recitals. CASP funding will also offer skills development in a diverse range of artforms including visual arts, theatre, dance, choral works, literature, drumming, photography, circus skills, sculpture, mosaics, textiles and mixed media.

Look out for a project near you! ■

The full list of CASP funded projects for 2006 is available on the Regional Arts NSW website at www.regionalartsnsw.com.au.

Capital infrastructure has

The topic was put on the list of State been identified by Regional Arts NSW as a priority area of concern for arts and cultural development in regional, rural and remote New South Wales.

The topic was put on the list of State advocacy priorities at the network's Annual General Congress in 2005 and Anne Dunn's report on RAA's national consultation in 2006 *New Directions: Regional Arts*, based on the feedback of over 1200 stakeholders across the nation, puts cultural facilities

on its list of Top 5 challenges for the sector.

Buildings

NO ONE WITH ANY KNOWLEDGE OR EXPERIENCE IN THE AREA should be surprised. People in regional and rural areas do not have the same level of access to arts and culture that their city counterparts enjoy. "In cinemas everywhere" doesn't mean it's on anywhere near most people in country New South Wales. Tours of major shows and exhibitions are few and far between and only go to major regional centres with high standard theatres and galleries. Many people in small towns have never seen any live theatre. Country people are missing out and the main reason is a lack of suitable capital infrastructure. Buildings matter.

But it's not just about shows on tour, or cultural tourism, or education. Buildings are vital for the support all the kinds of arts and cultural activity that make life worth living to many people in rural and regional areas. No one can participate, or watch, or get involved in any way in the arts – music, film, dance, visual arts, theatre, circus, whatever – without some sort of venue to congregate in. Whether they be large performing arts centres, regional galleries or local halls, cultural facilities are a vital ingredient for community identity, wellbeing and development.

The provision of suitable, well-functioning arts infrastructure to support local arts and culture is (or should be) a major interest of any decision-maker in a regional and rural area who wants vitality, growth and sustainability for their community.

April

7 April **Youth Week**

👁 Hastings Intergenerational Photography Competition Exhibition.

PORT MACQUARIE Library
Tel 02 6581 8625

7 – 9 April

👁 *Her-Storicals* Quilts by the **TENTERFIELD** Art and Craft Society.

Tel 02 6736 1843

7 – 13 April

🎭 *Jesus Christ Superstar* Carillion Theatrical Society production. **BATHURST** Memorial Entertainment Centre
Tel 02 6333 6161

8 April **Youth Week**

🎭 *Loud and Proud* A non-competitive showcase of local talent. **COOLAMON**
Tel 02 6927 2492

If only it was just a matter of having the political will.

Cultural capital infrastructure development is no simple business. It's very expensive, it often takes years to achieve and it's a complex enterprise involving a range of specialist skills from community consultation to architectural design and fit-out (not to mention management and development). In regional and rural New South Wales it's made even more difficult by the fact that the responsibility for it falls mostly on the shoulders of local government, many of which, with the exception of the larger regional councils, have very constrained financial and human resources, particularly in the more remote areas. There are very limited sources of other funding for capital infrastructure for arts and culture; there are no consistent State or Federal policies on the matter; and there is no reliable source of professional advice for people wishing to build, redevelop, refurbish or refit a cultural facility. There is a distinct need for comprehensive, quality

harbour about local government contributions to arts and culture should now be swiftly eradicated).

The bulk of Ballina Arts and Craft Centre's \$1.37m budget (for Stage 1 – see story p.10) is coming from Ballina Shire Council, which will be providing \$900,000 for the project. The rest is made up of \$355,000 from DOTARS, \$75,000 from the NSW Ministry for the Arts CIP and \$40,000 raised by the community. (\$130,000 is still to be raised for Stage 2.)

Tamworth Gallery and Library's \$7.8 million budget (see story p.12) was provided almost entirely by the Tamworth Regional Council (including substantial borrowed funds). A grant of just \$145,000 from the NSW Ministry for the Arts was the only other funding source. (The project was not eligible for a grant from the State Library's \$3million development grant pool because its floor area did not comply with the strict program guidelines).

The new AlburyCity Library Museum, a multi-staged cultural precinct development bringing together the library, museum,

matter

by RACHAEL VINCENT



L-R: 'Cinema' in Hill End; Under construction: The new Dubbo Cultural Centre on the old Dubbo High School site, which will open in September; The Crossing Theatre, Narrabri.



information on the subject – a portfolio of best practice projects and good models of how this work can be done well (or not).

The funding 'landscape' for cultural capital infrastructure projects is at once complex and, arguably, inadequate. Budgets for new works are typically made up of millions of dollars in local government funds, with a lesser contribution from the NSW Ministry for the Arts Capital Infrastructure Program (CIP) and perhaps a (larger) grant from the Federal Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS) Regional Partnerships Program. The following are some examples of purpose-built centres. (Any misconceptions you might

performing arts centre, gallery and café which will open next year, has a total budget of \$17 million (including the purchase of the land), the bulk of which will be provided by council, with an (exceptional) \$1.3 million contribution from the NSW Ministry for the Arts Capital Infrastructure Program and a \$330,000 grant from DOTARS.

The new Dubbo Cultural Centre, incorporating a gallery, café, museum and community arts centre, which is currently in construction, has a budget of \$6.5 million (including the purchase of land at a heavily discounted price from the Department of Education). The great majority of these funds will come from the

April

8 April

◆ The Quilters Guild's meeting, New Lambton Centre **NEWCASTLE**. All welcome. The guest speaker Anne van der Kley Tel 02 9283 3737 Website www.quiltersguildnsw.com.

8 April

♪ TaikOz *The Return of the Japanese Drums*. **BELLINGEN** Memorial Hall Tel 02 6655 1053

8 April – 21 May

🎬 *That Feeling You're Being Watched* 10-year retrospective of the Short Sited 10 Film Festival. **WOLLONGONG** City Gallery Tel 02 4228 7500.

12 April

🎭 Don Giovanni Co-Opera's production of Mozart's famous opera. **TAMWORTH**. Tel 02 6766 6911

council, with the exception of a \$230,000 grant from the NSW Ministry for the Arts Capital Infrastructure Program, and possibly a grant from DOTARS (application pending).

The simple fact is that the slice of the funding pie for cultural facilities provided by the State Government is a pretty slender one. With the exception of Heritage or Library grants, the only source of funding for cultural infrastructure – both purpose-built buildings and refurbished facilities – is the Ministry for the Arts' Capital Infrastructure Program. As the Guidelines state, "most grants are considerably less than \$100,000 and are intended for comparatively modest alterations to structures. For exceptional projects, grants of up to \$250,000 will be considered." The maximum grant is 50% of total eligible costs. It is 'catalyst' funding, designed to offer targeted projects a strategic benefit in leveraging funds from other sources. The total provided through the program for 2006 was just \$788,123 (a drop of some 44% from the 2004 total of \$1.4 million). Not surprisingly, most arts and culture professionals I have spoken to in regional and rural New South Wales strongly believe there needs to be another 'pot' of State Government funding for building cultural facilities. Some also suggested that funding for key infrastructure should sit with Planning (as it does to some extent in Queensland). Certainly there would seem to be some merit in a more 'whole of government approach' to key infrastructure (or 'whole of infrastructure' approach to key cultural facilities).

The Department of Transport and Regional Services' Regional Partnerships Program was established in 2003, combining several regional programs into a "whole of government one-stop-shop" with four overarching aims: to "assist Australia's communities to strengthen growth and opportunities," to "improve access to services," to "support planning" and to "provide assistance for structural adjustment." It is a discretionary grants program with final approval given by a Committee of three Ministers. Recommendations are made by the Department based on advice provided by Local Area Consultative Committees (ACCs) (17 in NSW) who are actively involved in developing applications in their areas. In the two and a quarter years from July 2003 to October 2005, the program provided \$170 million for over 750 community projects across the nation and there is \$360.9 million put aside for the Program for the next three years. The Department's website currently lists 234 grants made under the program for NSW projects, with a total value of \$52.65 million. Of these, there are 35, with a total value of \$6.17 million, specifically provided for cultural capital infrastructure in regional areas and another 15 (mostly for community halls) which have a potential or partial cultural component, with a value of around \$608,000: a total of close to \$6.8 million – or

around \$3 million a year – in grants for regional NSW cultural facilities development. It may not compare with the level of local government investment, but it's certainly not to be sniffed at.

Unfortunately there are some drawbacks for hopeful wannabe builders of arts and cultural spaces in the DOTARS program. Projects must be consistent with the "key regional priorities" identified by each ACC, which do not always include cultural development or even creative industries development. Priority is given to projects that demonstrate "value for money," that achieve tangible (measurable) outcomes (such as increased employment or tourism), and which have secured appropriate funding from other sources (this generally translates as a requirement for matched funds). There are no specific or uniform guidelines for developing or evaluating arts or cultural proposals under the program, although obviously it is possible to make effective arguments for cultural facilities from their ability to strengthen social participation and improve access to services.

At all levels of Government, as Anne Dunn reports, "the development of arts and cultural facilities in regional Australia

Right: Construction underway on the Dubbo Cultural Centre.

Below: The Royal Theatre in Balranald where the Shire Council has received grants of \$250,000 from DOTARS and \$75,000 from the NSW Ministry for the Arts for the re-development of the 1939 building into a multi-purpose centre including commercial spaces, courthouse, council chambers, library and 300 seat theatre. Cash and in-kind contributions from Council of \$65,000 and \$60,000 from the Theatre Royal Action Group (a local committee of about a dozen people) will cover the rest of the costs of the first stage of development but another \$2 million will be required to complete the project.



April

9 April Youth Week

 Creative Arts Workshop
Printmaking, painting and mixed media for
10-15 year olds. Old Court House,
HARDEN Tel 02 6924 8100

9 April Youth Week

 Youth Fashion Awards Showcase of
local creative talents. **PORT MACQUARIE**
Library Tel 02 6581 8625

13 – 17 April

 National Folk Festival – Family
festival with International and local acts.
Exhibition Park **CANBERRA**
Website www.folkfestival.asn.au

13 – 17 April

 BluesFest 2006 Annual Blues &
Roots Festival. International and local lineup.
Red Devil Park, **BYRON BAY**
Website www.bluesfest.com.au

appears to have no strategic direction,” and, she adds, “there is little information known by communities about what works and what doesn’t work.” Is it any wonder mistakes are made?

Scratch the surface of this topic with people in regional New South Wales and you will be peppered with examples of poor decisions: projects with little or no community support; spaces that are too large for local audiences; new spaces that are too expensive for local communities to hire; venues that are not suitable for specialised local audiences (youth/older people); places that are not sustainable, because there are insufficient financial resources or expertise for their effective, ongoing management (including a lack of marketing and audience development skills); new places that are too close to others already struggling for an audience or which threaten to ‘steal’ existing audiences; facilities that are built not because they were needed but because “someone” wanted them (not to mention the ones that are needed but never provided!); places that aren’t appropriate for their desired use (such as a performance venue with no workshop space for set-building); a performance venue that has carpeted walls providing the right acoustics for showing

films but with the result that every community event there now has to be miked ... the list goes on.

Fortunately a number of good decisions are being made – top picks suggested to me have included the Cootamundra Creative Arts and Cultural Centre; the School of Arts Building in Tenterfield (which combines the library, museum and theatre); the new Arts, Conference and Entertainment Centre in Port Macquarie; AlburyCity’s Library Museum and Dubbo’s new Gallery and Museum, as well as those profiled on the following pages; but the very best work does appear to be exceptional.

What regional and rural New South Wales communities need is carefully planned, affordable and sustainable infrastructure which is appropriate for identified arts and cultural needs. To achieve this we need a strategic framework which is soundly based on research and analysis of both facilities and the people who use them. A good place to start would be to identify the successful centres – the ‘iconic places,’ (as Anne Dunn says), the venues that enjoy consistent good relationships with diverse local audiences – determine the costs associated with building and managing them and evaluate their social and economic outcomes. Work needs to be done to accurately identify present and future needs: What cultural infrastructure is required per capita? Who is the audience? What is the real purpose of the facility? (Is it about building social capital, is it about tourism or is it about cultural industry development?)

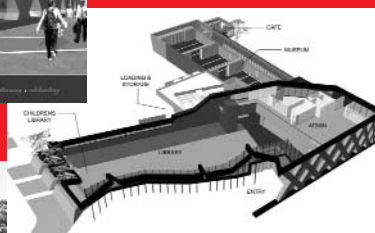
We have audited the level of access to cinemas in NSW but what about other cultural facilities? What are the existing amenities? Do we need to build or can we refurbish? Can we think outside the square – develop multifunction centres or converged facilities? And lastly, what are the available resources? What are the contributions of Local, State and Federal Government to cultural facilities and what should they be? What other agencies could – or should – be involved? (Planning? State & Regional Development? Education?) What about a policy for the role of Section 94 developer contributions to cultural facilities? Do we need to re-think other policies in a changing field, particularly with the emergence of converged facilities which challenge conventional thinking about the use of spaces for training, libraries and even visitor information centres as well as more traditional uses?

These and other questions need to be answered before we can be confident that the substantial investments being made in cultural capital infrastructure is going in to the right places, for the right people, for the right reasons. ■



Left and below: Front page and drawing from the brochure for the new fully integrated library and museum in Albury, an ambitious project, 10 years in development, which aims to redefine the cultural experience for its community when it opens in 2007 – borrow a book, view an exhibition, learn about ‘our story’, use the latest technology, all in the one civic building designed along ESD principles.

Bottom: Murrah community hall in the South East – all purpose cultural facility.



April

14 April

👁️ *Pojagi and Beyond and Ceramic Surface.* LAKE MACQUARIE City Art Gallery Tel 02 4965 8260

15 April

🎵 La Festa – Faces of Australia International music, food and wine event on Banna Ave GRIFFITH Tel 02 6964 7555

15 – 16 April

🎵 Country Music Jamboree Concert and talent quest at NAMBUCCA HEADS Bowling Club Tel 02 6568 6132

Until 16 April

👁️ *Pro Hart Retrospective* One of Australia’s most popular artists. Tweed River Art Gallery. MURWILLUMBAH Tel 02 6670 2790