

**When the brand new,
\$1.5m Community Arts
and Craft Centre opens in
Ballina later this year,
most of the centre's
planners will just about
be ready for some long
service leave.**



After all, it's been eight years since the first public meeting gave its support for the project and construction hasn't even begun yet.

by LOIS RANDALL

service leave.

GETTING A LARGE SCALE ARTS CAPITAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT is no small task. The idea to build a space for Northern Rivers artists and artisans to meet, develop their skills and exhibit and sell their work was first mooted in 1998. By 2004, after six years of monthly meetings, fundraising shows, funding applications, stalls, lamington drives and raffles, the 120 member Ballina Arts and Craft Centre Inc (BACCI) committee had raised a mighty \$40,000 for the project. They'd secured a grant of \$40,000 from the NSW Government Capital Grants Program and a small grant from the Living Centres Program to develop a business plan. Council had set aside land and a retired architect had drafted plans for the gallery. But they still only had 7.7% of the \$1.3 million they needed for the project to go ahead. Where was the other \$1.2 million going to come from?

When I started as RADO in 2003, an expression of interest for funding from the Federal Government had been rejected and the morale of the committee was low. Its chair, Lyn Cochrane, was struggling to maintain credibility with council and community, and keep the faith and vision of the committee alive, as well as keep up her full time job and maintain her own enthusiasm.

Fortunately, Arts Northern Rivers was able to assist. With our support, and after many meetings and submissions, an additional \$35,000 was granted by the NSW Ministry for the Arts Capital Infrastructure Program in 2004; in January 2005, Ballina Shire Council agreed to provide \$400,000; and late last year another \$355,000 in funding was approved from the Department of Transport and Regional Services' Sustainable Regions Program.

Large scale arts and capital infrastructure projects require support from several partners. Most agencies are reluctant to be the majority funding partner or investor and the pot of money

available is limited. The most difficult part is getting the first funding commitment. Everyone is waiting for someone else to take the first step.

The options for BACCI were similar to those available for most regional cultural infrastructure projects:

- **Local Government.** State and Federal agencies generally look for a strong commitment from Local Government.
- **State Government, *ie.***, the NSW Ministry for the Arts Capital Infrastructure program, which in 2005 granted \$788,123 to support 20 projects. (Grants ranged from \$125,000 for a Flying Fruit Fly Circus building to \$7,132 for Sir Henry Parkes School of the Arts Theatre in Tenterfield. The average grant was \$39,406).
- **Federal Government, *ie.***, regional development grants from Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS). (Large grants are available through Regional Partnerships and Sustainable

So you want to

Regions programs, but only for infrastructure projects where there are demonstrated economic and/or employment outcomes).

- **Sponsorship, philanthropic and community** support.

While the NSW Ministry for the Arts' entire funding allocation for New South Wales is smaller than some individual Federal Government infrastructure grants, these funds have often been used strategically to lever support from other agencies. This was the case for BACCI. Two small State Government grants, one from the Ministry and an earlier grant from the Premier's Department, were instrumental in securing local and federal support.

It was the credibility provided by the initial State Government grant (and the support of the Regional Arts Board) that encouraged Ballina Shire Council to increase its support from the provision of a site to substantial financial backing.

This support was provided in recognition of economic outcomes (increased tourism and increased sales for artisans) as well as social and community outcomes. The Council recognised that the gallery will stimulate community cultural development and community cohesion through increased participation in creative arts as a social activity of purpose.

"The Community Gallery is part of the cultural development of Ballina, along with Ballina Council's new Public Art Policy and

April

Until 16 April

👁 *Psitticulture* Blown glass works on parrot themes by Noel Hart. Tweed River Art Gallery. **MURWILLUMBAH**
Tel 02 6670 2790

Until 16 April

👁 *Caldera Shields* by Sharon Muir
Themed on local endangered flora and fauna. Tweed River Art Gallery.
MURWILLUMBAH Tel 02 6670 2790

20 April – 4 June

👁 *Quotidian* Everyday objects transformed into artistic forms. Tweed River Art Gallery. **MURWILLUMBAH**
Tel 02 6670 2790

20 April – 4 June

👁 *Paradox* by Daniel Brinsmead
People, society and their complexities. Tweed River Art Gallery.
MURWILLUMBAH Tel 02 6670 2790

support for the Naval and Maritime Museum”, said Cr Phillip Silver, Mayor of Ballina Shire Council. “It will also offer a solution to social isolation and lack of activities for Ballina’s aged population.”

For the application for DOTARS funding, it was necessary to demonstrate how the gallery would meet the regional priorities established by the Far North Coast Sustainable Regions Committee. These priorities are developed through community consultation and vary from region to region. It was vital to BACCI’s success that in this region the community had already identified creative industries and tourism on the list of priorities, along with business and community development.

The BACCI submission argued: “the region has the highest concentration of arts and creative industry workers outside of the major capital cities. There is an identified need for retail and exhibition space for their work. There is no other community

craft gallery servicing the Far North Coast region. The artists in the region have identified the lack of retail outlets as a major barrier to their business development, and the major downturn in arts and crafts business opportunities over the past ten years has resulted in an “exodus” of arts and crafts professionals from the region.”

They also argued that a number of benefits would flow from the community gallery:

- new tourist dollars through additional visitor nights;
- increased sales revenue for exhibiting regional artisans and artists;
- increased visibility and viability of the arts & crafts in the region;
- linkages for the arts & crafts communities throughout the region;
- development of new ‘cottage industries’;
- increased quality of product through training from top artisans in the region;
- employment for a full time gallery director and 40 tutors;
- increased exhibition and development opportunities for emerging artists;

build a community gallery?



Lyn Cochrane presents the plans for the new gallery.

Checklist: Do you have what it takes?

- **Capacity** — 8 years worth of energy and tenacity?
- **Skills** — to negotiate with funding agencies, fill in complex funding applications, oversee planning and development applications, develop business plans?
- **Resources** — ability to raise a few million dollars?
- **Rationale** — unique and urgent need?
- **Financial backing** — from your local government?
- **Community support** ?

- community cultural development;
- involvement of 5,000+ people in training workshops by year 3;
- after school workshops and art appreciation for school children; and
- social activity of purpose for increasing aged population.

The funding was only one of many headaches for the BACCI committee. Issues with the original site also caused frustrations and delays. Ultimately a new location had to be found and a new architect had to draft new plans, and all the time the building costs were rising exponentially.

But it has happened! The DA has now been approved and finally, at its last meeting of 2005, Ballina Shire Council took the step of agreeing to underwrite the costs of building the gallery up to an additional \$500,000, so that stage one of building can proceed without further costly delays. This means that even though there is still over half a million dollars to be raised to complete the building in two stages (including a gallery space, a learning centre and a café), the new community gallery will soon be under construction at Treelands Reserve, on the Byron side of Ballina. ■

Congratulations to Lyn Cochrane and the members of BACCI; its patrons, Mayor Phillip Silver and artist Digby Moran; and Ballina Shire Council for their commitment to developing this important community arts facility. I very much look forward to the grand opening some time this year.

Lois Randall is the Arts Northern Rivers RADO and is on the NSW Ministry for the Arts Capital Infrastructure Committee.

April

20 April — 4 June

👁️ *Skin* by Kasane Low + Linelle Stepto Sculpture and installation. Tweed River Art Gallery. **MURWILLUMBAH** Tel 02 6670 2790

Until 21 April

👁️ Wollemi Pine Photographic & Plant Exhibition **MOUNT TOMAH** Botanic Gardens Tel 02 4567 2154

21 April

🎵 *Pure Magic* Pianist David Helfgott and vocalist Bernadette Fisher. Langthorne House **BOAMBEE** Tel 0408 160 408.

21 — 22 April

👂 Lambing Flat Festival — Celebrates the rich cultural history of **YOUNG**. Tel 02 6382 3394