

Small Resources BIG IMPACT – The Bunker Cartoon Gallery



The Bunker Cartoon Gallery is a unique attraction, in that it attracts those interested in Australia's wartime history, and those who appreciate the visual arts.

The Coffs Harbour Bunker was a purpose built building, constructed at great expense by a nation at war - but only used for a very short time for that purpose. Later it was left trashed and derelict.

The Bunker Cartoon Gallery is the legacy of a project of the City of Coffs Harbour Rotary Club. It was their foresight which has brought back to life again the old communications bunker, which now communicates to the world, but this time the message is through the medium of Black and White Art.

The Gallery is not funded or administered by Rotary but by an independent Board of Management. The board includes representation from both Volunteers and the support group "Friends of the Bunker". Most of our exhibitions are, however, drawn from the Rotary Cartoon Collection. The collection has been developed through the annual Rotary Cartoon Awards run by the City of Coffs Harbour Rotary Club. The awards are now in their 13th Year. That is a long time to maintain a single project, which costs over \$10,000 each year.

Restoration of the building was made possibly through a Federal Government grant of \$123,000. Coffs Harbour City Council contributed \$60,000 and the infrastructure, and the Rotary Club of Coffs Harbour City itself – with donations of cash and kind, of \$90,000. It is estimated that it would cost over \$1 million to construct the Bunker today.

Whilst ultimately intended to be self-funding, we currently rely on a grant from Council, reviewed annually, to operate. (This year \$25,000). The day-to-day running of the gallery is left to a paid administrator (16 hrs per week) and there is an Exhibitions Officer who must spread the 400hrs allocated that position, over the three exhibitions displayed annually. Humidifiers operate 24hrs a day, and during the summer months, the air-conditioner constantly in use. This equates to an annual electricity bill of approximately \$4000. Another of any galleries 'unavoidable necessities' – insurances – approximately \$3000 – 4000 p.a. Then there is the telephone, fax, stationary, frames, gallery expenses, and exhibition material, *etc, etc, etc*. To say we have "limited financial resources" is an understatement.

Coffs Harbour boasts a population of 60,000 plus, but attendance for the first 3 years operation, only averaged 4200. Last year figures were up 85%, and figures to date indicate a further increase this year. Even so, this will only provide an estimated income of approximately \$8000.

So you may ask? How can they afford to operate? Where do they get the human resources to open daily from 10:00 – 4:00? How do you account for the dramatic increase in patronage?

The answer may lie in the fact that the Gallery is being run as a business. Everything and everyone is accountable. Galleries small and large cannot afford to operate any other way. The days of the museum and galleries operating as a hobby have long since gone. Complacency about acquisitions, stock takes, insurances *etc*: not to mention the more current issues of GST.

Changes in the staff structure, and delegation of duties, introduced marketing and promotional expertise, which was lacking. Introduction of education programs and involvement in community projects created more local interest and awareness. Literally hundreds of letters, sent to local community groups, bus companies, schools and service organizations. This attracted visitors from within, and outside of the Coffs Harbour area, even outside of the state of NSW. Local and national media coverage through interviews and talk shows helped immensely.

We changed our trading hours. Initially I worked during the afternoon, until sufficient extra volunteers were found to fill the roster. A survey indicated most tourists cannot book into a motel or resort before 2pm. (We originally operated 10:00am – 2:00pm six days a week, closing on Mondays.) Extending our hours has contributed to the upturn in visitors. We now operate 7 days a week 10:00am – 4:00pm.

Ask yourself – are we opening to suit the touring public or our own personal timetables?

For financial support, we depend on the generosity, not only of Council, but also local business houses, private citizens, and use every conceivable resource that is available to us. Where sometimes cash is not forthcoming – product and expertise are equally as valuable. For example:

Media

Nurture a good working relationship with local media. They will not come to you. You must provide them – with plenty of lead-up time – details of what ever is happening at your venue, no matter how trivial. Never limit yourself to one type of media. Make up a media contact list, television, radio and newspapers. Contact the radio and let them know about your organization. We have had national exposure on Australia in the summertime – ABC radio, and Good Morning Australia, which has delivered wonderful results.

Our promotional video was donated as a community service, from local television station, Channel 10.

Be Seen at other Functions

Get involved in other community projects – a great way to advertise and promote our gallery and show our community spirit. Just by having a presence at functions which are far remote from our actual 'business', we reach a market, hitherto untapped.

Examples are:

- Days of National celebrations- Australia Day, Anzac Day
- Heart Foundation
- Spring Festival of Flowers
- P.C.Y.C. Billy Cart Derby
- Theatrical Productions
- Marine Expo
- Yacht Races
- Sporting events.
- Conferences
- School information days
- Shopping centres
- Shop window displays – empty shops are the ideal venue.

Contra deals

In our case, we supply cartoons, which advertise the gallery, in return for advertising space.

Rent a Crowd!

As any functions organiser will attest, the greatest worry we have is – “What happens if no one turns up?” To overcome this problem, make sure to have a captive audience – in addition to invited guests. Encourage local choirs or bands, schools, scout, guides etc perform at your functions. They need the exposure just as much as you, and also provide the added presence to make any function look well attended.

Co-Operate with TAFE and University Studies

Local students now visit the gallery on a regular basis. The visits are used as examples of tourism in the area. As Gallery administrator I take time to spend with the students, answering questions of our current marketing and financial structure. They then have to make up business and marketing plans for the gallery. We sometimes have copies of assignments, which the teacher feels are outstanding, which supply us with marketing ideas and strategies from a young persons point of view. Sometimes they show strengths and weaknesses of the gallery, which are often overlooked.

But the Bunker Cartoons Gallery’s *biggest and most valuable resource*, are our volunteers. Our volunteers vary in ages from 18 to 80+ and assist with all manner of tasks from reception, cleaning, assisting with workshops, library duties, framing, record keeping and tour guides. Like most communities, Coffs Harbour has an enormous demand on volunteers, servicing various organizations. Recruiting and keeping the right ones is a continual task.

We take great pride in our volunteers and endeavour to take great care and personal interest in every one of them. Our volunteers are the first to see the new exhibitions, and whenever possible, meet the artists. We meet in a social atmosphere with either morning tea, or if it’s an afternoon function, drinks and nibbles – and always include the volunteer’s partners. Everyone must feel they are an important part of the operation. They are provided with background information on the exhibition, which, we hope, in turn is passed on tour visitors. O.H.&S classes are conducted twice a year, and each month there is written notification to the volunteers of what is happening during the month. They are always kept well informed and have a representative on the Board of Management.

The Rotary Cartoon Awards and the Bunker Cartoon Gallery have not made just a **BIG IMPACT** on Black and White Art in Coffs Harbour and Australia. It would be fair to say they have made a **HUGE IMPACT**, nationally and internationally. The Awards are conducted in Association with, and receive the full support, of the Australian Black and White Artist’s Club and the Federation of European Cartoonist’s Organization (FECO). The Awards are regarded as one of the top three competitions in Australia.

Professor Leon Cantrell of the Southern Cross University has described the cartoon collection of being “of national significance, and the nucleus of a much needed resource for art in the region.”

Schools are beginning to take a greater interest in teaching the events which took place during the Second World War, and this is where the historical aspect of the Bunker Cartoon Gallery has provided an invaluable contribution to Australia’s war time memoirs

The Bunker Cartoon Gallery has added to the ever-growing number of attractions in Coffs Harbour. The Gallery is a Niche Market. Australia’s only dedicated Black and White Gallery. It’s a great place to work – a better place to visit. We hope to see you there soon.

And remember our motto!

He who laughs – Lasts. ■

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