

The Gathering – Welcome Speech

Ahlan Wa Sahlan, Haere Mai, Welcome

It's been a long time coming, but here we all are.

On behalf of the committee, it is my pleasure to welcome you to what promises to be the grandest of all events ever held by our Club.

It's wonderful to see so many familiar faces, many of which I haven't seen in years.

Shortly, His Worship The Mayor will acknowledge those of you who have had to travel to be at this unique and historic event.

We were hoping for a double celebration this weekend, and our dream of becoming Rugby World Champions again has come true after 24 years. Well done AB's. Their victory galvanised our country which was in much need of a psychological boost after the Pike River mining tragedy, the Christchurch earthquakes, the collapse of many of our financial institutions, and most recently the oil spill off the coast of the Bay of Plenty.

Over the last couple of years I have been asked by many people what the motivation was to hold The Gathering.

My reply has always been:

§ To celebrate our culture

§ To celebrate our identity

§ But especially to celebrate a bygone era.

- An era where many of the community were original immigrants from Lebanon.

- An era where we all lived within a square kilometre of each other.

- An era where everybody knew each others children.

- An era where people carried food to each others houses.

An era where we had a place:

§ to meet

§ to celebrate together

§ to mourn together

§ to play together

§ and to pray together

- An era where we were one.

By comparison with that bygone era, the Kiwi and Lebanese cultures are now pretty much fully integrated.

So we the committee, thought it important to acknowledge our heritage and celebrate our culture in a significant and meaningful way, rather than have it simply fade quietly into obscurity.

So that's why we are here.

For those of you who haven't visited our beautiful city before, I hope you get the opportunity to

§ Take a jog up the steepest street on the planet,

§ Or take a drive down our picturesque Otago Peninsula to visit the worlds only mainland Albatross colony.

While you're down there;

§ You might even spot some Hoiho, the world's rarest penguins that feature on the back of our \$5 note.

- § While you are on the peninsula you can visit Larnach's Castle - NZ's only castle, which was built in 1871 by William Larnach.

- § For the chocolate lovers amongst you, Cadbury World is well worth a visit.

- § Or you could do the Speight's Brewery Tour, which is an award winning and informative guided tour through an historic working brewery.

- § The Otago Museum is also well worth a visit. It shows Dunedin is outward looking and reflects the history of this city as a seat of learning.

- § You might like to take a drive past our impressive new stadium. It is New Zealand's only stadium that is capable of hosting 30,000 fans under cover. A member of our Lebanese community, Malcolm Farry chaired that project on behalf of the DCC.

§ Or if you are simply going for a stroll down town, you will see the largest collection of heritage Victorian and Edwardian architecture in New Zealand.

So as you can see, Dunedin is a very special city with many unique attractions. We are honoured to have His Worship The Mayor, Dave Cull to welcome you all on behalf of the City. Dave himself has connections with our community, but I'll leave him to elaborate on that.

On behalf of the community and all of us here present, I would like to thank you Dave, for honouring us with your presence on this special weekend of celebration for the Lebanese community. So once again;

Ahlan Wa Sahlan, Haere Mai, Welcome