



Presidents Report - May 2012

The focus of the committee for 2011 was around preparation for The Gathering. It was a particularly busy year with the committee meeting with Kerry Buchan the project coordinator, monthly for 2 years in the lead up and subsequently every week for 3 months prior to the actual event, to ensure every detail was taken care of for the hosting of such an important and historically significant event.

We were hoping for a double celebration with New Zealand playing in the rugby world cup final the weekend prior to The Gathering. We were not to be disappointed, although for anybody who watched that game between New Zealand and France it was a nail biting, nerve wracking encounter.

The weekend of the 28th/29th October 2011 will be recorded as one of the most important dates in our club's history. People travelled from as far afield as Kuwait, United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada and Australia and from all over New Zealand, in keen anticipation of the much awaited event. They were not to be disappointed.

It is not appropriate to recount the events of that weekend in this report, but suffice to say the messages of gratitude poured in for weeks and months after the event.

Part of The Gathering celebrations included the opening of the Cedars of Lebanon Grove at the Botanic Garden by the Mayor, Dave Cull. This was a gift to the city from our community, and it stands as a proud monument to the Lebanese community of Dunedin. It will serve as a permanent reminder that will span the generations. It will serve to commemorate and honour those who have gone before us. For the current generation it is a celebration of our Lebanese heritage – for future generations we wish for it to be a reminder of the pioneers who preceded them – a 'touchstone' for our people.

As a committee, we feel privileged to have been able to organise The Gathering on behalf of our community. We are pleased with what we have achieved to date, but what of the future? We have two important projects that we are currently working on.



The first is the revised edition of Lebanon's Children, and the second is establishing a presence in the Otago Settlers Museum. When those two projects are completed, the committee will be satisfied it has gone a good way towards achieving one of its key objectives, that of leaving a strong footprint of the Lebanese community in Dunedin.

Going forward, we have a number of new people who are prepared to serve on the committee. What's particularly encouraging about that is, many of them are a younger generation who are proud of their heritage and keen to make a difference. They will bring with them a renewed vigour and fresh focus. I am putting my name forward for one more term as President to see through the above mentioned projects, but more importantly to ensure a seamless transition to whoever takes over the role of President next year.

I feel proud that our community has been able to preserve a culture brought to Dunedin from Lebanon well over a century years ago. We have been proud guardians of the traditions, the language, the values, and culinary aspects, amongst other things. All of this while achieving full integration and the blending of cultures.

A heartfelt thanks to a small but passionate committee who worked tirelessly to ensure the success of The Gathering. Their efforts, together with the efforts of many other members of our community (too many to name here), were given with love, selflessness, pride and a willingness to contribute to their community. As Gibran so aptly says; "When you give of yourself is when you truly give".

I feel satisfied that we as a committee have created a strong platform upon which future committees can continue to build on in order to keep the community's spirit strong and vibrant.

Richard Joseph

PRESIDENT