



President's Report –July 2016

THE TIME HAS COME

My report this year is not going to be the usual commentary on the year that has been, although there are a couple of significant events I will comment on, rather it is going to focus on the proposed future state of our club.

The first major event, held in October last year was when the club co-partnered UNICEF NZ and The City of Dunedin to raise funds for the displaced Syrian refugee children in Lebanon. The event raised in excess of fifteen thousand dollars for which UNICEF NZ was most grateful.

The second major event, was the opening of the Dunedin Lebanese Community Digitisation Centre in the Dunedin Public Library by His Worship the Mayor, Dave Cull. The Digitisation Centre provides an opportunity for our community to preserve its history permanently. Given the time and effort that has gone into gathering and recording our history over the last decade in particular, the next logical step was to ensure it was not lost or dissipated over time. The Digitisation Centre will act as a central repository for any information members of our community choose to record. It will be professionally managed by library staff *ad infinitum*. In addition, it will act as a legacy to the Dunedin Lebanese community as a gift to the city which has provided so much opportunity for our people.

I am sad to report that both the UNICEF NZ event and the opening of the Digitisation Centre were poorly attended by members of our community. While it was disappointing to see such a lack of interest in those events, I believe it reflects the interest, or lack of interest, the community now has in club based activities.

Our club has been in existence both informally and formally for over seventy years now. In its halcyon days it was the focal point of the community. I am fortunate enough to have seen and experienced how our parents and grand-parents utilised it as a place to socialise, play, pray, mourn and celebrate weddings, christenings, birthdays and other special occasions. I suppose that is why I wanted to ensure that it didn't slowly disappear into oblivion over time. I have always felt an enormous debt of gratitude to our courageous forebears who created the opportunity for subsequent generations to step into.

I would like to acknowledge those who have gone before me in the role as President of the club and for those who have willingly given of themselves to serve on the committee. To those who voluntarily ran the Housie for all those years. To the caretakers, the cleaners, the flower arrangers, and all of the other helpers including professional people in our community who willingly gave their time, advice and services gratis, they were the life blood of the club. Without them the club would have ceased to exist a long time ago.



I would particularly like to thank those people who have served on the committees with me in my role as president. There were many difficult decisions that confronted us over that time. The most difficult by far for me personally was initiating the sale of our clubrooms. For me it felt like our identity as a community was being destroyed and it was a betrayal of all the sacrifice, hard work and struggle that been made to acquire it. There are times when we would like nothing more than to go with our sentiments, but the commercial reality dictated that, in the absence of raising capital from within our community, we had to sell.

I remember about a year later talking to Richard Farry about the emotional wrench of selling the clubrooms. He commented that the identity of our community lay not in bricks and mortar but in the spirit of our people, and that will always live on. For that reason, the committee feels that out of respect for our club it is now timely for it to be put into a state of permanent recess. The club will remain in existence as a legal entity, but any activities will only be held on special occasions as agreed by the committee. Because there will be no structured activities I will formally move this evening that subscriptions be abolished.

I feel proud and privileged to have served our club as its president for the last eighteen years and to help usher it to a soft landing. Being the southern-most Cedars of Lebanon Club in the world is unique, but equally unique is the fact that history has remained frozen in time through our people preserving traditions, language, recipes, and faith amongst other things. Now that it has entered a new phase of recess, our club is appropriately positioned for the current level of activity.

I leave you with what I think is an appropriate quote from Lebanon's most famous son, Kahlil Gibran - "Ever has it been that love knows not its own depth until the hour of separation"

Alah Ecun Makon

RICHARD JOSEPH

PRESIDENT