

# REPORT TO GARDEN CLUBS AUSTRALIA

by Toronto & Districts Garden Club Convention Sub-Committee

November 16, 2023

Report and Evaluation of the GCA Biennial Convention and AGM 2023

hosted by Toronto and Districts Garden Club Inc.

Author: Ann Watkins, Secretary; [secretarytdgc@gmail.com](mailto:secretarytdgc@gmail.com)

Toronto & Districts Garden Club Inc (TDGC) hosted a 6-day convention that included the Garden Clubs Australia (GCA) AGM in Lake Macquarie from 10-15 September 2023. These dates were set in October 2021 and aligned with the Lake Macquarie City Council (LMCC) Living Smart Festival and Kariong Plant Lovers Fair that immediately followed the convention to encourage guests to extend their stay in Lake Macquarie.

This report is the evaluation of the convention by the hosts, Toronto and Districts Garden Club Convention Sub-Committee. Registrants had the opportunity to provide their feedback through an evaluation sheet on the final day of the convention. A separate document is provided with their feedback.

## **Registration profile**

A total of 315 people registered for the convention.

This figure was made up of 163 full registrations of which 6 were accompanying persons, plus 152 single day registrations. The following data is based on 163 registrants. The 152 single day registrants mostly lived within driving distance and travelled by car.

Registrants attended from 5 states as follows:

NSW	101	Queensland	52	South Australia	6
Victoria	2	Western Australia	2		

No age data was collected but most of the registrants were retired senior citizens.

Registrants stayed between 5-11 nights in Lake Macquarie with the average length of stay being 7 nights.

Registrants travelled to Lake Macquarie by:

Air	8	Car	115	Coach	30
Train	7	Not stated	3		

## **TDGC Sub-Committee:**

A Convention sub-committee was formed from members of the host club as follows:

Chairperson:	Jennifer Rosewood (2 previous conventions)
Secretary:	Ann Watkins (attended Townsville Convention)
Treasurer:	Mike Abberfield (attended Townsville Convention)
Visits:	Susan Laplain (attended Townsville Convention)

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Speakers: Leonie Mills (resigned, replaced by Pauline Leslie)  
Accommodation: Chrissie Peel (resigned after negotiating accommodation deals)  
Sponsorship: Lynne Turner (attended Townsville Convention)  
Zone support: Marilyn Swan, Zone Co-ordinator (previous conventions)

The Convention Sub-Committee was supported by Garden Clubs Australia, Lake Macquarie City Council and local business sponsors, including Tulloch Wines.

The Convention Sub-Committee would like to thank Garden Clubs Australia for the opportunity to host this event. Our thanks to GCA President, Lorraine Emerson for entrusting this event to TDGC and to the Board Members especially:

*Shirley Haslam, Hon. Secretary*, for her tremendous support in the administration of this event. The sharing of forms and formats for layouts were invaluable to us as was her advice that was always provided and always helpful.

*Joy Duke, Director Publicity, Promotions and Events*, for her unwavering support and encouragement. Her advice on how to promote the event through the right channels was invaluable and much appreciated. It made a huge difference when we decided to include single day registrants. Congratulations to the GCA team for selecting Joy for this crucial role where she is such a great asset.

*Frances Cairns, Hon Treasurer*, who encouraged and supported our team throughout the planning. Frances was a great support to our treasurer and she always provided feedback on the minutes which gave us confidence. We wish Frances well and thank her for her service to GCA as she moves on to her other interests.

*Judy Horton, Editor*, for her help in including relevant items for Our Gardens. In addition, Judy arranged raffle prizes for the convention raffle. Our thanks also to Rob Horton for the certificates he created for those raffle prizes.

*Sue Mowle, Director of Communications*, for her assistance with items to be included in The Bulletin and for distributing additional information through RSAJ to all affiliate members when required.

*Martin Boorer, Director of Insurance*, for his investigation of all our tricky insurance questions and his valuable knowledge.

*Lake Macquarie City Council sponsored this event, held in their city, and we thank their events team, headed by Jacqui Hemsley, Manager Arts, Culture and Tourism, and all her staff for their support, especially:*

*Kirrily Anderson, Lifelong learning and Audience Engagement Coordinator*

*Amy Harris, Tourism and Event Management Lead*

*Christina Hatzis, Performing Arts Lead*

*Pippa Budge, Senior Curator Multi-Arts Pavilion*

*Courtney Wagner, MAC yapang Curator and Operations Manager*

*Rachel Mallaby, Children's and Youth Officer*

*Joanna Davies, Visual Arts & Public Programs Leader*

GCA and LMCC were included in all meeting agendas and minutes and were welcome to attend meetings in person or on Zoom.

Our thanks go also to Marilyn Swan, Zone Coordinator Hunter South, who went above and beyond her duties to help make this event successful.

### **Venues required for Registration, Civic Welcome, AGM, the Farewell Function and any other activity/entertainment planned for the Convention.**

A range of indoor and outdoor venues, suitable for up to 300 people, were selected across the northern part of Lake Macquarie to hold GCA and program events. Venues were matched for suitability to the event being held and wet weather contingencies were in place. All venues were equipped with suitable audio-visual equipment and were well lit and sign posted. Guides were placed to direct people to the Multi-Arts Pavilion at Speers Point Park located in the large park. Garden venues and coach stops were identified with Bali Flags.

The list of venues for the Lake Macquarie Convention were as follows:

Registration Day:	Warners Bay Theatre
Civic Welcome:	Multi Arts Pavilion, Speers Point Park (or Warners Bay Theatre if wet)
GCA AGM:	Club Macquarie (GCA responsibility)
Movie Night:	Warners Bay Theatre
Speakers' morning and Farewell Function:	Rathmines Theatre (historical WWII Catalina Base)

GCA took responsibility for the AGM, keynote speaker and lunch at Club Macquarie and the zone coordinator meeting that followed at Club Macquarie.

The sub-committee was responsible for all other parts of the program in consultation with GCA.

### **Accommodation**

The nature of a lake is that accommodations and venues are widespread. It was recommended that visitors to the area would need a car. A discount car hire was negotiated with a local provider and advertised. The Visitor Information Centre provided a list of suitable accommodations that were published on the convention web site. Further details about accommodation discounts were described and links and contact details provided. A member of TDGC offered an independent disabled accommodation unit on her property, also promoted on the web site and on Facebook and even personally recommended, but not used. A link to the Visitor Information Centre site supplied all other accommodation options. On Registration Day the Visitor Information Van was onsite for people to access maps, local information and brochures.

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### **Convention Program:**

A varied program was provided with events, speakers and field trips that showcased local gardens, Hunter Region Botanic Gardens, Landcare, a propagation site, local art studios, the coastline environment and the lake environment seen from a cruise on Lake Macquarie. Many of the sites had speakers and/or tour guides to compliment the two tour guides on each coach who provided commentary and kept people informed of where they were going and what to expect. The day long tours were catered for by local garden clubs from this region who provided morning teas and some lunches to participants. We cannot thank our local clubs enough for their contribution to the success of this convention.

Rathmines Theatre was the venue for the speakers' morning. Three high profile speakers gave their time freely to share their knowledge and passions for gardening. We thank Angie Thomas from Yates, David Fripp and Costa Georgiadis for their presentations that were so well received. Speaker profiles were available online.

A detailed program was available online and distributed through GCA. The convention was announced in Townsville where Jennifer Rosewood gave a PowerPoint presentation to promote Lake Macquarie and the program. This presentation was delivered many times to regional clubs and societies and made available to Zone Coordinators to promote the convention to affiliate clubs and associations nationally.

### **Local input:**

This convention was based on local input. Local garden clubs were responsible for the décor at all the venues, except Club Macquarie, and provided catering for morning teas and some lunches. Local musicians provided the music at events and local artists shared their work at the three gallery locations. Their works were for sale and many participants bought something to remind them of their stay in Lake Macquarie.

A local cruise on Lake Macquarie provided a relaxed way to view the lake environment from the water whilst enjoying a morning or afternoon tea on board. The Cruise staff provided the on-board commentary and there was plenty of opportunity for Registrants to interact in a social environment.

Toronto & Districts Garden Club sincerely thank the clubs who contributed to the success of this convention, being Lake Macquarie Garden Club (donation & morning teas), Adamstown/Kotara Garden Club (fundraising, décor and morning teas), New Lambton Heights Garden Club (décor & lunches), Maitland Garden Club (lunches), Medowie Garden Club (lunches), Christmas Bush Garden Club (lunches) Gloucester

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Garden Club (major raffle prize contribution), Hunter Valley African Violet Society (Registration Day display), Newcastle Bonsai Society (Registration Day display). Local cafes and clubs donated food vouchers for their premises that were drawn as lucky door prizes at the Welcome Reception.

Local schools were included in a botanical art program and the works were photographed and shown at the Welcome Reception as a digital background on the stage.

Local businesses were informed about the convention in their area and encouraged to participate in any way appropriate to them.

The Mayor, represented by Cr Madeline Bishop and State MP Greg Piper welcomed registrants together with Lynne Faux GCA Vice President and Jennifer Rosewood, TDGC President at the Welcome Reception.

### **Publicity:**

Our first publication was a brochure that was available following the Townsville convention in 2022. Although TDGC had 2 years to plan this event there was only 12 months to promote it because the Townsville convention was delayed by the pandemic. We struggled with only one year to promote this event but provided information and articles to GCA throughout 2023 for publication in all GCA publications. Convention information appeared on the back page of Our Gardens from the summer edition 2022 and throughout 2023 and Lake Macquarie articles were submitted during 2023 with updates in The Bulletin and on the GCA website.

GCA provides an invaluable communication system to distribute information and promotional articles to their affiliates. Thank you to all who helped with deadlines, editing and promotions.

All our promotional & fundraising events displayed a banner with the words 'GCA Biennial Convention and AGM 2023 hosted by Toronto & Districts Garden Club'. A convention website is also an essential tool for convention registration. It is the gateway for information and the registration process. The website provided all the information needed for registrants including secure online application. Our website was developed and maintained by our webmaster, John Watkins and was published between December 2022 and September 2023. This task is a major piece of work and our thanks to John who did an enormous and professional job. Every convention needs a website. We are happy to share what has been developed with GCA or the next hosts.

Publicity included:

*Promotional Banner* displayed at all face to face promotions.

*PowerPoint presentation* delivered at Townsville Convention, made available to Zone Coordinators for distribution nationally, presented by the sub-committee to many garden clubs and associations & assisted by Frances Cairns in her area.

*Promotional Brochure* was available nationally following the Townsville Convention.

*Convention Website* published between 10 December 2022 – 22 September 2023.

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*GCA website* with link to Convention Website.

*Our Gardens* Convention advertisement with dates and contacts and articles about Lake Macquarie throughout 2022 - 2023.

*The Bulletin* convention updates for affiliates during 2023.

*GCA email to affiliates* including Brochure and Registration packages.

*TDGC Newsletter* contained TDGC minutes & Convention Information 2021-2023.

*Single Day registration package* introduced in July 2023 distributed through GCA to affiliates within 200kms of Lake Macquarie.

*Personal and email contact* to provide the community with convention information through nurseries and local businesses to make them aware of this event in their area, to seek their support to welcome guests to Lake Macquarie and encourage sponsorship.

*Facebook* promoted the lake Macquarie area, an accommodation option with assisted living options, fundraising events and general updates.

Publicity material was covered well, however reaching all members was reliant on internet access and the receipt of information packages by affiliates and sharing the content with their members. Zone coordinators and club secretaries must be responsible to update their contact details with GCA following an AGM or when changes are made and must share information received in correspondence with club members. This sub-committee visited many clubs and associations to promote this event. We found that some people were unaware of the convention despite the availability of all the information.

### **Convention booklet**

The Convention Booklet was printed and available in the convention bags. It provided welcome notes, venue addresses, tour information, program outline, event information, speaker profiles, award winners, and GCA. The final printing cost of \$945 was covered, in part, by \$678 advertising fees paid by businesses. The format for this publication was provided by Shirley Haslam which saved us many hours of work. The compilation of the content and the layout of this publication took many more hundreds of hours. It was an enormous task but with an excellent result. It was a handbook for all that the convention provided and more. It is recommended that content for the booklet is started early.

### **Finance**

Income included registration fees, Local Government support, local business sponsors, local garden clubs and fundraising. Income totalled \$90,963  
Expenses for this event totalled \$85,616.

Accounts have been prepared for auditing and will be provided when ready.

We estimate a small surplus of funds will be available to share with GCA.

### **Recommendations**

We would recommend that future conventions include the opportunity to include single day registrations from the beginning to help create affordable options and to help local affiliates to feel more included.

The website is an essential promotional tool and was a great success.

The online registration process provided registrants with a fillable online form and payment screen that could be completed and submitted online from the registration page. Just type in your details and submit. No printing or banking required.

Registrants received an automatic receipt immediately. This process then provided data and records of payment for the organising committee and for the auditor.

Refunds could also be made on request with details recorded. This registration process is recommended. This website is no longer published but its structure is available to share for future conventions on request to John Watkins,

[rocsolid@bigpond.net.au](mailto:rocsolid@bigpond.net.au) .

However, we realise that not everyone is computer literate and a manual registration process was also provided. The registration form could be downloaded from the website, printed, filled in, scanned and emailed and an EFT deposit made, or the form could be posted with a payment. It was then necessary for the Registrar to have an additional manual data collection process and to provide a manual receipt. Any refund also had to be done manually. The registration financials from non online registrations had to be recorded manually for auditing. This was an additional, onerous process. This option will be replaced by online registration in the future as people become more computer literate and realise it is easier to fill in their details on screen and press submit.

A good communication system is essential. Zone coordinators and club secretaries are the key people to receive and share important GCA information. They must be responsible to update their contact details with GCA following an AGM or when changes are made and must share information received in correspondence with club members. It was often difficult and time consuming to get accurate affiliate contact details from the GCA website. This sub-committee visited many clubs and associations to promote this event. We found that some people were unaware of the convention despite the availability of all the information.

Registration bags contain valuable and essential information. The Lake Macquarie team were mindful of paper and plastic waste. A drink bottle and insect repellent were provided as essentials for the coach trips, the booklet provided all the event addresses and contained drink vouchers needed for the events. Our registration desk had two stand up signs advertising the need for the drink bottle to be filled and the repellent needed at the Botanic Gardens. In addition, these items were shown in the on-screen presentation in the theatre. Our recommendation for future registration

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days is that people are told individually, when they collect their bag, of what contents are important. This will assist people to find important information. For this convention it was addresses, maps, supply of drinking water and drink vouchers needed for events. All of this was in the bag, if only people looked.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the committee did an outstanding job in delivering this convention given the time constraints for promotions. Other factors that may have affected the lower registration numbers include the economic environment of inflationary prices and the cost of travel, accommodations and the need for a car.

Registrants had many opportunities to socialise and interact at the various social and informative events and on the field trips as well as the morning tea breaks, lunches and dinners. Feedback from attendees was 80% positive and highlighted friendly interactions, supporting the motto 'friendship through gardens'. Single day registrations should be introduced early to provide affordable and inclusive options.

A website with online registration is essential. Online registration and payment should be promoted and encouraged for future conventions. This secure system provides accurate data management and accounting in one single system, is user friendly and saves managers a great deal of time.

Speakers need to be finalised early so that their details are available when people are deciding to register. This information is also needed for inclusion in the booklet.

A highlight for us was the support received from local garden clubs and associations who gave so much to make this convention a success as mentioned above. Their efforts were commented on by attendees in the evaluation sheets.

We were overwhelmed by the positive comments received from attendees in their feedback and we recommend that report to you.

We are looking forward to the next convention.

Contact the team

Position	Name	Email	Phone
President	Jennifer Rosewood	<a href="mailto:tdgcpres@gmail.com">tdgcpres@gmail.com</a>	02 4959 2632
Secretary	Ann Watkins	<a href="mailto:secretarytdgc@gmail.com">secretarytdgc@gmail.com</a>	0403105802
Treasurer	Mike Abberfield	<a href="mailto:abberfielduc@bigpond.com">abberfielduc@bigpond.com</a>	0423379848
Sponsors	Lynne Turner	<a href="mailto:torontoturners@gmail.com">torontoturners@gmail.com</a>	0418832522
Field trips	Susan Laplain	<a href="mailto:llaplain@bigpond.net.au">llaplain@bigpond.net.au</a>	0408618846
Zone Coord	Marilyn Swan	<a href="mailto:malanbil@hotmail.com">malanbil@hotmail.com</a>	0493490706