

DISTRICT 23 - HISTORY IN BRIEF

Ronda Walker. October 2015.

District XVI

'Zonta in the Antipodes', edited by Hazel King AM, documented the history of Zonta International District 16 from 1965 to 1989. Hazel also outlined the brief history of the first Zonta Club of Sydney, which was formed in 1929 and had disbanded by 1935.

Zonta returned to Australia in 1965. At the request of the then 'Chairman of Organisation' Ms J. Maria Pierce, Miss Dorothy Thompson from the Zonta Club of Toronto 1, Canada, visited Australia in 1965, 1969 and 1971. Miss Thompson organised clubs in the capital cities of all Australian States and in five cities in New Zealand.

These 11 clubs were first described as 'undistricted' and were managed as part of the Asia-Pacific 'Area III'. Joyce Fildes, from Canberra, was Area Representative for 1970-1972. The description changed from 'Area III' to 'Region III' in 1972-1974, with Cherry Raymond from Auckland as Regional Representative.

By 1974 there were 18 clubs in Region III and these clubs were the nucleus of District XVI, which was established at the start of the 1974-1976 biennium. Judith Dey, from Sydney, was the first Governor of District XVI. The first District XVI conference was hosted by the Zonta Club of Perth, in September 1975.

In the biennia that followed, the role of Governor was rotated between the two Nations. In 1977, under the leadership of Governor Beverley Bennett from Wellington, District XVI was divided into 4 Areas. The first Area Directors served for three years to 1980, encompassing the 1978-1980 term of Governor Elizabeth Todd, from Sydney. Heide Taylor, a member of the Zonta Club of Adelaide, was the first Area 2 Director.

Shirley Bull was the second Area 2 Director, serving with Governor Jeanne Edgar (Christchurch, NZ), in the 1980-82 biennium. Area 1 Director in this biennium was Mary Magee, who went on to serve as Zonta International President 2000-2002; the third Australian to hold this position.

A 5th Area was established in the 1980-82 biennium and by the 1982-84 biennium there were sufficient clubs to justify 6 Areas in the District. Area 1 - Queensland; Area 2 - Victoria; Area 3 – North Island of New Zealand; Area 4 – South Island of NZ; Area 5 New South Wales and Area 6 – South Australia and Western Australia.

Leneen Forde, from Brisbane, served as Governor 1982-1984 with Val Sarah, from Ballarat, as her Area 2 Director. Leneen later became the first Australian to serve as Zonta International President. For the 1984-86 biennium the leadership went back to New Zealand, with Valerie Webster as Governor. Val Sarah was her Lieutenant Governor and Caroline Chapman (Melbourne on Yarra) held the role of Area 2 Director.

Val Sarah, from the Zonta Club of Ballarat, and International President 1998-2000, served as Governor of District XVI for the biennium 1986-1988. Elizabeth Lucas, from the Zonta Club of Melbourne, was Area 2 Director and Elizabeth Harris, Zonta Club of Adelaide, was Area 6 Director.

Val's successor, Susan Laidlaw, from Manawatu in the North Island of New Zealand was the last to serve as Governor of District XVI. In this, the 1988-90 biennium, Elizabeth Harris (Adelaide) was Lt Governor and Ellen Cox (Perth) Treasurer, with Irena Kaluski (Footscray, Vic) Area 2 Director and Tricia Summerfield (Perth) as Area 6 Director.

Growth of Clubs and Areas in what would become District 23

The Zonta Club of Melbourne, club number 555, Chartered 28 May 1966, was the first Australian club established following Dorothy Thompson's 1965 visit and thus the first in what would become District 23. The Zonta Clubs of Adelaide (1969), Hobart (1971) and Perth (1972) followed in quick succession, all organised by Dorothy Thompson.

In turn, these Clubs sponsored new clubs through the late 1970s: Launceston in Tasmania; Melbourne Yarra, Waverley, Ballarat and Geelong in Victoria; Fleurieu Peninsula and Para District Area in South Australia, and South of Perth, in Western Australia.

The Zonta club of Glenorchy Derwent Valley was established in Tasmania in 1980. Through the 1980s Zontians in Victoria welcomed clubs in Frankston, Bendigo, Footscray, Latrobe Valley, Mornington, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Sale and Albury Wodonga. In South Australia and the Northern Territory there was also significant growth with the Zonta Clubs of Adelaide Torrens, Adelaide Flinders, Alice Springs, Darwin, Noarlunga Southern Vales, The Riverland, Adelaide Hills and Adelaide West. In Western Australia the Zonta Clubs of Perth Northern Suburbs, Darling Ranges and Bunbury were established.

Sadly nine of these early clubs have disbanded. Glenorchy Derwent Valley, Tasmania closed in 2007. In Victoria, Latrobe Valley (1999), Shepparton (1996) and Sale (1992) have closed; Melbourne Yarra merged with its sponsoring club, Melbourne, to form Melbourne on Yarra. Adelaide West has disbanded and in WA, both South of Perth and Darling Ranges have closed. Alice Springs handed back its Charter in 2013 after 30 years of service.

Elizabeth Lucas, in Victoria and Heide Taylor, in South Australia followed Dorothy Thompson's lead and dedicated a great deal of time and energy to organising new clubs. Elizabeth Lucas is credited with organising 10 clubs in Victoria; Heide Taylor organised 8 clubs in South Australia and the Northern Territory. Heide went on to serve with distinction as Co-Chairman and then Chairman of Zonta International Organisation and Extension committee, from 1986 to 1990.

Formation of District 23

By 1989 there were 90 clubs in District XVI and the vast geographic distance added to the challenges of managing so many clubs. At the District Conference in Auckland in 1989 it was resolved to divide the District into 3 parts, District 16 – New Zealand, District 23 – Tasmania, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, and District 24 – Queensland, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. This decision took effect from the International Convention in Dallas in 1990, with 25 clubs in the newly formed District 23.

Elizabeth Harris, from the Zonta Club of Adelaide, who had been Lt Governor of District XVI, served as the first Governor of District 23, in the 1990-1992 Biennium. Her Lt Governor was Bobbie Porter and Elizabeth Salt was Treasurer. The District began its financial life with an opening balance of \$3,746.21. The first District 23 Conference was hosted by the Zonta Club of Perth in September 1991; guest of honour was International President Leneen Forde.

Area boundaries generally followed State boundaries and were numbered in the sequence in which clubs were founded: Area 1 – Metropolitan and Eastern Victoria and Tasmania, with a Vice Area 1 Director until 2000; Area 2 – South Australia and Northern Territory, with a Vice Area 2 Director from 2006; Area 3 – Western Australia; Area 4 – Western and Northern Victoria; Area 5 – Tasmania was established in 2000. Since establishment, Area workshops or meetings have been held every year, with the Governor or Lt Governor in attendance. Areas 1 and 4 have held a combined meeting each year since 2001. Area 5 members attended this joint meeting in the years 2010-2013.

Now a District in its own right, District 23 continued to charter new clubs through the 1990s: In Tasmania the Zonta Clubs of Devonport and Storm Bay were chartered. Gawler and Port Lincoln were formed in South Australia, and Dunsborough, Peel and Swan Hills in Western Australia. In Victoria, Kyneton, Berwick and Melton were chartered.

District 23, 1992 - 2015

Bobbi Porter was the second Governor of District 23 (1992-94). She presided over the 2nd Biennial District 23 Conference, held at West Point Casino Hotel, Hobart, in September 1993.

In the 1994-96 biennium, with Naomi Arnold as Governor, the 3rd District Conference was held at the Australia Hotel, Melbourne in October 1995. The idea of a District service project was first proposed at this Conference and accepted by delegates. From three options, delegates agreed that where possible clubs would offer self-defence classes to young women in the next biennium. The project was implemented widely in South Australia but not consistently across the District.

During the 1994-96 biennium membership numbers reached 908 members, in 39 clubs. Naomi's successor Kay Poustie (1996-98) set members a target of 1000 members and this seemed achievable, but instead numbers dropped a little.

Governor Kay Poustie chaired the 4th Biennial District 23 Conference, at the Plaza Hotel, Alice Springs in 1997. The first Z-Club to be established in Australia, at Anzac Hill High School, was presented with its Charter at this Conference. Kay was keen to encourage clubs to support Zonta's International Relations program. District 23 was paired with District 18 and many clubs initiated contact with clubs in Africa. A District 23 President's Manual was developed in this Biennium and distributed to all club Presidents, along with a data base listing all members.

The host club, Alice Springs, proposed that funding to support 'Family News', a publication for remote Aboriginal communities where English is a second language, be adopted as the District project for 1998-2000. This was accepted by delegates with funding of \$4000 from District funds. Clubs were also urged to continue to support local self defence programs for young women.

Margaret Rowland was installed as Governor for 1998-2000 at the Paris Convention. A highlight of this Convention was Val Sarah's installation as Zonta International President; the second Australian to hold this office. District 23 Zontians were reminded that while we are a long way from Zonta International headquarters in Chicago we can play an active part in the organisation.

Margaret's District Conference was held at the Hilton Hotel, Adelaide in September 1999. Two new clubs were welcomed: Swan Hills in Western Australia and Queenborough in Tasmania. Tasmania now had 6 clubs and delegates voted to establish Area 5. Grace Seed was then elected as the first Area Director. In Victoria the Zonta Clubs of Berwick and Latrobe Valley had closed but a new club was in formation: Melbourne CBD, our first breakfast club, was chartered early in 2000.

A new District Project was adopted at the 1999 Conference. The Zonta Club of Footscray proposed that clubs in District 23 support the 'SoundHouse' program in the 2000-2002 biennium, providing specialised equipment to enable students with a disability to make music. The suggested contribution was up to \$500 per club.

Margaret Rowland's term as Governor and Val Sarah's term as International President, ended at Convention 2000 in Honolulu. At this Convention we celebrated the installations of Julie Wiltshire as D23 Governor for 2000-2002 and Mary Magee from District 24 as International President.

Governor Julie Wiltshire presided at the 6th District 23 Conference, held in Geelong in September 2001, just three weeks after the terrorist attacks in the USA. We admired the bravery of Zonta International Representative and ZI Treasurer Betty Jane Bourdon who flew to Australia for our Conference when flights were resumed. BJ took back with her a book of condolence messages.

Attendance at Conference was impacted by the collapse of Ansett Airlines. Seats on Australia's remaining domestic airline were expensive and limited because this was football Grand Final weekend in Melbourne. A group of determined West Australians braved the long train journey.

At this Conference, delegates accepted a proposal from the Zonta Club of Noarlunga Southern Vales to adopt production and supply of Breast Care Cushions as a District project. Several clubs had already been making these cushions, inspired by the Zonta Club of Botany Bay in District 24.

Under Julie Wiltshire's leadership, District Board had submitted a bid to host the 2006 International Convention in Melbourne. BJ Bourdon stayed in Melbourne for a few days after Conference to evaluate District 23's bid to host Convention. This was ultimately accepted by the ZI Board.

In May 2001 the District had 963 members, in 40 clubs, approaching Kay Poustie's target of 1000, but there was concern that 23 clubs had less than 20 members. In Julie Wiltshire's term of office a second Z Club was established, at Clonard College, Geelong. New Zonta clubs were formed in Clare (SA) and Geelong (Victoria). Geelong Central was the District's second breakfast club and first 'paperless' club, sending all information electronically. Sadly that club disbanded in 2007 as did Melbourne CBD in 2008.

Across the District, clubs demonstrated strong support for local projects with over \$100,000 expended and many hours of 'hands on' service. Clubs supported Zonta International Foundation too, with a total of \$28,000 contributed by District 23 clubs. An advocacy information booklet, prepared by Marilyn Piper from the Zonta Club of Perth, was distributed to all clubs in 2001.

In 2002 the Australian Women's Coalition was formed and was one of 5 women's organisations that reported to the Federal Government's Office for Women. Girl Guides, National Council of Women, Soroptimist International Australia, UNIFEM Australia, Australian Medical Women and Zonta International Districts 23 and 24 were among the founding members. It was agreed that District 24 Governor would represent Zonta at AWC meetings with District 23 Governor as alternate delegate. Our association with AWC continued until 2014.

Across the District, developments in information technology were taken up. A District webmaster was appointed and a website established. Many clubs now had their own websites and electronic communication of documents was more common. All but three clubs could be contacted by email.

Liz Woodgate was inducted as Governor for the 2002-2004 biennium. Records show 896 members in 40 clubs by March 2003, but there was a negative trend in mid-2003 and there were 7 clubs with fewer than 15 members. Use of information technology was well established and in this biennium the District newsletter was distributed as an electronic 'Newsflash'.

Following the lead of Zonta International, District 23 promoted the link between advocacy and service as a focus of workshops at all Area meetings and the District Advocacy booklet was updated and distributed to clubs. Preventing trafficking of women for sexual servitude was addressed in a ZISVAW project and Districts 23 and 24 took up this issue at a local level. A series of seminars with visiting expert Brian Islen was hosted by District 23, lawyer Georgi Costello spoke at District Conference, support was given to Project Respect and District Board wrote to the then Attorney General of Australia to advocate for a victim threatened with deportation.

The 7th District Conference was chaired by Liz Woodgate in Bunbury, Western Australia in 2003. The Z Club coordinator reported that with the addition of clubs organised by Melbourne Yarra at Presentation Convent and by Melbourne's West, at Mount St Joseph Girls' College, there were now four Z Clubs in the District.

District Breast Cushion project coordinators reported that 5,604 Cushions had been made since the last Conference and Delegates voted to continue the project. Delegates also agreed to begin a new District project, the Zonta Birthing Kit project, co-ordinated by the Zonta Club of Adelaide Hills.

During this biennium District received confirmation that Convention 2006 would be held in Melbourne. President Elect, Mary Ellen Bittner, appointed the Convention Committee with Naomi Arnold Reschke as Chairman. The first meeting of the committee was held early in 2003.

A strong contingent of District 23 members attended the 2004 Convention in New York City, not just because of the attraction of that city but in order to understand all of the details for which we would be responsible in 2006. At the closing ceremony, Liz Woodgate presented the Governor's pin to Ronda Walker. Most of the incoming Board members attended Convention and an informal Board meeting was held in New York, allowing early planning for what would be a busy biennium.

The 8th District Conference was held at the Stamford Grand Hotel, on the beachfront at Glenelg, South Australia in 2005. The two District Projects were being well supported and Conference delegates voted to continue the Breast Cushion and Birthing Kit projects.

In this biennium clubs voted to proceed with an application for incorporation of the District in the State of Victoria. The 'Constitution of District 23 Inc.' was adopted by delegates at the 2005 Conference and the subsequent application to Consumer Affairs Victoria was accepted.

In May 2004 membership of District 23 was 871, in 39 clubs. There were no new Zonta clubs formed in the District in the 2004-06 Biennium but two Golden Z-clubs were formed in Victoria. There was great concern that the Zonta Club of Melbourne, the oldest club in Australia, had only 14 members and the club it had sponsored in 1973, Melbourne Yarra, was at risk of closure. After careful discussion over many months, it was agreed that the clubs would amalgamate, retaining club number 555 and blending the names to form the Zonta Club of Melbourne on Yarra.

The challenge of hosting Convention 2006 was embraced with enthusiasm by District 23 Zontians. Committee members, team leaders and volunteers were drawn from all Areas of the District. Convention Committee was chaired by Naomi Arnold Reschke from Gawler (SA), the secretary was Alison Martin from Western Australia and Pauline Burton from South Australia was Treasurer. Members of the clubs closest to Melbourne provided 'hands on' support during Convention. Event management company ICMS managed registration and accommodation bookings.

Convention 2006, with Mary Ellen Bittner presiding, was a tremendous success. Melbourne's winter weather was benign, registrations totalled 1923, Convention business was conducted calmly and effectively, social events were marvellous and pre and post-convention tours were successful. To our delight, Zontians from around the world still comment on how much they enjoyed the Melbourne Convention. All the hard work and attention to detail proved worthwhile.

At the Melbourne Convention, Beryl McMillan was inducted as Governor for 2006-08. Conference Chairman, Naomi Arnold Reschke, was elected to the International Nominating Committee and chaired that committee. As expected, a record number of District 23 members attended the 2006 Melbourne Convention and gained a greater appreciation of the internationality of Zonta. This may have also encouraged clubs to give increased support to Zonta International Foundation: in this biennium, every club in the District contributed to the total District 23 contribution of AUD\$89,649.

Now it was time for District 23 to concentrate on local issues, particularly membership. At 31 July 2007, membership was 767 and four clubs had less than 10 members. With our energies focussed on Convention, no new clubs had been formed since Clare & Districts in May 2002. On a positive note, a new Z Club was established at Girton College, Bendigo in 2007. The two District service projects were well established; both had display booths at the Melbourne Convention, which attracted considerable interest from other Countries.

Governor Beryl McMillan appointed a History and Archives Committee. District archives were already well managed by long term Archivist Margaret Medcalf and safely held in the Batty Library in Perth. The committee supported Margaret in encouraging clubs to better manage their own records and to record their histories. The committee was also asked to begin discussion of how the District and clubs might celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2016.

The 9th Biennial District Conference was held at Wrest Point Conference Centre, Hobart in September 2007. Area Directors reported that clubs were applying the Zonta Project Test to local service projects and these were now more closely aligned with Zonta's mission. The PR committee reported updates to the District website and preparation of a new District brochure.

At this Conference, delegates voted to create a category of 'ongoing District project' and it was agreed that the Breast Cushion and Birthing Kit continue as 'ongoing projects'. Delegates then adopted a new project for the 2008-10 biennium: the 'Yarri Wada: Strong for Country Puppet Project'. This was proposed by the Zonta Club of Perth, at the request of senior women in

indigenous communities in the Western Kimberley area of Western Australia. A contribution of \$500 per club was suggested.

Zontians from District 23 enjoyed Convention 2008 in Rotterdam - we were able to sit back and relax after our hard work for the Melbourne Convention. Alison Martin succeeded Beryl McMillan as Governor and Beryl was elected as a Director of Zonta International 2009-2012. Past Governors Liz Woodgate and Ronda Walker were elected to the International Nominating Committee.

Governor Alison Martin chaired the 10th District Conference in Ballarat, Victoria in September 2009. Lt Governor Jane Smith reported concern that membership was at 709, the lowest for 10 years. The Zonta Club of Melbourne CBD had closed and the remaining members had joined the Zonta Club of Melbourne on Yarra. The two Golden Z clubs sponsored by Melbourne CBD had also closed, as had the Z Clubs at Mt St Joseph Girls' College and Clonard College.

District 23 UN Chairman reported good news: the Australian Government had signed the CEDAW agreement in November 2008, a commitment to promote the elimination of discrimination against women. A detailed report of the Yarri Wada project showed that while delivery had changed from a puppet show, senior women had developed leadership and teaching skills and health messages were reaching girls aged 8-18. The project had attracted sponsorship and coordinators expected that it would continue when Zonta's seed funding ended.

The 2010 International Convention was held in San Antonio, Texas, where Jane Smith was inducted as Governor and Alison Martin was elected to the International Nominating Committee. The Centennial Anniversary Committee was established, and its role defined, soon after Convention. International President Dianne Curtis appointed Past International President Val Sarah as Chairman and Ronda Walker as Vice Chairman.

In May 2011, then Governor-General of Australia, Quentin Bryce AC, was inducted as an Honorary Member of Zonta International at a ceremony at the Queen Elizabeth Club in Sydney. The presentation was made by International President Lynn McKenzie supported by PIP Val Sarah and Director Beryl McMillan. Zontians from across Australia were present at this special event, which was held in the same week as the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. Honorary Member status is also held by Australians Kay Cottee, Professor Fiona Stanley, Dr Catherine Hamlin, Gaby Kennard and Dr Helen Caldicott.

Governor Jane Smith chaired the 11th District Conference in Melbourne in October 2011. The 'Heide Taylor Honour Roll' was announced during Conference, recognising District 23 Zontians who have made an outstanding contribution at club level. At this Conference, after much discussion, Delegates agreed to a significant rise in the District membership fee - to \$40.

In her 2011 Conference report Lt Governor Cintra Amos noted that membership numbers had dropped to 671. The Zonta Clubs of Hobart East (previously Storm Bay) and Queenborough had amalgamated earlier in 2011 to form Hobart Derwent, retaining the Storm Bay Charter number 1569. This left Area 5 with 4 clubs but by the end of the Biennium the Zonta Club of Launceston was in recess and District Board discussed the viability of maintaining a 5th Area. On a brighter note, a new Z-Club was Chartered, at Matthew Flinders Girls School in Geelong (Vic).

District 23 was well represented at Convention 2012 in Torino, Italy where Ann Horrocks was inducted as Governor and Liz Woodgate was elected as a Zonta International Director. District 23 club contributions to the Foundation in the previous biennium were recognised at Convention; the total of \$96,663.78 had perhaps been helped by the strong value of the Australian dollar. It was also recognised that every club in the District had made a contribution to the Foundation.

In August 2012 Zontians across Australia celebrated the assembly of one million Birthing Kits, an extraordinary milestone that was marked with special events in several cities. This project was started by the Zonta Club of Adelaide Hills in 1999 and subsequently adopted by clubs throughout Australia.

In November 2012 Zonta International began the campaign 'Zonta Says NO to violence against women' and this was promptly taken up by most clubs in District 23. Many clubs already supported the White Ribbon Campaign and were able to incorporate the Zonta Says NO message into established programs. District Board funded pull up banners for each of the 5 Areas and these were made available for clubs to borrow for display at special events.

Governor Ann chaired the 12th District Conference in Scarborough, WA in September 2013. Alice Springs had just disbanded but Conference attendees welcomed members of the Zonta Club of Central Goldfields and celebrated a new Z-Club at Kyneton Secondary College, both in Area 4. Members of a new Golden Z Club at St Catherine's College at the University of Western Australia helped at the Conference. It was also announced that a new Zonta club was being formed in Area 2.

At the 2014 Convention in Orlando, Florida, District 23 was commended for one of the largest net increases in membership numbers – 14.42%. Outgoing Governor Ann Horrocks was delighted that District 23 Service projects were also recognised at Convention. We were awarded 'Best District Service Project' for Birthing Kits and the Zonta Club of Adelaide Hills was recognised for their *Expect Respect* project. It was also acknowledged that all clubs had made a contribution to the Foundation and that six clubs had forwarded individual contributions from every member.

In Orlando, Erica Majba was installed as the 13th Governor of District 23 and Past Governor Beryl McMillan was elected to the International Nominating Committee. PIP Val Sarah was appointed to continue as Chairman of the Centennial Anniversary Committee with Beryl McMillan as co-chair.

District 23 joined the Equality Rights Alliance (ERA) in 2014. ERA, managed by YWCA Australia, is one of five National women's alliances funded through the Federal Office for Women. ERA is the largest of these groups, representing 62 organisations with an interest in advocating for women's equality, leadership and recognition of women's diversity. District 23 has now withdrawn from membership of the Australian Women's Coalition.

The Zonta Club of Mt Barker, sponsored by Adelaide Hills, was officially chartered in May 2014, bringing the number of clubs to 36 and the number of members at the end of May to 825. Though much of 2014, the Zonta Club of Darwin was 'in recess' and seemed likely to close. A determined effort to rebuild the club culminated in a re-launch at Parliament House, Darwin in March 2015.

There was a mood of optimism at the 13th District Conference in Adelaide in October 2015. The Zonta Club of Darwin had been re-launched, the Zonta Club of Lower Eyre had been Chartered in Area 2 and a Z Club formed at Ogilvie High School, Hobart, in Area 5. Conference reports showed that clubs are effectively linking advocacy action with service projects and that membership numbers are growing.

Ronda Walker. Zonta Club of Kyneton, Victoria. Australia. October 2015.

Sources included:

District 23 Club 'histories in brief'

District 23 Conference Handbooks from 1995-2015

District 23 Directories,

District 23 Newsletters

King, Hazel et al: Zonta in the Antipodes: a short history of Zonta International District XVI

Recollections of past District 23 Governors

Theobald, Carol et al: A history of the Zonta Club of Perth Inc, 2013

The Zonta Book of South Australia and the Northern Territory, 2011

The Archives of Zonta International District 23 are held in the Battye Library, Perth W. It was not possible to consult these records in the preparation of this document.