

Vote of Thanks to Jane Higham
3pm Thursday 9th January 2020
Macandrew Bay Community Hall

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen - I'm privileged to have been invited to propose this vote of thanks to Jane Higham for her contribution to U3A Dunedin.

Just in case anyone is not sure, U3A stands for University of the Third Age. It is an educational opportunity for the retired, the wrinklies if you like, but definitely not for those who are past it or who have closed minds. We don't offer degrees and so are careful about using the word "University".

Jane joined U3A sometime in the noughties and came on to the Board at the 2010 AGM when Sue Cathro was Chair. She was a lively contributor from the start and in 2012 when long-term secretary Judith Gray retired, the then Chair Dame Norma Restieaux asked Jane to become the Membership Secretary and take on the waiting list.

In those days, joining U3A was more like getting into public school in England – you put your name down a couple of years before you retired to be sure of getting in.

Membership was around 520 – and the waiting list around 150. Indeed the November 2013 edition of our Newsletter shows 267 people waiting.

With Richard's help, Jane realised that since only 60% of the members attended courses at any one time the waiting list could be reduced and by August 2013 the decision was made to take another 100 members. Later the waiting list was scrapped – and we now have 930 members - but there are some in the community who think we still have that waiting list.

This membership growth required that more places had to be found in the courses and the Salmond and Knox venues were augmented first by the Leith Valley Bowling Club which initially took 100 but later was reconfigured to take 148. There was another move to use the 150 spaces at the Otago Golf Club and both of these sites are now our regular venues.

Jane followed Doug Holborow into the chair in 2015 and, unusually, served for two years, seeing the organisation grow and expand with the formation of Small Groups – we call them Discussion Groups now – Jane was keen to join one of the first groups. Judith Cowley was Board Member in charge and the groups started slowly but steadily. I understand that Jane remained a member of the Art discussion group right through.

Jane liked a tidy organisation and led a sub-committee to sort and archive the records and deposit them at the Hocken over the 2018-19 summer. She had a strong team and the job was done in record time.

As a Board member, she was due to retire at the AGM in 2019 but I heard her say how much she loved the organisation and so I was easily able to persuade her to be minute secretary in 2019 and she responded to the current lack of a Vice Chair by agreeing to be nominated back onto the Board for 2020, and serve as Vice Chair for 2020.

Her minutes were excellent, usually delivered within 48 hours of the meeting (often within 24) and rarely needed amendment. She encouraged the addition of ‘To Do’ lists at the end of the minutes so that everyone would have their homework and could be called to account in Matters Arising at the next meeting. She was one who worked hard at the tasks and stayed on duty until the job was thoroughly well done.

We have a database of courses which shows who develops, convenes and assists with the running of courses – Jane’s name appears in virtually every Series we have run, sometimes more than once.

She loved the huge variety of courses and was always up for a new 'learning direction'. In the last Series she developed a course on gardens and landscaping and it included a field trip to the Dunedin Botanic Garden. In typical fashion, she arranged an additional trip for members unable to attend the earlier one. A representative of the Friends of the Botanic Garden who contributed a lecture wrote to say how sad they were at Jane's passing but how much they had enjoyed working with her.

Someone said she did not suffer fools gladly – my headmaster commented on my retirement from school that I didn't suffer fools at all and Jane and I were kindred spirits in that and also in our love for and belief in the value of U3A. One of her Board colleagues has described her as *a marvellous lady with an inclusive nature, a big heart and a sense of humour*, another commented that she was *supportive, realistic, never pessimistic, a good person to know and a dear friend*.

I now call upon all members of U3A past and present to be upstanding and to give a ringing round of applause to pass this vote of thanks and appreciation by acclamation.

Post Script: A significant number of the approximately 200 present at Jane's celebration were U3A members who stood and, as expected, enthusiastically joined in a prolonged round of applause.