***The Beginning of the Port Phillip Men’s Shed (abridged)***

A group of blokes were chatting after hearing of an organization called “Men’s Shed”. The chatting gathered momentum with the feeling this could be a positive for them and after seeking and considering relevant information they decided to establish one in their own district, namely the City of Port Phillip.

One of these men Peter Simmons, with strong support from another, Mark Stephens started the ball rolling with a little local advertising and signage resulting with approximately sixty people arriving for the first advertised meeting. This proved to be very positive and a steering group of sixteen was established with the endeavour to form a “Shed” in Port Phillip.

Some members of that original steering group are still active in the Shed today; these include Rod Hall, Peter Harkin, Steve Ingrouille, Don Laird, and Bob Small, with Mark Stephens having to retire from the committee during this past year. Mark deserves special mention for his early work in guiding the establishment of the shed as well as establishing our bank accounts and all the other documentation needed to get any new group up and running.

The Australian Men’s Shed Association was formed in 2007 and currently has more than nine hundred active Sheds operating across Australia.

For any reader not familiar with Port Phillip the district may be described briefly as an area bounded by parts of South Melbourne, Port Melbourne, Albert and Middle Parks, Balaclava, East St Kilda, Ripponlea, Windsor and Garden City. The population was a little over 100,000 by official records 2012.

Port Phillip Men’s Shed was officially formed and incorporated 21st November 2012. That start up began with just a handful of members but through steady progress our membership today *(February 2016)* is forty-five.

A search began for a suitable work site and it was Southport Uniting Care who, working in a most ecumenical way, referred us to St Luke’s Anglican Church who had more space and an existing but unused workshop to offer us. This worked well all around with St Luke’s and ourselves having since developed a very amicable arrangement for these first three years of our activities.

We acknowledge the ongoing support from the City of Port Phillip who encouraged us in the beginning and have continued to do so since with grants of a significant nature, greatly appreciated.

Some tools and equipment were donated privately and other items purchased within the constraints of our budget at that time.

We are much indebted to several local organizations, businesses, and sponsors who also gave us strong support until we became better established. Several are still with us today and are duly acknowledged;

***National Storage:*** This group have provided us with very useful and convenient storage space, some extra facilities for making and assembling smaller jobs plus assisting us with transport when we have had special needs.

***Bunnings:*** This Company has helped us extremely well by allocating time and the facility to conduct an onsite B.B.Q. at their premises; this assists us by way of giving us a regular income stream. They often also help by either donation or discounts on materials we use, for jobs we do in our local community.

***Masters:***   This Company have also been of real assistance by way of providing us with donations of tools and materials.

We were fortunate to have in our start-up group some very capable men, several still with us, with broad experience across many areas in the use of machinery and of construction techniques. Their expertise and work experience has been used wisely in setting up our shed.

With the ‘bones’ of the club now established, thoughts turned to recruiting members, and what would be our first job? Some of those early jobs were right under our noses’ as whilst St Luke’s could give us space we had to first reorganise the existing workshop and replace or repair worn out equipment.

We were able to repay the generous attitude of St Luke’s by restoring and bringing back to life several broken church pews and other pieces of their furniture that needed a little loving care.

We each endeavoured to pass on the news of the creation of our club by word of mouth and while this is a tried and proven method we distributed, and still do, our club brochure whenever it is appropriate. This often works well for us.

Our doors are open to all; our Shed has no standards or levels of technical ability to meet before joining. We have people who need help in other ways, emotionally and physically, and we have a type of buddy system here to help make those in need feel comfortable.

Port Phillip Men’s Shed aims to help, wherever possible, local residents when they bring items to us in need of repair, or even sometimes just advice, but an active place in our community is our main thrust.

We have a strong and lively interest in promoting men’s health issues and have regular forums for any and all local persons to attend in conjunction with the teaching and instruction of the St Johns Ambulance Association

We have had much satisfaction in making items for local schools, kindergartens or like groups. We recently pre-cut and semi manufactured some small toolboxes for a local scout group allowing the boys and girls to assemble and finish them off in their own environment. Quite recently we did likewise with a run of billy carts allowing those to be completed also by local recipient groups.

An item of a different nature just completed was a maypole made for a dance group, an interesting project. A mud trough for a kindergarten and a series of bowling ball carriers for a local bowls club plus regular bits of broken furniture and lawn mowers in need of repair always make our Saturday work mornings very interesting.

Another channel we have opened is a liaison with a local antique shop where we are often asked to assist with restoration work before goods can be presented for sale in a proper manner. This works by arrangement and suits both parties.

The Shed is a not for profit organization and we endeavour to be self-funding with income derived from member subscriptions, BBQs at Bunnings and any donations received from community groups and individuals for work done.  We regularly apply for, when available (and have received) grants from Federal, State and Local government to provide health programs and assist with the establishment and upgrade of the workshop.

The mornings are broken up with a coffee and chat with everybody getting a chance to develop new friendships.

Our Shed, like many clubs has quite a mixture of people from many backgrounds with varying and interesting life stories.

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