

Australian Tidy Towns 2011 Program Report

Town/Community: RUTHERGLEN VIC**Date judged:** 11 & 12 November 2010

Population: approx 2 700

Organisers: RUTHERGLEN Tidy Towns Committee (RTTC) in partnership with the Indigo Shire and general community

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COMMUNITY ACTION/ PARTNERSHIPS

Situated in Victoria's north east, originally a gold-mining town of the mid 19th century, RUTHERGLEN has developed into a major wine producing region.

RUTHERGLEN has a proud and long-standing commitment to the Tidy Towns program and overall sustainability as well as other related environmental and beautification programs conducted within the town.

Extensive business and community partnerships are evident and celebrate numerous activities that help make RUTHERGLEN a special part of Victoria.

The community has a strong sense of commitment and pride and are involved in a broad range of initiatives to ensure a sustainable future.

Along with RUTHERGLEN's Tidy Town committee and Indigo Shire, the community is committed to the principles of sustainability.

RUTHERGLEN has a rich and varied history with a desire to retain its heritage, and a community that is friendly, enthusiastic and dedicated to caring for their unique environment.

LITTER PREVENTION

Positive litter control strategies and the community's commitment to keeping RUTHERGLEN litter free are more than evident.

As part of their community involvement Jones, All Saints, Chambers, Rutherglen Estates and Valhalla wineries manage the litter on the approaches to their wineries.

As part of the Indigo Shire's litter management commitment, the shire has a 'Tidy Town Team' who do regular patrols of the township, including street sweeping, mowing and collection of fallen trees to be mulched for the town gardens.

RESOURCE RECOVERY & WASTE MANAGEMENT

As a Rural Council, Indigo Shire has made every effort to separate waste into streams that allow for recovery, recycling, re-use rather than land-fill. RUTHERGLEN has been at the forefront of this desire with leadership, over many years, by the RUTHERGLEN Primary School, St Mary's Primary School and the RUTHERGLEN High School all being successful in this area and all having been acknowledged by State and National bodies for their continued efforts.

Schools are encouraged to provide education, leadership and support to the values of recovery, reuse, recycle and, eventually, disposal to foster long term goals of community sustainability.

'Recycle Annie' and 'Rubbish Ronnie' campaigns are regularly conducted throughout the area with effective results being achieved.

Never Waste, the regional Waste Management group provides advice to the schools and the community on minimising waste and resource recovery and litter issues. St Mary's School has a number of targets to minimise waste at the school and their education programme also involves the parents.

RUTHERGLEN's recycling and resource recovery initiatives divert extensive tonnes of waste from landfill each year.

ENVIRONMENTAL INNOVATION & PROTECTION

Numerous voluntary environmental community groups work in partnership with the Shire and effectively contribute to enhancing and protecting RUTHERGLEN's well managed environment.

Valhalla Wines' Green Living Fair, an initiative of Anton Therkildsen, demonstrates how easy it is to live a sustainable life by making changes that not only save money and improve health, but benefit the environment.

Anton is a leader in sustainable business practices with the winery constructed of straw bales, it runs off green power and features worm composting toilets and recycled waste water reticulation systems.

The Green Living Fair has become established and increases in popularity each year.

In the areas of biodiversity, waste, energy and water, students at the RUTHERGLEN Primary School are becoming well versed on aspects of sustainability and are seeking solutions to issues that they believe need addressing. In their teams and with staff or community members they are planning and implementing strategies to solve these issues, both at a school level and wider into the community. Using data from meters and other reference points, students are able to analyse their efforts and monitor improvements and savings at the school.

WATER CONSERVATION

Living through drought has taught the St Mary's Primary School community to value water as a valuable and precious natural resource. St Mary's commitment to water conservation is evident through the school's water management techniques which include the installation of water tanks, water free urinals, drought proof gardens and ice cream containers under bubblers and then for watering gardens.

RUTHERGLEN Primary School's rain harvesting system is a high quality process that includes the collection of 135 000 litres of water into ten tanks that are used for biodiversity gardens and toilet systems within the school. Water collected from the roof area within the school are able to maintain toilets and in addition to this water also maintains a biodiversity garden at the front of the school and a number of other gardens. Water is also used for propagation of plants, maintenance of the school's worm farm and on vegetable gardens.

ENERGY INNOVATION

Energy wise initiatives have become embedded into St Mary's school culture and now occur instinctively, such as having a 'switch off policy'. The school's sustainability initiatives have been highly celebrated, receiving several awards and commendations.

Environmental improvement initiatives continue with the recent installation of solar panels. St Mary's Primary School is committed to extending their knowledge of how to be more energy efficient throughout their school community and beyond.

HERITAGE & CULTURE

Heritage restoration and preservation is on a large scale in RUTHERGLEN with numerous buildings lovingly restored to their former glory. Various private and public buildings are tastefully conserved providing a welcoming ambience which is inviting to locals and visitors alike.

Notable examples include St Stephens Church with the plasterboard ceiling of the church sanctuary was sagging. With imminent danger of collapse, the RUTHERGLEN community worked together to raise \$64 000 required for repairs. A broad range of community fundraising events were undertaken to ensure this historic building was restored to its former glory.

RUTHERGLEN's Gold Battery on its present site since 1908 having been erected for the purpose of enabling small miners to crush their quartz to extract gold. The battery was in regular operation until around 1994.

By the 1980's with the slowing of mining, it was feared the battery would be decommissioned and a concerned group of people, with the support of the then RUTHERGLEN Shire, formed a committee to preserve the battery and to save it from decommission.

In late 2008 the community committee decided that with the '150 yrs since the discovery of gold in RUTHERGLEN in 2010' celebrations, it was an ideal opportunity to get the battery up and running again. A great example of the community saving and preserving an important part of RUTHERGLEN's history.

YOUNG LEGENDS

Environmental awareness and education programs are an integral part of education in RUTHERGLEN with students actively involved in numerous community activities and partnerships.

RUTHERGLEN Primary School believes that it is vital that sustainable practices are in place as well as educating students about environmental issues. Minimising waste was their initial focus with waste reduced to landfill by 90%.

The school's rain harvesting system is a high quality process that includes the collection of rainwater into ten tanks that can be used for biodiversity gardens and toilet systems. Water is also used for the propagation of plants, maintenance of the school's worm farm and used on vegetable gardens.

St Mary's RUTHERGLEN is one of only 30 schools in Victoria to be awarded as a Carbon Sink school. The school is committed to sustainability and living habitats. They have been able to reduce their carbon omissions by 42% through their whole school commitment to being 'energy wise'. The school takes on simple measures to ensure a 'greener' future.

When students were asked if they would like to be involved in an environmental student action team, the entire student body of the school turned up to the first meeting, inspiring teachers with their eagerness for making a difference. They called themselves the F.R.O.G.S.S - the Friendly Resourceful Organised Group of Sustainable Students.

SUGGESTIONS

RUTHERGLEN's Tidy Towns Award for Victoria is a great achievement for the community and could be promoted on local business and Shire letterheads, envelopes, etc. Promoting the community's great commitment to Tidy Towns may assist in encouraging involvement as well as developing positive economic benefits and marketing opportunities.

RUTHERGLEN's well established school system is available for a formal network of teachers to share ideas, initiatives and improvements at regular meetings. If not already in place, a school rep(s) may also be advantageous as a member of the Tidy Towns Committee.

Indigo Shire and the community may wish to consider the concept of a by-pass to protect the amenity of RUTHERGLEN and reduce the impact of heavy vehicles that currently pass through the town generating pollution and potential damage to historic buildings.

With the RUTHERGLEN Gun Club taking over the over the management of the Racecourse Reserve after many years of neglect. The area is significant because it is one of the largest intact examples of grassy woodlands in north east Victoria. This has provided a great opportunity to hopefully develop strong links between the Gun Club, Landcare group(s) and local schools to assist with resourcing future planting programs, etc.

Congratulations to everyone involved in the RUTHERGLEN's Tidy Towns and associated community action programs.

Good luck with future initiatives in helping to keep your part of Australia sustainable.

*Dick Olesinski
National Tidy Towns judge*