

**A celebration for Tidy Towners:  
the Keep Australia Beautiful  
Australian Tidy Towns Awards  
sponsored by HUNGRY JACK'S ®**

**Protection of the Environment: BENALLA, VIC**

BENALLA has a strong commitment to broad environmental protection and innovation which aims at preserving the important natural values of the area and to encourage and promote sustainable use and development.

Major environmental protection initiatives include the habitat restoration of the endangered bird species, the Regent Honeyeater, where Ray Thomas and his network have made significant contributions to restoring its habitats together with other native fauna species, the challenges with removal of noxious weed, Cobomba from Lake BENALLA, Council's commitment to partnerships in protecting roadside vegetation, particularly native shrubs, grasses and trees, together with introducing roadside management plans and implementing biodiversity protection.

BENALLA's Rakali project, coordinated by the District Environment Group raises awareness of water contamination, bank erosion and weeds which reduce water quality, biodiversity issues, unsustainable water use, as well as the need for healthy habitats for the protection of native flora and fauna species.

Benalla Tidy Towns Committee: Ms Sharon Zimmerman, 03 5760 2600

**Dame Phyllis Frost Award for Outstanding Achievement:  
RAY THOMAS, BENALLA VICTORIA**

The Regent Honeyeater is an endangered bird species, with numbers declining seriously over recent times in and around the BENALLA community.

As a result, Regent Honeyeater coordinator and Landcarer, Ray Thomas and his network have made significant contributions to restoring its habitats together with other native fauna species, also mostly endangered. Enormous support has been gained from a broad range of volunteers to plant and restore habitat in and around BENALLA.

With numerous landholders and schools involved in the project, Ray Thomas' dedication and commitment to the project for over 10 years is to be commended.

Besides other environmental benefits being realised, a major outcome to the conservation of native flora and fauna in the region has been achieved with over a quarter of a million seedlings being planted, and over 700 hectares of habitat restored during this period.

Almost 45,000 plants have been planted as a result of Ray's commitment and coordinating skills over the past 12 months. Further positive environmental outcomes have been achieved besides numerous presentations, farm visits, project tours, monitoring weekends, seed collection, plant propagation and planting days, environmental weeding and trials for new techniques.

As a further result of Ray Thomas' dedication:

-landholders are now seeking his opinion on how to put in their own independent proposal for Bush Tender schemes,

-more and more high fertility sites along creeks are being fenced and revegetated,  
 -an increasing number of large sites, rather than small patches are being restored,  
 -an increasing number of joint project between adjacent landholders are being achieved, and  
 -an increasing number of landholders are requesting for Ray Thomas and his great environmental action network to come and plant a site on their properties.

Ray Thomas is a great and truly worthy recipient of the Dame Phyllis Frost Award for Outstanding Achievement.

Mr Ray Thomas, Benalla, VIC, 03 5760 2600

<b>Program or Category</b>	<b>Awarded to</b>	<b>Sponsored by</b>
Australia's Tidiest Town	Collie, WA	Hungry Jack's
Highly commended	Singleton, NSW	Hungry Jack's
Community Action Award	Collie, WA	Department of Transport and Regional Services 'Growing Regions' conference
Spirit of Australia Award	Singleton, NSW	Best Western
Environmental Innovation Award	Redcliffe, QLD	Veolia Environmental Services / Collex
Litter and Waste Management Award	Yulara/Ayers Rock Resort, NT	Australian Food and Grocery Council, Packaging Stewardship Forum
Community-Local Government Partnership Award	Burnie, TAS	Bunnings Warehouse
Protection of the Environment Award	Benalla, VIC	
Young Legends Award Mount	Lucindale, SA	Coca-Cola Amatil
Dame Phyllis Frost Award for Outstanding Achievement	Ray Thomas, Benalla VIC	Lothian Books, publishers of the biography of the founder of Keep Australia Beautiful

Full details at [www.kab.org.au](http://www.kab.org.au)

## **HUNGRY JACK'S Australian Tidy Towns 2006 Program Report**

***Town/Community: BENALLA Victoria Date judged: 13 & 14 Dec 2005***

**Population:**..... approx 9 000

**Organising Group/s:** *BENALLA Tidy Towns volunteers in conjunction with BENALLA Rural City (BRC)*

**Contact Names:** *Sharon Zimmerman (BRC) Phone: (03) 5760 2600*

## **COMMUNITY ACTION LOCAL GOVERNMENT/ COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

BENALLA's Tidy Towns network of volunteers plays an important role, in partnership with Council and numerous other advisory committees and community volunteers in enhancing the local environment for a sustainable future.

Part of BENALLA Rural City Council's vision statement refers to a diverse balanced economic base, environmentally responsible, socially just and sustainable. This vision is certainly demonstrated in the diverse range of community projects that make up BENALLA's commitment to the Tidy Towns ethos and other related environmental and beautification initiatives.

Numerous projects completed and currently underway underpin this visionary approach which enhances the image, vitality and marketability of BENALLA. A well-designed, unique and colourful community mural artwork provides a hospitable welcome to the many thousands of tourists who visit each year - a true testament to the numerous community members who made it possible.

BENALLA's residents were perceived to have a strong sense of community and pride. Outstanding example of this is the memorial in the Botanical Gardens which celebrates BENALLA's favourite son, Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop. The sculpture celebrates his life which was filled with legendary war service achievements and welcomes visitors to stop and take time to reflect on his life and its message of integrity, friendship, humility, courage, leadership, compassion and forgiveness. A wonderful memorial that was made possible due to tireless community fundraising efforts and spirit which helped make it a reality.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION & INNOVATION**

BENALLA has a strong commitment to broad environmental protection and innovation which aims at preserving the important natural values of the area and to encourage and promote sustainable use and development.

The Regent Honeyeater is an endangered bird species, with numbers declining seriously over recent times. As a result, Regent Honeyeater coordinator and Landcarer, Ray Thomas and his network have made significant contributions to restoring its habitats together with other native fauna species, also mostly endangered. Enormous support has been gained from a broad range of volunteers to plant and restore habitat in and around BENALLA.

With numerous landholders and schools involved in the project, Ray Thomas' dedication and commitment to the project for over 10 years is to be commended. Besides other environmental benefits being realised, a major outcome to the conservation of native flora and fauna in the region has been achieved with over a quarter of a million seedlings being planted and over 700 hectares of habitat restored during this period.

BENALLA's Rakali project is a new program coordinated by the BENALLA District Environment Group. Using the character and Aboriginal name for the Australian Water Rat, Rakali, the project aims to raise awareness of water contamination, bank erosion and weeds which reduce water quality, biodiversity issues, unsustainable water use, as well as the need for healthy habitats for native flora and fauna species. The project's long term goal is to develop positive changes in attitude and practices towards healthier waterway habitat.

BENALLA's new Sustainable Land Management Directory is an essential community resource in providing information regarding environmental care, what to do, why and who can assist. Local environment groups, Council and the overall community developed the directory to promote and encourage positive environmental awareness and actions.

Other major environmental initiatives include the challenges being encountered with the removal of noxious weed Cobomba from Lake BENALLA, Council's commitment to the development of a Roadside Management Plan to protect roadside vegetation, particularly native shrubs, grasses and trees, together with the introduction of a Forest Officer whose role is, besides other tasks, to manage roadside management plans and biodiversity protection.

## **LITTER & WASTE MANAGEMENT**

The BENALLA community is committed to a broad range of recycling programs currently in place.

BENALLA's new kerbside waste and recycling collection service has made a huge difference to reducing the community's overall impact on landfill. Combining resource recovery and waste management needs with neighbouring Councils provides a regional 'economy of scale' approach to an effective system with numerous environmental and economic outcomes.

The new system has also effectively reduced previously unsightly materials and the spread of waste due to the new contained 240 litre bin system.

Residents are also able to recycle various other items including the separation of cardboard, oil, tyres, asbestos, etc at the local waste transfer station.

A unique weekly collection service to 21 rural deposit sites, strategically placed around the district further enables a broad cross section of the community to be involved in reducing household waste as well as being able to recycle more materials.

A network of 17 community volunteers are part of Council's Litter Prevention Committee and ensure that BENALLA is litter free at all times. The committee also provides advice to Council on litter 'hot spots' and suggestions for approaches to continue to keep BENALLA neat and tidy.

## **SPIRIT OF AUSTRALIA**

Numerous heritage restoration programs and the preservation of BENALLA District's rich culture are managed by many groups throughout the community.

The Tatong Heritage Group is to be commended with a strong commitment to preserving and promoting history of the area through the restoration of historic sites and introduction of commemorative plaques. Local landholders have been in particularly cooperative with the group's initiatives in recognising and celebrating the rich history of the BENALLA - Tatong railway line.

With the pride shown in the commitment to maintaining and restoring numerous historic buildings blended with the modern architecture of the Performing Arts and Convention Centre, a feeling of community pride is certainly demonstrated in ensuring surroundings are well maintained and welcoming for visitors as well as residents.

As indicated previously, BENALLA's Ceramic Mural is a community art project that links the skills of ceramic artists, architects and broad cross section within the community in a large scale piece of public art work. Described as one of Australia's largest community art works, the mural, a major tourist attraction, is situated on Lake Benalla foreshore and is a place to rest, reflect, to relax and for children to play and all enjoy. The Mural stands as a legacy to the years of dedicated commitment of numerous amateur and professional potters and benefactors that have financially contributed to the success of the project.

BENALLA's Service Clubs are major contributors to a broad range of beautification and social programs within the community. Notable example is BENALLA Rotary Club's

commitment to the restoration and renovation of the BBQ shelter situated within the Botanical Gardens and originally built by the club 40 years ago. The new shelter is a welcoming facility for residents and visitors.

## **YOUNG LEGENDS/ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION**

BENALLA's education system is committed to raising student awareness of the need to care for the environment.

In particular, Swanpool Primary School's students are actively involved in programs tailored to develop an environmental ethos for a sustainable future. Notable projects include involvement in the Regent Honeyeater program, where students collect seeds for propagation, involved with extensive planting in areas where endangered species are known to habitat as well as constructing nesting boxes for the project. Involvement in the Saltwatch program is also an important part of the schools commitment to local water quality monitoring. Recycling initiatives involve students, teachers and parents in a broad range of onsite separation and recycling of waste.

BENALLA's Youth Service Providers Network enables a monthly forum for individuals and organisations working with young people as well as interested community members to discuss, plan and initiate projects aimed at improving the quality of youth service provision within BENALLA. It also provides an opportunity to promote BENALLA as being a 'youth-friendly' community.

BENALLA's PULSE youth newspaper is a notable example of a medium where young people have a 'voice' in the community while learning skills such as team building, business development, being responsible, leadership skills and identifying opportunities to address the needs of youth in the area. Rose McKean's contributions must be recognised in her role and support to BENALLA's youth in community building, creating, designing and driving their own future.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

If not already in place, BENALLA's Tidy Towns achievement could be promoted on Council's letterheads, envelopes, etc. Local businesses and tourism operators could also be encouraged to promote the award. Promoting the community's great achievement may derive positive marketing outcomes.

Stormwater pollution prevention approaches are a challenge for communities throughout Australia. The development of grassy swales in new housing developments may assist in reducing nutrient impacts on local waterways.

As BENALLA is now recognised as Victoria's Tidiest Town 2006, there may be an opportunity to encourage further beautification initiatives around the town's commercial/industrial precinct, particularly in planting programs to assist with providing natural and visual barriers.

There is a great opportunity to develop an interpretive trail around Lake BENALLA and Broken River to highlight and share the numerous aesthetic and cultural icons within this welcoming and well used high traffic area.

BENALLA's Youth Awards program is a great method of recognising the contributions of young people in the community. Perhaps an 'eco-action' or environmental commitment category could be added to recognise and encourage further youth commitment to the environment.

*Congratulations to everyone involved in the BENALLA's Tidy Towns program and associated community projects.*

*Good luck with future initiatives and 'challenges' in helping to keep your part of Australia beautiful.*

*Dick Olesinski*  
*National Tidy Towns judge*