

History of Upwey High School and DRMC joining their resources together.

On Wednesday evening 28th May 1985 around one third of Upwey High School was destroyed by fire including the School Hall which had been funded by the School Community some years before. First news most parents heard was on the early morning radio news saying "don't send your children to school today".

The School Council called a parents' meeting a few days after the fire to ask for help and a packed meeting voted in 10 parents to organise a fundraising effort while the School Council concentrated on the immediate issues of getting students back into a classroom.

During the rest of 1985 the Fundraising Committee had amazing support from the Hills community, past and present students and their families. With the school community spread over the steep terrain each of the small communities ran their own fund raising efforts in conjunction with the committee. Larger fundraising like a car raffle were run by the Committee. The end result of amount of money raised was used as an example by a fundraising marketing company of what a community coming together could achieve.

Early in 1986 Murray McAlister who as Senior Teacher (later Vice Principal, then elected Principal) asked me to stand for School Council to ensure the money raised by the community was used to the benefit of Students not just swallowed up by the Government towards rebuilding costs. After being elected by parents I attended my first ever School Council meeting and in the first 5 minutes I was elected Vice President and 2 years later President. (I've often said I went to one meeting and went home four years later!)

The School Council had enormous issues with the Cain/Kirner Government with changes especially Joan Kirner wanted to make to Secondary Education and for a while it looked like Upwey High School would be downgraded to teaching Years 7-10 only and a Regional 11-12 School replace the Technical School at Upper Ferntree Gully. The School Council, community and most importantly the staff voted for this not to happen and Neil Pope as Member for Monbulk (and later Education Minister) was very supportive that the views of our School Community should be listened to. It at least gave us one vote around the Cabinet table. Eventually the decision was made not to continue with the plan of merging secondary schools in the outer eastern area of Melbourne together.

Meanwhile the issues of the rebuild also took up a lot of time and meetings. The final decision was that the rebuild would be a School Council contract not handled by PWD Dept. Not many realised at that time how bad the financial position of Victoria was. The Government refused to rebuild all the facilities the School had lost and that included not rebuilding the School Hall. The local sports clubs were keen to see a recreation hall being part of the rebuild and the School Council opened discussions with DRMC how they could share the resources the school rebuilt.

By introducing other users and extending the hours of use of school facilities enabled the School Council to attract other funding including Federal Government money. Every dollar was needed!

The School Council took out a \$200,000 loan with the State Bank of Victoria which was sold a few months later to the Commonwealth Bank which clearly knew how bad Victoria's financial situation was. At one stage we were being charged 20.5% interest on the loan for a building still being built with no income. The School was very close to being the first Government school to be insolvent!

Meanwhile our student numbers continued to grow even though we had a small catchment area. At this time our numbers were over 1,300 students plus a staff of over 100 and Upwey Primary School, who shared the administration area with the High School, had over 400 students plus staff. It was a very busy building site. Two wet winters didn't help the rebuild timetable. Murray McAlister, as well as having a school to run as Vice Principal, had a second task as the Rebuilding Supervisor. Once Murray took on the Principal position because of our rising numbers, the Education Department did allow the school to have 2 Vice Principals which helped a lot.

The opening of the Sports Stadium and then the Community Music Facilities of DRMC were both amazing days after all the issues the School and its community faced over a number of years. It allowed the catchment area that the School represents to continue to offer education for years 7 to 12 students plus better use of the school's facilities nearly every night and at weekends. This not only sees more people using the facility but offers better security than the school only operating from around 8.30am to 4pm which is what happened in the days before the fire.

After 4 years I went home and back to my real job and Bob Daly and his School Council continued the work we had done over the previous four years. Sadly Murray passed away a few years later but his legacy is sitting there every time people visit Upwey High School and his efforts and Bev's support through those very difficult times was fully appreciated by all of those on the School Council at that time and it's great to see DRMC is still providing its music program to the Hills community after 40 years!! Congratulations.

Chris Day
Former School Council President