



Holland Festival



The Associated Netherlands Societies in Victoria Inc. decided in 1974 to start planning a Dutch carnival for February 1975.

The combined clubs, members of the Association, made this now historic plan to stimulate and promote their plans for establishing an "Age Care" policy for the Dutch Community. The name of the project was to be "Hollands Glorie" and it was to be held at the park adjacent to Ringwood Lake. All member clubs gave their support by organising stands with their own personnel.

A village mayor was elected assisted by some councillors which formed the organising committee of the project. Despite extreme hot conditions, the show became a resounding success, the beginning of a long annual feature.

Due to Melbourne's quite changeable weather patterns, it was necessary to change location and the show was then moved to "Greaves Reserve" in Dandenong. This ground had beside adequate open areas and parking facilities, two large roofed exhibition buildings, thus some guarantee of cover if needed. So the 1976 show was held at Dandenong with many years to follow.

However the name of the project became a rather confusing issue, as the Dutch community gave it their own name "Hollandse kermis" whereas the Association thought that the name "Dutch Village Fair" would be a suitable English translation. The typical "Dutch gezelligheid" is not only created by food and drinks, but also by having lots of people enjoying each others company. The organising committee endeavoured to bring in plenty of entertainment, art displays, etc.

As the Association wanted to give the project an international flavour it attracted other Ethnic artists, dance groups and musicians and thus the public from other Ethnic groups, the name "Holland Festival" was given and is now known as one of the largest festivals in the state. Through the years hundreds of Dutch volunteers gave their service to assist with the organising, building and participation of the festival.

Next to a finance raising project, the Holland Festival had become a cultural festival, during which the Dutch had the opportunity to display their traditions in the form of food, costumes, entertainment and a real Dutch carnival feeling. One great example is the gathering of the various Limburger carnival groups who manage to give each year a great show in the celebration of carnival together with brass bands and performers from the province of Limburg. So far every festival also managed to organise a "klaverjas" card game competition, a card game dear to many Dutch.

Traditional Dutch games and equipment have been produced and are now enjoyed by the young, but often need to be taught in the use by their Dutch parents. Every year new attractions were introduced, such as some miniature buildings from the Dutch village of "Madurodam", which was brought in by KLM. Or the large balloon, which was transported to Melbourne and flew over Melbourne's suburbs to promote the festival. And dancing groups from different local ethnic communities, clog makers and other artists were flown over from the Netherlands attracting thousands of visitors to the festival.



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Till now, the association and its “Holland Festival” committee, have been receiving encouragement to continue this annual project as that created the opportunity to assist its “age care” member organisations with financial assistance so that they in turn, could provide the greatly needed housing for our Dutch aged. Age Care therefore became the initial reason for the festival, but not the only one. For instance the Association has been able to support the victims of the terrible floods in Queensland and Victoria and has been very generous during the Ash Wednesday bush fires. But funds can also be used for cultural projects.

In 1994, the Festival was moved to Sandown race course, a new and much more convenient location. This has resulted in a more efficient site for setting up and for the convenience of the Festival’s visitors. Being totally under roof, the festival is now not affected by inclement weather conditions.

The Festival has now become an annual meeting between families and friends, providing entertainment for young and old, a tradition on the calendar of Dutch Community of Victoria. Great credit goes to the Associated clubs in Victoria, because their great belief in working together for the Holland Festival project and for the well being of the Dutch community in general, has been the reason for the festival’s success over the many years.

The festival today is still organised by volunteers. The Association is committed to assist that committee. But the responsibility lies totally with the member clubs of the Association ensuring the success and continuance of the project. All finances are handled by the Holland Festival treasury and in case of a favourable outcome, the committee will then hand the proceeds to the Association on completion of the festival, to be put in trust by the Association for eventual distribution to the charities within our Dutch community.

One of the association’s projects is the “Dutch Australian Heritage Centre” and the history of Dutch migration to Australia after the war. The Holland Festival project is of immense value to exhibit the culture and traditions that the Dutch migrants brought with them to Australia. The younger generations will be reminded of the country of origin of their (grand) parents. There is always a place in Australia for our Dutch traditions and that should be promoted as it will enrich Australia’s cultural treasure.



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