

President's Speech for the Launch of the Penola Coonawarra Arts Festival

04.04.08

Welcome to the launch of the 17th arts festival.

The festival would not happen without our sponsors of whom I am happy to report are growing in number thanks to the efforts of Gail Stephenson. Tonight I would like to recognise and thank all our sponsors and especially highlight our major sponsors Festivals Australia, Arts SA, South Australian Tourism Commission, Wattle Range Council and the Coonawarra Vignerons Association. I would also like to thank our 'friends' many of whom have been able to join us here this evening.

The 2008 festival is jam packed with events, exhibitions, workshops and performances. It is the most comprehensive programme that we have ever put together and I thank the committee for their hard work and support. I would also like to thank Ben Hood from Hansen Print for his work on the programme. We have a great mix of experience, wisdom and new faces on the committee; the festival is in great hands.

This year we have decided to do things a little differently, the programme will be listed firstly online on our website, artsfestival.com.au and a printed version will follow shortly.

We have done this to encourage people to visit the website. Many thanks to Simone Burdon, a fellow committee member, who has donated a great deal of time and effort into putting the new website together. It looks terrific and allows the public to gain a better understanding of the festival through a more interactive medium.

Onto the programme...I am excited to announce that this year sees the return of the writer's element with a number of workshops and a writer's forum, the third instalment of the wine and food workshop – Dorinda Hafner will spice up the Art of Tapas and Co-Opera performs La Traviata – a great opening night at the opera, don't forget to dress up. We are in fact encouraging everyone to dress for a night at the opera!

The committee this year felt it was time to increase the number of activities for younger members of our community and have put together a detailed family programme that not only includes a family performance on Sunday afternoon, the Drumming Monkeys, but also a wide array of workshops. The kids can cook, learn about poetry, do their own visual arts and perfect the art of hip hop dancing.

Saturday night is 'Variety amongst the Vines', a bit of comedy, music, wine, food and jazz all rolled into one. Fiona O'Loughlin will host the evening with the Janet Seidel Quintet and Calamari for Breakfast keeping your toes tapping. The quintet will even play patrons requests.

Recognising the importance of the John Shaw Neilson art prize the committee has increased the first prize to \$5000. With this increase we hope to lift the profile of the prize and encourage more entrants.

As is customary there is also a myriad of exhibitions and workshops on throughout the district, the design prize winner will be announced on Saturday morning with the photographic winners announced on Saturday afternoon. To help you make sense of all the openings, announcements etc. there will be a two page overview at the front of the programme.

The committee realises that the festival won't be getting its public holiday back anytime soon so the festival will now finish with a relaxing night at the movies, the 2008 SA Short Screen winners will be screened at Leconfield Winery along with fish and chips by Limestone Coast Trout.

We have the festival posters here tonight for you to take with you, please put them up in a prominent position. Tickets for the major performances go on sale at the Penola Coonawarra Visitor Information Centre tomorrow.

Finally thanks to Koonara for hosting this event and I hope that you enjoy this year's festival.

It will be a fantastic weekend for Penola and Coonawarra. Don't forget to get online to view the whole programme, all 28 pages!

Fiona Luestner
President.