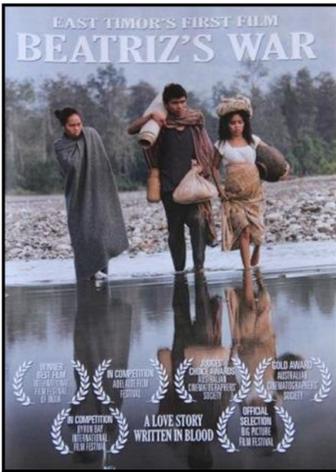


A Little Look Back Over the Year for Friends of Lolotoe

Hello Everyone,

This is not a formal newsletter but rather a ‘**Christmas Greetings and Thank You**’ note to all of you who have been involved with the Mt. Alexander/ Friends of Lolotoe group in some way this year.

It has been an eventful year as the group continues to strengthen again, building on the excellent work of our predecessors.



Our President’s Annual Report will soon be uploaded to the website but for those of you who don’t get the chance to visit it – here’s a little breakdown of the year that’s been.

In March we began the year with our first fundraiser and awareness raising event by showing the film, **Beatriz’s War at the Theatre Royal**. We are grateful to Maggie, the previous owner and to Stella Zammataro the film’s producer who came from Melbourne to take part in the Q&A which followed the film.

In May we launched once again into **Coffee Week** where sixteen very generous local cafes and businesses agreed to sell Wild Timor Coffee to promote the support of scholarships for students in Lolotoe.

This was followed up with a stall at the Wesley Hill Market giving local people and visitors a chance to learn more about Lolotoe and our local friendship group. It was interesting to see the number of people who came up to the stall and wanted to talk about some link they had with East Timor – either through family or friends involved in peace keeping tours of duty, to members of friendships groups from other cities and people who had worked and lived in East Timor themselves. Some had even been adventurers in their youth, exploring East Timor and its beauty in the 1960’s.

We have decided that next year our coffee event will be **Coffee Fortnight finishing up with a special evening at Lot 19 on Saturday 27th May**.

Don’t forget to put this event in your calendar.

In July this year **three members of the FoL committee headed off to Lolotoe** to catch up with our friends in the community.

What an exciting trip that was for Louise, Jeni and Chris. Five days in the beautiful mountain country of Lolotoe gave us the opportunity to meet with a wide range of community leaders and members, visit the kindergarten, local health clinic, primary and secondary school in Opa and walk to neighbouring villages to check out permaculture gardens and fish ponds. Along the way we were constantly met by smiling faces, beautiful singing and people of all ages who were keen to say hello and talk about their own lives.



We were very fortunate to have Louise, our president with us as a fluent speaker of Tetum, which enabled deeper conversations about the needs and aspirations of the people of Lolotoe.

The trip enabled us to clarify key needs and goals of the people of Lolotoe and this has directed our focus in the development of our strategic plan for the coming five years.



One of the **highlights in preparing for the trip** was the generous contribution made by local groups from the Mt. Alexander Shire. The VCAL class from Castlemaine Secondary College organized an excellent ‘Pencil Drive’ amongst the students of the junior campus which enabled us to take over 700 pencils and numerous small bottles of shampoo, body lotion and conditioner to the people of Lolotoe.

The students from Chewton Primary School, which has supported the community of Lolotoe for a number of years, sent solar lights to be used by teachers and students in the primary school in Opa.

The ladies of the Harcourt CWA once again, showed their generosity by sewing a large number of bags for the women of Lolotoe – very practical gifts that were warmly received.

In October this year **The Hub Castlemaine held a wonderful garden themed Garage Sale event.**

The day was beautiful, attendance was large and a total of \$1400 was raised to help create a school garden in Timor Leste.

Friends of Lolotoe are very grateful to Heather Barrett and all those from The Hub who worked to make the day such a success.



In November eight members of the Mt. Alexander/ Friends of Lolotoe group attended an excellent evening run by our neighbouring group, Macedon Ranges Friends of East Timor (MRFoET). This networking with other regional friendship groups helps us to learn from each other, share ideas and extend our connections with the people of East Timor.

Next year is shaping up to be an interesting and productive year. We will have the necessary goods and materials ready to ship to East Timor in February for the youth of Opa to set up a formal hire clothing business and for the women in the area to form **local sewing groups**. The youth have very limited opportunities to work and make money. Their idea to set up a small **‘Formal Hire’business** will give them a chance to make some money and at the same time provide clothing for people who may be looking for something to wear to that ‘special’ event. Sewing machines, along with materials and all the extras needed for sewing will also be sent in the February shipment.

Jeni Foster has established links with specialists in agriculture in East Timor in the pursuit of helping the community of Lolotoe set up **small scale chicken farming**. Funds are now available to help with the establishment of a permaculture school garden in Opa and plans are underway to offer a scholarship to **train a local person in Certificate III and IV (Library Skills)** which would enable the community library in Opa to operate regularly. There was great excitement this year when we managed to encourage the local administration to re open the library that has been closed to the community for the past few years.



Calendar of Events for 2017

You may like to look out for all or some of these events that are happening in the coming year. We would love to see you there.

1. Wesley Hill Market Stalls – Saturday Feb 11th, April 8th and October 14th.
2. Coffee Fortnight – Sunday 14th May – Saturday 27th May
3. Extravaganza Night – **East Timor – Talking Heads Saturday 27th May** – Lot19 Castlemaine

**Happy Christmas to everyone. Thank you for your support of the Friends of Lolotoe this year.
Each contribution is greatly appreciated.**