

100 years in just one week

Melbourne may have grabbed the national spotlight when it hosted the Centenary of Parliament celebrations in May, but it was events 80 kilometres away that gave a true sense of the community spirit generated by the Centenary of Federation.



Bringing history and Parliament to life at the Warragul Shire Hall. Photo: Parliamentary Education Office

In the heart of dairy country east of the Victorian capital, 500 residents of Warragul recently came out in force to debate "this thing called Federation". Joining them were Debbie Parish and Mary Fahey from the Parliamentary Education Office, who coordinated an engaging community outreach program all about decision-making and Federal Parliament.

The program commenced with professional development for teachers, followed by role-plays. Held in the Warragul Shire Hall, the role-plays took the community back to 1898, just six years after the Shire Hall was constructed, to relive the great debates leading to Federation.

"Like time travellers we were," said Debbie Parish. "As we climbed those old

Shire Hall stairs, each step took us back decade by decade until, once again, the feisty arguments for and against Federation raged across the council chamber.

"When the time came to vote on this thing called Federation . . . well, the rest is history. Just like then, we united again, six colonies as a nation.

"And to put into context what Federation had begun, our program moved forward to 2001. On the agenda a New State Bill, no easy task for those on the hill.

"Amid ringing of bells and a chamber abuzz, we considered the Bill as Parliament does. They want a new State - what's the debate, it's allowed in the Australian Constitution!"

And so it was - the Parliamentary Education Office bringing to life for the people of Warragul 100 years of history and letting them see how history can still impact on their lives.

The third stage in the Warragul Outreach Program is still to come. In September this year, staff of the Parliamentary Education Office will participate in the judging of "The Warragul Young Writers Competition" focusing on Federation poems, stories and plays.

For information on the outreach programs of the Parliamentary Education Office

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