

# East Timor libraries study tour

'A life-changing experience' was how Patti Manolis, manager of Community Learning and Libraries for Maribyrnong Council, described her recent six-week tour of library services throughout East Timor.

Ms Manolis was awarded the prestigious \$15 000 Margaret C Ramsay Scholarship by the State Library of Victoria to fund the tour. Patti's scholarship submission was supported by the First Lady of East Timor, Ms Kirsty Sword Gusmao.

'I was privileged to spend six weeks during May and June studying library and community building activities in the East Timorese capital Dili and in more remote areas of the country,' Ms Manolis said.

'Everywhere that I travelled, I was struck by the East Timorese people's hunger and desire for knowledge, and their heartfelt commitment to contributing meaningfully to the re-development of their country,' she said.

'This was obvious in their enthusiasm for developing libraries — although most are still in the very early planning stages — and establishing community centres that include library collections.'

'Although there is a lot of discussion and planning for libraries in East Timor, the situation is difficult due to a lack of financial resources and appropriate skills,' she said.

'After such a long period of occupation, colonial indifference and war, the East Timorese have not had the opportunities to develop the skills that we take for granted here in Australia.'

Prior to leaving for the study tour, Patti and colleagues from the Victorian Public Library Network organised a *Library books for East Timor trivia night* which has been described by some 'as the best trivia night ever' and 'the paradigm for all trivia nights.'

An incredible \$30 000 was raised on the evening.

Melbourne writer and comedian Brian Nankervis was the master of ceremonies with guest trivia masters including Terry Bracks, Lonely Planet's Tony Wheeler, Readings Bookshops' Mark Rubbo, and film buff Paul Harris. Musi-  
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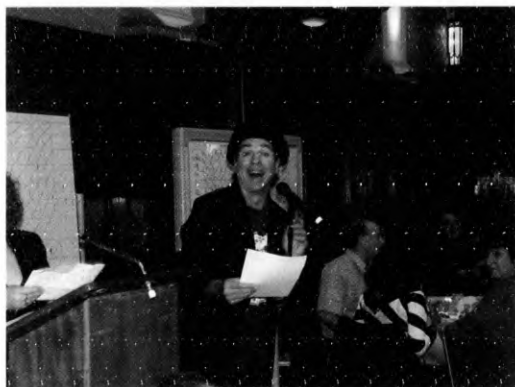
Some of the 400-plus participants who raised \$30 000 at the trivia night

inspirational warm-up were provided by the Dili Allstars. The event was attended by more than 400 people and supported by many generous sponsors who provided donations of prizes, food and money for the event.

All proceeds from the night were transferred to the Xanana Gusmao Reading Room in Dili, the first public library established in East Timor since independence. The Reading Room will co-ordinate the acquisition and distribution of new books. Libraries that will benefit from the trivia night include Xanana Gusmao Reading Room, Manatuto Public Library, Atauro Island Library, Baucau Public Library and the National University Library in Dili.



Children enjoy some quiet reading at the Atauro Island Library



Master of ceremonies Brian Nankervis works the crowd

'My six weeks in East Timor was so rewarding on both a personal and professional level. I hope that it is just the start of a long, mutually beneficial relationship between Victorian and East Timorese libraries,' Ms Manolis said.

Patti is planning another East Timorese fundraiser for next year. People interested in supporting these fundraising efforts through donations of prizes, attending the event, catering, or volunteering their time can contact Patti on 03 9688 0290, 0418 550 650 or [patti.manolis@maribyrnong.vic.gov.au](mailto:patti.manolis@maribyrnong.vic.gov.au). ■