

Sunshine Valley Gazette's post



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Hinterland's life-saving Zonta hosts changeover

By Richard Bruinsma

The women of the Zonta Club of Blackall Range, and their supporters, have quite literally saved lives. The club's members and guests gathered at Maleny recently for their Annual General Meeting and office bearers changeover dinner, where the great work of the local group was also outlined and acknowledged.

Zonta has as its mission to improve the legal, political, economic, educational and professional status of women around the globe – their work of the local club has had impacts in their own communities as well as around the world.

"We're living in such a rich country, and we're so fortunate, and the work we do, and the membership fees we pay, the fundraising we organise, is just the least we can do to give back to women who are less fortunate than us," immediate past President Julie Bevan said at the event.

"It'd be great if we lived in a world where that wasn't the case, but, 100 years on, we've still got a long way to go."

Some of the key contributions of Zonta worldwide is the preparation of birthing kits – a simple package that includes a 1m square piece of plastic, rubber gloves, a sterile blade, gauze and cord ties, and soap. The kits help expectant mothers in third world countries have a birth that is, at least, hygienic, which aims to address the shocking fact that countless women that still die globally from childbirth.

"Sadly, there's about 400 women who die giving childbirth every day, still, in the world – it's pretty horrific when you think about it - so to know that, at a local level, you're folding up pieces of plastic, and putting together kits that help create a sterile environment for child birth, which is something in western society we just take for granted, is good," Ms Bevan said.

The local club also supports the Hamlin Fistula organisation, in Ethiopia, which helps train women to act as midwives, to ensure safe births.

"The sad thing is that in countries like Ethiopia, you might ask, 'Where are all the doctors?' but all the doctors get the qualifications and then they go to the western countries, so there's a vacuum there of skilled physicians to help these women, so women are doing it for other women, which is marvellous," Ms Bevan explained.

"We do a fundraising morning tea, and we know if we raise money you can help one woman do a midwifery course and they're all becoming self-sufficient now.

"That's one thing I like about the whole Zonta movement - that we help people help themselves." Other key initiatives by the local Zonta group include the local Women of Achievement Awards, Refuge Packs (soap, deodorant, toothbrush and personal items, etc) for women entering domestic violence safe houses, Financial Literacy Workshops for women who find themselves single after a death or separation and needing assistance with finances, advocacy against domestic violence, creating the Mapleton-Flaxton-Montville Business Directory as a fundraiser, and offering study scholarships for local young female students, and more.

The incoming executive members are: President Judith Ross-Smith, Vice President Carina Biddle, Minutes Secretary Leanne Newberry, Correspondence Secretary Mary Donohue, Treasurer Dorothy Craig, Directors Gloria Cooke, Barb Inwood and Renate Ogilvie, and Alison Huth as Parliamentarian and Archivist.

It's interesting to know that both the birthing kits and the Hamlin Fistula organisation were started by Australians, and are having a positive life-saving influence on the lives of women globally.

Ms Bevan said of the involvement of her and other Zonta members: "I am so proud".

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