

## Speech notes for CR JIM PENNA, Knox Mayor

**EVENT:** Knox Little Athletics 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Mayoral Reception

**VENUE:** Knox Civic Centre

**DATE:** Saturday 20 September 2008

**EVENT TIME:** 6:30pm (arrival)

**SPEECH TIME:** 7:32pm

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The Hon **Chris Pearce** MP, Member for Aston  
Hon **Bruce Atkinson** MLC, Deputy President of the Legislative  
Council and Member for Eastern Metropolitan Region  
**Nick Wakeling** MP, Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of  
the Opposition and Member for Ferntree Gully

**Christine Billingham** — wife of the late Trevor Billingham — founder  
of Little Athletics

**Alan Triscott** — a leading identity from Little Athletics beginnings and  
the founding Chair of the Victorian Little Athletics Association

**Adam Wallish** – CEO of Australian Little Athletics

**Dean Paulin** — General Manager of Victorian Little Athletics Association  
Fellow VLAA Board Members **Neville Harris** and **Ian Brown**  
President of the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Little Athletics, **Graeme  
Lucas** and his wife and long-time EMR committee member **Diane**.

From Knox Little Athletics

President **Matt Davies** and the Knox Centre executive committee  
The 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Sub-committee, chaired by **Stephen Egan**  
and Secretary **Phil Matthews**

Founding members of the Knox Centre present,  
including **George Dyer Snr**, **Don** and **Kath Brown**,  
**Alan Johnson** and **Geoff Warren**.

Life Members of the Knox Centre and Life Members of the  
Centre's respective clubs.

Representing the Sherbrooke Centre, President **Martin Pyke**

Councillors **David Cooper**, **Debbie Field**, **Adam Gill**  
Knox Council Chief Executive **Graeme Emonson**

40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Sponsors: **Bendigo Bank** Ferntree Gully, Rowville &  
Wantirna Community Branches and **JC Quality Foods**

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Welcome everyone to this great occasion, celebrating 40 years of the Knox Little Athletics Centre.

As always, at each event, Knox City Council acknowledges we are on the traditional land of the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people and we pay our respects to their elders, past and present.

It really is a great pleasure to welcome you to tonight's reception ***in your honour***... and I use that word '***honour***' very deliberately.

You ***deserve*** the accolades of your community and certainly the respect and praise that comes with a civic reception like tonight's.

Frankly, there's nothing '***little***' about your achievements as Knox's, most popular, and well-established sporting organisation.

We've all been thinking a lot about athletics in recent days and weeks — we've all watched as Australia's best have competed in Beijing, both at the Olympic Games and the Paralympics.

And we all know — here tonight — where the true success stories lie.

They start ***here***, with Little Athletics... with children who learn skills for track and field... with parents and volunteers who ***train, nurture*** and ***develop*** the talents of our future stars.

Across Australia, Little Athletes now number close to 100,000 every year.

In Knox, the 11 clubs that make up your centre have nurtured and developed the skills of some 30,000 children since 1968.

As Mayor of Knox Council, I'm really privileged to say that we have been a strong and committed partner all those 40 years.

That partnership goes back to 12 August 1968, when Council was host to a formation meeting. An inauguration meeting followed, on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September.

And as a true demonstration of the popularity and strength of the Knox Little Athletics Centre, yours was the Centre in which Sherbrooke Little Athletics was a formation club, now operating at Kings Park.

I know that you're going to hear tonight some other stories from the past... and you'll certainly be focusing on **a lot of memories** over coming days, weeks and months throughout your celebrations.

Back then, I'm sure the Councillors of the day saw great promise in Little Athletics, thanks to the enthusiasm already generated by Trevor Billingham in Geelong in October 1964 and then with Alan Triscott to spread the sport around Victoria and interstate.

Since 1968, Council has continued its support of athletics in Knox, providing ongoing funding for track and facility upgrades.

All up, the figure would be hundreds of thousands of dollars in both grants to the facilities you have used and to your continued operation. Olympic standard run-ups for the long jump and triple jump, and redeveloped discus cages, javelin and high jump areas, have also come about through the **long-running partnership** between Knox Council and the Knox Athletics administrators.

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The current track at Knox Park — laid down in the early 1990s is a rubberised all-weather type one track — the **only** such track in Victoria outside of Olympic Park.

And as I look across your ranks tonight, that confidence shown by Council in 1968 was well placed.

Personally, I can vouch for the benefits of little athletics, having five children who competed in the 1970s. They competed at regional championships and represented as far as the Victorian Championships.

After little athletics, three of my children went on to join the Knox Athletics Club, and competed at Doncaster on a Saturday afternoon for several years.

Little aths gave them the experience and fitness to also participate in competitive tennis, basketball, netball and football.

Besides being a time keeper, starter — alongside every other hat a parent wears when their kids are playing sport — I went on to become a walk judge and coach and completed an athletics coaching program to become a nationally-accredited track and field coach. I also competed on a Saturday afternoon at Doncaster.

One of my great thrills was to follow the adult careers of little athletes like Jane Flemming.

We all know about Jane's great accomplishments at an international level in the early 1990s. As a former Australian Olympic track and field athlete, Jane was the winner of the 1990 Commonwealth Games Heptathlon and Long Jump, and competed internationally at 100m hurdles.

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The financial services organisation, of which I was the CEO, sponsored Jane for 3 years. In every branch, we had big cut-outs of Jane in a red dress. She did a lot of promotions and advertising and was very popular with our customers.

I also noticed that former Knox Little Athletics Members Kellie Wapshott and Brydee Moore have represented Australia in Beijing recently — Kellie at the Olympics Games and Brydee at the Paralympics.

Many other little athletes have gone on to excel in athletics — and other sports — as well as their professional careers and jobs. Many are here this evening.

You are a credit to athletics, to your parents and to the many club and centre volunteers who supported you.

Tonight's Mayoral Reception is Council's way of thanking everyone — past and present — for the development and growth of Knox Little Athletics Centre — to the coaches, all the various officials, organisers, time keepers, starters, the Executive and Board of Management, Club and other committees... and most, importantly the athletes.

Many of the children who have competed over the past 40 years are now parents themselves, and in turn are today's Knox Little Athletics Centre volunteers, enabling their own children to compete.

As I said this week in the local media, that's the best endorsement any sporting or community group can expect — gaining support across generations, endorsed by families voting with their feet and energy. It's a 'revolving commitment' to community building that begins with a child's growth and continues with supporting other children, other families.

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This reception is also about supporting — and celebrating — the principles of little athletics — of striving to do your best, of good sportsmanship, of respecting your fellow competitors, about getting along with others and about leading healthy and active lifestyles.

As I said, many little athletes have gone on to excel in athletics — and other sports — as well as their professional careers and jobs. Many are here this evening. Can I say to you that you are a credit to little athletics, to your parents and to the many club and centre volunteers who supported you.

I'm sure that many of you live in Knox and we are also proud of you as Knox citizens.

Indeed, Knox Council is extremely proud of everyone who has contributed in any way over the past 40 years to the Knox Little Athletics Centre — and also to the Sherbrooke Little Athletics. Over the past 40 years there must be thousands of you who have given your time in the name of Knox Little Athletics. You have invested your own time and effort not just in a sport, but also — and most importantly — in the physical and social development of our children, who are our community's future.

Congratulations and a big thank you to the members of the Organising Committee — you have done a magnificent job to have this celebration this evening — an unforgettable event!

It's now my sincere pleasure to thank you for your presence, your efforts, your time and your energies... to officially recognise the Knox Little Athletics Centre's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary and to launch the start of six months of celebrations.

Thank you.