**NORTHCOTE HIGH SCHOOL 90TH BIRTHDAY – A History of Struggle and Success**

**Gary Israel – Past Principal**

On Saturday, January the 16th 1926 The *Northcote Leader* was ecstatic; quote; “A High School at last, Temporary Building secured, opens on Feb 9th, long agitation at last successful” its headlines trumpeted! The path to this day was not easy. After all, Government secondary education was extremely limited or non-existent in Victoria until Federation in 1901. After Federation, Continuation Schools (ostensibly for teacher training were the forerunners of high schools), Technical Schools and Agricultural High Schools for rural areas, were established by the reformed Education Department of Victoria.

In the early part of the 20th. C. councillors of the City of Northcote, as it then was, and headmasters of local State Primary Schools called for a Government secondary school in Northcote. Their efforts reached fever pitch by the start of World War 1 but to no avail. There was a technical school in Collingwood and the Nationalist Party Government had only established a handful of city high schools. The War slowed the efforts of the city leaders but agitation began again in earnest at the War’s end. John Cain Senior, father of our ex-student the Hon. John Cain, both Premiers of Victoria, played a pivotal role in pressing the Government for a secondary school in Northcote. As local Member of Parliament, John Cain Senior organized 17 deputations to the Minister for Public Instruction and spoke frequently in Parliament about Northcote’s urgent need for a secondary school. This then was the first great struggle – getting a secondary school at all and it took until 1926 for success to be achieved.

The high school was set up on very traditional academic lines based on selective entry and early successes were noted. Scholarships were won, the first boys’ dux went on to become Sir Frederick Wiltshire, founder of the Wiltshire stainless steel “empire” which still exists. The Head Prefect of 1931 was Jim Cairns who went on to study at Melbourne and Oxford Universities, clinched his Ph. D. and held very senior ministries in the Whitlam Labor Government, including the position of Treasurer and Deputy Prime Minister of 1974-5.

The next great struggle for the school was obtaining a permanent building. The Department decided it favoured single sex education over co-education and pressured Northcote to become a boys’ school. It seemed to some that a permanent building depended on agreeing to the Department’s terms. The girls were sent off at the start 1929 and the new building was opened later that year ...for males only! Men in grey 3 piece suits inhabited the staffroom and classrooms then for decades. Girls were not readmitted until 1989.

The Great Depression of the 1930s offered further challenges to the school’s progress. A cash strapped Government insisted on the payment of fees for enrolments and many parents could not pay the nine pounds for students from year 9 and three pounds for juniors. Middle school enrolments declined by over 50% by 1934. Year 12 was only allowed at 3 high schools as a cost cutting measure. The Head was driven hard by the Department in pursuit of fees with detailed reporting required. It seems incredible now that despite the wording of the Education Act “Free, secular and Compulsory” that it was the Government demanding fees for enrolment. Despite this set back the school maintained high standards and achieved prominently in interschool sports.

World War II in 1939 saw the departure of many fine teachers into the armed services, leaving the young scholars to contend with some aged gentleman brought out of retirement to fill the gaps. The staff of course continued as” all male”. John Cain junior was a student at the School in these years. Students helped to dig trenches in Merri Park against the threat of air raid. Many ex-students joined up and served with great distinction during this terrible conflict. We know of 41 making the supreme sacrifice and of many awards of gallantry being earned by “our “ boys, including some 14 Distinguished Flying Crosses and 2 Distinguished Service Crosses (RAN). How many other Schools in Australia lost five ex-students, one of them a teacher at the school, in association with the ultimately ill-fated HMAS *Sydney*, sunk in battle against an Axis raider, with all hands, in1941?

The 1950s to 1970s offered great changes to Australian society as the era of mass migration took hold. NHS saw a big influx of new arrivals to the country and its traditional curriculum came under stress from students lacking much knowledge of English. The support structures for them were slow to be funded by Government. The buildings were showing their age and the laboratories were little different from those installed in 1928. Nevertheless the core of new students adapted to the approaches of NHS and maintained high academic standards and continued to produce some fine outcomes in extra-curricular pursuits thanks to the ongoing core of very dedicated and experienced teachers. One of the great features of this school from the very beginning has been the general excellence and stability of service of the teaching and non-teaching staff, the great support given by parents and School Council and the outstanding esprit de corps of the student body. Cr William Olver for instance was on School Council continuously from 1926 to 1964. President from 1929 until his death.

The challenge through to the 1990s was to update the buildings and equipment, get rid of sagging old portables, navigate school closures and amalgamations, successfully reintroduce coeducation and prepare for the electronic age. Re-establishing music in the curriculum after a total absence of several years was another major issue. In the mid-1990s NHS was announced as one of the 3 State secondary Navigator Schools and received millions of dollars in new funding for buildings & equipment. The School was reborn, building on the strengths of the past to create a great school for the future. The revitalized school was designed for 1200 students. Now there are 1600 students and a new major challenge emerges which is in fact the old and ongoing accommodation problem. Hard work lies ahead for the School administration and Council to resolve this vital matter.

Northcote High School has an enviable list of distinguished alumnists. I have mentioned a few. To the names of Jim Cairns, Fred Wiltshire and John Cain add Senator Don Chipp, Australian Democrats founder and former Liberal Minister; Bruce Dawe, Australian poet; Walter Bourke, premier male dancer Australian Ballet; Gilbert Brealey key figure of the Australian film industry; Garth Buckner QC; Sir William Cole , Suzy Wilkinson public Servants; Noel Ferrier, actor; Jack Hamilton, General Manager of the VFL; Neville Howell, Olympic Medalist; Professors Ken Inglis, John Ritchie , Historians; Men of music like Len Weir, Les Miers and Brian Brown; Max Lay and Colin Sach, outstanding engineers; Chris Leptos and Jac Nasser of the business world; Churchmen like Warren Bartlett and Albert McPherson; Phoebe Montague, fashion designer; Medicos like Professors Graeme Young, Alex Lopata, Peter Barlis, Bob Marshall, Evange Romas, Ian Rechtmann; Normie Rowe famous pop singer of the 60s; sports guru Dick Telford and perhaps more importantly the thousands of ex-students who have contributed in ways great and small to the success of our nation. I finish with the words of the School song “Here’s to the Green, the Purple and the Gold, the colours of the School we love so well”.

**Northcote High School - Now!**

Matthew Thomas - School Captain

My journey at Northcote High School began after seven years at Preston Primary School. Although outside the Northcote High School zone, attending Northcote was always appealing to my family; my twin sister and I both moving into secondary school. The opportunities the school provided and the environment and reputation that Northcote had established were like no other school in our area. On my first day of school, being the nervous and anxious twelve year old that I was, I found my new surroundings to be terrifying. Everything was new to me. Northcote was double the size of the primary school that I had attended. With the diverse opportunities that Northcote has provided me, however, I have become a more skilled, confident and capable individual. The person I am now is in sharp contrast to the person I once was, with the support and opportunities that the school has provided me with.

Northcote has been at the forefront of social progression and a key participant of the internationalisation movement. The global connections and relationships that have been established and maintained throughout our history is a credit to our innovation and global citizenship. In the 1930s, before international travel was accessible, Northcote wrote letters to Staszic High School in Lublin. While Staszic High School was another tragic casualty of the war, Northcote has continued to pursue its goals  of excellence and combining a strong community focus together with a growing international focus. The 1950s saw the school accept a large influx of immigrant from a wide range of countries. In the 1990s we established a sister school relationship with Huabei Number 1 school in China, a partnership which remains strong and vitally important today in building friendships across the globe, through providing opportunities for international students, whilst also rewarding opportunities for local students. With the domestic and international trips available, students are able to gain deeper insights and connections to the world beyond the school. This year, students are visiting Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, working with small communities through actions of philanthropy. Trips to China, Malaysia and the United States are also available for music students, providing a range of unique experiences.  
The global opportunities that the school provides have had a profound impact on my schooling, knowledge and ambitions. In 2013, I was fortunate enough to go on a school trip to Italy, which was a life-changing experience, influencing my perspective on the world. Furthermore, the International Student program has given me incredible experiences and opportunities. Throughout my time at Northcote, I have had the privilege to meet amazing students from many different countries - some of which I have developed friendships with which I hope to last beyond my time at the school. This program, as well as the influential and supportive teachers I have had, has influenced my desire to pursue a future in politics and international relations. The cultural diversity and range of opportunities of the International Students program has benefitted the school and all of its students significantly, and I look forward to seeing this program developed even further in the future.​

**Northcote High School - Now!**

Lily Chalmers – School Captain

It was sense of community that led me to coming to Northcote High School. My parents and I were undecided as to whether I would come here or attend an all girls catholic school, but we decided that a school in which my brother and I, could stay together was best, leading me to walk in through those gates as a rather small year 7. Knowing it was our school, and that we belonged there.  Something that we all share, demonstrated by our attendance here today.

However, in the history of the school; it was not always possible for both boys and girls to come to Northcote High School. After, the first two years of the school being co-ed, all the girls were sent to Preston Girls College- and it remained an all boys school until the late 1980’s, about ten years before I was born. Although, for many of you sitting here, it might be hard to imagine what school would have been like if girls were at the school, I couldn’t imagine the school without them- As ultimately in the wider world genders are not separated.

The strong community that has always existed at Northcote has provided both my brother and myself with an environment in which we strive to be at our best. The fact that this is available to all students in the Northcote area, not just one gender is a credit to the families who fought for their local school to provide education to both their sons and daughters. It is also credit to the female students’ who once the school return to being co-educational- put up with the initially extreme gender imbalance, which lead to quirky occurrences such as the girls from NHS playing in the all-male division of soccer, as there were not enough girls to form an all-girls team.

The value on which the school returned to being to co-ed, one of ensuring we create change for the better in many ways frames the student experience; from the Philanthropic projects to the Public Art club to Rainbow day, each of these initiatives encourages students to do something to make the school or wider community a little better.

This idea of improving the world around us has in many ways driven my understanding of the world, and in fact directed where I would like to go next. From the idea that we live in a world that is not always just; I would like to pursue a career which seeks to make it more fair for all. My current interests lie in pursuing a career in International Humanitarian or Human Rights Law, or working in this area to enforce the laws which currently exist to protect those in situations of discrimination, persecution or conflict. This passion would not have been fostered, without the strong network of teachers and students’ around me.  
On behalf of the 1,700 students today, we thank those who came before us for their contributions to the school, and their efforts in building the community we celebrate today. Your legacy will shape the school in the future, hopefully for another ninety years.

**Northcote High School – Community, Courage and Change**

Kate Morris - Principal

Earlier this year I received an electronic 90th birthday card from a former student…. I’ll start again earlier this year the school received a 90th birthday card from a former student. The card was from Tian a Northcote High igh High graduate of the late 90s, a lawyer, currently posted in Shanghai. I met Tian three years ago at Beijing Airport, whilst on a MUSIC tour with the brilliant Northcote High Music Program – he was so excited to re-connect with his old school.

Tian’s heartfelt words affirm the affection held by many associated with this school:

*Northcote High is a place committed to the best of Australian values and aspirations – unity in cultural diversity, humility in the support of achievement and an unrelenting dedication to being your best. Not only your best academically, but also having fun, working hard, taking risks with learning new ’things’ and being part of something.*

*Northcote High is a school that gives students the chance to find their potential, regardless of background. It’s a school that embraces individuals and their contributions and does not advantage privilege.”*

Tian concludes:

*I’d like to thank the school, teachers and broader staff for assisting me to realize my potential.*

*A 90th celebration is a significant milestone in the history of this great school - congratulations!*

Northcote High is one of only a few non selective public secondary schools in Australia to stand the test of time.

Our school has consistently stepped up to the mark:

* striving for excellence in experiences and outcomes for young people
* providing opportunities for staff to work collaboratively and grow professionally,
* whilst holding a deep sense of commitment to community - ensuring the school reflects the values and ideals of the community of which it is a part.

Northcote High is a shining example of public education at its best, history is made each day through the efforts of students and teachers – learning is alive in classrooms and beyond.

For example just in the last few weeks students led International Women’s Day celebrations raising awareness and money for a women’s only bus service in Port Moresby, they wrote entries on women for Wikipedia and created an art installation titled ‘Bloom’ to elevate the role of women in literature.

Students debated at the Northcote Lions Club, rehearsed VCE Drama Solos, featured in the in TOPs Arts exhibition at the Museum of Victoria, competed in Maths, chess, aerobics, baseball and swimming, camped at BOHO and participated in a careers expo featuring ex-students and parents in ‘new world professions’. This is our school today - each day – real world learning in our class rooms and beyond

In 2015 the year 12 graduating class received brilliant results - the best in the modern era of our school with 25% of students achieving an ATAR of 90 and above and 15% of study scores of 40+.

Outcomes as measured by external markers like ATARs, 40+s and NAPLANs are just one way to measure a school. On all of these measures Northcote High rates very well. This is a testament to the support of school councils, strong relationships with local primary schools, the vision of past Principals in partnership with staff, community trust and appreciation and finally and most importantly the excellent efforts of students, who walk in the gates of our school each day - positive, ready to learn, to have fun and to take opportunities to challenge and create positive change like the thousands of students who preceded them.

We are engineers, historians, artists, entrepreneurs, we design, educate, lead in areas of sport and community, we are business owners from trades to IT, hospitality to property development, we are performers, musicians dancers and social commentators, we are contributors, we volunteer, we work in business, medicine, law and social justice…

Northcote High Graduates are everywhere!

Northcote High has demonstrated over the past 90 years its capacity to meet challenges head-on, to show courage and to be responsive to the issues of the time.

In 2008, The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* were adopted nationally. The declaration states as its first goal

* that schools promotes equity and excellence.

It further states that all school must:

* provide all students with access to high-quality schooling that is free from discrimination
* and ensure that socioeconomic disadvantage ceases to be a significant determinant of educational outcomes

This declaration mirrors the goals of Northcote High since its inception. These goals have been at the forefront of the school’s planning and actions.

Adaptability, change and innovation have been key to the schools success – celebrating the traditions of the schools past whilst living the schools motto – ***Meliora Sequamur* – ‘finding the better path…’**

The world is changing and we need to change too.

Over the past decade Northcote High has committed to establishing the **corner stones for its future** as the school and its community grows and changes… the expectation is for enrolment of 2000+ students by 2020.

***Realising the Vision*** is key – through creating the conditions and environments for our young people’s learning… we must expand the types of interactions **all of our** students experience and recognize that being ‘in’ the world is essential to developing the thinking, skills and attributes that ‘our’ students and ‘our’ world will need in the future.

Other recent projects include partnering with school council – staff, students and families to ***Re-Vision our Values*** - *Achievement, Curiosity, Humanity and Fairness* frame all that we do.

A Campus Master Plan has been developed and presents a compelling vision for the schools facilities and social spaces again supporting best outcomes for young people

* integral to the plan is the critical guiding principle of community partnership and specialist hubs – a vision that can only be achieved through partnering with local, state and federal governments to make this a reality.
* Small steps have been made with recent State Govt funding of a Performing Arts space- which is in the design phase.
* Future pressing projects await funding – we desperately need a community sports stadium, along with upgrades to Art and Design, Science, a library/learning commons and more

Schools as community hubs are the future and Northcote High is committed to leading the way and partner with government to make this a reality.

Importantly, after families, teachers can be the strongest influence on the lives of young people.

Teachers hold a privileged position because of their expertise, values, attitudes and can have a lasting impact on young peoples’ self-esteem, ability to think, to research, to evaluate and consider the importance of what they learn.

In my role as Principal and I am sure from the perspective of Gary and Gail I cannot speak highly enough of the outstanding educators who are a part of this school.

Over the past 90 years Northcote High has had more than its fair share of what many would regard as the ‘best of the best’ - dedicated and inspiring professionals determined to give their students a first-class education. There are many in this room today and we salute you!

Northcote High has a strong track record of taking on the challenge of shaping a vision for its school community.

Victorian schools have been supported by an education reform agenda that is deeply respectful of the local community context, recognising that partnership with community places schools in the best position to have optimum impact on learning.

Northcote High has a long tradition of being outward facing and in so doing has led, piloted trialled innovated on so many levels.

Past Principals and staff have formed effective partnerships and relationships within our school and our community particularly local primary schools and tertiary providers and more broadly across the education globe.

Northcote High continues to elevate Internationalisation as core to our work, exemplifying the importance of being ‘borderless’ in terms of who we connect with and learn from.

This year we celebrate a 17 year sister school friendship with Hauibei No. 1 High School in Anhui – China. Each year students, staff and families connect deepening our understanding of each other and our cultures.

In the next few weeks we hope to receive final approval from Minister Merlino to partner with Huaibei no.1 High School to deliver the VCE in China; making Northcote High the first government school in Australia to engage in internationalisation to this level.

This ambitious project builds on Northcote High Schools very successful International Student Program, which is a now notably welcoming second generation alumnus into our school.

Creative and progressive public leadership is a feature of Northcote High School, ‘our job’ is to continue to be creative and outward facing and in so doing maximise the opportunities afforded to the learners we serve.

Please join me in with a celebratory three cheers to recognise and congratulate Northcote High School:

* *For* accepting the challenge to lead the Northcote Community in our complex world of change
* For supporting *young people to realise and enhance their talents*
* *For fostering a community where positive relationships allow all to challenge ourselves and each other.*
* *And for celebrating that the paths we each follow will take us out into the world, changed and different.*

Happy 90th Birthday Northcote High School – Hip Hip Hooray!