Building a great future

St Catherine’s College is about to undergo a transformation! Beginning in November 2001 and continuing for a period of 12 weeks (we hope!) we will be undertaking a major building project. When our residents return next year, they will have to adjust to these new facilities . . . making a choice about which room to watch TV. Will I go and sit in the Media Room and watch Fox-Sports on the big screen, or go to the Court Party Room (one of the converted squash courts) or perhaps to the regular Junior Common Room? Or should I just go and finish my assignment upstairs in the new computer room?!

The Council decided this year that we would proceed with the plan originally proposed by the architects who designed these buildings in the 1950’s. The flat roof above the JCR was always intended as a suitable site for expansion so we are going ahead with adding another level. The rooms that will be provided include a computer room with 10 computers, internet access, scanning facilities and multiple printers, including a laser printer; a purpose built Senior Common Room with its own kitchen and balcony area; a Media Room with DVD player, a large screen, rear projection television and access to pay TV; and a group study room with improved working space and internet outlets.

Downstairs we are extending the kitchen area of the JCR to provide a dining facility. In doing so, we have made provision to remove the steps and to ensure that there is access for the disabled in this ground floor area.

The former Treasurer of the Council, Michael Carren, had urged fellow Councillors that it was important that St Catherine’s College maintain its high profile amongst Colleges. Not only was it important that our College provide attractive, secure facilities with high level pastoral care and academic support, but the College should seek to provide the best possible technological support for its residents. Funding such initiatives is always a challenge for non-profit organisations but the Council agreed that unless the College undertook these improvements, it would fail to attract new residents.

With these changes, we will actually have

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Building better facilities not only makes academic life easier (and more enjoyable!) for our residents, but these facilities keep St Catherine’s a successful contender in the competitive student accommodation market. As was said in one of Kevin Costner’s many baseball movies, *If you build it, they will come.* But of course, “building it” is an expensive exercise.

St Catherine’s is a self-funded independently operated college. Until the late eighties the colleges received government funding which helped enormously in meeting much of the operating expenses.

Following that change in funding, St Catherine’s struggled for a number of years. Not only because of the withdrawal of government funding, but also, through the downturn in the rural sector which meant that the College could not fill all its rooms. During that period, the facilities became run down and major maintenance and upgrades were virtually zero.

The change in the university funding arrangements necessitated a change in outlook for universities. Seeking opportunities to develop other sources of income became essential and one clear option was to offer an alternative to overseas students for university education. Our near Asian neighbours embraced this opportunity enthusiastically and now form a significant portion of our student population.

In 1995 the college took a business approach to the operations of St Catherine’s. The fees and expenditure controls were structured in such a way as to provide for the future up keep of the College.

This approach, together with the most generous bequests from Malvina Wood, Jean Randall, Joyce Riley and Jean Rogerson, has enabled the College to upgrade most of the facilities and accumulate sufficient funds to embark upon our current building project.

In fact over the past 7 years, the College has spent over $1.6m on major maintenance and upgrade work to the College.

Now to the future! The Council adopted a philosophy to continually improve the College and the general standard of the facilities to optimise the opportunities for our students to reach their full potential academically. To this end we sought help from architects to develop a master plan including additional facilities. Unfortunately, the cost of implementing the suggested plan was way outside the possible resources available to the college in the present and the foreseeable future.

We then looked at opportunities to expand and improve within our current buildings. The current building project as explained in our cover story, is the first phase of that program. Other improvements that have been identified include disabled access and facilities, air conditioning student rooms and building post-graduate accommodation.

Unfortunately, future developments will have to wait until we can raise the funds necessary. To assist this endeavour, the Council is hoping to strengthen the alumni of the college and invite support similar to that of the past when the College was first muted and the university women got behind the effort to make St Catherine’s a reality. The generosity of the benefactors already mentioned has made an enormous difference to the College.

You will soon be receiving further information on our building fund, which will explain how you can help to build a great future for tomorrow’s women of St Catherine’s College.

Lorna MacGregor – Chair of Council

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another six study/bedrooms bringing our total to 145 with six residential tutors. Our residents are excited about the proposed changes and are looking forward to their return. Amanda Olsen, a resident for the past three years and a Tutor for 2002 commented that “We say goodbye to the dinosaur residence VHS and embrace the New Age of the DVD, Foxtel and all-night brawls as we cats bare our claws to watch our desired programs!”

Yvonne Rate – Head of College
When we started at St Catherine’s College in 1960, we were all fresh out of high school and looking forward to experiencing a new life at university. A brand new College was an added bonus. Forty-nine young women from a great variety of schools and backgrounds ventured into the College not really knowing what to expect. Meeting up with so many new people was rather daunting . . .

Information about the courses available was limited, but so were our choices. In 1960, women were not allowed to study engineering at UWA. There were just a handful of women studying Law, Medicine and Commerce. The majority of women were in Arts, Science and Education. We of course were the only College at UWA that housed women students. Currie Hall, St George’s College, Kingswood were all men’s colleges and St Columba College was not established until 1970.

At that time, there were in fact only 3,508 students at UWA and we felt that we knew almost everyone . . .

We had some fairly strict rules at College at that time. There was a curfew, a strict guest policy and everyone wore academic gowns to formal dinners on weeknights. In 1960, the “Visitors Policy” stated:

“Gentlemen may be entertained in the Entrance Hall in the afternoon and evenings until 9.30pm on week nights and Sundays and until 11.30pm on Saturdays. In addition, gentlemen may be entertained in students’ rooms on Sundays 2pm to 5.15pm.” These rules however were no bar to a variety of inter-College pranks.

A tradition in our time was an annual drama production by St George’s College students and St Catherine’s students. The first of these productions “Crime and Punishment” took place at the Dolphin Theatre in 1962 and was produced by Colleen Clifford. The proceeds from this went to the St Catherine’s College Building Fund.

On November 17, we went back to St Catherine’s for lunch and a catch-up with other students of the sixties. Despite the many changes and improvements over the years, there was a sense of “coming home”. (Improvements there have certainly been – when the Head of College announced at the reunion that student rooms were to be air-conditioned, many memories flooded back of chilly winter evenings spent grudgingly feeding precious shillings into voracious little radiators). After an excellent lunch, we toured the corridors of the College, checking out our old rooms and the various landings on which we had spent many hours drinking too much coffee, with lumpy dried milk.

Everyone present at the reunion seemed to carry on where they had left off – 40 years before. It was as if the intervening years had never happened. This was all the more extraordinary as this was a gathering of women with considerable and varied achievements in the professions, the academic life, the arts, and the sporting arena, as well as in their own personal and family lives. After they left College, they went their separate ways, many to live in different parts of Australia and others to live overseas in the UK, the USA, France, Germany and South Africa, to name only a few. The vitality which drove their achievements is still there in abundance, but so too is friendship and a sense of belonging to a College community.

Usually the overwhelming impression which lingers after a reunion such as this, is how much has changed. What was so pleasantly surprising about this reunion was exactly the opposite – how little had changed. The College itself, the University and the world in which we live are inevitably very different to what they were in the 1960s. Despite all this, the “College spirit” which Dr Eden (the Warden) was so keen to foster, and the friendships which resulted, have endured and continued to this day.

More reunions of ex-St Cat’s girls are planned for the future. The next reunion will be for residents who lived at the College in the 1970’s. This will be held some time in 2002, so students of the 70’s, start getting your list of contacts together!
YIIIIHAARRRR!!! That was the call that welcomed our residents back to the College at Commencement Dinner. The Bush Dance theme was a great success, do sa do-ing really helps break the ice!

The start of the inter-college sporting competition (WICSA) saw St Cat’s win the first event of the year, swimming. Sadly, things went downhill from there in the sporting arena, but our fighting spirit never waned!

The activities kept rolling on as the year progressed, including a weekend at Rottnest; a two day retreat full of soul searching and group hugs; café and pub crawls; an evening river cruise; Faculty nights; a visit to the Monet and Japan exhibition; international cuisine nights, Melbourne Cup Luncheon and not to forget Mrs Taylor’s craft lessons.

Our major events were as spectacular as ever – Casino Night, the Annual Ball, Multi-cultural Night, Arts Week and the grand finale – the Moulin Rouge themed Valedictory Dinner.

It really was a great year and as the photographs show, our residents had a ball. The House Committee, tutors and staff are to be commended for all their efforts in making these events happen, and of course thank you to the residents for getting involved and making them a success. Here’s to 2002!!