

# Upper Yarra Community Environment Park

## Sustainable living solutions for the Yarra Valley

### UYCEP Annual Report November 2008

The Vision for our centre is that it will be: “**A vibrant and innovative Community Environment Park, creating and supporting sustainable living solutions in the Yarra Valley**”. In 2008 we laid the foundations towards the achievement of this vision.

#### THE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT PARK CONCEPT

The Upper Yarra Community Environment Park (UYCEP) officially began with the formation of the committee of management over 18 months ago. But of course it didn't appear just out of a vacuum – it is the outcome of the visions and actions of many people and organisations. CERES Environmental Park has been the primary model – many people involved in this project have been inspired by the potential of CERES to engender a culture of sustainability through harnessing the creative energy of the community ([www.ceres.org.au](http://www.ceres.org.au)). There are other established models overseas as well such as CAT (Centre for Alternative Technology) in Wales and Auroville in India. Indeed ‘CERES type centres’ are today springing up across Australia. The dream of our *Community Environment Park* in the Upper Yarra has finally arrived.



CERES 2008

#### ORGANISATIONAL PLANNING

Following the formation of the UYCEP Committee of Management the group became Incorporated in 2006 with the aim of creating an independent organisation that drew in a wide breadth of community expertise and support. The proposal to locate the center at the old UYCH horticulture and business training park in Wesburn was supported by the Yarra Ranges Shire following the recommendation from a consultant that this was indeed the best location for the centre on shire owned land in the Upper Yarra. It was clear that the project would contribute directly to the achievement of the objectives of the shires ‘2020 Vision’. A 5 year lease agreement was signed and a Community Partnership Agreement followed soon after. As a vote of confidence in the project the Warburton Community Bank made an initial seeding donation to cover basic administrative costs.



There have been several Community Planning days in this ‘start up’ phase of the project. The most recent, facilitated by the Shire, resulted in the development of Strategic Business and Implementation plans. This was followed by the creation of working groups: Master Planning, Community Engagement, Governance and

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Project coordination. These working groups have been researching and facilitating these key areas of focus and making recommendations to the committee of management

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

We have a growing community support and good will. A recent grant from the Shire (through the patronage of the current councillor, Monika Keane) has begun the process of creating arts infrastructure and has seen the development of our first 'site group' – the UYCEP Community Arts Group.

We have applied for funding for a 'Community Engagement Coordinator'.

This position will facilitate community involvement and development on the site through the development of the



'Sustainable Community Engagement Plan' and the Master Planning process. We expect to develop many more options and opportunities for concrete community involvement in the centre in years to come.

### A SENSE OF PLACE

A critical part of CERES' identity is its actual location and embodiment on 4 hectares of land in the inner city. We are blessed with a wonderful site for the creation of our CEP. The 7 hectare site at 711 Old Warburton Rd, Wesburn, a chicken farm in a previous life is a lovely rural and bush landscape setting. There are some great established gardens (including bushfood gardens developed by UYCH), substantial buildings including an old farm house, and massive chicken sheds. There is huge potential and opportunity for creative development of the site.

The Site Projects working group and volunteers have been tirelessly working to clean up the site and renovate the old farm house that will be used as the interim site-centre. We have recently secured a grant of \$30,000 for the development of a Master Plan from the State Government Community Support Fund. Already many hundreds of hours of volunteer time have been put into maintenance and preparation of the old farm house and weed infestations. A UYCH Horticulture course has been working to re-establish the propagation infrastructure and bush food gardens.





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### 2009, THE YEAR AHEAD - PLANNING, CONSOLIDATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The hard work has just begun. This year will focus on planning and administrative infrastructure development, site maintenance and community engagement. The development of the site **Master Plan, Sustainable Community Engagement Plan, Strategic Business Plan** and **Governance model** will be a large part of our focus. The Master Plan will create the rationale for site development in context of site constraints and the UYCEP Vision and Objectives. The Community Engagement Plan will see genuine engagement with the community in the exploration of the possibilities for sustainable living. The Business Plan and Governance model will ensure that the centre is effectively managed on behalf of the community.



We will ready the site to welcome the community. There is a huge task ahead of us to rid the site of environmental weeds. The completion of the renovations for the farm house offices and the arts facility space will occur early in the year. We will open the site to the public and establish a solid membership base. A key component to the successful development of the park will be the employment of paid staff to begin to take over the heavy lifting from the committee of management. The development of a website and marketing will be important means of 'getting our message out' to the community.

*By 2009 the Upper Yarra Community Environment Park will have a critical mass of support from the community, key stakeholder groups and sponsors and will be well on its way to realising its vision of creating and supporting sustainable living solutions in the Yarra Valley. Indeed the need for CEP's that can facilitate and demonstrate sustainable living options has never been greater. There are many critical environmental issues that we will need to positively and creatively address. None are more urgent than raising awareness and action on the impacts on the world climate systems of our current lifestyles.*

### THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS, SPONSORS AND SUPPORTERS

We are especially indebted to the volunteers who have given their time to create the UYCEP Committee of Management. We also must make a special thank you to Shire of Yarra Ranges Council Officers Kim Swinson and Bernie Lobert for their unflagging support and energy. We must also thank those organisations who have joined us in partnership or sponsorship: Shire of Yarra Ranges, Upper Yarra Community House, Warburton Community Bank, Department of Planning and Community Development (State). CERES Environment Park and Swinburne University.

Keith Jesse – President UYCEP  
19<sup>th</sup> November 2008

