

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL, DEVONPORT CHAPTER
70TH ANNIVERSARY LUNCHEON
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
DEVONPORT COUNTRY CLUB, SATURDAY 25 JUNE 2022

Good afternoon everyone. As your Patron, I am delighted to have been asked to celebrate your 70th anniversary with you all today.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community. I recognise a history of truth, which acknowledges the impacts of colonisation upon our First People. I stand for a future that respects and acknowledges Aboriginal stories, culture, language and history.

May I acknowledge among us:

- Sally Cooper, President
- Lyn Johnson, Past President
- Kate Beer, Treasurer
- Mayor Annette Rockliff, and
- Christine Johnstone, President Soroptimist International South East Asia Pacific

A 70th anniversary of your organisation is a milestone worthy of celebration, especially in today's world dominated by online meetings and forums. Online meetings have had a regrettable consequence of the closure and disbandment of many longstanding community organisations and clubs.

Your Devonport Club was formed in March, 1952. It was an historical first, as it was the first Soroptimist club formed without the aid of an overseas organisation.¹

After just two years, your club was regarded by the community as, and I quote, "worthwhile"; and a club where "the spirit of friendship is enjoyed, while an outstanding community job is done".²

Newspaper articles of the time record community work done by your Devonport club as delivering firewood to the 'aged folk'; delivering Easter cheer to the boys

¹ The Examiner 7 March 1952 [07 Mar 1952 - SOROPTIMIST CLUB IN DEVONPORT - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

² Ibid

of the Roland Home, blankets, sheets, and Christmas parcels to needy families and pensioners, organising the adoption of a Legacy child; and, assisting families attending the chest clinic.³

Whilst the social issues you face may have changed in the last 70 years, today you largely fight the same battles for your community; to support those in need and to promote equality.

Soroptimist International advocates the creation and provision of opportunities to educate, empower and enable women and girls. I understand that your club is constantly and actively engaged in advocacy and fundraising to achieve these critical objectives.

You assist and support organisations such as the Warrawee Women's Shelter, the Royal Flying Doctor Service, and the Hamlin Fistula Association.

This year you have also looked overseas and raised much needed funds for Ukraine. I understand that Ukrainian Soroptimist members are able to distribute your funds to those who are in most need. This is a wonderful and touching example of how the Soroptimist sisterhood unite to provide assistance, compassion, and care around the world wherever it is needed.

I particularly note that you provide beanie and book packs for local premature babies. I am aware how appreciated and touching such gifts are, as our daughter was the recipient of books and beanies for her premature baby last year.

In addition to your constant fundraising efforts, you are active in advocating women's rights and equality and raising awareness about domestic violence.

Evidence based research shows that gender inequality is a contributing factor to violence against women.⁴ In recognition of this, your Club provides three scholarships for local primary school girls moving from grade 5 to 6. These scholarships assist with school fees, uniforms and textbooks and also assist with accessing scholastic and extracurricular opportunities such as excursions and sporting equipment. In addition to this, you also award two scholarships each year for women to access TAFE courses. May I congratulate you all on your active promotion of education as a means of empowering girls and women; education is vital in counteracting systemic inequality and also in raising aspirations.

³ The Advocate 27 March 1954 [27 Mar 1954 - Soroptimist club "worthwhile" - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

⁴ [Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia – Summary \(2nd ed.\). \(ourwatch.org.au\)](#)

I hope today, as Tasmania's second female Governor out of 29, that the movement towards equality and empowerment for women hastens somewhat. An apposite statement is that of UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, that achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls is the unfinished business of our time, and the greatest human rights challenge in our world."⁵

My own journey has not been without personal challenges. To give one example, when I was made partner at a law firm, for two years, I received 60% of the salary of my male partners because I had a husband with a 'good salary.' Disappointingly, the gender gap remains today and directly contributes to the reduced financial independence of women. Women continue to have a reduced ability to achieve financial security, quality of life, and housing. They can be trapped in abusive relationships.

Thankfully, your clubs work within and support the community. Your objectives and work make you visibly stand out as role models for young girls and women. Through your actions, you empower them; you show that opportunities are available; you raise aspirations. You also anchor the values of friendship, community, generosity, kindness, and compassion, which remains as important as they were 70 years ago.

Quite simply, you are inspirational.

And so, may I thank each and every one of you for all that you do for communities, both here and abroad.

May I also extend my warmest congratulations on your club's 70th anniversary. A remarkable achievement indeed. May your community enjoy the benefits of this club another 70 years more.

Thank you.

⁵ <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/gender-equality#>; accessed 21 June 2022