

I have been asked to talk to you this evening on the University of the Third Age.

What is the University of the Third Age? or U3A as we commonly describe it.

I guess a lot of people have the idea that when you retire, the grey matter in your brain ceases to work, and you settle down to drink tea, play indoor bowls and bingo for the rest of your days.

This is the right approach to retirement for some but many retirees, my wife and I included, feel that mental stimulation is a major requirement at this time of life.

And so when we arrived in this district two years ago we were introduced to the University of the Third Age.

A formal definition is - It is a voluntary self help ~~organization~~ <sup>association</sup> for providing mature people with short or continuing programs of intellectual and cultural activities which will give stimulation and enjoyment to their lives in a more relaxed way than in the formal Adult Education system.

During the weekend I was looking through the newsletter issued by the Nowra U3A and came up with this comment by a member - I quote -

"Just because I had to retire from work, I didn't feel I had to retire from life. What was needed was intellectual stimulation, not craft workshops and social groups, which I don't much care for. I wanted something to widen my horizons, something to give me a sense of achievement without having to undergo the pressure of exams. U3A was exactly what I was looking for.

It was such a pleasure to be part of this self generated, self sustaining group, giving me the opportunity to catch up on some much wanted learning, which I enjoy a great deal. U3A has become a part of my life and I hope it will be for a long time to come." unquote

The organization commenced in France in 1973 and the concept in various ways has spread throughout the world.

The French have determined there are four stages of life as distinct from Shakespeare who wrote his famous verse describing the seven stages of man. The French describe the stages of life as -

- First Age - Youth and ~~College~~ Adolescence
- Second Age - Wife and Homemaking
- Third Age - Active Retirement
- Fourth Age - Dependence

The use of the word University is perhaps a little pretentious.

The original concept of a University was a community of scholars who came together to discuss and learn about any topic at all of mutual

interest. The idea of the USA has much in common with this concept but the scholarship required is no more than a lively interest in the

topic - all have something to contribute if only through their questions. There is a great deal of wisdom, knowledge and skills amongst

retired people. It should be used at least for the benefit of the third

Age group or even for the whole community. So how is it used?

We run lectures, study circles or discussion groups depending on

the subject and how the tutor or leader wishes to approach the subject. Everything is done on a voluntary basis.

How did we start in this district?

As I have stated the organization commenced in France and has spread throughout the world. Although other States commenced earlier the

first USA in N.S.W. commenced in Neutra during 1987. At the same time Neutra formed a sub-committee in Milton/Willadilla and tribute must be

paid to those people who started the organization and carried it through its early days in this district. ~~The early days~~ Being responsible for an

organization in its early days is usually a thankless task. In 1989 we were staggered along with three study groups organized - French,

Calligraphy and Bridge for Beginners. The tutors for these courses were Marcia Higo, Pauline Kato and Helen Batta.

Our President Harry Higo decided it was time we got the

organization moving - Harry, a former firmament head of the Dept of Environment in Canberra before his retirement can be a great persuader

and he rounded me about joining the committee.

At that time I felt that we would just be completing with T.A.F.E. and Adult Education. But then I realized that retired people didn't require the formal side of education - the examinations, the essays, the assignments etc, they just want the mental stimulation and learning for the mere joy of learning and the company of people with similar outlooks on life - also courses at T.A.F.E. etc are not cheap. These days and finance can be a problem with lots of retired people.

In 1989 we called a general meeting at Mallymore Bowling Club and over fifty enthusiastic people attended wanting to start varying study courses immediately. A strong working committee was formed and from that day we have continued to grow. Last year we had over 140 members, some attending more than one study group.

The cost is minimal - \$5 membership per year and \$6 per term for study group (A term is usually 6-8 lectures).

All our tutors give their services voluntarily and in most cases their homes for the study groups to meet in. The organization is centered mainly in the Mallymore area and as you know there is a lack of meeting places ~~in~~ there. I think we will have to start petitioning Shelburne City Council for the erection of a Community Hall in Mallymore.

The organization lives or dies on the availability of tutors. We are in the lookout continually for people with expertise in any subject that may be used for study groups. When Rob Cantrell arrived in the district last year his wife Jenny reminded to me that she had run a creative writing group in Shenlymore. We had been trying to get such a group off the ground for over twelve months so we had Jenny running the course immediately. The group of twelve had a very happy and creative year with their creative writing and they and Jenny are all looking forward to continuing that course again this year.

As I look round the room I can see a lot of potential tutors for USA courses.

We commenced as a sub-committee of Neutra USA but with the growth of our membership and also some differences of opinion with the Neutra Committee we set up our own independent USA organization last year.

Our study groups are mostly restricted to a maximum of twelve. Firstly because we meet in private homes which restrict numbers and also a group of this number allows for easy group discussion and allows everyone to contribute.

What are the courses we organize?

Creative Writing - ~~led~~ by Jenny Cartell - very successful, very creative and thoroughly enjoyed by all. My wife belongs to this group as I get first hand reports.

Armchair Theatre - ~~led~~ by Laine Jolley - Laine gives a lecture on the play and playwright under discussion and then the group do a full play reading of the play - each member being allocated a part. Emergent the plays used by this group have been a few by George Bernard Shaw. They are always on the lookout for cheap second hand books of classic plays.

French - ~~led~~ by Maria Higo (a retired language teacher) - also a formal study of the French language.

Musical Appreciation - ~~led~~ by Nan Wright (a retired music teacher) - each member in turn gives a program of their favorite music. A very relaxed group.

Australian Wildflowers - ~~led~~ by Jo Bengson (a very keen and knowledgeable naturalist). Reads giving lectures on the botanical structure of Australian Wildflowers. Jo leads her group on field trips into nature reserves for practical work.

Aspects of Aviation - ~~led~~ by Tom Cook, this is a group of old aviation enthusiasts who take turns in lecturing on all aspects including the history of aviation.

Current Affairs - ~~led~~ by Neil Peter-Smeis. They alternate between Journal and I mean spirited discussion on local and

I believe you take your ~~to~~ life in your hands joining this group of very outspoken and radical female retirees.

Australian History - ~~Lead~~<sup>Led</sup> by Bert Dixon - I believe Bert after retirement obtained an arts degree majoring in Australian History. He lead two terms of Australian History last year but I believe that this year each member of the study group will be required to research and lead one session on aspects of Australian History determined by the group at the beginning of the year.

Bridge for Beginners - ~~Lead~~<sup>Led</sup> by Aileen Bathe, a leading member of the local Bridge Club. Aileen gives a very concentrated course on the playing of the game of bridge and I believe many members have continued on to membership of the Bridge Club.

Indonesian Culture - ~~Lead~~<sup>Led</sup> by Gerry Dale who spent many years living in Indonesia and has a great love of the country and its culture. This group not only studies the culture of the country but also the language.

Australian Environment & Society - ~~Lead~~<sup>Led</sup> by Gordon Sanders and Harry Higgs both leading members of the National Parks Association with a strong interest in all aspects of Environment and Society. I have belonged to this group for the past two years during which we have progressed from the environment of the world, to the environment of Australia, to the environment of the Shoalhaven. With ~~the~~ a title like that your discussion group can cover just about anything. During the last term of 1990 members were given a topic to research and lead a session. I was given the subject of the "Multi-Function Polio" to research and prepare a lecture. I found I was working till midnight for quite a few nights but found the effort quite rewarding and mentally stimulating and was rewarded with a very responsive and enthusiastic discussion group on my lecture.

Other courses such as Calligraphy, Floral Art and the Treasure of Talk were also held last year.

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As stated previously we had 140 members last year. We will be calling a general meeting early in February to enroll for the New Year and discuss our program. Most of the Courses from last year will continue and we are hoping to get other courses organised. It all depends on the availability of tutors. Our membership is both male and female although as in all retirement groups the females tend to dominate - they have a tendency to live longer.

The organisation is growing throughout N.S.W and although some form of amalgamation is felt necessary it is also felt by most U3A's that we should be keeping the organisation simple and locally orientated instead of having some tightly organised formal body. In the last twelve months meetings of the various U3A's have been held throughout the State investigating some form of simple federation.

Some ~~other~~ of the other U3A's throughout the State, especially those in Sydney are adopting a rather formal attitude and only organising academic subjects but we in the district take the attitude that if we have a tutor with the expertise to teach or lead discussion on a subject (no matter what) and members who wish to join such a group, we will put that subject in our program.

During 1989 a survey was carried out in the City of Shoalhaven by the U3A on "Learning in Retirement." I would like to quote extracts from that survey -

"The survey showed that there are motivations other than the accumulation of knowledge which are satisfied by membership of U3A; belonging to a group, social interaction and the opportunity for self-expression for instance, proved to be important considerations for members.

"The majority of the respondents belong, roughly to the same generation; those born around the middle of the period between the two world wars. They also grew up during the Great Depression

They have therefore, lived in the social, economic and political ~~but~~ turbulence that followed these three catastrophes and no doubt, have benefitted or suffered accordingly. Membership of U3A, at a time of life when members have the freedom and capacity to reflect, with maturity, provides the opportunity to gain greater understanding of the forces which have shaped their lives and resulted in being what and where they are today. It further enabled them to break free of the educational restraints from which the majority of their generation suffered; the economic barriers to a complete education, inflexible curricula and strict streaming of pupils according to academic and financial ability.

Above all, the survey results show that, given the opportunity, people will seek learning for its own sake, divorced from vocational, promotional or other "practical" reasons.

For me a couple of very interesting statistics came out of this survey.

The survey was divided into three areas -

Area 1 - Nowra / Bomaderry

Area 2 - The Coastal District (centred around Jervis Bay)

Area 3 - The Southern District (Milton / Ulladulla / Mollismook).

Area 1 - Preference was allocated to studies which would be of practical use. The lowest priority was for intellectually challenging learning.

Area 2 - Also preferred practically orientated subjects and learning that was interesting, entertaining and not too demanding.

Area 3 - Highest preference was for learning activities that were interesting, entertaining and not too demanding with intellectually challenging content being preferred to more practically orientated studies.

My reading of this confirmed by the people I have met in the two years I have lived here is that we have a pretty intelligent group of retirees living in the district.

Another interesting set of statistics from this survey -

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The most popular subjects selected by male members of the U3A were communication skills, literature and history, followed by care of the environment, computer studies and current affairs.

The most popular subjects selected by female members of the U3A were current affairs, followed by literature, history, music and the care of the environment.

The most popular subjects selected by non-members of the U3A were gardening, followed by current affairs, Australian geography, care of the environment, painting, music, cooking and car maintenance.

So gentlemen I hope I have enlightened you about this organisation known as the University of the Third Age or U3A in this district and look forward to your membership applications when you are approaching retirement.