

My View - May 19, 08

Years ago I was involved in the grass-roots campaign of Ian Keirnan's initiative, Clean Up Australia. This genius idea designed to clean up the country's land and waterways was and still is, based around an actual event.

Earth Hour is another example of an idea that has quickly taken hold which basically says, you too can make a difference - starting with turning off the lights. Add to this, the never ending list of successful fundraising initiatives that include Red Nose Day for AIDS and Australia's Biggest Morning Tea, Relay for Life, the World's Greatest Shave and close to home, COUCH - all cancer related causes based on a series of events.

What this is leading me to say, is a suggestion that we, as a community at large, adopt a similar approach to positioning and promoting our city as we race headlong into what is being forecast as lean and challenging times.

As a community who looks beyond its city walls for sustained economic growth, we should never underestimate events like Festival Cairns and their ability to focus attention both in the short and long term.

Having been involved in the marketing of Festival Cairns from the outset in 2002, and witnessing its transition from a one week Reef Festival to a three week uber-event, I still share in the vision of its founder, our former mayor, Kevin Byrne, who predicted that that in the future, this event has the power to put Cairns on the map. It's definitely not there yet, but each year grows a little bigger and brighter.

In recent years, Cummings Economics has been contracted to provide a factual overview of the event and so far, findings have underscored its success in terms of attendance, economic impact and importantly, its genuine appeal to families.

Let's start with the numbers. Last year's event recorded participation of 145,000 people compared to 138,000 in 2006 with an increase in its economic contribution from \$19.1 million in 2005 to \$20 million in 2006 and 2007. Last year's equine flu epidemic and the impact it had on attendances at Cairns Amateurs is the reason there was no marked increase in economic viability, however the fact it held its ground is telling.

To truly succeed, Festival Cairns needs a bigger voice. To achieve this, it needs greater involvement from the corporate sector and specifically, financial backing. Up until now, Cairns City Council and Pacific Toyota, along with a loyal band of event partners and sponsors, have been largely responsible for the festival's annual staging. But this duet and its accompaniment/band needs to get way bigger if it is going to have any hope of sounding like an orchestra...

Taking cue from Festival Cairns and its Love Cairns message, we as a community should help our hard-working tourism industry out in their quest to get people travelling north by starting our own chorus about Cairns.

With belief in ourselves and this great place we live, we should make it our own personal mission to spread the word and in essence, get people visiting Cairns.

We could start by singing the praises of Cairns - think Facebooking, My Spacing, You Tubing and good old fashioned communicating - and before long, we will be heard....just like it showed in Dr Seuss' adorable tale, Horton Hears a Who.

If we, as a community can all get behind this initiative - it won't be long before we are heard far and beyond the city walls.