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Chamber of Commerce AGM – 1 September 2009

PRESIDENTS REPORT

The past year has been a difficult financial year for the Chamber, as it has been for business throughout Manly, and the rest of the country.

The economic downturn has resulted in the loss of a number of members, and in particular one Corporate member and a few of our Gold Members. When the Treasurers Report is presented you will appreciate why we have had to initiate some changes to bring our expenditure in line with our forecast income.

I have enjoyed my year as President and it was very pleasing to see the very positive impact of the completed Corso Upgrade. Despite the problems encountered during construction I believe the Corso design, in which the primary aim was to “de-clutter” the Corso, is now proving very successful. In particular it is good to see that shoppers and visitors now spread out to both sides of the “mall” and we have somewhat eliminated the previous “ant track” down the south side. The media exposure of the problems with the outdoor restaurants has been unfortunate, and we have deliberately adopted a low profile on this issue so that we did not provide comment to prolong the media “circus”.

Throughout the year our Chamber Beat and Networking events were well attended. The Melbourne Cup function and the Chamber Golf Day were both successful and were run at a reasonable profit.

I can also report that our initiative to establish a Mainstreet Centre Management office is now almost 3 years old and continues to provide a strong level of professional support for the operation and management of the Manly CBD. Our Centre Manager Meegan Clancy has continued to work at improving the retail mix in Manly and the emergence of the strong fashion offering over the last 2 years, is an endorsement of her efforts. The roll out of the Immerse Yourself in Manly branding, the quality directory signage, the monthly newsletter and other promotional initiatives have provided a co-ordinated and much more professional approach to the promotion, presentation and management of our business centre.

In an effort to reduce our overheads it was decided to combine the offices of the Chamber and the Centre Manager, and this was implemented in June. Manly Mainstreet Centre Management Pty. Limited, the company owned 50/50 with Manly Council has been de-registered, and Meegan is now an employee of the Chamber, but we have to maintain completely separate accounts for Centre Management activities, as the funding comes from

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Council, and is part of the Special Levy that we pay with our commercial rates. The combined office has resulted in significant savings in the Chamber and the Centre Managers overheads.

In June we also saw the departure of our long standing Executive Officer, Jenni Burgess, after 10 years at the Chamber. Jenni had a very good rapport with our members and held the Chamber together with her regular social and networking functions. Jenni's enthusiasm helped the Chamber to maintain its strong presence in Manly over the 10 years, and we wish her well for the future (and I know she is keen to make more use of her apartment in Bali). I would ask that we all show our appreciation for the work Jenni has done for the Chamber in the usual way. (applause). I will make sure that we record that appreciation in the minutes.

Our new Executive Officer is Margot Stolle, and I hope you have all had an opportunity to meet Margot, if not please stay after the meeting for a few drinks and I am sure Margot will introduce herself. Margot is currently in the office on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, and our Tourism Promotions Manager Jackie Lehman, is usually in the office on Mondays and Wednesdays. Margot brings with her strong experience in events management and fund raising activities and has settled in very well and I know that Meegan and her are forming a very enthusiastic and formidable team. Margot has some new initiatives, starting with a more interactive and informative website, and I will ask her to give you a short up-date later in the meeting.

Currently we are placing pressure on Council to review it's Section 94 Contributions and the CBD Parking Code, both of which are proving a considerable disincentive to the up-grading or redevelopment of some of the more dilapidated and obsolete properties in the CBD. In particular it is creating problems when shops become vacant and potential tenants want to change the approved use. Also, at the Chambers request the Council earlier this year undertook a review and survey of the on and off street parking in Manly. Some of the recommendations in the report are supported by Chamber, while others are not, and we have made a number of our own recommendations for improvements in the management and presentation of our car parks. The blatant misuse of the Residents Parking Permits has also been highlighted. We need to continue to remind Councilors' that the major car parks are "our" parking assets and they need to be managed for the benefit of our local businesses, and not seen as a growth revenue source by Council.

Initiatives and achievements for the Chamber and Centre Management this year were many and I will point out a few:

- Widening of the footpath in North Steyne from the Corso to Raglan Street
- The sign in Sydney Rd showing available parking in the various car parks

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- Directory map and signage on the Corso and on the Manly Ferry
- A well targeted tourism promotion campaign funded by local operators and Council (Council provided \$15k and another \$15k for the Ferry promotion)
- Obtaining Councils agreement to initiate a laneways strategy to upgrade the many "back laneways" of the CBD.
- The creation of a new iconic Festival to celebrate the Surfing Culture that underpins the Manly lifestyle.

At this point I would like to acknowledge the support of those members who put up their hand last year to come on to the Executive Committee. We have a real need to again build up our membership, if we are to be able to maintain our office presence in Manly. I particularly thank our Corporate and Gold members for sticking with us during this tough economic period, and I urge you to continue your support in the coming year. I know it is often difficult to see the "value return" on this annual cost but it is critical in enabling us to maintain our strong lobbying position with Manly Council. It is encouraging to see that we have a strong number of nominations for the Executive Committee for the coming year. I wish the new Committee well for 2010