

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT – JULY 2007

At our last AGM I announced our forward plans for the Centre and indicated that we had approval for grants from the Highland Council and Leader Plus towards carrying out these plans. Shortly after the meeting we received the final £5,000 from Awards For All and we were then able to start discussing the finer details of our requirements for the new exhibitions.

We put the proposals out to tender with three exhibition companies with the hope that we would be able to start work at the end of the season in October, but one company declined to tender, the second came in considerably over budget and the third company kept us waiting for some months, and then eventually admitted that they did not have the time to do the work. We were then left in November having to start again and look for other companies. Navy Blue 3D Design were very interested in the project from the start and not only tendered for the grant amount but also agreed to a few extras: they said that they could start work immediately after New Year. We think that they have provided us with a very attractive exhibition room and, apart from the signage in the village square, which should be arriving any day, and a top coat of paint for the front of the old Village Store, the work is now complete. Because of the very tight timescale to which we were all working, the directors had to do a lot of the research and composition for the text included in the interpretive panels and that has taken up a considerable amount of time this Spring. I would like to thank Ann Fraser of the Lovat Arms for her assistance in this respect and also to thank her once again for all the original information she supplied; this is still available for viewing in the exhibition room. Along with the approval of each item and proof reading of the panels we have had a very hands-on involvement with the project which has given us all a great deal of satisfaction. On completion the Trust held an opening evening for members and funders which was very successful and, I am glad to report that all the funding agencies were extremely pleased with the way the Centre is now looking. I would like to thank Stuart Hutton of the Priory Hotel for providing the food and drink for this event.

On the business front we have also been extremely active. You will see from our accounts that the income from the retail shops has gone up yet again on the previous year. Caroline Bullock, who joined us last year as shop manager, has made a great improvement in both the appearance and the sales in the shop and, has been a loyal and supportive member of staff throughout our very hectic year. This year we have promoted her to the position of Business Development Manager with overall responsibility for all the retail outlets and exhibitions in the Centre. Since her appointment, Caroline has implemented a Health and Safety Policy and a Fire Policy, as well as

completely revitalising the public areas of the building. This has resulted in the Centre acquiring an additional star and we have been awarded three stars from VisitScotland. Caroline has been joined by Claire Zablinski as a full-time shop assistant and Moira Sinclair and Sheila Grenfell on a part-time basis. This means that we have two members of staff in the building at all times.

Our administration manager, for personal reasons, resigned last September and left us at the end of October. This occurred at a time when the directors were still involved with summer projects of their own and when I had a number of personal matters to attend to that were going to take me away from home for some while. We had been in contact with a firm of consultants who were able to advise us on funding packages and project development. One of their partners offered to act as locum manager until such time as we were in a position to interview and select a new permanent manager. We gratefully took up the offer but I am afraid that it turned out to be an unfortunate experience. The person concerned did not complete any of the tasks which we required and we decided to bring his employment to a close at the end of his contract period in January. He contacted a number of people after his departure with a view to causing a nuisance to the Trust but I am glad to be able to report that, in every case, the organisations he contacted have investigated our activities and have been more than satisfied with the work we are carrying out and the way we conduct our business.

We have now held interviews and I am delighted to report that we have appointed Carol Masheter as Project Development Manager and she will be joining us next Monday on the 16th July. Her remit is to follow up future projects of the Trust, both in and outside the Centre, organise fund-raising events, secure sustainable funding and liaise with the community at large as well as with members of the Trust. Carol was born and brought up locally at Aigas but has recently been working for Staffordshire Council in a similar capacity.

Those of you with internet access will have seen that we have upgraded our website and for this I would like to thank ex-director Jim McAuley for his very generous contribution in this respect. Jim composes and oversees the website for us on a voluntary basis under the address of www.beaulyandglens.com. We have also upgraded our computer system within the Beaully Centre and we can now access broadband throughout the building. This first necessitated some rewiring and then Inverness Computer Centre installed the equipment. With this facility we are able to offer open internet access to the public. We have organised for road signage on the A9 at Tore roundabout and again at Muir-of-Ord and, once the signage for House of Beaully has been agreed, the Roads Department will be fixing up all the signs at the same time. We have also drawn up a comprehensive

marketing plan which Caroline and Carol will be implementing together over the next few months.

The other major change to the Centre this year is to the kiltmaking room, now known as "The Cloister Room". Gary Smyth decided to take his business into Inverness at the end of April and the directors were making plans to turn the room into a children's clothing shop. We then were put in touch, by a friend of the Trust, with Ellen Marshall who has agreed to bring her kiltmaking business into the Centre. We have a shared arrangement in the room with Ellen taking the rear of the room for her workshop and the front being for retail display of her kilts and for a range of attractive children's and nursery clothes. Ellen will also be hiring out kilts for weddings and functions.

Finally, and, as always, I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to my fellow directors for the amount of time and effort that they have put into running the Trust over the previous year. There are not many of them but their contribution during such an eventful year has been enormous and their loyalty and support much appreciated.