

MEDIA RELEASE

BIRTHDAY REUNION FOR ALL PAST SHOW CAMP PUPILS

Calling all past students of the Brisbane Show Camps that have been part of the Ekka tradition for 75 years.

There's a special invitation for both teachers and students who have attended any camp during that period to be part of a special birthday ceremony at the RNA Showgrounds during the 2003 Ekka.

A commemorative badge has been struck to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of an organization that has brought hundreds of children from city and country to exchange ideas, to learn, and most of all, to have fun during the 10 days of the Royal Queensland Show.

At a ceremony to mark the 70th birthday of the Show Camp in 1998 the oldest ex-student was 85 and the youngest 11.

More than 500 schools and as many as 20,000 students across the State have enjoyed the show camp activities over the years. Students visit each section of the exhibition, take part in Young Judges competitions, help to write a daily newspaper, run a computerized weather station and enjoy being entertained to morning tea by the RNA President.

The idea of the Show Camp was first mooted early in 1928 by RNA Councillor J.P. Bottomley whose idea was to build on the Pig Club scheme, then operating in most rural schools.

Male students were encouraged to rear and look after a couple of pigs each and to learn all about this form of animal husbandry.

Students involved in this activity were the first to be invited to attend the Show Camp but the activity quickly developed to include boys interested in a wider field of activities. Mr Bottomley - obviously rather a progressive thinker - saw nothing wrong with including girls in the farm camp.

However, Director of Education, Mr Bernard McKenna, made it clear he was not "entirely in favour" of including females in the early intakes.

The RNA accepted his advice and the first Boys' Farm Camp went ahead in August, 1928.

It was not until 1934 that girls were able to nominate for the camp, although they were housed at the YWCA hostel at New Farm while the boys slept on stretchers at the Fortitude Valley School.

Finally in 1984 the RNA converted the on-site Farm Boys' Camp to a facility that enables boys and girls to stay together.

These days 11 girls and 11 boys, two from each region, are selected on merit and arrive in Brisbane to enjoy the diversity of the annual show.

Show manager, Keith Enchelmaier, has been in charge for the past 14 years and still shows unbounded enthusiasm for the job.

He says friendships formed during the 10 days of Ekka often last a lifetime and continue to bring country and city children together to learn and celebrate Queensland's rural heritage.

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