

RURAL COMMUNITY EVENTS

Statement

HON MATTHEW BENSON-LIDHOLM (South West) [6.30 pm]: I would like to report on two events of great significance to rural communities with which I had some involvement during the recent school holidays. On both occasions I represented the Premier, first during the middle weekend of the school holidays at the Katanning-Nyoongah reunion, and last weekend at Jerramungup for the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the soldier settlement scheme and later for the distribution of World War II medallions to veterans or members of their families.

The Jerramungup celebrations coincided with the local district agricultural show. Both occasions were wonderful examples of community building when people came together to acknowledge the trials and tribulations of the past, many of which both groups had experienced. At both events, people came together to express their confidence in the future of rural and regional Western Australia. The Jerramungup war medallion presentation was special to me because one of the gentlemen there introduced himself afterwards as a friend of my father. He had a 1944 Anzac Day photograph. There were three Benson boys and two Herbert boys in the photograph. He told me that there was a rough chance that I could well be related to one of the Benson boys. The gentleman I am talking about is Mr Rex Herbert from around Bremer Bay, who some members might know. Sure enough, one of the Benson boys was my father, Gerry. Rex had not seen him for about 61 years. I found that a very uplifting experience. Subsequently, of course, I ordered a copy of Rex's photograph and I hope, shortly, to be able to show that to my family and close friends.

People came from all over the state, including Perth, Albany and the Kimberley region, to attend the Katanning-Nyoongah event. As members can imagine, many bonding activities were undertaken. I was honoured to be asked to join the march through the main street of Katanning and to speak on behalf of Premier Gallop. I made a particular point of mentioning the Nyoongah people's contributions to the farming communities around Katanning. I was also invited to view exhibits at the Katanning art show. A number of well-known Aboriginal artists exhibited there, including a gentleman by the name of Mr Athol Farmer, who has close links to the Carrolup artists of the 1940s and 1950s.

The Jerramungup celebrations were a huge undertaking for a small country town. I was not there on the Saturday night but I am told that about 700 people turned up for the dinner. That is a big effort by any definition. On Sunday, I was with - please bear with me - the shire president, Mrs Glenyse Garnett; Colonel Doug Webb, representing the defence forces; Hon Murray Criddle, MLC; Dr Graham Jacobs, MLA; and Mr Digger Cleak, OAM. On behalf of the Premier, I acknowledged the achievements of local people in farming the region and building a town over the past 50 years that boasts some excellent social infrastructure.

The highlight of the ceremony was the unveiling of a fiftieth anniversary plaque by Mrs Doreen Cameron, the widow of the town's first development supervisor from 1950 to 1955. I suggest that people such as the Camerons, the eight founding families and others who came shortly afterwards, who met the challenges of yesterday, have made the town and the community stronger as it meets the challenges of today and the future.

The Returned and Services League service completed the weekend's celebrations. There was a march-past, a flag ceremony, a wreath laying and a medallion presentation. They were followed by a fly-past and the unveiling of a World War II honour board, bringing to an end a most memorable occasion, and one that I was very proud to be a part of. I congratulate all the people concerned with the organisation of both weekends. It was fantastic, and it was something that moved me.