



Saturday 27th February, 2010

LEAPING INTO ARTS – GREAT FOR WELLBEING

The Mildura community has a big reason to celebrate with the launch of a ground-breaking program encouraging community members to participate in arts activities.

The Localities Enhancing Arts Participation (LEAP) program is being launched at Mildura Wentworth Arts Festival's Mardi Gras Parade and River Festival.

LEAP is a Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) initiative encouraging community participation in the arts, with health and wellbeing benefits.

Mildura Rural City Council is one of three localities in Victoria which have been awarded \$600,000 over three years by VicHealth to implement the program.

The program in the Mildura region will take place in various communities and will draw on diverse activities ranging from community based theatre through digital storytelling to drawing and printmaking.

Mildura Rural City Council's portfolio councillor for the arts Judi Harris said, "the LEAP project will be rolled out across the municipality and will encourage participation by people from all walks of life."

"The LEAP project will dispel the myth that the arts is only for a very select group. The three diverse projects will allow people to get involved and try out something new as a way of expressing themselves and enhancing their wellbeing," said Cr Harris.

"Council is partnering with the Old Van Theatre Company, who have worked locally on a number of projects including *My Homeland* and *A Mid-Summer Night's Dreaming Mildura 1956*, to provide the core expertise and direction for community-based theatre projects which will also draw on the experiences of participants to tell the story," said Cr Harris.

"Art Vault, Mildura's wonderful printmaking workshop, gallery and artist studio facility will generously provide access to their facilities for the visual arts aspect of the project," said Cr Harris.

"Another exciting partnership with the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) will give residents across the municipality access to expertise and equipment for digital video storytelling. It will draw upon the unique experiences and interests of participants and provide an outlet for creativity," said Cr Harris.

It is the first time in Australia that local governments are being funded to work right across the community, for instance with sports clubs, children and disadvantaged communities, to give people the opportunity to express their creativity and tell their stories.

VicHealth CEO Todd Harper said, "Research shows that participating in the arts and other social activities has big benefits for health and wellbeing of local communities."

For more information please contact:

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“There is also strong evidence that mental health and wellbeing is improved amongst individuals who participate in social networks and activities in the arts like singing, music, dancing or theatre groups,” Mr Harper said.

“The evidence shows that it is about being connected socially and that’s why it’s more beneficial for community members to actively participate in the arts rather than passively sitting and watching a performance – to be a participant rather than a spectator.”

“When more community members are participating in making arts and engaging in social activity, there is reduced crime, increased employment rates and enhanced educational performance.

Drawing upon Mildura Rural City Council’s well-regarded work with Professor Tony Vinson on the Mildura Social Indicators Report, Council is also working with the University of Melbourne School of Population Health and VicHealth on a ground-breaking study to evaluate the health benefits of participating in the arts.

Mildura is one of three local government areas to have received funding as part of VicHealth’s \$2.2 million LEAP program, alongside the City of Ballarat, with neighbouring Central Highland shires, and the City of Casey, in south east Melbourne.

For more information about the Localities Enhancing Arts Participation (LEAP) program visit:
www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/leap

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