

## THE HISTORY OF PEAKHURST POOL - 1956 to 1991

Peakhurst Pool was built with funds raised by the Community.

Thirty five years ago there wasn't much for young people in the Herne Bay (now Riverwood) area to do. There were no facilities locally, and even to go for a swim meant a trip to Bankstown or Ramsgate Pool or the long trip to the beach at Cronulla. In those days local communities tried to sort out their own problems, so the solution was to build their own local pool.

In 1956, under the sponsorship of the Herne Bay Businessmen's Association, the Herne Bay (later Riverwood) & District Olympic Pool Association was formed. Under the Presidency of Charles Barbato the committee worked very hard to raise sufficient funds. There was Len Avard the local builder who eventually built the pool, Eddie Green a local businessman, Jimmy Steel "the best fundraiser of the lot", K Mills, John Staples, R Coulson, R Powell, J Lyons, G Taylor, B Stitt, R Huthnance and Don Smith, who as Peakhurst West P & C President, later helped to steer the project through. Funds were raised in many varied ways including Carnivals, Raffles (they even raffled a car), Street Collections, Beauty Queen Competitions, Housie Nights etc. The biggest fundraiser was the street collection idea. Each street in the area had a Street Warden, (sometimes it was one of the children), whose responsibility it was to collect sixpence (five cents) per household every week.

The Pool Association never had a target amount, they just kept raising money, but as the fund grew they approached Hurstville Council about a site. Council wanted the pool in Olds Park, but that was outside the area of fundraising and negotiations continued. The Pool Association proposed a site in the area bounded by Belmore Road, Jacques Avenue and Hedley Street, but Council required them to construct a grandstand, change rooms and toilets on the site before construction of the pool could begin. This was an impossible task and the stalemate continued. Finally they decided to approach the local schools, first the High Schools then the Primary Schools with the proposal to build a learn to swim pool for the use of the school and the local community. In the second half of 1959, with the approval of the Education Department, Peakhurst West P & C took up the offer and a steering committee was formed.

Lengthy negotiations were needed before the project could go ahead. P & C President Don Smith and Secretary Meg White carried a great deal of this load. The pool would be the first in a public primary school and had to meet strict Departmental requirements, including a restriction on size. The pool must be no larger than sixty by thirty feet. In March 1960 the Pool Association handed over 9,500 pounds (\$19,000) in the form of a loan to the P & C and work commenced later in the year. Fundraising continued as the cost was estimated to be in the vicinity of 12,000 pounds (\$24,000).

Plans were drawn up by Architects Figgis & Jefferson and construction was undertaken by local builder Len Avard who was also a trustee of the Swimming Pool Steering Committee. In an effort to reduce costs voluntary labour was sought from the P & C members. Several gave their time, particularly Don Smith, Doug Brown and Arthur Larter. Every hour worked by the volunteers was logged and the value, calculated at the award rates, was credited by the builder to the debt. Other volunteers gave their time and knowhow when needed, the P & C contributed to the balance, but Len Avard still lost money on the job. He didn't mind.

The pool opened on 16 January 1961. There is some dispute as to who christened the pool, Don Smith says that he had a swim as soon as it was full, Len Avard states that he was thrown in fully clothed. Both were entitled. The official opening by Gordon Young did not come until 6 October 1962.

Over the next few years the Peakhurst West Pool Steering Committee administered the pool and from pool earnings, the Olympic Pool Association was fully re-paid. Not long after the pool opened, Peakhurst Amateur Swimming Club was formed, using equipment donated by local businesses. Activities at the pool were conducted (on a voluntary basis) by members of the P & C and the Peakhurst Amateur Swimming Club (many of the volunteers were both) and by other local community members. Public swimming was also made available to the community.

Learn to Swim classes, with Arthur Larter and Bill Gault amongst the instructors, always featured largely in pool activities (the swimming club has conducted free classes for many years). Riverwood Rotary Club donated a resuscitation manikin. At one time Judy and Gayle Pettiford practiced their synchronised swimming in the pool and the State titles were held here

The Education Department met the costs of general maintenance (e.g. power, water and chemicals) but the Pool Steering Committee had to pay for any agreed improvements. Excess funds not required for operation or development of the pool were to be paid into general school funds. Pool maintenance was also undertaken on a voluntary basis, when possible, although some of the local teenage boys earned pocket money by cleaning the pool.

In 1976 Hurstville Council had access to a Federal Government Grant of \$57,000 which was allocated for pool heating at Peakhurst West. If it had not been applied within the council area, it would have been lost to the community.

The Peakhurst West P & C, encouraged by the Headmaster Mr. Doug Pettfield, called a public meeting to gauge interest and support for the conversion of the pool to an all weather facility. State and Local Government representatives, people from the

Asthma Foundation and representatives from local community groups attended and showed enthusiasm for the project. The decision was made to take advantage of the grant to heat and cover the pool, and construct a special Asthma Pool, although the community still had to find a large amount of the necessary money to capitalise on the opportunity.

Further grants totalling \$62,000 were obtained from the State Government Department of Sport and Recreation and all the funds of the Riverwood Olympic Pool Association were donated back into the project (the Association was then disbanded). The rest of the funds came as a gift from Peakhurst West P & C, local service groups and Peakhurst Amateur Swimming Club. President of the P & C John Coppock and Arthur Larter (a member of the P & C who had been associated with the maintenance and running of the pool since the beginning) undertook the long and sometimes frustrating task of developing the project.

The Department of Education approved the project with the proviso that they would not be responsible for any capital or maintenance costs related to the heating of the pool.

A steering committee was formed to administer the work, comprising four representatives from the P & C (Arthur Larter, John Coppock, Richard Crane and Kevin Murphy), one from Peakhurst Amateur Swimming Club (William Andrews) and two from Hurstville Council (Ald. Joan Loew and Ald. Russ Smith). Subsequently, Charles Barbato from the Riverwood Olympic Swimming Pool Association was appointed to the steering committee.

Reynolds Constructions Pty Ltd were the builders and work was commenced in late July 1977. The pool was re-opened on 11 February 1978 by F J Walker MP, and the administration of the pool was no longer the responsibility of the P & C but was vested in a Co-Operative, "The Peakhurst West Swimming Pool Co-Op Ltd". Their responsibility was to the pool itself. Although the Registrar of Co-Operative Societies recommendation was for a larger Board of Directors, only seven people were willing to take up positions, most of them serving for several years. Until mid-1987 there were several who had been on the Board since its inception. The make up of the Board was the same as that of the steering committee, and the original members of the steering committee became the inaugural Co-Op Directors. The objects or aims of the Board were detailed:-

- a) To provide a heated swimming facility at Peakhurst West for the use of the Education Department during school hours.
- b) To provide a public swimming facility outside of school hours, for the Hurstville Municipality.

- c) To promote, and encourage the art of swimming, life saving techniques and physical education.
- d) To co-operate with all sections of the community who have a need for the use of a heated swimming pool.
- e) To co-operate with the private and government sectors in the promotion of sporting facilities.

In late 1981 The Department of Education agreed to be responsible for maintenance costs of the building and the filtration system with the Co-Op responsible for the running costs, e.g heating costs, 75% of the electricity, and all insurance charges.

Finances were very tight at first but a lot of hard work by the Board allowed them to pay off the debts and get the books out of the red. Once the pool was functioning properly the P & C was given a percentage of the profit each year, with half to be held in trust in the event of future pool extensions and the remainder to go directly to P & C funds. The school received rental earned from other schools who used the pool during school hours. Costs were kept to a minimum because much of the maintenance was done by Arthur Larter and other members of the committee.

The new complex allowed expansion of pool usage, and soon all available pool time was being used by Learn to Swim, Water confidence and Stroke Correction Classes, Peakhurst Amateur Swimming Club, Penshurst RSL Swim Club, St. George Leagues Club Swim Group, Peakhurst Asthma Swimming Group, Fitness Classes, Life Saving Classes, Peakhurst ASC's Free Learn to Swim Campaign, several local schools and even Scuba Diving Classes. Casual usage by several of the local Guiding and Scouting organisations is constant and the pool is one of the venues used by the Department of Sport & Recreation for its Christmas Vacation Learn to Swim and Austswim Programmes.

By the middle of the 1980s there was again a need to upgrade the pool, and once more fundraising efforts went into high gear with the aim of extending the pool to 25 metres. By hard work and careful management, the Co-Op Board was able to build up the necessary funds for the purpose and negotiations began with the Department of Sport & Recreation for a State Government grant. In 1987 Arthur Larter's long association with the pool ended.

Around this time, the filtration system needed to be replaced, as maintaining the quality of the water was becoming increasingly difficult. Although responsible for the cost, the Education Department was unwilling to pay for the work and the Co-Operatives rebuilding funds had to be used. The pool closed in November 1987 for five weeks while new filtration equipment was installed.

The lengthy negotiations with the Department of Sport & Recreation finally resulted in the provision of a grant, and in July 1989 Co-Op Board Chairman Robert Inglis and his team saw the end of the negotiations and the start of the work in August, 1989. The extension of the pool was undertaken by contractors Mutual Pools. The old twenty yard pool was completely demolished and replaced by a new, state-of-the-art wet deck pool twenty five metres long and ten metres wide at a cost of \$230,000. The new pool re-opened in November 1989, the project having been completed on time and within budget.

With the increased size of the new pool, maintaining water quality again became a problem with the existing chlorination equipment, proving to be unable to cope reliably. In May 1990, new chlorination equipment was installed. The new equipment was selected on the basis that its capabilities could be upgraded if the need arose, rather than becoming obsolete. Since this installation, water quality has been consistently high and pool down-time has all but disappeared.

Hurstville Council later contributed \$50,000 toward the cost of the building extension needed to comfortably house the extended length pool. In October, 1990, nearly a year after the extension of the pool was completed, the building extension commenced. The builders, Stynex Pty Ltd, completed their work in April 1991. Funds raised by the Co-Operative Board, grants from The Department of Sport and Recreation, Hurstville Council and a donation from the Peakhurst Amateur Swimming Club were used to pay the \$180,000 final costs of the extension and related facilities. The construction was undertaken without closing the facility and with minimal disruption to the pool users.

Of the current Co-Operative Board, Alan Askew, Robert Inglis, Trevor Keith, John Ryan and John N. Thomas all contributed to the successful completion of this project. Today, May 21, 1991, the Premier of New South Wales, The Hon. Nick Greiner MP, will officially open the new pool complex.

Peakhurst Pool is an example of what community involvement can achieve. Many individuals and organisations have given their time and effort over the years. The dream and determination of Charlie Barbato, Arthur Larter's twenty seven years of dedication and hard work, and the contribution by others too numerous to mention just goes to show that you can do it if you try. The pool has been an asset to the people in the area for thirty years.

This history of the pool was kindly assembled by Mrs. Pat Lusty in discussion with many of the founders and contributors to the pool. From the Directors of the Peakhurst West Pool Co-operative, thank you for your efforts.

Shown below are the regular activities currently available at Peakhurst West Pool.

Rose Agius Swim School

Jill Gault Swim School

Peakhurst Amateur Swimming Club Learn to Swim

Department of Sport & Rec Vacation Swimming Programme

Department of Sport & Rec Austswim Programme

Peakhurst Amateur Swimming Club

Aquarobics

Asthma Group Swimming

St. George AUSSIE Senior Swim Group

Ladies Aquafitness Classes

SAFED, Water Therapy for Arthritics

Friday Ladies Swimming Group

Padstow RSL Swimming Club

Panania / East Hills RSL Swimming Club

Riverwood Legion Club

St. George RSL Swimming Club

Local Scouts, Cubs and Girl Guides Groups

Several local Primary and Secondary Schools

Public Swimming