



# Bendigo Advertiser

\$1.40 (GST Inc) Thursday August 29 2013 .com.au

## STUPENDOUS ANNOUNCEMENT

Late-winter sun sets yesterday on Bendigo's Great Stupa of Universal Compassion, the largest Buddhist stupa in the Western world. Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development Damian Drum will today announce \$20,000 Victorian government funding for urgent repair work to the Great Stupa under the Multicultural Commission's community grants program, which supports culturally and linguistically diverse communities to develop and sustain local community organisations.



# Cook reflects on changes

**JOSH FAGAN**

AD MAN Robert Cook says Bendigo is poised for a major period of growth as a global city.

The retiring head of creative design business Yoke said attractions such as the Great Stupa, the planned expansion of the Golden Dragon Museum and Bendigo Art Gallery would establish Bendigo as an international destination.

"It's an absolutely exciting time," he said.

"The Stupa will be the biggest thing that has ever come to Bendigo. You can't stop this progress. I don't want to end up as one of those old farts saying 'it's not the same as it used to be'. It will be a bigger city and it will be better."

Mr Cook said the changing business landscape was also creating major opportunities for investment.

He said the local business sector had come a long way since the 1980s when his advertising firm was one of the only Bendigo companies with a mobile phone.

"It was the size of a briefcase and you had a magnetic aerial you needed to place on the roof of the car," he said.

"But it was revolutionary at the time."

Mr Cook and business partners Ian Green and John Moore helped pioneer a range of changes in the advertising industry.

He said the development of Cook, Green & Moore was among the most exciting opportunities in his 50 years working in the advertising, marketing and PR industry.

"It was a fabulous time," he said.

"We worked for a whole lot of national agencies out of our Bendigo office. We were in a situation in those days, we were three young guys and we were in the top 25 advertising agencies in the country.

"It was the first time we were doing all these major projects operating out of a regional city."

Mr Cook said Bendigo had grown as a thriving centre for start-up businesses and expanding industries.

"I think with our communications now you can operate from anywhere," he said.

"And we've got great resources here - La Trobe University, the bank, a lot of businesses.

"The great thing about Bendigo is that it's got a strong, loyal, supportive community. I think that grows from the council that is trying to help look at ways of building the community. It certainly grew out of the bank. There are so many other companies that followed that."

Mr Cook said a rising population signalled "great news for Bendigo" and would play a role in maintaining growth in the region.

"Bendigo should be a major city," he said. "We have a good rail system between Melbourne but it could be even better with fast rail. But that won't be in my lifetime, I suspect."

Reflecting on the end of his career, Mr Cook said he had had a chance to realise the things that were most important to him - family, friends and charity.

"In retiring you start to think about how hard you've worked in your life and then suddenly you're a has-been," he said.

"Life goes on. I've still got a few other interests. I want to play some role with Horizon House on their ministerial committee... I'll be out of sight and out of mind, but I'll be paddling my feet underwater and doing the things I love."



## HIS VIEWS...

### ■ On Bendigo's population:

I would think 200,000 or 300,000 is not beyond capacity in time. I mean you've got to have the resources to support that. Old farts like me, people of my vintage, say "oh, we don't want to be bigger". There's sometimes a feeling of do we want to be 200,000 or 300,000? I think the city will grow substantially and probably quicker than most anticipate. That comes out of the ease of living here. I think we can certainly live here and have a good quality of life and have more people commute to Melbourne.

### ■ On battling depression:

I went through depression 12 years ago, which was a pretty frightening thing to admit. I got over it not because I thought I could do it myself, but because I sought help and saw the right doctors. It took time. It was a big learning curve for me. I mean, I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth, I was a doctor's son. At the age of 50 I've suddenly hit a brick wall. I had nothing I could put it down to other than sometimes they say you've got a chemical imbalance. When I first came out and told people there was still a huge stigma attached. It wasn't easy, I can tell you. Today, fortunately, people can come out and talk about it and they're able to get help.

### ■ On Horizon House:

We've got 300 homeless kids in Bendigo every night. It's a shocking statistic. People want to do what they can to help. Nelson Mandela's statement says "the soul of a nation is in the way it treats its youth". I think if we don't treat our youth properly we will suffer the ramifications later on. I think that is a real truism. Too often the younger generation are treated as if they're drunks, drug addicts, irresponsible. The upside is the young people today are incredible and stunningly intelligent. Through Horizon House it's a way of getting into high school and getting kids helping their peers.



**BENDIGO ICON:** Robert Cook and his wife Diane.

Picture: JODIE DONNELLAN