

Melbourne Cup Luncheon 2008

Support the Forthcoming Melbourne Cup Luncheon to raise funds for the Parkinson's Centre. Article by Jo Rollinson, Marketing Writer Researcher..

After almost twenty years of active membership of the Royal Freshwater Bay Yacht Club, regular skipper and popular Member Don Caple was more recently diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. Since his diagnosis, Don has become more conscious of younger people with the same diagnosis, and how relatively fortunate he is by comparison. Keen to raise awareness about the need for research into Parkinson's in general, with the promise of assistance for all ages but particularly those with young onset, Don explains why he, and now the RFBYC, find it worthwhile to support this research through funds raised at the next two Club Melbourne Cup Luncheons.

Don's much enjoyed association with the RFBYC has seen him spend almost two decades of joyous Saturday afternoons on his beloved Farr 9.2. After acquiring her in 1998, and temptingly naming her Farrago ("a confused mixture of things"), Don quickly settled on his choice of Yacht Club as it was

both relatively convenient to his family's home, and it supplied a good spread of yachts for Don to race against.

"It's a great club" reflects Don. "During the summer season I'm there every Saturday, but during winter it's more occasional. Trying to get your crew interested in winter racing is harder. Winter racing is either great, or diabolical".

Ever the pragmatist, Don lets neither seasonal fluctuations nor other challenges affect his dedication to life and sailing.

Formally diagnosed with Parkinson's less than two years ago, Don suspects he was showing symptoms for a considerable time before that – if someone with the knowledge and awareness had tuned into the subtle signs he now recognises he would have been exhibiting. These included:

- A slight stoop
- A reduction in facial expression
- A minor tremor
- A little loss in manual dexterity
- A lessening of a natural arm-swing when walking.

Don's story is a salutary tale worth relating and sharing, for he had, years before his diagnosis, visited his GP with concerned curiosity as to why his arm had seemingly stopped swinging. "I just wondered why isn't that going, and to make it go you had to consciously make it happen. I had a bit of a stoop also, and he (the Doctor) said it was one of those things that come on with age", explains Don.

It was another year or two before Don was then visiting a Physiotherapist for some relief from back pain, that the Physio raised the possibility of Parkinson's with Don's GP. "I'm a bit staggered now when I think about it".

At present Don's sore back, unrelated to Parkinson's, bothers him more than any Parkinson's symptoms. Don's medication is highly effective at controlling things, and on all accounts Don might reasonably expect this efficacy to continue for a honeymoon period of ten years. After that, drugs can become less effective, requiring greater dosage, which in turn lead to greater side effects. However, for now Don considers that his Parkinson's has negligible impact on his life.

Don is gracious about Yacht Club Members knowing of his diagnosis because he believes in the benefit of raised awareness amongst the varied age groups within the Club. "Parkinson's is not limited to older people" says Don.

Don's greatest concern is for the younger people diagnosed at a relatively early age, and who then must live beyond any honeymoon period – people such as 36-year old Tara, a mother with a four-year-old son, of whom Don has more recently become aware.

Although retired and technically out of the age range, Don is a honorary member of the Young Onset Group: a special support group set up specifically to assist those with early onset Parkinson's and their families.

Don hopes that research can help all people affected with Parkinson's, but in particular those diagnosed at a younger age. "I am starting to understand what the "younger" ones must have to put up with. It hasn't affected me as much as it would for someone in employment, and all of a sudden their whole world crashes in around their ears".

Club Member Don Caple and his daughter Lisa at the launch of ParkC earlier this year



Melbourne Cup Luncheon 2008 continued...

It is for this reason that Don and his committed daughter Lisa have thrown their weight recently behind the recent application to the RFBYC's Melbourne Cup funds committee. The success of this application has resulted in the Yacht Club agreeing to donate, for this year and next, all funds raised at their annual Melbourne Cup luncheon to Parkinson's Research Centre (ParkC) located at Edith Cowan University in Joondalup.

Proudly run by Dr Meghan Thomas, the Centre aims to conduct research to improve the quality of life of people affected by Parkinson's by optimising collaborative research.

Parkinson's is the second most common neurological condition in Australia (after dementia), and the cause and progression of the condition is still unknown. Approximately 55,000 Australians suffer from Parkinson's – a figure expected to increase to around 63,000 by 2010, and almost 100,000 by 2025.

When asked about his own future, Don is characteristically stoic. "Yes, I'm fairly confident up to this point. No doubt I'll get a bit annoyed when I lose my driving license, but it hasn't affected my sailing".

That much is self-evident, if Don's recent sailing successes are anything to go by! "I had an excellent season this season, so it can't have affected me that badly! So much so that I won two races on the trot, and that's most embarrassing to the handicapper!"

Farrago may mean a confused mixture, but we suspect that it will take more than naming omens, winter temperatures, and even Parkinson's to keep this seasoned skipper away from winning a few more races yet. It may be worth following his tips if he transfers his winning streak to the four-legged variety traversing the turf on the first Tuesday in November, when Melbourne Cup comes to the RFBYC.

You will learn more about why the Yacht Club is supporting this invaluable research when entertaining guest speakers Karen Rowland from the Young Onset Support Group and Dr Meghan Thomas from ParkC make an informative start to the Melbourne Cup Luncheon.

Tickets are only available to Yacht Club Members and their guests. In past years numbers have exceeded 250 due to the excellent value, and through ticket sales and auctions of donated items during the event, funds of many thousands of dollars have been raised. Last year the cause supported was Angel Flight, which brings country folk to the city for much needed medical help, and now it is the turn of Park C to help them in the fight against this insidious condition which affects so many among us – young and not so young!

Tickets are available from the Main Office at Royal Freshwater Bay Yacht Club by phoning 9384 9100, by fax to 93851483 or by email to rfbyc@rfbyc.asn.au