

Sister cities or business brothers?



[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DDCE8D;"] A [dropcap]mid all the [arguing](#) about whether Warrnambool City Council should send a delegation to Miura, Japan, for Sister City celebrations, a simple question is yet to be answered: what do we gain from our two Sister City connections?

And, more importantly, what do we expect?

Trying to answer the first question is harder than you think, as there is no single, easily accessible reporting mechanism that documents the achievements of the Miura link that dates back more than 20 years (our Sister City link with Changchun, China, began last year).

Instead, you have to trawl through two decades of council minutes and newspaper archives to discover that our Sister

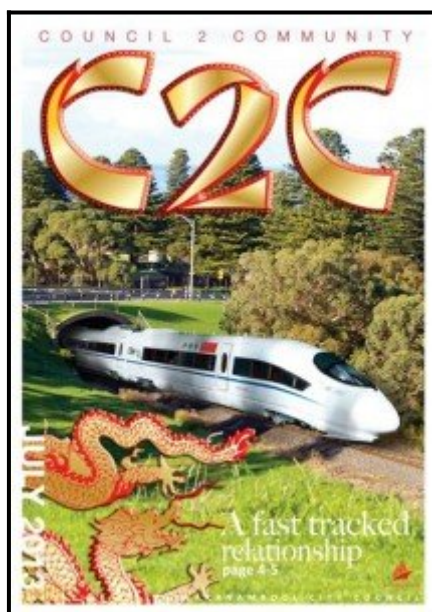
City relationship with Miura has pretty much done what it set out to do, which was to build “friendship, cooperation and understanding” between two very different cultures.

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[/dropcap]n a pre-Internet world, it was considered money well spent to invest ratepayer dollars in building harmonious relationships with cultures so unlike our own as to be exotic. School kids have a chance to visit another country, and to host international students in return. We have a lovely, if hidden, Japanese friendship garden, and Miura has some Norfolk pine seedlings. Funds have been used to host and attend civic functions, both here and in Miura.

That’s what a Sister City relationship used to be about and what ratepayers’ money has been spent on, although whether – in the wired, highly mobile world of 2013 – it is still money well spent, is open to debate.

Which brings us to the second question: what do we expect?

This is where things have shifted.



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the July edition of the Council's newsletter, [C2C](#), was almost breathless in its description of our newest Sister City, Changchun, as a place of 7.5 million people, spread across 20,571sq/km, and pumping out 2.8 million and 2500 train carriages a year. Who wouldn't want a piece of that action?

Indeed, the newsletter cover gave a tantalising taste of what we might look forward to, with a mock image of a Chinese bullet train speeding into Warrnambool railway station. Wow, this would be so much better than the current V-Line service that is one of the [poorest performing in the state](#) because of its breakdowns and delays.

This new Sister City relationship is not only about friendship and goodwill, but promoting "common prosperity and development" – in other words, business – and this takes a lot of time, and we can expect, a lot more money before we see any concrete results.

The council minutes of September 9 make this clear:

"If the Council and the Great South Coast elect to use the relationship with Changchun to leverage business opportunities, further costs will accrue in hosting visits to Warrnambool from Changchun and staff resources in preparing and supporting business and projects to the benefit of the region, matching funding with state government grants etc. These are unknown at this stage."



While we might be flattered by the intentions of a major city, we certainly don't have Changchun all to

ourselves. Changchun has 19 other Sister Cities: Warrnambool is number 20. In this regard, it is a bit like being married to a polygamist – you have a seat at the table, but the love is being shared around.

Still, the [recent business delegation to Changchun](#), led by Mayor Michael Neoh and CEO Bruce Anson, reported that they found the trip invaluable as an entrée to potential new markets.

No doubt their efforts to build on this introduction will dovetail with the work of the Great South Coast Exporters Group, and similar state and federal bodies that work to build international trade relations.

But is this what our Sister City relationships should be about?

And should ratepayers' money be directed to this purpose, or could it be better used to fund, for example, more tangible and immediate projects such as improving the restaurant end of Liebig St, installing more public art, or buying more books for the library?

The little sister has grown up: now is the time for an open discussion on where she fits into the family.



If you enjoyed this, you might enjoy...

[When scrutiny is sub-standard, democracy suffers](#)

Art as medicine: Glenn Morgan

As one of South-West Victoria's most successful and prolific artists, Glenn Morgan could have easily become pompous and aloof, but instead he remains refreshingly down to earth and committed to his home town.

Do you remember the Drive-in?

This week's offering from Mum's Drawer isn't from Mum's Drawer at all, but we couldn't resist sharing it with you...does this look familiar to those of you from around Warrnambool?

Gardeners get down and dirty



Warrnambool Community Garden Convenor Geoff Rollinson has been one of the driving forces behind the transformation of the old quarry.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] T
[/dropcap]urning old quarries into beautiful places and spaces is something of a Warrnambool speciality: the late Sir Fletcher Jones did just that with Pleasant Hill outside his Raglan Parade factory.

About a kilometre up the hill from his masterpiece is another, equally impressive transformation of a former council quarry into the Warrnambool Community Garden and Hub.

Instead of taking things from the land, the Warrnambool Community Garden has spent the past six years putting life back into it.

The 2 acre site on the corner of Grieve St and Grafton Rd is a shining example of organic and permaculture gardening, with the site divided into areas of raised vegetable beds, more than 50 fruit and nut trees, a herb garden, bush tucker area, communal garden and 56 individual garden beds, all of which

appear to be thriving.



A piece of paradise – the community garden right in the heart of Warrnambool.

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[/dropcap]he individual plots are planted and maintained by group members who are assigned a patch of dirt for their own enjoyment. When Bluestone visited last week, the spring crops were booming, with beans, snap peas, rhubarb, spring onions, several varieties of lettuce and thick clumps of silverbeet among the delicious produce.

Incredibly, there was barely a weed to be seen.

“We have a flag system,” explained Convenor **Geoff Rollinson**.

“That means that if your plot is looking a bit neglected, a flag goes up on it...but we have never had a flag. It is the thought of being flagged that is the deterrent,” he said, laughing.



Where it all began...the Grieves St site before its transformation into an environmental hub.

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[/dropcap]he garden is home to several employment scheme projects and works in closely with other like-minded environmental groups around the area, who can also make use of the Hub: a retro-fitted portable classroom that showcases energy efficient building.

This weekend (October 12-13 from 10am), the garden is hosting its annual Dirty Weekend full of gardening and sustainable living-related activities, including composting, permaculture techniques, learning about edible weeds and indigenous foods, cooking with 'ugly' vegetables and various stalls, exhibits and competitions. A dry stone wall building workshop will also be held with expert David Long (\$88 – bookings 0429 928 511).

[box type="bio"] For more information on the garden, or how to become involved, visit its website [here](#). [/box]



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Windy? Make the most of it!

“My friend the wind will come from the hills When dawn will rise, he’ll wake me again My friend the wind will tell me a secret He shares with me, he shares with me...” Growing up in Warrnambool, we had...