



# Friends of Suai

May 2010



## Port Phillip Council extends the hand of friendship with Suai for another ten years

On Monday May 10, 2010, the City of Port Phillip moved a motion to renew its friendship agreement with Suai, East Timor, for a further ten years. The renewal of the agreement is due to be signed later this year, following the development of a strategic plan.

On May 4, 2000, the City of Port Phillip became the first local government in Australia to sign a statement of friendship with East Timor or Timor Leste, as the Timorese call it.

The original agreement, signed by Xanana Gusmao, the President of National Council of Timorese Resistance (now Prime Minister) pledged to help rebuild the country which had been almost totally destroyed by Indonesian forces after the overwhelming vote for independence on August 30, 1999.

At that time each Port Phillip councillor signed the statement and committed the community to work with the coastal town of Suai where a shocking massacre had resulted in the killing of at least 150 people, including priests, who were sheltering in the cathedral.

Through Friends of Suai, a community taskforce set up in March 2000, the people of Port Phillip have offered friendship and given time, goods, hospitality, money and skills to their near neighbours in Suai and the surrounding district of Covalima. In turn, the people of Suai have enriched the lives of Port Phillip residents. Friendships have developed and have been fostered by regular communication including through Suaimediaspace and exchange visits.

Ten years ago we started Truckloads for Timor and sent rice, clothing, bikes and other urgently-needed aid to Suai in a ute. That ute has just been retired so we're pleased to announce we're donating an ex-fleet Toyota Hi Lux utility filled with library books and school packs and flat screen monitors for the Suai Community Centre early next month as part of the celebrations. Most initiatives over the past ten years have been in the form of targeted small-scale



Suai Massacre Commemoration, Port Phillip, 2009



Alberto Barros shearing sheep, Benalla, 2009



Bright Star women's group, 2010



community support and training programs involving education, health, environment, arts, media and technology.

Last year five retired teachers, including two from Port Phillip, spent a month training English Language teachers in Suai. Thanks to Friends of Suai book sales and donations from Balwyn Rotary and others, Suai Secondary School was able to open a library for its 3000 students last July.

Friends of Suai are now working in partnership to deliver new programs including a women's livelihoods project with International Women's Development Agency and a Green PC information technology enterprise with InfoXchange Australia and involving broadband internet.

There are now some 50 local government relationships with East Timor across Australia.



### **Suai Coordinator Simao da Silva Barreto is Recovering**

It is with deep sadness that we have to report that Simao da Silva Barreto had a stroke in January 2010. Simao has been the Coordinator at Centro Comunidade Covalima (Covalima Community Centre, Suai) since 2006 and the Commission Chairperson at the Centre in 2005. The stroke

affected Simao's speech and mobility but we are delighted that he is now responding well to rehabilitation and slowly recovering his speech and movement. We all wish him a full recovery and hope that he will be back home in Suai together with his family soon.

Simao has implemented many programs and projects at CCC funded by Friends of Suai and is an important community leader who also is Chairperson of the local community radio station Radio Taroman, a secondary-school teacher and tireless worker.

When Simao came to Australia in 2006 he told Friends of Suai the story of his great uncle who was killed by the Japanese in WW2. His great uncle was killed because he was found by the Japanese to have Australian coins in his pocket. He told Pat Jessen that his older brother said "You must learn English and go to Australia and tell this story." Well indeed he did tell this us this story and ensured that the friendship that began in WW2 has continued between our communities. He has also taught many others people English as a school teacher and community worker.

### **Alberto Barros is the Acting Coordinator at the Community Centre**

Alberto Barros, who worked as the financial administrator for the Covalima Community Centre (Suai) for four years, has been appointed as Acting Coordinator while Simao Barreto is recovering from a stroke. Alberto is a very experienced community development worker who recently spent 6 months in Port Phillip studying English

and is experienced in financial accountability. Whilst he was in Australia he worked closely with Friends of Suai, representing his community at events here and meeting many from the East Timor network and partners in Australia. Alberto will do a great job with the help of the Board of Commissioners and Suai leadership who have also expressed their approval of the appointment.



### **Reflections on Suai Visit February 2010**

Overall it was a very positive visit and we believe we achieved a great amount in terms of consolidating the relationship between the City of Port Phillip (CoPP) and the community of Covalima. We also helped build the confidence of the staff of the Cento Comunidade Covalima (CCC), especially in light of the sad reality of Simao's recent cardio vascular stroke.

The community meeting of some 20 people identified a very positive attitude and understanding of the work of the CCC and a very strong desire that this relationship and activities should continue. In terms of the shape and style of the of the future program it was clear that as well as doing more of what is already happening e.g. computer training, English language and women's livelihoods training and

small projects etc, they expressed a clear desire to decentralise more of the activities and assist more in what one might call rural community development, with a strong agricultural focus.

In the coming months and years Suai and the district of Covalima will experience massive change. The major supply base for the oil program is to be sited in Covalima, probably in Suai Loro, the community on the water closest to Suai. Plans are afoot for the development of a port, the construction of a major airport and the rebuilding of the Dili/Suai road. The introduction of major electricity supply and water storage in the highlands is also muted. A Polytechnic with emphasis on petroleum management and agriculture is in the pipeline for possibly 2012.

Initially this will bring many jobs to the area and provide a large range of commercial opportunities. Whether the people of Covalima will be able to share in this development is very much dependent on their ability to negotiate and their level of training.

Other changes that need to be understood include the fact that many families and sections of the community are likely to be relocated, a process that is often fraught with difficulty and sometimes conflict. It must also be understood that following the major construction work is completed the number of jobs is likely to dramatically reduce leaving people unemployed and disappointed.

The district of Covalima is seen as a potential major agricultural supplier both in food crops and livestock for both the oil and gas industry, and the capital Dili.

At the same time TL is in the process of planning the introduction of local municipal government. The introduction of Local Government will enable the friendship to consolidate our relationship with Covalima and provide many opportunities for sharing, exchanges and training alongside the considerable contribution already being made at the community level. This has now been delayed until 2014.

*Bill Armstrong, Chairperson  
and Pat Jessen, Coordinator  
Friends of Suai*



### **Youth Media Training: YoMatre**

Media training workshops run by Jen Hughes from Friends of Suai in 2006 and 2007 have uncovered lots of talent. YoMaTre's documentary about traditional methods of reconciliation, *Reconciled by Drinking Sacred Water*, won first prize at the 2008 Dili Independent Film Festival. Community media has proved a simple and smart way to provide educational programs on health and agriculture to people who are illiterate. A mobile media unit takes videos to remote communities.

With support from Friends of Suai in 2008, Jen and Ergilio set up the Suai Media Space, an on-line site in English and Tetun connecting the communities of Suai and Port Phillip (and

the world) through videos, photographs, artworks, blogs and chatrooms:  
[www.suaimediaspace.org](http://www.suaimediaspace.org)

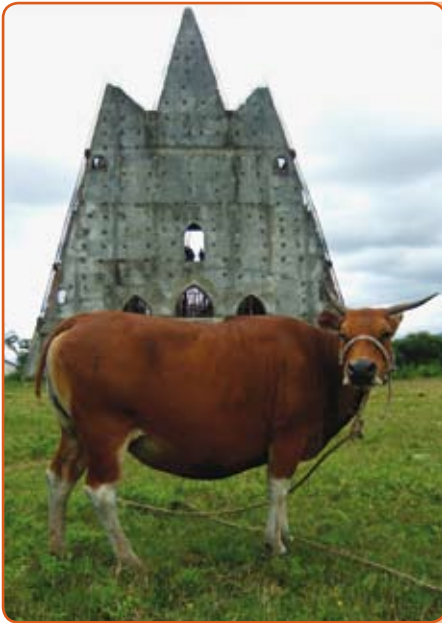
Following USAID and AusAID funding in 2009, Suai has become one of five media houses (Uma Media) set up around the with broadband, additional computing power and training to enable journalists to contribute to Timor news online ([www.timornewsline.com](http://www.timornewsline.com)) YoMaTre and the Uma Media are now working closely together.

A digital photography workshop was funded by Friends of Suai in 2009 to provide training to youth and media volunteers. The students' works will be displayed in the Friends of Suai exhibition: *Connections Across the Timor Sea* (exhibition details on page 4).

If you would like more information on how to get involved with Friends of Suai please contact:

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## Suai Unfinished Cathedral and Cow by Livanía de Jesus

*What I like most is taking photos of or shooting people's activity of selling and buying in the market, because whenever we have an exhibition people will see and realise that through the activity selling and buying in the market they can sustain their daily lives, and can afford to send their children to school.*

*I must also take photos of children going to school because through these photos all people can realize that it is through selling things in the market that they can support their children to go to school.*

*Thank you for your attention.*

## Connections across the Timor Sea

The Gallery, St Kilda Town Hall, May 26 - June 23, from 9am to 5pm.

Connections across the Timor Sea: memory, friendship and future will be launched by the new East Timor Ambassador to Australia, Abel Guterres to kick off celebrations for the 10th anniversary of the City of Port Phillip friendship with East Timor.

“The exhibition will reveal some of the depth and history of friendship arising from Timorese courage in World War II and our shared stories since independence in the last 10 years,” said Deputy Mayor Cr Powning who will join Mr Guterres in launching the event.

The Australian troops in East Timor from 1941 to 1943 - called the Sparrow Force - survived largely because of the dedication and self-sacrifice of the East Timorese people. The Japanese forces put a price of on the heads of the Australians, dead or alive, but never once did the East Timorese people betray them. Only about 40 of the Sparrow Force died during the East Timor campaign but at least 20,000 Timorese were killed by the Japanese during the two years they were stationed there. Many

more Timorese - perhaps another 40,000 - lost their lives in the remaining years of the war.

Connections across the Timor Sea features a range of works including water colour snapshots of Timorese life back in the 1940s which will be exhibited for the first time. The paintings belong to Friends of Suai member and local artist Elizabeth Milsom and have populated her home since early childhood.

Elizabeth has a long connection with East Timor. Her father, Sergeant George Milsom, served there from 1941-1942. He later returned in 1945 as a guide with Lieutenant Charles Bush war artist, and photographer Sergeant Keith Davis.

Local documentary-maker Jen Hughes has been travelling to Suai for the last 10 years and her video installation will give an insight in to her personal journey by combining selected video with the art of Covalima Suai artists Sergio da Costa and Natalino dos Reis Pires.

“Through the installation, I am aiming to show what Suai looks

and sounds like, telling the story through local art and music. I also want to capture what we've done to make a difference since 2000,” she said.

Photographs taken by unemployed youth from a photography workshop in 2009 held by former St Kilda filmmaker Richard Jones and Timor artist Afreo Sanches, also feature in the exhibition. The photos capture themes of friendship and rhythm of life around the Suai market, church, schools and soccer field.

“The students were keen to document their culture and traditions of village life showing their hopes for the future,” said Richard. “They were quick to learn how to combine their photographic work with their new computer skills.”

The Exhibition runs from May 26 to June 23 at the Town Hall Gallery from 9 am to 5 pm.

Suaimediaspace puts culture and creativity at the centre of friendship.

Check it out at:  
[www.suaimediaspace.org](http://www.suaimediaspace.org)