

Nethercote community greets new "heart and soul"

By Amanda Stroud

On a stunning spring day the Nethercote and surrounding communities turned out in force to witness the reopening of the restored Nethercote Hall and to share stories of times past and project on what was to come.

Amongst officials at the celebrations were Mayor Tony Allen and Federal Member for Eden Monaro Dr Mike Kelly.

Both were relaxed, at home and clearly pleased to be a part of the proceedings.

Mayor Allen recalled a conversation some years back about cost-cutting with a state member of parliament who suggested that he disband the 19 community halls within the Bega Valley Shire as a cost-saving measure. Tony Allen responded to the MP by saying that "the hall in a small community is the heart and soul of that community," and his recounting of the story was met with loud applause by those gathered.

The hall restoration is largely due to the drive, planning and sheer hard work of the Nethercote Residents Association (NRA), currently (then) led by president Paul Gersbach.

Mr Gersbach hosted Saturday's events and euphorically described how "the gathering place for the community" came to be restored.

A series of fundraising activities over 12 years helped to build a restoration pool of over \$60,000.

The Federal Government contributed a further \$38,000 from the Regional Solutions infrastructure grants and the Bega Valley Shire Council also helped through its annual hall contributions.

But it was the dedication of the community itself that brought the project to completion with almost all the work carried out by volunteer labour on weekend working bees.

In a surprise move on the weekend, Mayor Allen deputised Paul Gersbach as mayor for the day, making it 'official' by placing an impressive medallion around Paul's neck.

Mike Kelly likened the work of the volunteers over the 12 years, led by Mr Gersbach, to "Michelangelo working on the Sistine Chapel, but a lot more useful

Mr Kelly regretted not being able to appoint Mr Gersbach "Prime Minister for the day."

Where is it: The Nethercote Community Hall is on the corner of Nethercote Road and Back Creek Road, in the locality of Nethercote, some ten kilometres along the Nethercote Road turnoff on the Princes Highway, just south of Eden on the right hand side as you leave town heading for Victoria



A surprised Paul Gersbach, president of the Nethercote Residents Association, was made honorary mayor for the day by Mayor Tony Allen.



"The hall in a small community is the heart and soul of that community' Mayor Tony Allen.