

## INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS

**David Lawry** - Chair, TREENET and Director of Lawry's Nurseries

In setting out the vision for TREENET this morning I'd like to draw your attention to two articles in this mornings' *Advertiser*. You couldn't miss the headline Page 1 which reports the tragedy involving a fallen tree on the Onkaparinga Valley Rd near Verdun yesterday. A motorist was crushed to death and the passenger had a narrow escape as a big old pine tree, weakened by poor management and inadequately assessed for hazard fell on her 4WD vehicle as she passed down the road. We all can share the horror of that event in purely human terms but perhaps beyond the common response are reminded of our duty as tree people to understand and manage trees in such a way as to prevent these "Acts of God"!

The second article trumpets the success of the wine industry in achieving record export sales yet again with the flagship Jacobs Creek label leading the industrial pack. South Australia can boast few such success stories and it is interesting to reflect that 20 years ago the wine industry was struggling and old vines were being pulled out all around the state. How did this happen and what does it have to do with the 'accident' on the Verdun Road?

The Winter 2000 edition of "Lumen", the Adelaide University magazine carries 2 articles which hint at the link. There is a brief overview, " TREENET – Everyone's a winner" and a profile on Brian Croser titled "Wine sets the standard in investment stakes". The latter article outlines the role Brian Croser and other graduates from the Adelaide University Waite Campus has in shifting an industry in the doldrums in the 70s to a world leader in the 90s. In the late 60s and early 70s when Croser, Day, Dunsford, Weaver, Gunner, Couche and others were students the emphasis at the Waite was wheat and sheep. There was no Oenology course and Croser undertook a Masters Degree at the University of California. The following years saw him establish similar courses in Australia and as an industry lobbyist assist in obtaining funding for the research needed within Australia. The article emphasises time and again the key role research and education played in the success of the wine industry and the central relationship between industry and the Adelaide University in that journey.

Croser said "The Waite is the best wine facility in the world, bar none, for oenological and viticultural research. If you combine the resources of SARDI, the University, the Australian Wine Research Institute, the CSIRO on that site, it's a magnificent complex".

Well we can say the same as a group whose interests cover all aspects of research and education in street trees. In fact we were in a better position 70 years ago than the wine industry was half a century later. We had Peter Waite bequest of the large area in the west of the campus which in 1928 became the Arboretum. Unfortunately there has not till now been the recognition within the University of the significance of this rare facility even though it is acknowledged throughout Australia and internationally by arborists as an outstanding arboretum with a continuous history of data collection and low impact management which provides an ideal opportunity for useful research. It is also one of the few arboreta in the world attached to a University.

The TREENET vision is based on this unique association, and following the example of the wine industry by emphasising research and education is set to have a significant impact on the way we deal with street trees in the future.

The inaugural meeting of the Urban Tree Cooperative Research Group was held in February 1997 and brought together representatives of State Government as well as the Nursery Industry and education sectors. There were 4 of us present.

The aims were "To improve the streetscapes of South Australia through a coordinated assessment of existing and potential client needs, species, production methods, establishment practices and information sharing."

The Arboretum had a great variety of trees with potential for street planting. TransportSA was happy to encourage research through financial support, and Urrbrae Agricultural High School was keen to involve Year 11 & 12 students in projects of this sort. We identified 3 main areas of activity:

- 1) Street Tree Trials – focussing on selecting trees which minimised problems of roots, leaf drop, line clearance, canopy management and to widen the palette of suitable species available. We intended to set these trials up on campus and figured we needed \$2000 to trial 10 species – We thought we'd find the money from the Catchment Boards, Telstra, Optus and ETSA.
- 2) Production of *Pyrus* 'Lynington' – this was a spectacular selection of *Pyrus calleryana* made by former Arboretum Curator Dr David Symon. The aim was to make the cultivar available to the trade and generate kudos and hopefully income for the Arboretum
- 3) Soil and Water management – the aim was to test new technology in irrigation and to research soil and water properties in relation to dryland and wetland plants.

Future potential projects included:

- Revising ways to harvest storm water in gutters for the benefit of street trees
- Modeling different footpaths and assessing the effect on tree establishment
- Incorporation of green waste into tree planting
- Running a 2 day conference in 1999/2000
- Conveying information on all the projects via the internet.

Although our ideas were fairly ambitious and perhaps a little naïve, enthusiasm was high. We met again a little over a week later, the number of participants had grown to 7 and we adopted the name TREENET – Tree and Roadway Experimental and Educational Network. Since then, we have had over 100 meetings (quite often just 15 minutes long between two participants) and achieved our initial aims of setting up street tree trials, producing *Pyrus* 'Lynington', running a 2 day conference and commencing a website. More importantly we have created an organisation with a management structure which ensures most efficient use of existing resources and has access to a broad base of expertise in all aspects of research and education relating to street trees.

We are extremely fortunate that through the Waite Arboretum TREENET comes under the umbrella of Adelaide University and is endorsed by it. We have avoided a

cumbersome administration structure which would have to confer with a committee before taking any actions or spending any funds. The advantages include:

- Members, sponsors etc. can have confidence in the University's financial system
- The financial infrastructure is already in place
- Automatic auditing
- Tax deductibility for gifts
- The University's purchasing power on all expenditure
- As research income it helps to attract a greater share of Federal funding for the Faculty
- Eliminates the need to set up an independent incorporated body to manage funds.

The vision has now widened to a national stage and we are indeed fortunate to have on our Advisory Board Dr Greg Moore, Principal of Burnley College at Melbourne University and Judith Fakes, Senior Lecturer in Arboriculture at the Ryde College of TAFE, NSW. These appointments to the Board are crucial as I believe the future of research and education lies with tertiary institutions such as these. It is a great pity that there is no arboriculture course offered by the Adelaide University and I believe the new TAFE facilities at the Urrbrae Education Centre across the road offer a great opportunity to significantly improve the standard of arboricultural training in this state. It is to the credit of the South Australian Society of Arboriculture that they have identified the need for industry training and have instituted their own privately provided course. If I can take my TREENET hat off for a moment and offer a private view, I generally regard these "industry courses" as useful but limited in scope and would like to see lecture room based training given a prominent place in any tertiary course. If you don't have this opportunity to expose students to appropriately presented theory and practical as well as the culture that goes with sharing the journey with others under the guidance of highly influential tutors, they will not have an opportunity to assess the wide range of career paths available.

Where will the necessary research be done if we abandoned Universities in favour of private providers? Personally speaking, if the wine industry relied on getting a couple of blokes over from the local liquor store after hours to run a course on "Safe handling of empty bottles" and "How to recognise a bargain red when you see one" we would not have had that report of the success of the SA wine industry in this mornings' *Advertiser*".

The acronym TREENET not only emphasises research and education but is focussed on trees in the roadway. We are not involved in issues related to trees in parks, or the bush, or woodlots and so can address the myriad of issues unique to this very harsh urban environment. We are all allegedly forest dwellers and must have trees close at hand. For most Australians that means we rely on street trees to provide that need. We all are privileged to be part of the network and TREENET looks forward to your continuing involvement and contribution, fulfilling the TREENET vision.