

At the 2011 Annual General Meeting the three long-standing office holders, President Neil Allport, Secretary Sheryel Marsden and Treasurer Rochelle Allport all chose to stand down, leaving a committee of just four people. A leaflet advertising that meeting had the headline "In Crisis," and warned of the possibility of the Association going into recess, risking a loss of autonomy in the face of the supercity and, in particular, loss of management of the two halls - the hub of the Oratia community.

It worked. Forty people showed up at the meeting and by the end of it there was a new fourteen-strong committee including a new Secretary, Penny Sparks, but no President or Treasurer. I was one of the other thirteen people. At the first committee meeting I was chosen as Chair; the word President wasn't actually mentioned.

The committee acquired the services of Steven Perich as Treasurer and the line-up of office-holders was again complete for the year.

A look back over the minutes shows that the year's early committee meetings were mostly concerned with matters to do with the two halls. In one sense this is appropriate, since - as the flyer I quoted a moment ago said - the halls, which we lease from the Council and manage, are the hub of the Oratia community. In another sense though, it tended to take air-time away from other concerns facing the Oratia District.

My purpose in offering to serve on the committee was to be part of a group which gave voice to the concerns of a community, and in some way, big or small, helped to empower that community. To that end, maintaining the community's social and cultural hub - the halls - is vital, and throughout the year we've done that quite well. Having a place where people gather and do something together in an organised way, is itself one form of empowerment. Debbie Hall is going to talk shortly, about some of the maintenance, progress, activities and so on which have taken place in the halls - and maybe throw a few statistics our way.

In terms of representing the voices of Oratia's people in their relationship with the Council and the local board, I think the committee has been less successful. I don't think I can honestly say I truly understand what Oratia's people at large want to say to the Council and the local board.

I've attended two local board meetings, and local board member Neil Henderson has attended some of our committee meetings. Penny Sparks and I also spoke to the local board in support of a submission Penny made on the Long Term Plan, which the committee had discussed. I've also attended two combined R&R meetings which is a new - or rather a resurrected - initiative where representatives of all the R&R Associations in the west meet to discuss matters of common concern.

In all of these interactions, and at committee meetings, I still felt that the views being represented were those of the committee members, and I wasn't sure how closely those same views were held by the wider community.

We all talk to our neighbours, and we all get a sense of what others are thinking from impromptu conversations we have at the dairy, or playgroup, or church, or dropping the kids off at school, or just having a cup of tea at someone's place. This organic way of getting a sense of the community's feeling naturally informs the discussion at committee meetings - but in the end, if things are going to change for the better - that is, the community's idea of better - I think we need to be organised.

I'm one of the people offering to serve for another year on the committee. I would like to see strong communication between the residents and their committee. I would like to see a big, thorough mailing list which is regularly used to distribute agendas and minutes of our meetings, and to invite people to comment or even attend.

I would like to see a website - an online forum - where those who choose to can talk about things they're hot under the collar about, and we can all join in. To this end the committee has purchased the domain name [oratia.org.nz](http://oratia.org.nz) and we have plans to set up such a website. We intend that all our agendas, minutes, the constitution, and other items of interest will be available on the site.

I would like to see the Association, via the committee, take a formal, active part in supporting social and cultural events which are currently organised by individuals or ad hoc groups who sometimes feel the strain. The marvellous Settlers' Film Club, and the equally marvellous Jungle Festival are two examples. I'd also like to see the Oratia Apple back in my letterbox.

The committee can only achieve this by co-ordinating the wider membership of the association, and it can only do that through strong, clear communication - which I think must be a priority for the committee in the coming year.

I'd like to give a huge vote of thanks to our current committee for the time and energy spent on R&R matters this year.

Two are stepping down. I'd like to express the association's thanks and best wishes to Murray Gray, who, with his wife Naomi McCleary, has moved away and has a lot on his plate coming up - specifically the Going West Books and Writers Festival in August and September. (Which I highly recommend).

I'd also like to thank Steven Perich who has been our cheery treasurer, and has offered to show the incoming treasurer the ropes, and even help with preparing monthly statements for the committee.

That ends the Chair's report. Thank you.