



Rotary and Rotaract get ‘out ’n’ proud’ in Newcastle

On Saturday, August 24, Rotarians from District 9670 and the Rotaract Club of the Hunter, NSW, attended the annual Newcastle Pride Festival, an exciting, glamorous and “out ’n’ proud” series of events celebrating sexuality and gender diversity in Newcastle, Lake Macquarie and the Hunter Region.

The atmosphere on the day was electric, with both Rotarians and Rotaractors talking to hundreds, if not thousands, of community-minded individuals.

While a huge number of names and enquiries for membership were received, one of the key drivers for the event was to support the local community and challenge the stigmas and perceptions people have of Rotary.

That goal was definitely achieved, with Rotary and Rotaract being the talk of the event.

Outdated perceptions of barbecues and old men’s clubs were heard over and over, but many opinions were changed on the day; a favourite comment being, “I didn’t think Rotary would attend Pride, but seeing this now makes me more appreciative of Rotary and I want to join up and get involved.”

“The fact that we stood side-by-side with Rotaract made all the difference,” Jesse Lackey, of the Rotary Club of Greenhills-Maitland said. “If anyone over 30 spoke to Rotaract they could easily pass them on to Rotary, while any under 30s were provided the option of Rotary or Rotaract.

“The twin Rotary gazebos were a beacon for passersby to come and have a chat to both of us, with strong branding elements

throughout the stalls giving a consistent message.”

This approach worked well with one potential member, Reece, who was super keen to get involved with Rotaract, but was just a little bit too old.

“When we said he could talk to Rotary, he said ‘Nope, no way. Don’t even, not a chance.’ Then ended up signing up to come along to a meeting because his opinion of Rotary was completely shattered,” Tori Baudinette, of the Rotaract Club of the Hunter said.

The district didn’t stop at shattering perceptions, however. They also ran some fundraisers and fun things for the community to do. Both Rotaractors and Rotarians sold badges and stickers designed and made inhouse by the district, while a selfie competition with Rotary-branded props proved a huge hit. The positive affirmation board, created by Rotaract for people to write messages of positivity and empowerment on, was also a winner.

The event was a huge public image coup for the district, with Mardi Gras Sydney using photos of Rotarians on their page (with over 400,000 followers), local media engagement, and just general positivity from all attendees. •

