

Thursday May 25, 2006

## NEW ARTS CENTRE FOR DANDENONG RANGES

The Premier Steve Bracks today announced \$3 million towards the development of a new \$7.6 million theatre at Burrinja, the Dandenong Ranges Community Cultural Centre.

Mr Bracks said the state of the art facility will seat up to 450 people and will mean that a wide range of theatrical productions and concerts that are currently staged elsewhere will now be able to be staged in this local community.

“Investing in the arts is central to the development of strong, vibrant communities. The addition of a new purpose built theatre will allow Burrinja to build on its excellent reputation as a vibrant community cultural centre.

Mr Bracks commended the Shire of Yarra Ranges for contributing \$4.6 million towards the theatre and recognising the value of such a far-reaching resource.

“This project also owes a lot to the support of local schools, St Joseph’s College, Monbulk College, Upwey High and Mater Christi College, that will all be able to use the theatre for end of year concerts and other activities,” Mr Bracks said.

Mr Bracks said the Member for Monbulk, James Merlino has been tireless in his efforts to make this project a reality.

“Mr Merlino had the drive to establish the Community Working Party that included local schools and the Dandenong Ranges Music Council. His efforts brought this project back to life after decades of wishful thinking.”

Mr Bracks also thanked the community for backing the project.

“This project is a great example of what can be achieved when state and local governments, and the community, work together in partnership. I look forward to seeing the new theatre further strengthen the region’s reputation as an arts and cultural powerhouse.

The Member for Monbulk, James Merlino said the new theatre will ensure the addition of a broad range of the best in theatre, dance, and music performances to the annual calendar of activities at Burrinja.

“When I was elected in 2002 one of my highest priorities was to re-ignite this campaign and finally deliver a local performing arts venue to the local community.

“Local schools’ musicals, amateur and professional theatre productions, or local touring music concerts have had to be staged ‘off the hill’ and often at a considerable distance for local residents,” Mr Merlino said.

Mr Bracks said Burrinja is the Yorta Yorta nickname of local artist and community activist Lin Onus who made an extraordinary impact during his life, helping to bridge the divide between people and cultures.

“Burrinja Aboriginal and Oceanic gallery and collection are renowned and include several of Onus’ works.

The Centre’s exhibition programme is also supported by a range of community cultural development programmes including youth arts, studios, seniors programs, education activities and workshops.”

“Every one involved can look forward to an even more exciting future at Burrinja,” Mr Bracks said.