

Opportunity to 'rebirth' vocational service

By Bob Aitken

Since the demise of the Shell Livewire mentor program, many Rotarians have been frustrated by the lack of vocational mentoring programs that heighten awareness of Rotary's vocational service base.

Rotary clubs and Districts still do vocational awards and careers nights with considerable success, but the satisfaction that comes from mentoring young tradesmen and women, young professionals, or young people in business is very special.

Earlier this year, a National Skills Survey by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry revealed an ongoing national skills shortage.

The survey highlights the need for increased interaction between employers and industry, increased funding for mentoring and supervision of trainees and apprentices and most important of all – the need to highlight the importance and relevance of vocational training in Australia targeted towards the immediate skills needs of the workplace.

National Skills Week – taking place October 1-8, 2011 – is a new initiative; a collaborative approach dedicated to raising the status of practical and vocational learning. National Skills Week aims to provide a focus to Vocational Education & Training (VET), its achievements, opportunities and success stories.

Rotary's Vocational Service Month – October – coincides with National Skills Week and *Rotary Down Under* has agreed to become a collaborating partner in promotion of vocational skills, activities and events nationwide.

One of the main aims of National

Skills Week will be to dispel the myth that a university education is the only path to success – and to raise the status of vocational education among parents, teachers, students and careers counsellors.

Rotary clubs and/or Districts are being encouraged to organise a special event, dinner or activity that acknowledges the importance of vocational service – with a focus on ethical consciousness and community awareness.

This is a splendid opportunity for Rotary's club and District Vocational Service Directors to plan a unique event during Vocational Month 2011.

National Skills Week is supported by the Australian Government and more information is available on www.nationalskillsweek.com.au

Rotary clubs can get involved in many ways:

- Organise formal lunches/dinners for local business and community members – hosted and catered for by hospitality students and apprentices.
- Organise horticulture/landscaping students from TAFE colleges to do 'make-overs' on local parks and gardens to make communities aware of the talents of such students.
- Liaise with local high schools to organise special assemblies/barbecues with representatives from Australia's past WorldSkills teams, or past training award winners to attend and address students on training and career opportunities within modern trades.

Rotary leaders keen to organise special events to highlight Rotary's involvement in and support for National Skills Week

may contact Rachel Small or Kerrie Gale at SkillsOne for further information and assistance.

Rachel and Kerrie have access to a growing list of young trades/business volunteers prepared to support Rotary, either in a conceptual capacity, helping to instigate or coordinate activities, or as guest speakers at events. Vocational Service Directors are encouraged to contact Rachel or Kerrie immediately.

From sheet metal workers and cooks to bakers, hairdressers and gardeners, the range of trade skills for showcasing to communities is enormous.

These young people include many who have won medals at the WorldSkills "Olympics" and are high achievers in their own right. For more information on WorldSkills – this year's event will also coincide with National Skills Week – visit www.worldskills.org.au

The outstanding SkillsOne organisation is a government/industry sponsored organisation, launched in 2007 to deliver trade objectives of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Bob Aitken is a member of the Rotary Club of Lower Blue Mountains, NSW, and Executive Director of Rotary Down Under Inc. He is a Past Governor of District 9690. ■

ROTARY CLUB VOCATIONAL DIRECTORS

We need you to get your club involved. National Skills Week is a great opportunity for vocational directors to help engage in activities that will assist in encouraging people – young and old – to consider the great diversity and career opportunities offered through vocational education.

To find out more, visit www.nationalskillsweek.com.au and register for email updates. If you would like to get involved, contact Kerrie Gale or Rachel Small.

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