



Australian Sewing Guild Ltd.

SHARING AND FURTHERING THE ART OF SEWING

The Australian Sewing Guild Ltd - A History

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The Australian Sewing Guild Ltd (ASG) is a national not-for-profit organisation for people who regard sewing as a creative and rewarding activity. Sharing the benefits and joys of sewing is almost as much fun as sewing itself. The ASG provides the latest sewing information and a friendly support network for all level of sewers, from beginners to advanced. Their motto is "Sharing and Furthering the Art of Sewing".

The Australian Sewing Guild (ASG) began in 1996 as the Australian Sewing and Creative Textiles Guild (Incorporated in New South Wales October 1996) as the brainchild of Michelle Pullen, a well recognised publisher and tutor, with a business based in cutwork embroidery. Michelle had long been associated with the American Sewing Guild and realised that such an organisation would be of tremendous value to Australian sewers. The need arose for the establishment of the Guild when state governments downgraded textile courses in the schools and TAFE colleges. During a break in the Stitches & Craft Show in Melbourne, her idea was pitched to Susan Neall, Executive Director, and The Australian Sewing & Craft Industry Association (ASCIA) who met the idea with enthusiasm.

The American Sewing Guild assisted with the formation of the Guild by allowing the Guild to draw on their years of experience, and their Procedure Schedule to form the basis for the ASG's first Constitution. Having this information made available helped to speed up the establishment process. The Australian Sewing & Craft Industry Association (defunct since 1998) financially supported the formation of the Guild under the Presidency of J. A. (Tony) Castley and Executive Director, Susan Neall.

Australian Stitches Magazine (published by Express Publications) were great supporters of the ASG and first published a personal invitation from Michelle Pullen in their magazine in 1996, for all tutors, seamstresses and businesses in the sewing industry to contact her with a view to meeting up for discussion. These meetings to discuss how they could contribute to the establishment of the Guild took place as she travelled around the country appearing at craft shows. From October 1996 through to February 1997 a series of editorials were published to launch the Guild to potential members. This proved very successful in obtaining members, Neighbourhood Group Coordinators and Regional Organisers.

The National Board of the Australian Sewing Guild Inc. was appointed in March 1997. Michelle Pullen, Founder, was appointed President; Diana Oakley, Treasurer; Christine Floyd, Membership Secretary; Susan Neall, Industry Liaison Officer (resigning later that year); Robin Nixon, Director and Convention Organiser. A few months later came Phyllis Hoffman, Newsletter Editor and Elizabeth Kennedy, Secretary. The National Board was a very important stage of the Guild's development. The Board Members represented the sewer, the teacher and the industry. By May 1998, Diana Oakley had become Vice President, acting for the President after the birth of her first child; becoming President in August 1998. There were several changes of names and roles that year as the Guild grew.



*Diana Oakley, Christine Floyd, Robin Nixon,
Sue Neall, Phyllis Hoffman and (seated)
Founder, Michelle Pullen*

Michelle Pullen had started a Pilot Neighbourhood Group, in Bega, in July 1996 as the practicalities of running a group and operating a National Guild were worked out. The first, official, Neighbourhood Group was formed in NSW, Carlingford, a Sydney suburb, in July 1997. Other States followed later that year with groups forming in the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia. By May 1998 there were 55 Neighbourhood Groups around Australia. Tasmania's first group commenced December 2006, giving the ASG groups in every Australian State and Capital Territory. We even have members in New Zealand, with the first joining in 2005.

First mention of a website (piggybacked onto another popular craft website) was in July 1998. Five applications for membership were received in the first week! The Guild as it stands today (2016) has almost 1,700 members and 110 groups with sewing related Industry Partners in every state.

Also, in 1998, the first ASG National Convention was held from 30 September to 4 October at the New England Girls' School in Armidale. Attendees boarded at the school and attended workshops run by recognised sewing industry tutors during the day. This continues to this day and is a very popular part of the sewing calendar; along with Sewing Retreats; Sewing Workshops and the state based Industry Days (begun in 2003) as the brainchild of Susan Neall, where members and guests have an opportunity to hear speakers on the latest trends and make purchases at a discount.

In July 1999, Pamela Manley put to a meeting of the Board a review the Constitution of the ASG which, to this day, operates on Neighbourhood, Regional, State and National levels. All levels working with each other for the benefit of all. It is a self-governing body; its Constitution, Aims and Objectives are governed by the membership.

The following October 1999, at the AGM, a vote was put to the membership to shorten the name and consolidate the outdated Model Rules and Procedure Schedule following the Guild's Incorporation to one Constitution. A competition was run to design a unique logo, which was

won by Jessica Dunn, a junior member of the Nambucca Valley Neighbourhood Group, at 13 years of age. Jessica's logo depicts Australia as a sewing machine and pin cushion.

By the time of the 2000 AGM, there was a representative from each state sitting on the board as State Liaison Officers.

At the 2015 AGM the membership voted to move from being a NSW based Incorporated Association to a nationally recognised Company Limited by Guarantee. On 14th November 2016 the ASG was officially registered with ASIC as the Australian Sewing Guild Ltd.

The Australian Sewing Guild's website www.aussew.org.au has also moved with the times and offers members and prospective members a huge array of information, skill building videos and e-books, Industry Partner offers, competitions, Sew-Alongs, news and ways of getting involved; along with information on what Neighbourhood Groups and States are doing. The ASG has also embraced social media and operates a Facebook page as well as a Blog. Both are accessible from the website by clicking the icons in the upper right corner of the screen.

Prohibitive costs meant the cessation of the popular printed Newsletter in 2014, which was published quarterly, and members now receive a digital newsletter, AUSSEW News, that provides up-to-date information, hints, activities and news.

Most Neighbourhood Groups meet each month, some, twice a month and programs are being developed to bring together those members in outlying areas, too far from an established group, via the wonderful mediums of Facebook, Blogs and soon, it is hoped, distance education via the Internet. Our members are made up of professional tutors, home sewers, authors, industry, bloggers, quilters, creative sewers, dressmakers, patchworkers, knitters, academics and, basically, everyone who loves to sew! Where to find mentoring to help improve your sewing? Go to Australian Sewing Guild website to join as a member www.aussew.org.au.

References

Australian Stitches Magazine (published by Express Publications) Michelle Pullen, ASCTG, Vol. 3 No. 2 pages 6 and 7

Australian Stitches Magazine (published by Express Publications) Susan Neall, ASCIA, Vol. 3 No. 5 page 1