



The man from BRAG

Kylie Dominick tracked him down

RAY LEGGOTT SPENT TWENTY years working in marketing and advertising, in Sydney, London and New York. To atone for his sins, he now gives time to the promotion of craft and art in Braidwood and elsewhere around Australia.

He is the Secretary of Braidwood Regional Arts Group, and operates The Wood Agency, which handles advertising for various institutions round the country such as The Powerhouse Museum and the Art Gallery of South Australia. In his own art practice, he works in collage and mixed media.

What he loves most about his collage work is tearing up old ads from the glossy magazines of his past life to make new work he can really believe in.

He can also sometimes be found

behind the counter at the post office, helping people post things.

Can you give us a quick history of The Braidwood Regional Arts Group?

BRAG kicked off in 2002 to give economic, practical and peer support to members — artists and craftspeople — such as insurance, auspicing grants and lobbying, and in December 2003 the first annual BRAG Members' Exhibition was held in the National Theatre.

By about 2005, we needed somewhere that people could come together and do things and have projects and exhibitions and classes and people could earn money that way too.

Through the Regional Development Fund, BRAG applied to fund a community Arts Centre so it would not only help BRAG members' social and

economic development, but it would feed into the general community. Ron White's Saddlery in Wallace Street was identified as a suitable building.

In 2007, prior to the election, the ALP candidate Mike Kelly, and Simon Crean, visited Braidwood and pledged that the Regional Development Fund would help buy the Saddlery if Labor won the election. They did, and with the help of everyone who donated, in May 2012 The Braidwood Community Arts Centre was officially opened by Mike Kelly.

Where is BRAG at now?

The opening of the Arts Centre in 2012 has changed the way that BRAG works, in that having the Centre there gives people more of a forum to get together that they didn't have before, so having that space has given BRAG a higher profile in that you can see peoples' work more readily. In the past we had the BRAG annual members' exhibition once a year at the National Theatre, whereas now I think there's a lot more opportunity for people to have solo shows or be shown as part of a group exhibition, or to write and present a performance or a workshop, so there's a greater ability to foster all kinds of things under a loose "arts" banner. It's not just visual arts, it can be comedy, song, poetry, indigenous works. It can be as wide and as diverse as the term 'art' is. So having that building has made a big difference to BRAG, to be able to showcase the work of all the members, and the space is available for workshops and other hands-on meetings. That's a big difference for where BRAG is at now.

Has there been increasing interest in artists using the building for exhibitions or projects?

Yes. We had a brainstorming session at the beginning of this year, and that was a call-out to see what people



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wanted to do in 2014 and how they wanted to use that space. That was really helpful because it diversified the interest in what was going to be shown at the Centre, and showed some diversity in people's artistic talents as well. We were also able to listen to lots of ideas for further development, and people had the chance to express their views on what did, and didn't, work for them, and what they'd like to see and do at the Centre during 2014.

The thing about the space is that it's not just one room, there's yoga on every week, there are workshops and performances. The Centre itself is more of a broad community centre in that sense as well. I would like to see it used as much as possible as a hired venue for everyone in town — for meetings, birthday parties, anything you want. Members can hire the venue at a reduced rate, but everyone is welcome to use it.

Throughout 2013, usage of the building really increased, there were new exhibitions and other events on every three or four weeks.

Give us a physical description of the space.

The building itself was originally two old schoolrooms from Braidwood Central School, put together, with a nice verandah out the front that catches the Western sun in the afternoon. As you come in there are two gallery spaces, to the left and right, that have beautiful natural light through those old school house windows. There's a little kitchen, then out the back there's a workshop area that has more privacy off the street. Then there's the Long Room — one idea I like for that is that it's usable as studio space.

At the back there's quite a sizable yard, with access through the side, and that would be a good space to showcase sculpture and metalwork from the area in the future.

What developments and changes have we seen? There are people who've been members in the past but may have lost touch with BRAG — what things are different now that they should know about?

We've had change of guard amongst the committee last year, bringing in new skills and areas of interest, and a different perspective to complement the founding members who are still with us. It was a great thing for the old guard to bring in new blood.

The Centre is being continually improved by the efforts of members and others — we got gas heating last year, which means we have gatherings during winter now as well.

There might be a perception that BRAG is all knitters and quilters, but there is a very broad range of expertise amongst members, with most of the crafts, visual arts and performing arts represented. We aim to have the established and the upcoming artists brought together — we even have members who don't identify as being artists themselves, but who wish to support and promote arts and crafts in Braidwood, as well as members who work professionally and have an excellent reputation internationally, and everyone in between.

Mainly, I'd like to see to see BRAG become a forum for all artists in Braidwood to come together and be welcomed and feel like they can use the space in any way they see fit — and to have no regulation on that as well.

Have there been some setbacks along the way?

There have been some things that haven't worked out as some members had wanted. One is that we weren't able to buy the empty block to the side of the building. Originally the plan was to have woodworks and metalworks and studios there.

We'd also like to develop the youth arm of BRAG, which is called BRAG-Y, a lot more. Our ethos is that everyone is

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