



SEGRA 2010

MEDIA RELEASE

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Attention News Editors / Chief of Staff
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BUILDING SOUL INTO SUBURBS

SEGRA (Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia) will examine the X-Factor that builds community spirit at the upcoming conference in Townsville 19 – 21 October.

“The problem with new suburbs is there is no-where to make a mess. One thing I know about community groups like theatre groups, pottery co-ops, Girl Guides and the like, is they need a shed - some where to store all of their gear, and it may not always look pristine.”

Lorna Hempstead AM is a community leader with a long association with professional and amateur Arts groups. Her dedication has seen her serve on the National Performing Arts Board, Tourism Queensland Board and the James Cook University Governing Council to name just a few.

Ms Hempstead will address the upcoming **SEGRA** conference focusing on the social infrastructure deficit and the looming volunteers crisis – both critical ingredients for vibrant communities.

New suburbs, country towns and remote areas all strive to create a buzz of activity and amenity.

Ms Hempstead points to the green spaces and parklands that are mandatory inclusions in any new development, but warns the ingredients that build community atmosphere are overlooked.

“It’s not the first thing people think of, but the infrastructure that creates really vibrant communities is physical space and good will,” said Ms Hempstead.

“Groups that engage people, young and old, and keep them fit and active, need a home. Often they end up being based in someone’s garage, and if that person moves town that can spell the end for that group,” said Ms Hempstead.

Australians are flocking to the coastline, putting enormous strain on burgeoning coastal communities. New developments, such as the recently approved Rocky Springs south of Townsville will ultimately house 38,000 people.

Ms Hempstead hopes developers, local businesses and councils will all consider accommodating community groups with donations of land or rent-free arrangements.

Aside from the physical infrastructure, the other critical issue is the decline in volunteers to run community groups.

“We are in a crisis now, but it will really hit in around 10 years time, when the baby boomers start pulling out,” said Ms Hempstead.

The modern two income family, combined with the reluctance to let children travel unsupervised is sapping people of time, that previously would have been dedicated to volunteering.

"Australia has such a strong tradition in volunteering, but it has been severely eroded in less than a generation.

"As a society we need to look for creative solutions, otherwise the things we really value in our community will start to disappear," said Ms Hempstead.

SEGRA convener, Ms Kate Charters said creating social amenity was a critical factor in determining a community's economic success.

"If towns are vital and attractive it is easier to draw in and secure a workforce," said Ms Charters.

"With a stable or growing population to underpin the local economy, regions can attract investment and embed some resilience into the community.

"It is an elusive quality at times, but Lorna Hempstead has some valuable experience and insights which will inspire **SEGRA** delegates," said Ms Charters.

SEGRA is the premier national forum for discussion of regional development, and will host debate on a raft of ideas and emerging issues for regional Australia.

For a full program visit www.segra.com.au

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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SEGRA 2010 is proudly supported by the Townsville City Council; the Queensland Government; James Cook University; Regional Futures Institute, Southern Cross University; Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation; and Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government; James Cook University; Townsville Enterprise; Port of Townsville; Indigenous Business Australia and the Australian Rainforest Foundation, National Institute for Rural and Regional Australia and Remplan.

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