

Kanyana Festival

1966-1988

The early Kanyana carnivals were the result of the leading townfolk of Mandurah attempting to provide an ongoing attraction for tourists after the Fishpot fishing competitions of the late 50s and early 60s came to an end. This also coincided with the transformation of the Sontoy (Santoy) ballroom into a shopping arcade, an event which removed another of the early tourist attractions in Mandurah.

The founding committee meeting took place at the Brighton Hotel on May 3 1965, at which Mr Jim White was elected president and Mr Alf Snell honorary secretary. There was considerable enthusiasm at early meetings, one of which attracted no less than 54 local citizens.

An early move envisaged that an appropriate name should be chosen for Mandurah's proposed annual festival. With this objective in view, a competition was held among students of Pinjarra High School where Mandurah children made up a large proportion of enrolments.

The word "Kanyana," with an aboriginal meaning of "a gathering of people," was submitted by Miss Helen Proctor, then 15 years of age and daughter of Mr & Mrs Ken Proctor of Pinjarra. "Kanyana" was accepted by a carnival committee meeting held on July 13, 1965.

The inaugural president, Mr Jim White, tendered his resignation to the committee in August and was succeeded by Mr W (Wally) Doney.

Early discussion favoured two separate carnival periods throughout the two last weekends in January. However, a committee meeting in October 1965 favoured and decided on a ten-day period in January. With the approach of the first carnival period, the committee held regular weekly meetings and, in some cases, at more frequent intervals. One of the biggest events within the carnival programme was instigated in time for the 1966 festival for which Mr W (Bill) Crowley donated \$200.



Kanyana Festival cont'd

Former minister for Fisheries, Flora and Fauna, Mr G. C. MacKinnon, M.L.C., officially opened Mandurah's first Kanyana Carnival on Saturday January 22 1966 at a ceremony on the western foreshore.

Similar to later years, the inaugural carnival smacked of variety, and was considered a successful accomplishment, despite some obvious teething troubles quite normal with the organisation of such festivals.

A children's picnic and family day was introduced into the programme from the outset, Wednesday being set aside for this event. Its success throughout the first eight carnivals was so great that an extension was necessary over to the Thursday on subsequent occasions.

Mrs H Maddern was assistant secretary to Mr Alf Snell for the initial carnival after which Mr D. C. Tuckey took over the presidential helm from Mr Doney, with Mr Bert Hummel as vice president.

Prior to the 1967 carnival, the Kanyana Committee took the unusual step of convening a meeting of sponsors and organisations at the Royal Hotel, Perth. This proved successful but for various reasons was not repeated in subsequent years. Perth sponsors made significant contributions to the Kanyana Carnival in its early stages.

This support was one of the important factors that prompted the committee to hold the festival in January—when the flush of the holiday season was most evident.

Other factors attributing to the summer period, was the number of programmed water events, and presentation of organised entertainment for holiday makers. However, these factors were queried in later years and suggestions came forward for an ongoing carnival period.

Extreme pressure of business necessitated the resignation of Mr Snell as secretary almost 18 months after his election at the inaugural meeting. He was succeeded by the late Mr W. F. Kelly who carried out secretarial duties for the next 12 months involving the 1967 carnival.

Mr J Dawson, when elected secretary, after the resignation of Mr Kelly and the conduct of the 1968 and 1969 carnivals took place under a Tuckey-Dawson leadership. After the 1968 carnival, changes in organising were envisaged involving emergency decisions and election of principal sponsors of the committee for a period of three years.

The 1970 carnival saw the Mandurah Tourist Bureau (formed in 1969) move into the carnival organisational field, due to an apparent loss of interest and a dwindling in numbers of committee members.

The Tourist Bureau took over total control for 1971-72-73-74 with Mr F Semmens (manager) as organiser [in conjunction with an elected committee of 4 members] giving the annual carnival a much-needed shot in the arm. The Premier, John Tonkin, opened the 1972 Carnival.



Kanyana Festival cont'd

An attempt to commercialise the carnival and remove the organisational burden from the Tourist Bureau in 1977 did not meet with success. A commercial promoter brought new attractions to the carnival including live music and other cultural events.

Admission fees were charged for these, and this produced a backlash within the town. The carnival and its future were left in disarray.

Frank Semmens and the Tourist Bureau stepped in again for 1978 and 79 to prove that the carnival had a future. The 1979 carnival featured cultural events staged in cooperation with the Festival of Perth.

Frank Semmens once again stepped down in 1980, and another push to commercialise failed due to the bad impression left by the 1977 carnival.

However, the committee, with assistance from the Tourist Bureau and ongoing support from sponsors, kept the festival alive in a reduced format. However, 1988 marked the end of Kanyana as an annual event.

Lack of ongoing sponsorship and community enthusiasm for a format which had become a little tired over the years saw Kanyana come to a close. It was revived in 1991, being held in November, and was run on and off in a very much reduced format during the early and mid-90's before being replaced by Crab Fest in 1999.

Its 22 year run as an annual festival spanned a time of change in Mandurah's history, and the role it played in attracting tourism to the town as the first modern community event in Mandurah will always stand as a significant achievement for the Mandurah community.

