

Friends of Venilale E Newsletter

JANUARY 2026

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2025 saw a jam-packed second half of the year. Fundraising has been in full swing with some amazing events held - fabulous Hamoris Lian Timor concert, popular annual Ridgeline Walk, the November Bush Market, The Steiner School Spring Fair and a visually stunning Open Garden at Claire and John Owen's.

It was a particularly memorable year as we celebrated the 20 year anniversary of our friendship relationship and were honoured to be awarded an Order of Timor-Leste medal and certificate of recognition from the Timor-Leste President, Jose Ramos-Horta.

In July a group of FoV members visited Venilale after attending a two day conference in Dili. Regular visitors Lynn Elder and David and Anne Foster were joined by Trish McKenzie who was visiting for the first time.

In Venilale, the Peace Corps volunteers ended their posting, Mestri Pedro finished his time as Education Support Officer and there was significant progress made at the Venilale schools .

In this newsletter you can expect:

Community Updates

Venilale Visits

Scholarship updates

Partnership School news

Events & Fundraising

AGM

Venilale Community News



Mestri Pedro de Sousa came to Australia in 2005, the first person from Venilale to come to Mansfield. He taught Indonesian at the Secondary College and stayed with a few different FoV members giving him a broad experience of Australian life. In 2015 he became the first Friends of Mansfield Education Support Officer setting up the scholarship program and liaising with students, teachers and parents. At that time he was the English teacher at Bercoli Junior High.

Now he is the Inspector of Middle Schools, responsible for approximately 80 teachers and all students in the Venilale district from Grades 1 to 9. Bercoli has grown from a middle school to include a kindergarten and senior secondary levels.

We would like to thank Mestri Pedro for his outstanding commitment to education in the Venilale District and administration of the scholarship process for the last 10 years. His organisation of impressive welcome ceremonies for each group of Mansfield visitors has been amazing. He has been a key member of Friends of Mansfield and an essential reason for the success of our relationship.



Three Peace Corps volunteers, Andy Kline, Caleb Betts and Quentin Power worked in Venilale for two years and finished in December 2025.

Andy worked at the Senior Secondary School teaching English. He loved the close connection he made with the community and getting to know his students very well. Caleb worked at SMK, the Catholic girls school teaching business and marketing. He also worked with Joni at the Community Centre. Quentin taught at Bercoli and was considered an honorary Aussie because of the Mansfield connection.



The road from Dili to Baucau is now a well-made highway. Travelling through Baucau reminds us of the past with rough road surface and huge craters. However, from Baucau to Venilale is fabulous and even extends down the main street of the town. Joni has acted as a guide for two Timor Adventures tour groups and continues to teach at the Senior High School.

Venilale visitors



In July Joni, Candida and the current Posto Administrator for Venilale, Senor Jose, joined David and Anne Foster and Lynn Elder at a two day conference for Friendship Groups organised by the Minister for State Administration.



It was a very special privilege to visit Joni's home and meet his family.



Every school we visited welcomed us officially by presenting tais.



Our newest FoV member Trish McKenzie was a valuable and knowledgeable contributor when we met Mana Marciana, the head of the Venilale Health Centre. Trish was able to describe the essential supplies we donated and discover future needs. She also gave practical demonstrations to staff in the maternity wing.



As usual Mestri Pedro and the staff at Bercoli organised a fabulous welcome.



Our visit to Venilale Senior School clashed with their mid-year exams. These are taken very seriously. Note the boy in the front row with his unusual hair cut. Teachers act as hairdressers if any boy's hair is too long. They all get a basin cut!



The first students to attend the newly constructed kindergarten wing at Bercoli were very happy to meet David Foster.



Uai Bua Junior High finally has a water supply thanks to this teacher Aze and his family. No longer do students have to cart water just to use the toilets.



Thanks to a government priority, every school now has a kitchen which supplies varied and nutritious lunches before students go home.



Mansfield was treated to an amazing concert by the group Hamoris Lian Timor. The variety of music was outstanding and the talents of the performers were impressive. This event was not organised in order to raise money but the efforts of Ann Eldred to run a silent auction and the other FoV members who managed the food and drink sales did allow FoV to cover its costs.

Fundraising Events



Again many thanks to Kirstie for her wonderful photography. Including family pets was a fabulous idea. She raised \$1,392



The Bush Market is a great way for FoV to connect with the community. The stall raised \$575.



The stall at the Steiner Spring Fair was another opportunity to connect with our community. A poster given to the Principal, Glenn Hood celebrated the school partnership with Uai Laco Junior High which has lasted 13 years.

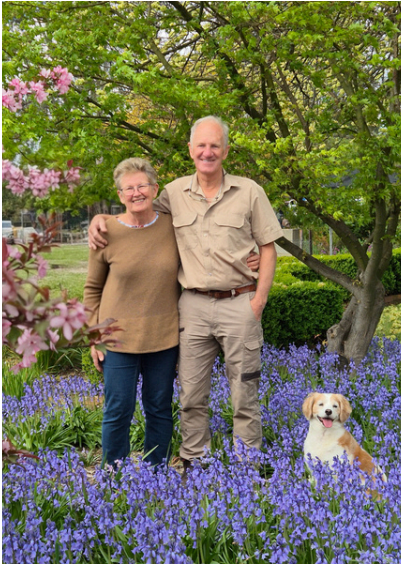


The Annual Ridgeline Walk



Thanks to landholders, Helen and Andrew Crockett and Margie Twycross, the walk was again a huge success. There were over 200 walkers, and Bear Hodge and Nikki generously offered lollies, watermelon and sheep to pat at the halfway point. The Walk raised \$3,236. Boss came up from Melbourne with fellow students Eugenia, Natalia, Liv, Ido, Dobe and Alau. They are Timorese postgraduate students studying English.

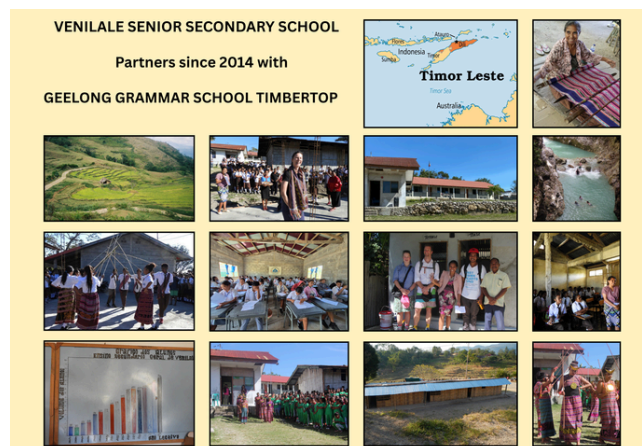
Owen's Open Garden



Claire and John Owen very generously opened up their garden to raise funds for Venilale. Visitors enjoyed this visual delight while listening to various musical renditions from the MAD Orchestra. Passionate gardeners, John and Claire established the garden when the house was built 40 years ago.

Karen and Ann, supported by friends and FoV members ran a very successful cupcake stall, Andy and David ran the BBQ and thanks to St John's for their donation of plants left over from their fete, visitors were able to buy plants for their own gardens.

Timbertop Monarch of the Mountain Mega Run



Every year Geelong Grammar Timbertop challenge their students to show how much they have improved throughout the year. Each year FoV members cook up the BBQ to feed the hungry horde when they finish. The school very generously donated \$3000. They are partnered with Venilale Senior Secondary so they were presented with a poster which celebrates this successful friendship relationship.



FoV representatives Julie Aldous, Lynn Elder and Boss were presented with the Order of Timor-Leste medal and certificate by Timor-Leste President, Jose Ramos-Horta. The medal and certificate were presented to the Mansfield Shire Council so that they could be publicly displayed. It is thanks to our extremely supportive community that we have been able to maintain such a strong friendship relationship.



20th Anniversary of Venilale / Mansfield friendship

In September, FoV celebrated 20 years of friendship. In Wangaratta we joined with the other Indi Friendship groups - Wangaratta/Lacluta and Indigo Shire/Atauro for a dinner with special speaker, Andrew Mahar who currently works with the Timor-Leste government and farmers to increase sustainability and economic returns. MC'd by Will Twycross, the evening was a huge success. Boss participated with an interview on his perception of the importance of the relationship, there was music by Mystic Trio, a silent auction, and a photo display prepared by Andy Kimber.



Scholarships awarded for 2026



The students awarded scholarships in 2025 will continue to receive funding till 2027.

FoV realised that it was better for students to complete a full part of their education, e.g. junior high school or senior high school rather than just a single year. University students and Marsh Foundation medical students continue to be funded for their full course. All students were interviewed when we visited Venetia in July and it was interesting to hear that they had much more specific ideas of what they would like to do when they finish school.



Having completed the first year of his Masters in Urban Planning in 2025, Boss returned to Timor to help Iza, Valenzo and Valerie fly to Australia. His DFAT scholarship and tremendous support from Judy Doubas and her family have allowed the whole family to be together for his second and final year of study. In January the family came by bus to Mansfield where they were hosted by various FoV members. Michelle Harmer has been instrumental in visiting the family regularly in Melbourne. It was great for Iza to become familiar with the place that is like Boss's second home. The children loved visiting Jamieson, having a farm experience, playing at the Botanic Park and enjoying a huge range of toys. Ian and Kate Cowling, our newest FoV members, enjoyed having the family to lunch and learning more about Timor-Leste.

Wild Timor Coffee



**Buy your coffee at
Oakbank Produce or
contact Ann Eldred -
0419950724**



Join our community

Friends of Venilale annual membership is just \$25.

Please use the following direct debit or postal information to join or renew your subscription for 2026

Name:

Email address:

Phone Number:

Address:

If new, email details to: david_anne_foster@bigpond.com

OR

Print & Post to: PO BOX 204. MANSFIELD VIC 3724

Direct deposit:

Account name: Friends of Venilale Incorporated

BSB: 013714 Acc Number: 269147371

Reference: Your name



2026 Committee

President : Julie Aldous

Vice President: Helen Crockett

Secretary: David Foster

Treasurer: Karen Lewis

Committee Members:

Ann Eldred, Lynn Elder, Andy Barltrop, Andrew & Helen Crockett, Trish McKenzie, Margie Twycross, Rachel Meadows and Anne Foster. A very special welcome to our new members - Kate and Ian Cowling, Sue Elliot and Hannah Wright

**MAKE A DIFFERENCE AND JOIN THE
FOV COMMITTEE.
4TH WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH
6PM
RSL HALL - HIGHETT STREET,
MANSFIELD**