Summary of April 2013 Address

Guest Speaker: John McDermott. — “The Skill of Aging While Remaining Young.”

John is the principal of a well-respected legal practice. He was one of the State’s most experienced arbitrators and mediators, a former Councillor with the City of Sydney, a newspaper columnist, also has board membership/chairman roles with numerous companies including health and aged care. His insightful knowledge of the health and aged care industry has provided the backbone to research for his book “Vint-Age Life”, which could be described as a handbook for healthy and productive living for those approaching their “vint-age” years.

The real message from John was that everyone should plan ahead for aging well and ensure they have a life outside of work. Referring to his topic John reinforced his view that it is a topic that needs to get on the table and that it can be best addressed by us.

Since 1907 when the average life span was 35-40 years we now live well into our eighties and therefore must organise our lives for some 20 years beyond “retirement”. John likes to refer to it as “reorient” rather than retirement. Surely we have not reached our “use by date”. At present there is no economic model to deal with aging and John advised that he would be taking us through some suggested approaches, reflected in the letters of the title from his book that would provide some answers to his topic.

“V” is for “vigorous”. Be active and assertive. There are many examples of older persons remaining in successful activities. Perhaps even the “men’s shed” concept provides avenues for creativity and an ability to contribute.

“I” is for “intelligence”. There are different forms e.g. emotional, common sense etc. but the message is to maintain a health mind and body. Do not be bluffed by computers, read widely, play bridge or Sudoku, socialise or even embrace spirituality through gardening, yoga. In John’s view people moderate themselves, hence monitor your health and act intelligently.

“N” is for “now”. Perhaps join a club. Where are you living – do you stay or go, should you make changes e.g. ramps for later ease of access or should you “downsize”. Should an Enduring Power of Attorney be executed for future situations? Ensure you maintain contact with the outside world.

“T” is for “time”. Ensure you spend it well and in our latter years we have the ability to take more control of it e.g. we can change our eating habits and have a good breakfast rather than previously when we may have skipped it altogether as we were in a rush. Take the time to learn computers, take courses, and use the facilities of the local library. We are able to plan more as we have that time available.

“A” is for “adapt”. Be willing to make whatever changes are needed. We have been adapting all our lives so it is not new.

“G” is for “goals”. Do not be dull and embrace John’s “three tier rule” and have something planned for tomorrow, next week and next month or beyond. In other words establish a “bucket List” of achievements to be completed - whether it is reading all Australian authors in two years (as was John’s goal) or travel Australia which is John’s
long time assistant’s goal. “E” is for “eagle”. Develop your wisdom. Do not be a duck pecking around on the ground – fly high and see the bigger picture.

One of John’s mottos is “Don’t let other people’s ideas shape you, shape yourself” In John’s view we are letting ourselves down is we do not plan for the next twenty years, if we do not volunteer for something, if we don’t get part-time jobs and keep a healthy mind and healthy body.

Question from members relating to remaining younger were: (1) the frequency of intimacy; (2) drinking red wine; (3) working with younger people; (4) Trade Union impact on wages and conditions impeding working longer; (5) medical profession not telling patients the full story; (6) what are the major health problems of today; (7) what to look for in selecting a retirement village; (8) older people’s obsession with their health condition; and (9) use of Enduring Powers of Attorney.

Ray Hyslop thanked John for his wonderful talk, which was beautifully presented and reminding us of how important time is. In Ray’s words “we don’t wear out we rust out”. Physically we do deteriorate, our brain reduces and it is important to act intelligently and to “rewire”.