



## ***Building Relationships: A key partnership between Waverley Council and Westfield, Bondi Junction***

**The Westfield/Waverley Library Award for Literature  
2002 - 2007**

### **Background**

Waverley Library is one of the largest public libraries in N.S.W. and has an enviable reputation for its cultural programs which have been undertaken over many years. A wide range of exhibitions, play readings, author talks, recitals, poetry readings, book launches, photographic competition, and other activities comprise the library's program which contributes significantly to the local cultural life and is appreciated by people across the broader Sydney area.

Since 1972 the Library has been strongly supported in the provision of these activities by the Friends of Waverley Library (FOWL). Some eight years ago, FOWL's Patron, distinguished actor and local resident, Chris Haywood, proposed the creation of a literary prize. A community group with an extensive literary and publishing background was established to support library staff. Establishing excellence in research as the main criteria, it was felt that this would not only help to draw attention to the role of libraries in the provision of research, but would reward authors whose outstanding books bring such pleasure and knowledge to library readers. Chris sought funding to establish a prize of some eminence, and approached Westfield. A hard person to say no to, Westfield agreed to sponsor an annual prize of \$15,000 and contribute \$3,500 towards its running costs. FOWL also contributes financially towards the award.

And so began a very significant and productive relationship between Westfield Bondi Junction and Waverley Council through its library service, and the Friends of Waverley Library. In a short period, the Westfield/Waverley Library Award for Literature has emerged as a major national literary event.

### **The Award**

The Award is supported by an expert community group which advises the library in the organisation of the award. The group currently comprises Chris Haywood, Jamie Grant, Susannah Fullerton, Kathleen Stewart, Peter Coleman, Dr. Lorna Graham, Merelyn Buzo, Ron Lander and Denis Moore. The organising committee also includes library staff Linda Bathur as chairperson, Roniet Meyerthal and Alec

Sissaguian.

The distinguished playwright and author, Alex Buzo, was a foundation committee member who contributed significantly to the establishment and success of the award. His outstanding contribution was recognised in 2006 by the creation of the Alex Buzo Shortlist Prize which is presented to each of the finalists.

The Award, which recognises excellence in research in the creation of a literary work of merit, published during the 12 months prior to 30 June, was launched at the 2002 Sydney Writers Festival. Other factors considered by the judges include readability, innovation, knowledge and literary merit, and value to the community. The Award is open to all kinds of fiction and non-fiction by authors who are citizens or permanent residents of Australia.

Winners of the Award are:

2002	Tim Low	<i>The New Nature</i>
2003	Barry Hill	<i>Broken Song: T.G.H. Strehlow and Aboriginal Possession</i>
2004	Geoffrey Blainey	<i>Black Kettle and Full Moon: Daily Life in a Vanished Australia</i>
2005	Helen Garner	<i>Joe Cinque's Consolation: A True Story of Death, Grief and the Law</i>
2006	Gideon Haigh	<i>Asbestos House: The Secret History of James Hardie Industries</i>
2007	John Bailey	<i>Mr Stuart's Tracks</i>

The Award is strongly supported by the publishing and writing communities, last year attracting more than 140 nominations. The Award has also been well supported by the community with such local luminaries as James Valentine, Judy Nunn, Libbi Gorr, Peter Overton and Chris Haywood involved in the award presentations. Each year's winner has been interviewed by Andrea Stretton, prior to her untimely death in 2007, in conjunction the award presentation. All interviews have been recorded, with last year's conducted by Susannah Fullerton.

The Award's success has been very dependant on the cooperation and goodwill of many people from the corporate, community, and local government sectors. The Local Government and Shires Associations' annually recognise best practice management and innovation in cultural development within NSW Local Governments. The Award was shortlisted for the Associations' 2006 Cultural Award, as an example of exemplary cooperation and networking. It is this widespread and significant support which will ensure the Award continues as an increasingly important component of our national literary scene.

The award guidelines and nomination forms are available from March from the Library's website [www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/library/award](http://www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/library/award), with the closing date for entries being early July. The shortlist is announced towards the end of October and the award presentation held in November. The prize of \$15,000 is accompanied by a very stylish statuette, "The Nib".

## **New Sponsor**

Waverley Council has negotiated a new sponsorship arrangement with Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) for the next three years, resulting in an increased winner's prize of \$20,000.

## **Value of the Award**

Perhaps the words of the inaugural winner, Tim Low, most poignantly convey a sense of this:

*Authors seldom earn a fair return on their work. I went deep into debt while writing this book, and at times that seemed unfair. The money I received with the award was very important, both symbolically and practically. It has made it much easier for me to carry on as a writer. I can concentrate on the words, without having to think so much about finances. Westfield should be congratulated for supporting this award.*

The standing of the Award was acknowledged by respected literary columnist Susan Wyndham when she said, in reference to Gideon Haigh's *Asbestos House*, *It's a sign of integrity that a prize sponsored by one corporation can go to a book critical of another.*

## **Further Information**

Further information about the award, now known as 'The Nib' CAL – Waverley Library Award for Literature, may be found at: [www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/library/award](http://www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/library/award) or telephone Linda Bathur, Manager, Library and Customer Services, Waverley Council on 02 9386 7766.