



Bill Phippen

TADNSW President

Bill Phippen says that in his 33 years with TAD, his greatest feeling of achievement was being President of the TADNSW Board which enabled the organisation to move from its impossibly cramped quarters at Ryde to new \$2.7 million premises in Northmead.

As a licensed builder, he also gained enormous satisfaction in managing and carrying out the \$300,000 fit-out of the new building (for which he charged his time at heavily discounted rates).

His main disappointment is that TADNSW's operations are still not fully funded. "It's regrettable that fundraising consumes so much of the organisation's energy," he says. "Government should be more prepared to fund the essential services that TADNSW provides."

Bill became a member of TAD when it began in 1976. He had been introduced to TAD founder George Winston by a

mutual friend, Mary Case, who used a wheelchair after having polio as a child. Bill had made a desk and bookcase for Mary and, quite independently, George had made her a bed.

George unexpectedly nominated Bill to the management committee at TAD's first AGM in March 1976, and he has served on it continuously ever since. He has been President of TADNSW since 1997.

Bill's friends in TADNSW know him as a successful builder, but he tried other careers before deciding on this one. When he left school in 1968, he joined a Catholic order, the De La Salle Brothers, where he trained as a school teacher.

"After a year or two, I decided a celibate life as a school teacher was not for me," Bill said. "I enrolled in civil engineering at Sydney University and graduated in 1976." He began a PhD but decided he did not want to become an academic. With two

friends, he started a building business which he continues to run today.

He started growing his famous beard in 1970. "It's not a statement about anything," he said. "I just couldn't be bothered shaving!"

He married in 1978 and has three children: Kathryn (26) is a school counsellor, Laura (24) has a degree in digital media, and 22-year-old Christopher is completing a degree in chemistry.

Now separated from his wife, he lives with his two daughters in a rambling house on two hectares of land outside Picton. "I moved to Picton because the land was affordable, flat and accessible," he said. "I designed and built the house myself in 1980."

During his three decades with TADNSW, Bill has completed about 125 projects for the Custom Designed Aids Service. "Probably my most interesting job was building, with

“I believe in the general level of human goodness. So many people I meet are committed to something worthwhile in the world.”

George Winston, an automatic gate for a wheelchair-bound woman,” he said. “It was a massive job involving many people, with excavation, concreting, welding, electrical work and so on.”

As Board President for the past 12 years, he has been mainly involved with TADNSW’s governance and management issues. “I miss the project work,” he said. “I have met so many volunteers who are such wonderful people. I have often said that TADNSW’s volunteers are God’s gift to the country and I still believe that.”

When asked about the most memorable people he had worked with in TADNSW, Bill named George Winston (“an amazing man who gave up a career to pursue his dream”); Jim Dods (“a remarkable leader, despite being quadriplegic”); Jim Shires (“he was everything to TAD for many years”); and John Roarty (“so remarkably patient for a man with severe cerebral palsy”).

Bill also feels proud of the selection and appointment of two excellent chief executives for TADNSW at critical times in the organisation’s history – previous CEO Sancha Donald and current CEO Joy Barrett.

Bill’s interests outside TADNSW include the Australian Railway Historical Society, of which he has been a member for more than 30 years. As a volunteer, he renovated the Society’s Redfern offices over a 10-year period, and made most of the office furniture. For years he also led tours of the unused railway tunnels at St James, until they were blocked for security reasons.

He has been a blood donor for almost 40 years and for the last five years has



Photos from top

Bill as a Catholic novice and trainee teacher in 1969; with TADNSW client Sharon Sheedie; with his daughters Laura (left) and Kathryn this year.

donated plasma every fortnight. He gave his 250th donation in September 2009.

Bill has also been a strong supporter of Chevalier College in Bowral, which his children attended. “I helped the P & F Association with debutante balls – in fact I was the only male on the deb ball committee – and they still ask for my help with the Year 12 dinner,” he said. “It’s great fun.”

He is too busy with his building business, TADNSW and other interests to travel. He rarely watches TV or goes to the movies, though when he does go, he prefers the Imax Theatre. He relaxes with the Herald’s cryptic crossword every day.

Bill says that TADNSW has found itself a niche in the disability sector and its operations run relatively smoothly. “But financial security is everything,” he said. “We have a good business but I expect we’ll have an ongoing challenge to fund it adequately in the long term.”

Bill believes that new businesses will emerge in future for TADNSW, just as the Computer Loan Service and FREEDOM WHEELS® appeared almost by accident during the last 15 years. “It’s hard to plan for new businesses,” he says. “We’ll just need to be ready to meet the needs of people with disabilities and other disadvantages when they arise.”

When asked about his personal philosophy, he says: “I believe in the general level of human goodness. So many people I meet are committed to something worthwhile in the world.”

It’s a philosophy that certainly applies to Bill Phippen.