

DAMASCUS COLLEGE CELEBRATES HISTORIC RESTORATION

Damascus College Ballarat was thrilled to welcome students, staff, alumni and very special guests to the reopening of the Mud Brick House on the afternoon of Friday, November 22. The celebration took place at the Historic Mud Brick House which is nestled in the beautiful natural bushland of Damascus College.

The Mud Brick House was constructed by students of St Martin's in the Pines between 1982 and 1985 under the leadership of the Sisters of Mercy. The build was funded by a Federal Government grant of \$15,000 in 1981, as part of a program to support students making the transition from school to work or further study. The focus of the program was to introduce students to alternative styles of living that focussed on self-sufficiency and the development of resourcefulness.

More than three hundred students and staff participated in the original building project and so with a lot of hard work from Sr Mary Darcy and the extended St Martin's community, the Mud Brick House was completed using clay and topsoil from the site.

Over the years, the Mud Brick House has been used for various activities, including the Drama and Art departments, the Energy Breakthrough Team and it has most recently been a great space for the College's horticulture program. However time and the elements had not been kind to the structure and it was in need of some attention. From 2017 to 2019, the house was refurbished by Damascus College students and staff as part of the Christian Personal Development Award (CPDA) and Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) programs. The reopening of the Mud Brick House is a testament to the College's concern for the earth which lies at the heart of social justice and mercy.



The event celebrated the original construction as well as the refurbishing work completed. The outside of the building was rendered, outside woodwork repainted and a new mantle fitted over the fireplace. The structure has also gone through a technology upgrade so that the space can be used as a fully functioning classroom.

Mr Tony Haintz, Vice Principal of Catholic School Culture, addressed the gathered crowd and recognised the significant amount of work and energy that had been shown by Damascus students over the last three years. For those students who participated, it was a proud acknowledgment of the work they had completed. Students, William Smith and Bethany Boland, recounted for the assembled crowd their own personal experience of working on

the Mud Brick House and the joy and satisfaction it had given them. Mary Darcy recounted the journey she had gone through in the 80's; seeking funding, researching building methods and ultimately working with students and local craftsman to see the plans for the structure become the reality of the Mud Brick House.

The celebration wrapped up with Principal, Matthew Byrne thanking teachers David Neate and Neale Thompson for the long hours they have contributed to working on the structure, many of it after hours or on weekends. He praised their commitment to their students and the building. He spoke about the significant role the House has in the history of the College and that it has a special place in the hearts and minds of many current and past students and staff of St Martin's in the Pines and Damascus College.

Story provided by Damascus College

Photos:

Top: Damascus College students, St Martin's in the Pines Student, Sisters of Mercy and Mary Darcy in front of the Damascus College Mud Brick House

Bottom: Damascus College Principal and staff, students and Mary Darcy in front of the Damascus College Mud Brick House.