

Law Week Launch 2017

County Court – Waldron Hall

Wednesday 10 May 2017, 6:00 - 7:30pm

Before I commence I want to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting and pay my respects to their elders, past, present and future.

To everyone here tonight let me welcome you to the County Court. It is the Court's very great pleasure to have you here.

There are many dignitaries here this evening... I'll find myself in trouble if I attempt to acknowledge everyone, but I would like to single out a few of those who are here:

- The Honourable Hartley Hansen, Chair of Victoria Law Foundation;
- Joh Kirby, Executive Director of the Victoria Law Foundation... can I also thank you for your very kind introduction;
- Bevan Warner, the Managing Director of Victoria Legal Aid;
- Councillor Jackie Watts, from the City of Melbourne;
- Judges, Magistrates, Tribunal Members;
- Court administrators;
- Ladies and gentlemen.

Can I also thank the Djirri Djirri Dance Group for your performance earlier. It was outstanding.

- Pause -

Courts' ability to perform their vital work is based, in large part, on the trust and confidence members of the community have in them, and in the justice system more broadly.

Trust and confidence is engendered, largely, when the public understands what happens in buildings such as this one –

- when they understand that matters are determined as a result of a fair and unbiased process;
- when they have insight into the actual cases judges decide, including the basis upon which they are decided;
- and, crucially, when they understand not only that the parties to proceedings are human, but that judges are as well.

At a time when judges are so often the subject of sharp, even harsh criticism, working to build that trust and confidence is perhaps now more important than ever.

That's why events such as Law Week are so important.

They perform a vital role in promoting public understanding of the law, and thus they help imbue our system of justice with the legitimacy and authority it needs in order to function effectively –

- so that victims report crimes and assist in the prosecution process;
- so that jurors and witnesses participate in court proceedings;

- and so that, hopefully, the community accepts the justice that is delivered on its behalf.

Law Week – which starts on Monday 15 May – offers Victorians an opportunity to learn more about the law, and to find answers to everyday legal issues.

The Courts Open Day – which is on Saturday 20 May – is, I think, a highlight.

For a day, the Victorian courts throw open their doors and provide the members of the public with an opportunity to go behind the scenes.

They'll be:

- tours of the courts, including heritage and history-themed tours of the Supreme Court;
- the ever-popular tour of the County Court's custody centre;
- an overview of how VCAT works;
- a County Koori Court mock plea hearing;
- the Children's Court and Early Learning Centre artwork display;
- and much, much more.

Over the course of Law Week they'll be discussions, debates, information sessions, advice sessions, webinars, talks, and musical performances. The Law Week program describes Law Week as a 'festival of events'. Well it truly is!

Without any more talk from me this evening, let me open this 'festival of events' and declare Law Week 2017 officially open.