



A CHAT WITH

## Rebecca Ryan

GENERAL MANAGER OF BLAYNEY SHIRE

I met with Blayney Shire's General Manager, Rebecca Ryan, in her office in Blayney and we immediately started talking about leadership in times of uncertainty. 'It is important to give people unbiased and correct information. We show leadership by staying calm in times of uncertainty'. Rebecca is a big believer in speaking with people, not just sending information out. 'We talk with our staff a lot, and with the community as much as possible'.

Rebecca has been General Manager for five years now. 'It was a roller coaster for a while with all of the Fit for the Future issues and amalgamation proposal of Blayney with Orange and Cabonne. We remained focussed on the 'business as usual' and since then we have been delivering significant capital projects with a variety of government and Council funding.'

'We have a very stable Council with seven Councillors and low staff turnover. We are a flexible and family friendly Council with young staff. People need to put their family first. If people are worried or anxious about their own health issues or families, how can we expect them to be operating at 100% at work?'

Rebecca was the 2018 winner of the Ministers' Awards for Women in Local Government. The Awards were established 11 years ago to recognise the outstanding contributions and achievements of women in local government in NSW. We had a conversation about strategic planning in local government and, no doubt, if anyone else had been listening, we would have sounded like a couple of enthusiastic nerds. We talked about difficulties with measuring outcomes. We concluded that it's a journey that Councillors, staff and community need to go on together with ongoing improvements.

Blayney's Community Strategic Plan is built on the various Village Plans that are developed by village communities themselves. 'This has proved very helpful as each village's priorities are clear for when funding becomes available. Business cases are developed, and we have shovel ready projects, and we have been able to tick off a number of achievements. We will get back into the next Integrated Planning and Reporting framework cycle after the September elections.'

'We have received significant funding from both Federal and State Governments; including Building Better Regions and Stronger Country Communities Funding, so have employed a Project Manager to ensure we can complete projects within the timeframes. The result has been refurbished and new community facilities, like the CentrePoint swimming pool refurbishment project in progress. We are all

looking forward to it being re-opened in late April. Community groups helped us deliver the majority of our Drought Communities Projects last year and have done a really excellent job. Council provides grant funding for community groups and helps them to build capacity.'

'We work in partnership with the many volunteer Village Committees, Sporting Clubs, and Blayney Rotary Club to deliver events, projects and programs. We have been working with the Blayney Town Association and Sydney Trains to develop plans for Blayney Train Station refurbishment for an arts and community space.'

'Our Councillors represent the whole community and share the workload of attending as many of the village events and meetings as they can. We will be holding information sessions prior to each Council meeting, in April and May for people interested in standing for election in September this year. Councillors are great barometers of the feelings of the community and if there is a problem or they feel that the level of trust is falling, they bring that information to our attention for action. Councillors, in addition to the Councillor specific training and induction program, are included in the training opportunities we deliver to staff, such as like Cyber Risk and Disability Awareness.'

'We are really working hard to grow our villages using existing infrastructure and reviewing the Blayney, Orange, Cabonne Rural Lands Strategy, which will be on Public Exhibition from early April, and has been the first step in this process. The next item will be to adopt the draft Local Strategic Planning Statement, and currently we are reviewing the Blayney Shire Settlement Strategy. These documents are very important to ensure we facilitate housing development without creating conflict between rural residential, mining and our important agricultural industry.'

'There are no local government boundaries as far as tourists are concerned, and Orange 360 has done a great job with bringing tourists to the Orange Region which includes Blayney as the Village Shire. Orange, Blayney and Cabonne have an excellent combination of urban and rural attractions creating synergy. The Accommodation Working Group has

also been a big success in delivering shared benefits from the Cadia Mine workforce needing short term accommodation or, even better, moving into the region. The other objective of this collaboration is to ensure our signature tourist events and important tourism accommodation market is not adversely impacted, and Orange 360 with Newcrest Mining support, were able to successfully juggle the different accommodation needs at various times like the Day on the Green.'

'Mining has played an important part in Blayney Shire's history and Newcrest Mining, whilst a significant ratepayer, is also a major employer of our people. We hope miners will make Blayney Shire their families' permanent home in future. The proximity and position of Blayney Shire means that people who live here, have diverse job opportunities to choose from locally and in Bathurst and Orange.'

'Some of our staff have come from Cadia and bring with them a great work ethic and an excellent health and safety culture. We decided a few years ago that we needed to grow our own staff and introduced four Skillset Trainee positions into our outdoor crews. We cannot guarantee Trainees a permanent role, however, due to some recent retirements, we actually have employed a few of the Trainees onto the permanent workforce. We have amazing staff, with a can do attitude, who are proud of their work and community. We also have a very stable workforce with new Managers coming through and are pleased to be an employer of choice locally.'

'2020 is fast becoming a memorable and challenging year for everyone and it is very wearing to be hearing such constant and worrying news. We had already developed a 12 month Wellbeing Program, which includes topics such as Sleep and Fatigue, Positive Communication, Skin Cancer Checks and Mental Health Awareness – so I am pleased we had commenced this program. Building resilience and looking after each other is so important under the current circumstances, and my mantra at the moment is 'Social Distancing does not mean Not being Social'. I am encouraging my staff to turn off the 24/7 media alerts and enjoy life. Walk the dog, keep up your regular exercise, get outdoors, do some gardening, read a book or watch a movie and maintain normal family, recreational hobbies and interests as best you can.'

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BLAYNEY'S GM  
REBECCA RYAN  
SUGGESTS:

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