

Off the floor ...



Margaret Emery - Having a Ball



“I was at a social one night and joined in a conversation between Julie Talbot and Kelvin Dale. They were discussing the need for a Sydney Ball and how difficult it would be to organize.

*I very bravely said ‘what if I do it and make it a charity event?’ What was I thinking? I had never organized a ball or such a large charity event on my own before!
It was a very long drive home!”*

The Ball is over for another year and what a great night it was! We danced and danced, had lots of fun and raised heaps of money. And for Margaret Emery, it makes all the hard work that goes into making the event such a success so very worthwhile.

Let’s join Margaret for a behind the scenes look at how it all began and comes together on the night.



“Having offered to take on the task, the following week I approached my manager at Ronald McDonald House with the idea. I was full of enthusiasm, but of course I was also very concerned that I might lose money for the charity. She was fantastic, encouraged me to go for it and offered her full support,” says Margaret.

“It was her suggestion to form a committee. So I invited any teachers who might be interested in such an event to come to Westmead to discuss the idea. And everybody who came to that first meeting joined the first year Ball Committee.

“The Committee is made up of eight people, all with different talents and ideas. There are only two rules. If you have an ego, you must leave it at the door, and we do not entertain negative words about other people.

“Our focus is solely on raising money to help the families of some of the sickest kids in Australia through a terrible time, whilst hopefully having a good night.”

Margaret says that choosing the theme and name for the balls has made for some very entertaining moments, which really can’t be repeated. “But the common focus, teamwork, good natures and social atmosphere of the meetings make it very enjoyable. We often have times when we agree to disagree but it is fun getting to that stage!”

The dance program

The most challenging part of the planning is choosing the dances. While we have a system in place, we still receive about 300 requests from which we have to select 75 dances. And we also need to ensure there is a fair mix of beginner, intermediate and advanced dances with about 75% of them having split floors.

“I usually make the tea and coffee during that part of the meeting!” says Margaret.





A week before

The Committee has its final meeting the week before the ball to double check that everything is on schedule and in place. Tasks are assigned for the day. And the music must all be ready by this time with back ups 1, 2 and 3. At this stage they are all very excited.

The big day starts early

At around 10am, Margaret rushes off to collect all the silent auction items and raffle prizes from Ronald McDonald House. The Committee all arrive at the venue at around 12 noon. The sound system is tested. The people decorating the venue and the food and stall sellers start to arrive. The Committee members set up the tables, decorate the stage, lay out the auction items and double check the seating.

“We try to get it all done by 4pm so we have time for a quick shower and are ready for the door to open at 4.30pm. By this time we have all walked that hall *so many times* that our feet and legs are already aching,” says Margaret. This year, courtesy of Robert Fletcher, members will have walkie-talkies, so hopefully there will be a little less stress from running up and down that huge hall.

The first ball was like having a baby!

Margaret says she likened the first ball to having a baby. “The 1st trimester I spent looking for a venue, not sure what I needed or wanted. But knowing I would like it when I found it. Just like setting up a nursery for the first time. Which room will I use? Where will I put everything?”

“The 2nd trimester was purchasing all the goods at the right price and hoping I didn’t overspend the budget.

“And the 3rd trimester was spent worrying if we were doing it right, and would everything work out.

“Margaret is like a fairy godmother.

When she takes the Committee on a tour of the House, she knows every child by name and they all know her.

She always has a smile on her face.

Her commitment to Ronald McDonald House is second to none and this is reflected in the way she manages the ball.”

Lyndsay Ryan

“The day of the ball was such hard work and full of worry. I had no sleep because I was so worried it would all go wrong. I likened that to the actual labor. The night of the ball I regarded as the birth itself. The sheer joy of the venue looking so fantastic, and everything being so wonderful.

“I can’t actually remember the night itself, except for so many lovely people coming up to me and saying what a great night they were having, and how soon could they buy tickets for the next one.”



I will continue for as long as the linedance community supports it

Margaret says she will continue to organize the Ball for as long as the linedancing community supports it. "The challenge is to keep it a great night whilst being a little different every year."

"The State Sports Centre is the only venue which ticks all the boxes. But even with charity prices and getting as much as possible donated, we still have to work very hard to minimize our expenses and ensure that the bulk of the money raised on the night goes to Ronald McDonald House.

"It also can't be done without the Committee and all the dance instructors who lead the floor on the night. They are just so supportive and generous with their time. I am eternally grateful to them and to the many dancers who come on the night to support the House."



Ronald McDonald House
Westmead

*Approx \$70,000
has been raised
from the first three balls!*

Here are just a few examples of how that money contributes to helping Ronald McDonald House:

- * To keep its 23 rooms open and functioning on a daily basis - \$5,500 per week. A quick calculation will tell you that the amount we raised will keep the House operating for approx 13 weeks.
- * Due to timber rot, the rails around the house needed to be replaced with metal ones - \$70,000
- * Keeping the house painted every seven years - \$70,000

Ronald McDonald House is located in the grounds of the Children's Hospital at Westmead.

It provides a home away from home for families with seriously ill children receiving treatment at the Children's Hospital.

It is run by a small group of staff and volunteers who provide a caring and supportive environment, which enables families to deal as well as they can with their situation.

Without donations from the community through events such as the Ball, it simply could not continue to provide this support.



“I can’t make them better, but I can make their journey smoother by providing the material things whilst they stay with us.

And provide a shoulder to cry on when things get tough, a joke when it’s needed, and a tissue to wipe away their tears and often mine.”

Margaret



A Yorkshire lass

Margaret was born in Yorkshire, England. She came to Australia when she was 23 years old and met her English husband here. They have lived and worked in Sydney ever since.

“Before bad knees and line dancing (don’t know which came first), I used to love to walk. It was my personal time to think or listen to country music, which I love. I even walked in the City to Surf seven times! Now I enjoy going to live concerts, cooking and dining out. Reading is also relaxation for me, and watching TV, but I always fall asleep and miss the good bits!”

“I have been with Ronald McDonald House for 10 years now.

“In 1997, my husband and I retired. We bought a motor home and did the grey nomad thing around Australia and Europe for about 3 years.

“After we returned home, I started to get bored and decided to volunteer at the House for a couple of hours a week. Very soon they asked me if I would do relief work. Then four years ago they offered me the position of Community Liaison/Fundraising Officer. I love my job and I love the Charity.

“The families we help are not there because of any fault of their own. They are there because they have very sick children and the places where they live can’t provide the type of medical support they need to make their kids better.

“I am so fortunate to be able to do something I love. I also love people of all shapes, sizes and nationalities. I learn something everyday just by interacting with them.

“And I love to laugh. It’s true laughter is a great medicine and I believe in taking my medicine daily.”

After the Ball is over

Margaret is trading in her knee for an upgraded model and will be ‘off the floor’ herself for a while.

We will miss your smiling face in class Margaret, so best wishes for a speedy recover.

