

Call for new venue as event cancelled

Angela Ranke and Stacey Roberts

IT is time The Hills had a decent, dedicated performing arts centre, say local residents and politicians.

The call followed news that this year's Orange Blossom Festival Gala Concert had been cancelled after the organiser could not find a suitable venue.

Hills Musical Academy's musical director Garry Clark, who created the gala, said the concert required a "decent-sized" venue with spare rooms for waiting ensembles to practise before going on stage.

"It's been growing every year for nine years and this year was looking even bigger," Mr Clark said.

"It is frustrating to not have a decent venue to put something like this in."

Mr Clark said the gala could not be held at William Clarke College, where it was hosted last year, because it would clash with student examinations. The Castle Hill Community Centre's Pioneer Room, where it was held for many years, was also not available due to planned renovations.

Labor Councillor Ray Harty said a dedicated performing arts centre should be built with the "substantial compensation" council received from the sale of the Hills Centre and the council building in Carrington Rd. The land was bought by the state

government to make way for the metro rail line.

"Many small councils across NSW who are not as financially sustainable as The Hills Shire Council have, for example, a community art centre," he said.

"The Hills Shire, despite the wealth of the council, have none."

Cr Harty said he had raised on many occasions within council the need to provide for such a facility, but council's response had so far been "piecemeal".

"For example, discussion occurred within council for a terrace amphitheatre to be built at Bella Vista Farm, instead a stage was built – a stage on its own is a pretty poor response to meeting the cultural needs of the Hills community.

"The conversion of the Pioneer Room into a boutique theatre at the Council Community Centre is a good initiative, however it will only cater for small scale production with a seating capacity for 364 patrons."

Hills Mayor Michelle Byrne said a purpose-built theatre in the style of the now defunct Hills Centre "didn't work for 25 years and it won't work again".

"It was little more than a glorified school hall for end-of-year awards nights," she said.

Cr Byrne said what the shire needed was more versatile venues that cater

PIONEER ROOM WORKS

THE Pioneer Room will again close for renovations, but it is not clear when or for how long.

Council is planning to convert the room, which is used by many community groups for events and performances, into a 346-seat performance space.

A council spokesman said the room recently reopened after it was closed last July while fire, structural and acoustic studies were conducted.

"As a result of these investigations, further studies are required and until they are completed, we cannot give a specific indication of when stage two will commence.

"Council acknowledges that this may be frustrating for previous regular users of the Pioneer Room, however council has made every effort to find alternate venues for the users."

for a range of options, like Bella Vista Farm Park and the multipurpose venue earmarked in the 20-year concept plan for Castle Hill Showground.