



Speech by

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ATHERTON MAIZE FESTIVAL

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (11.17 p.m.): Atherton held its 39th annual Maize Festival with a wonderful program of events. The Maize Festival has been a yearly event since 1962, when the first post-war festival was held. Originally, the 1962 Maize Festival was organised to raise funds for the Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade. That year, four girls were chosen to represent the industries of maize, peanuts, dairying and timber. They each had a committee, which worked tirelessly for nine months raising funds for the ambulance centre. Fundraising events included a boxing tournament, barbeques, dances, cake stalls, gambling nights and raffles.

Up until the last couple of years, the festivals did not incorporate fundraising by the Maize Queen entrants themselves. However, that aspect of the festival has been reintroduced and there is now a Charity Queen prize as well. This Centenary of Federation year saw 18 girls competing. Businesses also took part in the celebrations by decorating their premises and supporting the festival in various ways. Decorative displays brought out some of the most innovative and comical ideas.

This year, the festival kicked off with an art exhibition in the foyer of the Atherton Shire Council office displaying artworks by some of our very talented locals. The devil's triangle 1,500 metre fun run was held on the Sunday morning. Teams of 13, each running 1,500 metres, started at the Tolga Lions Park, ran through the Tolga scrub to Atherton, continued along Grove Street to Maunds Road, ran along Tinaroo Falls Road to Kairi and then back to Tolga. Participants from around the district and local schools took part in the fun run. The same afternoon, the Maize Queen entrants attended the Rocky Creek War Memorial Park for the Victory of Peace celebrations. Huge crowds attended from various northern districts. The 18 queen entrants were presented at a cocktail party attended by local dignitaries and business sponsors.

At the Mardi Gras on the Friday night, there was fun for all with the barrow dash for cash in the main street, junior and senior corn husking championships, wood chops and a tug of war. A procession consisting of 50 floats was one of the best for a long time, with the theme being Aussie images. Pretend cassowaries performed to the delight of the children and crowds lining the streets. The costumes for the cassowaries were made locally and the humans who wore them performed like real cassowaries. The police joined in the fun with their radar guns, judging how fast children were able to throw a ball.

Restructuring of the Maize Festival this year saw the return of a ball at Merrilands Hall, where the winner of the queen competition was crowned. A crowd of about 500 attended the ball and capped off a very busy and pleasant week of festivities. Atherton has always been considered a solid town and, even with the setbacks of the past few years with industries in disarray, the people always find what it takes to keep festivals such as this alive.
