

FOR THE YOUNG AT HEART

IT is said that a great many marriages in Canberra during the 60s and 70s had their beginnings on a dance floor in McKay Gardens, in the suburb of Turner.

The venue was a building which housed the Canberra Police and Citizens Youth Club. The event was a regular Wednesday night 50:50 dance organised by the club.

"In a town where the movies only changed on a fortnightly basis, it's no wonder that the 'Wednesday night hop' became the most popular dance for young people of Canberra," says Sergeant Ken Morris, General Secretary of the Canberra Police and Citizens Youth Club Inc.

Ken is on very familiar terms with life in those early days of the national capital — he is a fifth generation born and raised in the area.

"Club members put a lot of work into the dance and it proved one of the most successful of the club's community activities for years," he said.

The club's involvement in the community began in 1957 when Sergeant Harry Luton formed a committee to establish a Police-Citizens Boys Club. Three years later, the club became a reality and Harry was appointed its first Secretary Superintendent. Harry retired through ill health in 1974.

"The original club building in McKay Gardens was officially opened on 3 December 1960 by Viscountess Dunrossil, the wife of the then Governor-General," Ken Morris said.

"There have since been two extensions — in 1973 an addition on the northern side provided a gymnasium, judo and boxing rooms, as well as more balcony area and toilet facilities.

"During the 60s and 70s the club was a part of the lives of many young Canberrans, with the dance being the main interest. Bruce Lansley, an announcer from the local radio station, and his band, the "Presidents", provided the music and there were guest appearances by prominent Australian rock and roll stars."

The club also provided many of the traditional sporting activities.

Ken said successive Secretary Superintendents had all contributed to the club in many different ways.

"Sergeant Jack Dealy became well known in the community through his exploits in the wrestling tournaments which were staged at the club during this term," he said.

"For a while, world championship wrestling was staged on a regular basis and proved popular as well as financially rewarding."

The club, like many organisations of a similar nature, has had its periods of ups and downs and has had to adapt through the years to the changing needs of the community.

An example of this is the admission of girls to the club and

subsequent name change to the Canberra Police and citizens Youth Club in 1968.

"Some of the activities organised through the years include a hot rod club to keep young drivers off the streets and on to the Mount Ginn stock car circuit, a sailing club, marching girl troop, yoga classes and a band," Ken Morris said.

At present, the club has branches at Turner, Narrabundah and Tuggeranong. The Narrabundah branch, which operates from the local primary school hall, was started to serve the youth of that area in an effort to reduce vandalism and other associated problems.

The Tuggeranong Branch started in 1983 and operates from the Richardson primary school hall.

The club has involved itself in activities in several other fields over the past few years.

"Junior Police Rangers was formed in 1983 to broaden the club's appeal to the young people in the 10-16-year-old age group," Ken Morris said.

"The scheme provides personal development instruction in health, hygiene, community service, drill, drug education and bush orientated skills such as conservation, survival and orienteering.

"Packs of the Rangers are run by each branch with a pack being conducted at the Page primary school for the young people of Belconnen."

Each club had its own civilian committee which works in conjunction with the AFP-appointed Secretary Superintendents and their assistants. A management committee controls the overall operation of the club and is made up of a president and general secretary appointed by the AFP, the secretary superintendent of each branch and elected members of the community.

The club also is closely associated with the Blue Light Disco in Canberra. The discos, run by a sub-committee of the youth clubs management committee, assisted by other volunteers from the AFP, are at present held monthly at suitable high schools. They cater for young people from 12 to 17 years and are conducted under the same guidelines as Blue Light Discos throughout Australia. Later this year it is hoped a Junior Blue Light Disco will be held on the same night as the senior disco and will provide entertainment for the 2-12-year-old age group.

Money raised from the discos is distributed between the youth club and other youth orientated charities selected by the Blue Light Disco committee and the Youth Club management committee as being deserving of financial assistance.

Both the Youth Club and the Blue Light Discos have affiliations with the Australian Association of Police-Citizens Youth Clubs and the Australian Blue Light Disco Federation and benefit from interchange of ideas and information.

Ken Morris said a number of developments which had been in the pipeline for some time had come to fruition. Recently, settlement had taken place between the club and a developer on a sub-divided block of land from the original lease at Turner. This had released funds for much needed projects within the club.

"Some of this money has been used to buy a block of land in Grattan Court, Wanniasa, on which the developer will build a new \$557,000 club building for Tuggeranong Branch," he said.

"Building should begin soon and will provide the club with a basketball auditorium, stage and dressing room, weights room, martial arts room, meeting room, canteen, office, change room and toilet facilities.

Other money from the sale of the land had enabled the club to engage a contractor to remove asbestos-based materials which were used in the construction of the northern wing of the Turner Branch building in 1973," Ken said. The Branch would be able to re-open areas that had been closed since the discovery of the asbestos in 1984 and allow it to once again operate at its full potential.



• Artist's impression of Tuggeranong Clubhouse.