

# Art of democracy buzzes at The Lodge

By Justine Landis-Hanley

Sunday Canberra Times

Sunday 25th February 2024

556 words

Page 6 | Section: NEWS

442cm on the page



## Art of democracy buzzes at The Lodge

Justine Landis-Hanley

THE Lodge was abuzz this week, as a group of local school kids, donning child-sized protective mesh suits, descended on the grounds on Thursday to meet its newest residents.

The year 5 and 6 students from Ngunnawal Primary School were the lucky winners of a school competition to design The Lodge's first beehive, which they hand painted across two days.

Decorated with the official flowers of every state and territory, the beehive will home a colony of honeybees who will help maintain The Lodge's gardens and service the prime minister's kitchen with fresh honey.

Dianna Wright, the school's specialist art teacher, said it was a "fantastic opportunity" for the students to contribute to one of Australia's most famous

addresses, and had even prompted some to consider a life in politics.

"The kids on the bus were saying 'we've got butterflies in our bellies' because it was just something that they never thought would be a reality for them," she said.

"I even had one of the kids saying 'I'm going to live here, I'm going to become the Prime Minister and live here'. So yeah, it was very inspiring for them."

Ten-year-old Indi Gwilt was one of several students who confessed their political aspirations.

"I want to say that I'm just very happy to be here, the house and the gardens and everything looks really nice.

"And I really want to live here someday and I want to be the prime minister," she said, adding that her back-up plan is to become a singer.

But Indi had clearly put

quite a bit of consideration into her first career option.

Asked what plans she had for the country if elected, she thoughtfully replied that by the time she becomes the prime minister "it's going to be a bit different to now, so it depends what there is that I need to fix in the future".

With the help of beekeeper Cormac Farrell, the school children wielded the smoker and held out their gloved hands to pet the frames of docile European honey bees ready to migrate to their new abode.

Mr Farrell, head beekeeper at Parliament House and now also The Lodge, said the colony was made up of a swarm he caught this year in Belconnen, and one of Parliament's reserve colonies.

"So the queen from this colony was created on the grounds of Parliament. She's actually very much a Can-

berra queen," he said.

But while she is the most important figure, the queen bee isn't in charge of the hive.

Bees are a true collective democracy, Mr Farrell explained, who vote on big decisions through interpretive dance.

"They actually waggle their bums in a certain way to give directions to the other bees and that's how they find food," he said.

Mr Cormac hopes that introducing the hive to The Lodge is an opportunity to get Canberrans thinking about how they can better protect bees, in everything from their choice in garden pesticides to the action they can take to mitigate climate change.

"I think it just highlights how important bees are and how critical they are to our survival and the survival of the wider environment," he said.



Ngunnawal Primary School students paid a visit to The Lodge's new honeybee colony. Picture by Elesia Kurtz