

The WLCU NSW held their *En Route to Beirut* dinner on 28th November 2020.

It was so enjoyable to be together again with our members and guests after such a difficult year. We received a tremendous response, with 350 guests joining us (restricted due to COVID-19) and many turned away.

We were honoured to have in attendance the Hon. Dr Geoff Lee MP, Minister for Skills, Tertiary Education and multiculturalism who was representing the Premier of NSW. As well as the Hon. Jodi McKay Leader of the Opposition, and Shadow Minister for Multiculturalism and Mr Jihad Dib MP, Shadow Minister for Skills and TAFE and Shadow Minister Assisting on Multiculturalism. Also in attendance, was the World President of the WLCU, Mr Stephen Stanton, and the President of the GRC, Mr Michel Doueihi.



(Top left to right: Hon. Dr Geoff Lee MP with M.C. Paul Shalhoub; the Hon. Jodi McKay; Dani Gaegae with World President of the WLCU, Mr Stephen Stanton. Bottom left to right: Tony Sukkar AM and Josephine Sukkar; Crown Group CEO Iwan Sunito; President of the GRC, Mr Michel Doueihi and Abraham Khoury.)

The theme for the night was *En Route to Beirut*, a virtual taxi tour around Lebanon to celebrate the local wines and cuisines of our majestic country with the music of Fairouz. Our journey commenced in the Bekaa Valley, then up the Lebanese Mountain ranges, down to the coast and finishing our journey at Beirut. Along the journey we enjoyed live music and singing from our band and singer with a selection of songs from Fairuz “played” by our taxi driver.

Our first stopover was in the Bekaa Valley where we celebrated the concept of small-shared platters (Meiza) of fava bean hummus, eggplant with labneh, herb dried Shanklish and kibbe nayeh with saj bread. Accompanying the mezza was the Petit Couvent Blanc, a delicious wine made from the Obeidi grape, a native grape only found in Lebanon.

Our second stopover was at Al Arez where we celebrated the region's rich agriculture. We enjoyed Sumac poached chicken, with a glass of Ksara, Blanc de Blanc, a blend of Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Semillion grapes.

Our third stopover was at Al-Koura, a valley famed for its olive oil, butter and yoghurt. At Al-Koura, we enjoyed a modern Shish Barak - beef cheek stuffed dumplings in yoghurt sauce and chilli butter. This was accompanied with Ksara - Cuvée du Troisième Millénaire, a full-bodied red wine made from Cabernet-Franc, Petit Verdot and Syrah grapes.

Our fourth stopover was at Jounieh, where we came face to face with Phoenicia's seafaring history built around the humble fishermen. At this stop we dined on Mahshi Squid- Burgul stuffed squid with tomato and okra accompanied with Massaya Terrasses de Baalbeck; a red wine from the foothills of Mt Lebanon made from Grenache Noir, Mourvèdre and Syrah grapes.



Our last and final stopover was at Beirut where we enjoyed our last course; a selection of sumptuous Lebanese sweets: Taj El Malak, Halawet El Jeben with Ashta Ice Cream, Classic Pistachio and a Chocolate Finger Beelewa.

A key focus on the night was to raise money for the rebuilding of Beirut. Supporting our fund-raising efforts were some beautiful gifts donated by our key sponsors, Levendi jewellers and Vittoria Coffee that allowed us to raise funds through a raffle and auctions. Further donations by Harkola, Sea Sweets and Doltone House assisted with reducing our costs for wine, dessert and our wonderful venue.



(Top left to right: Doltone House Head Chef, Mario Karam; Gift Hamper courtesy of Harkola; Sea Sweets Dessert.)

Our donation partner on the night was Lebanese International Finance Executives (LIFE) Sydney who, through LIFE international, will distribute the funds to Lebanese NGOs assisting devastated families in rebuilding their lives in the aftermath of the horrific events of 4th August. As the Lebanese winter approaches, we are determined to do whatever we can to alleviate further suffering for the people of our beloved Lebanon.

Through the generosity of our donors and supporters, WLCU NSW raised over \$40,000 on the night. We are continuing to receive additional donations post the event. The dinner is a tribute to the NSW President, Dr Shane Geha and his Committee who established the NSW Chapter only 4 months ago.



(Top left to right: Levendi Prize winner; Karen Khadi; WLCU NSW President Dr Shane Geha; M.C. Paul Shalhoub with WLCU NSW Vice President, George Bousamra. 2nd Row, left of right: Venue

image; WLCU Steering Committee member Petra Fakhry; WLCU Steering Committee member Laudy Farah-Ayoub; 3rd Row, left to right: WLCU Steering Committee member Chantelle Farah. Bottom left to right: Mira Hasham and Dr Anthony Hasham; raffle winner Joseph Kalk; M.C. Paul Shalhoub.)