

The show goes on

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BACK IN PICTURE: The Coober Pedy drive-in committee with their recycled film projector.

COOBER PEDY | Rural renewal

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A UNIQUE funding program to help disenfranchised rural and regional communities has allowed the Coober Pedy drive-in to continue operating.

It is one of three drive-ins remaining in South Australia, which once had 37 outdoor picture theatres.

The saviour of Coober Pedy's Outback Open Air Cinema was the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal, which provided essential funds to allow it to overcome technical problems with its 50-year-old equipment.

It is just one of 106 grants totalling \$561,166.30 that the FRRR has made to South Australian communities since starting in 2000.

Foundation chief executive Sylvia Admans said the FRRR had initially been based in the Adelaide Hills when the Federal Government announced it following the Regional Australia summit in 1999.

But it is now based at Bendigo because Victoria is the home of philanthropy in Australia and has many philanthropic foundations. "The success of FRRR has been significant, particularly in smaller rural communities," Ms Admans said.

She said FRRR had provided more than \$7.5 million to thou-

sands of communities around Australia.

"We've tended to focus on smaller communities with the majority of the money going to towns of 5000 people or less," Ms Admans said.

"And the benefit is that for every \$1 we provide, another \$9 has been leveraged in to the projects from other sources."

The FRRR is funded by donors such as the Pratt Foundation, ANZ, the Myer Foundation, the Rural Education Foundation initiated by private donors including the Myer, Fairfax and Calvert-Jones fam-

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ilies, Perpetual Trustees, Bendigo Bank and significant South Australian donors.

"We've developed a program that is simple to apply for and has a very quick turn-around," Ms Admans said.

The Coober Pedy drive-in received its funds directly from the ANZ Seeds of Renewal Program, an ANZ partnership where it provides the cash and FRRR delivers the program.

The Outback Open Air Cinema screens movies once a fort-

night and plays an important role in the remote Outback town.

Its canteen is operated by the Coober Pedy Football Club with all money raised from the canteen going towards the club's operational costs.

Northern Regional Development Board Outback tourism product development officer and cinema secretary Steve Staines said it had taken dedication and commitment from the executive committee to achieve the upgrade.

Apart from the FRRR funds, it included \$18,000 from the Northern Regional Development Board and \$4400 from the District Council of Coober Pedy.

The money allowed the committee to buy a projector, which became available when Colin Kennett closed the Murray Bridge drive-in in early 2005 after 48 years in the industry.

"Due to the limited number of public entertainment facilities in town, the community sees the continuation and ongoing improvement of the cinema as vitally important," Mr Staines said. About 27 vehicles attend each session, but the committee plans to double this number within three months.