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*10th Souvenir Edition*

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# HEARTBEAT



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# FROM OUR FOUNDATION CHAIR

What a remarkable year it has been for the MBPH Foundation as we continue to make a real difference in improving health outcomes across our region through the many initiatives we have supported.

Without doubt the most significant project this year has been our funding of the hospital's new screening truck. Once completed early next year, this state-of-the-art mobile unit will transform how people in remote and rural areas access vital breast, skin, and heart screening services. The total project cost will exceed \$2.5 million, and it has only been possible thanks to the incredible generosity of our sponsors and community groups.

We were also proud to fund the purchase of a new patient transport vehicle, which has already completed more than 700 transfers. This service ensures patients can return to their primary place of care more quickly and efficiently, while also providing a substantial cost saving to the hospital.

A generous \$230,000 donation has enabled the hospital to purchase new equipment for the newly established cardiac unit, the first time this essential service has been available through our public hospital.

We have continued to honour the legacy of the late Mr Kevin Chambers through our K C Society Scholarships, awarded to local students pursuing health-related degrees at university.

Another wonderful initiative this year was the rollout of the hospital's new patient menu, a Foundation-supported project that has given patients greater choice while strengthening relationships with local food producers. The seasonal, locally inspired menu was developed by the hospital's food services team with the support of renowned local chef Stefano Di Pieri.

Alongside these projects, we have continued to grow our sponsorship base, and I extend my thanks to all the businesses that have stood by the Foundation and our mission.

Our *Heartbeat of the Mallee* podcast has also gone from strength to strength, deepening our connection with the community, while this publication, *HEARTBEAT*, continues to grow in popularity, now celebrating its tenth edition.

Over the past year, we've also hosted several memorable events, including a hugely successful golf day at Coomealla Golf Club, our Black and White-themed Gala Ball at Willow & Ivie, the K C Society luncheon and, of course, the A-League match between Melbourne Victory and Adelaide United at the Mildura Sporting Precinct in early October.

Finally, I'd like to sincerely thank everyone who has supported the Foundation during the past 12 months. As you can see from the many projects we've been able to fund, together we are truly making a big difference.

Wishing you all a wonderful Christmas and a happy New Year. I look forward to continued success in 2026.

Regards,  
Ross Lake OAM  
Chairman, MBPH Foundation









JAMARL GODER AT HIS PART-TIME WORKPLACE  
BUNNINGS MILDURA.



JAMARL GODER WITH KIILALAANA FOUNDATION FOUNDER SHANTELL THOMPSON.

# JAMARL SETS A CRACKING EXAMPLE

*Indigenous youngster Jamarl Goder is a rising star. His dedication to his studies, his after-school job, his involvement with a traditional dance group and his beloved basketball team, ensure he is actively engaged in the Sunraysia community on many fronts.*

**By John Dooley**

*HEARTBEAT* first met 16-year-old Jamarl Goder at the Mildura Base Public Hospital's NAIDOC 2025 celebrations in July this year.

Jamarl is the one of the 'male leads' in the Kiilalaana Foundation Indigenous Dance Group, run by founder Shantelle Thompson and during this year's NAIDOC Day celebrations he was on the microphone enthusiastically talking about the traditional dances being performed in front of the gathered crowd in the hospital's courtyard.

"I really enjoy being part of the dance group... it connects me to Indigenous culture which I know quite a lot about," Jamarl proudly told *Heartbeat*. "My other passion is playing basketball for Irymple Tigers."

This year, Jamarl was in Year 11 at Mildura Senior College and undertaking Building and Construction training at the Trade Centre as part of his VET studies.

"I want to be a bricklayer when I finish at the College... I want to start an apprenticeship," Jamarl said.

*Heartbeat* asked Jamarl if he had always lived in Mildura.

"I was born in Melbourne and then raised in Mildura," he said. "While I like living here, I think we need some more entertainment for young people."

"I like playing video games and hanging out with my mates, but it gets a bit boring at times."

Asked about his prowess on the basketball court, Jamarl told *Heartbeat* that he considered himself "a handy player".

"I'm pretty good at basketball. I was supposed to be in Division 2 for the season, but they moved me up to Division 1 because I was better than most of my team mates!" Jamarl explained without a hint of a boast.



JAMARL ON THE BENCH WITH HIS COACH AND TEAM MATES FROM IRYMPLE TIGERS.



RIGHT FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE MATCH IT WAS GAME ON WITH JAMARL'S TEAM BEING THE VICTORS.



A COMPETITIVE JAMARL GODER ON THE COURT AT THE MSP NUMBER 72 FOR THE IRYMPLE TIGERS IN A MATCH AGAINST THE WORKERS WARRIORS SHARPENED.



JAMARL SHEPHERDS HIS OPPONENT AS THE MATCH HEATS UP.



JAMARL IS HELD BACK BUT HIS RATHER TALL OPPONENT.



JAMARL WAS ALWAYS IN THE THICK OF THE ACTION THROUGHOUT THE MATCH.



IRYMPLE TIGERS ENJOY A HEALTHY VICTORY OVER THE WORKERS WARRIORS AT THE MSP.



JAMARL GIVES THE THUMBS UP AFTER HIS TEAM'S VICTORY OVER THEIR OPPONENTS IN WHAT WAS A HARD FOUGHT MATCH AT THE MSP.

*Heartbeat* met with Jamarl's mother Kala Goder who described her son as "pretty amazing".

"I am very proud of him. He has worked really hard on developing his basketball skills and managed to break into Division 1," she said.

"He a great kid. I am very lucky. Jamarl has three sisters and a brother who are also lovely kids."

Jamarl works at Bunnings in Mildura a few days a week after school, something he enjoys immensely.

"I get to take the trolleys to the cars, and I meet a lot of people that way... while also spending time outside the store," he said.

"I am learning to develop a good work ethic and save some money at the same time."

*Heartbeat* attended the Mildura Sporting

Precinct on a Thursday night in October to see Jamarl in action on the court in a match between Irymple Tigers and Workers Warriors.

Jamarl wears the number 72 singlet for Tigers, and he was certainly in the thick of the play at all times.

The match was closely fought but eventually Tigers came out convincing victors!

Jamarl is a shining example of a youngster making the most of their life from an early age.

While he thinks Mildura needs some more things for young people like himself to do, getting involved in positive activities outside of school is certainly keeping him occupied.

*Heartbeat* wishes him all the best for the future.



JAMARL LEAPS INTO THE AIR TO THWART THE OPPONENT'S SHOT FOR A BASKET.



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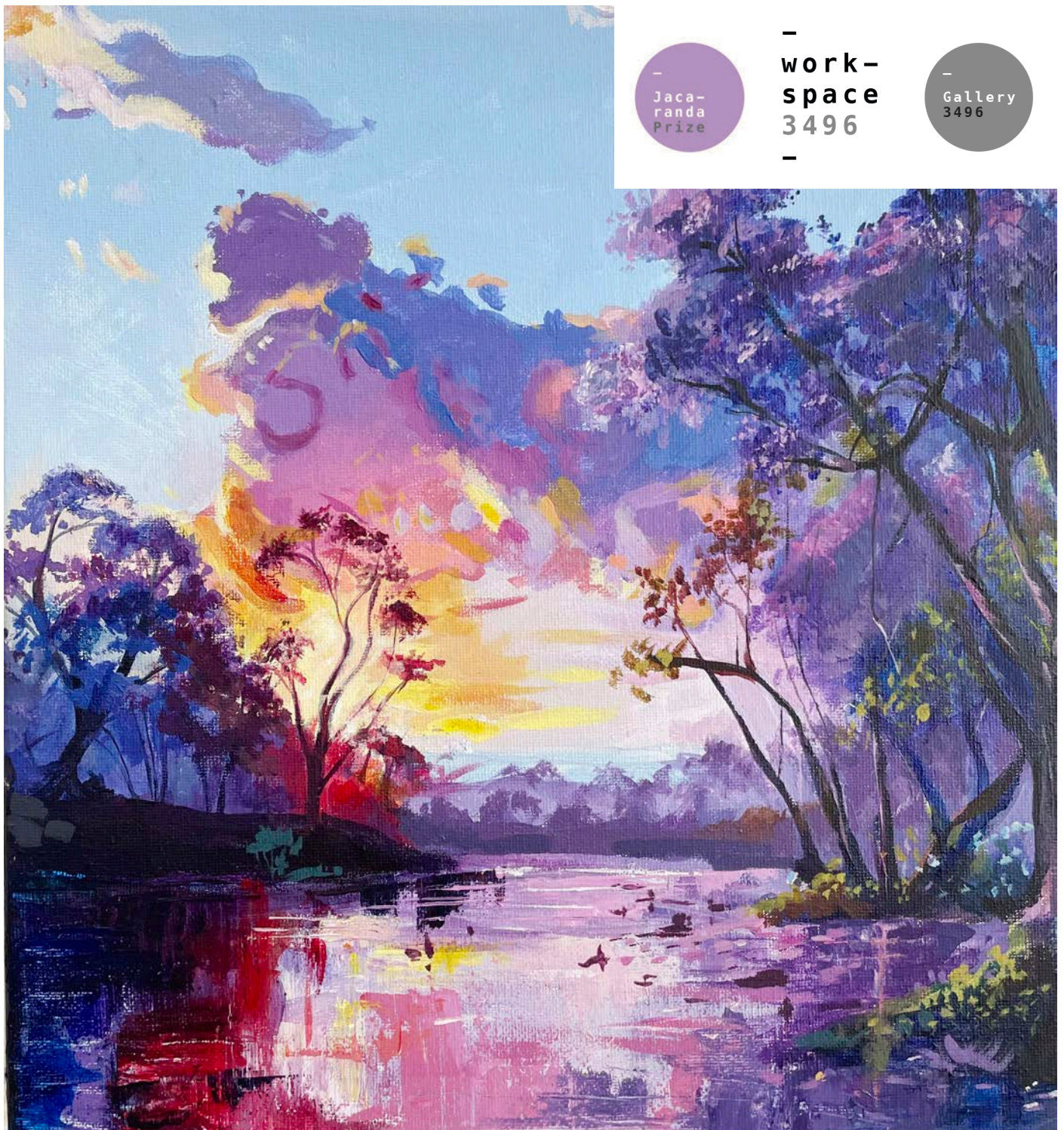
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JASMINE SHAW JACARANDA LAKE 2025.

# JACARANDA ART PRIZE 2026: A CELEBRATION OF COLOUR, CREATIVITY AND COMMUNITY

---

*As the Jacarandas burst into bloom across Sunraysia Workspace 3496 + Gallery once again invites artists from near and far to take part in one of the region's most loved creative showcases - the Jacaranda Art Prize 2026.*





DEIRDRE JAENSCH IRYMPLE BATHS 2025.

### **By Rohan Morris**

NOW entering its fourth year, the prize continues to grow as a vibrant platform for artistic expression, celebrating the boundless creativity found across the Mallee and beyond.

“The Jacaranda Art Prize has become a true reflection of who we are as a creative community, bold, curious and full of heart,” Director of Workspace 3496 + Gallery, Rohan Morris said.

“Every year we see incredible work arrive from artists aged twelve to seventy plus,

people who are experimenting, learning and sharing their view of the world through colour, texture and form. It is what makes this show so special.”

### **A PRIZE FOR EVERYONE**

The Jacaranda Art Prize is open to artists of all ages and experience levels, from emerging makers to seasoned professionals, working in any medium including painting, drawing, photography, mixed media and sculpture.

Each artwork must fit within the distinctive 30 centimetre by 30 centimetre format, or footprint for sculpture, creating an equal playing field that challenges artists to think within the square, both literally and conceptually.

“That thirty-centimetre diameter is the great equaliser,” Rohan explained. “It forces artists to focus their ideas, to distil their vision into something powerful and compact. The result is an exhibition that is incredibly diverse yet cohesive, a feast of small works that together create a huge impact.”



## KEY DATES AND DETAILS

With keen interest enthusiasm shown in this year's art prize, entries closed on Friday, December 12, 2025. The exhibition will run from January 4 – 23, 2026 at Workspace 3496 + Gallery in Red Cliffs. The official opening and prize announcement will coincide with The Red Cliffs Country Market on Sunday January 4, a lively day that draws thousands of visitors into the township.

## PRIZES AND RECOGNITION

The Jacaranda Art Prize continues to offer an impressive line-up of cash awards thanks to the support of generous local sponsors.

**Best in Show** – \$600 cash donated by TASCO Petroleum

**Best Classic Jacaranda** – \$200 cash donated by TASCO Petroleum

**Best Use of Medium** – \$200 cash donated by TASCO Petroleum

**Under 18 Nurture Award** – \$150 cash donated by Riverside Boutique Market

**People's Choice Award** – \$100 cash donated by The Red Cliffs Country Market

"We are deeply grateful to our sponsors for standing behind local art," Rohan said.

"Their support does not just fund prizes, it validates creativity. It says to artists, your work matters here, your stories belong here."

## A COMMUNITY OF MAKERS

Beyond the competition, the Jacaranda Art Prize has become a space for connection where artists meet, collaborate and celebrate one another's achievements.

The exhibition has grown into a cornerstone of the regional arts calendar, attracting visitors from Mildura, Wentworth and the wider Mallee region.

The exhibition will once again be presented within the walls of Workspace 3496 + Gallery, a vibrant artist run space and community hub in Red Cliffs that showcases local and emerging talent year-round.



SHARYN DAVY THE GATHERER 2025.



TANYA LENZ KYEEMA 2025.

"Whether you are entering for the first time or returning to exhibit again, the Jacaranda Art Prize is your opportunity to share your vision and be part of something that is uniquely Mallee," Rohan added.

"It is about celebrating creativity in all its forms, small works, big ideas and a community that keeps growing stronger each year."

## VISIT THE GALLERY

Workspace 3496 + Gallery is located at Shop 2, 38 Indi Avenue, Red Cliffs.

Opening hours:

Wednesday - Friday 10am - 4pm

Saturday 10am - 1pm

\*Open 1st Sunday of the month for The Red Cliffs Country Markets from 9am.

For more information:

[www.workspace3496.com](http://www.workspace3496.com)





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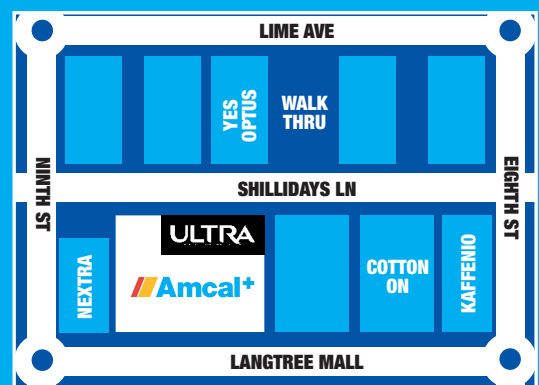
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*Work on Rural Imaging Australia's pioneering mobile screening truck is powering ahead, with manufacturing on schedule for completion early next year.*

---

# FOUNDATION'S SPECIAL PROJECT IS GATHERING MOMENTUM

**By John Dooley**

ONCE finished, the purpose-built semi-trailer will bring vital breast, cardiac and skin screening services directly to regional communities, ensuring rural Australians can access the latest health technology without the need to travel long distances. The state-of-the-art vehicle is currently

being constructed by Shepparton Body Builders and represents a significant investment in community health. The project has been fully funded by the MBPH Foundation, made possible through the generosity of local donors and sponsors. Acting Mildura Base Public Hospital CEO, Matthew Jukes said the mobile service will play an essential role in bridging the

health-care gap experienced by many country residents.

"This truck will be pivotal in improving health outcomes for regional communities," he said.

"With construction advancing smoothly, the initiative marks an exciting step toward more equitable access to preventative health screening across regional Australia."

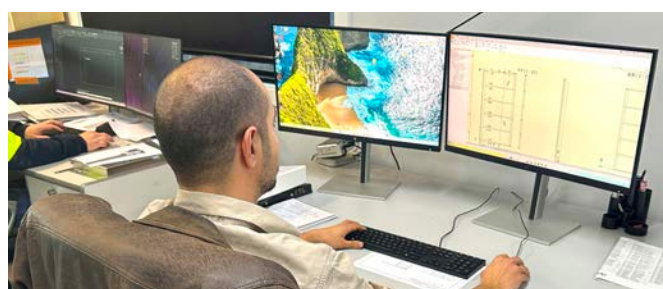
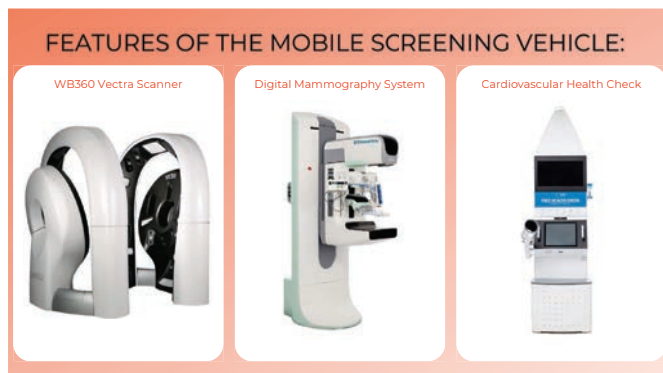




MBPH FOUNDATION SCREENING VEHICLE.



SHEPPARTON MOTOR BODY BUILDERS MANAGER CRAIG COXHELL & MANAGING DIRECTOR ROB COXHELL.



THE DESIGNERS AT SHEPPARTON MOTOR BODY BUILDERS WORK ON MAJOR PROJECTS FOR CLIENTS ACROSS AUSTRALIA.

Executive Director Engagement & Support Services Heath Kendall is overseeing the screening truck project and has visited Shepparton to see the progress of the vehicle build.

"The boys from Shepparton Motor Body Builders have done a magnificent job to have the truck build to this advanced stage," Heath said.

"We're all excited to see it coming to fruition and knowing the difference that it is going to make to our community in Mildura and northern Victoria, is exciting.

"It is going to make an incredible difference to our family's lives, farmers and remote rural communities in general.

"It's about giving them accessible health solutions that are close to home rather than having to come into town. It will be a real game-changer - a massive game - changer for people.

"This is a one-of-a-kind truck. There are other trucks out there, but they don't have the multiple solutions that we have on this truck."

Shepparton Motor Body Builders' Managing

Director, Rob Coxhell, told *Heartbeat* his company was delighted to be constructing the vehicle.

"We're delighted and super excited to be doing a job like this for Mildura Base Public Hospital," he said.

"It's a state-of-the-art cancer screening trailer. And these jobs don't come around very often and while they're really challenging, we are very proud to be undertaking this project."

Rob's son Craig, is Shepparton Motor Body Builders' manager and he is supervising the vehicle's build.

"It really is an honour for us to be able to be a part of this venture," he said.

"This sort of build is something that's really up-our-alley.

"All of our design team, Rob and the guys on the floor, are really excited about what the end result will be. We're aiming to have it on the road in early 2026, ahead of the AFL Gather Round in Adelaide, where the vehicle will make its debut.

The Gather Round will include nine matches across four days from April 9-12, 2026

with all 18 AFL clubs descending on South Australia, with many of the matches being played at the Adelaide Oval.

The event will coincide with the first week of school holidays in South Australia, and will also fall after the Easter long weekend.

The final design of the vehicle includes three distinct clinical zones within the truck.

A skin screening area, designed for privacy and equipped with dermatological diagnostic tools.

A breast screening suite, housing mammography equipment in a controlled environment.

A central consultation and cardiac testing area

The mobile clinic will also feature wheelchair access and innovative slide-out sides to increase interior space when deployed, enhancing both patient and staff experience.

To view a feature video about the Screening Vehicle, scan the QR code or visit <https://youtu.be/MTZmgUzyEIY>



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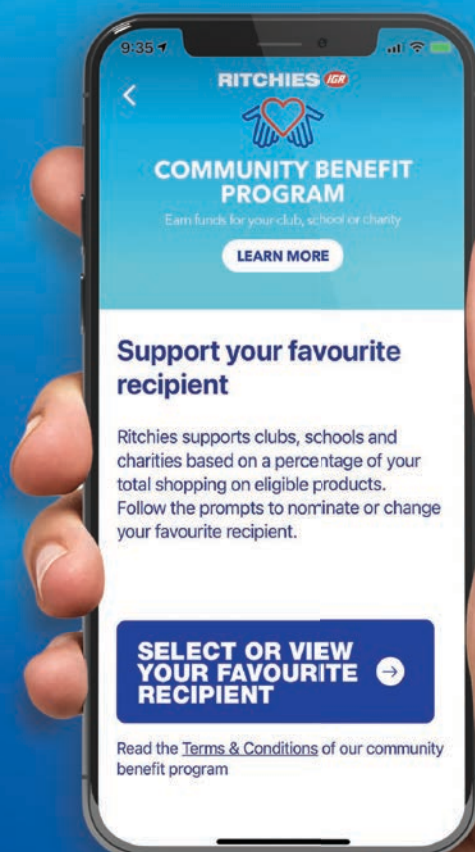


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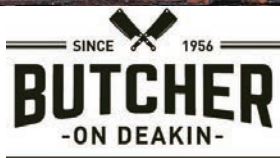
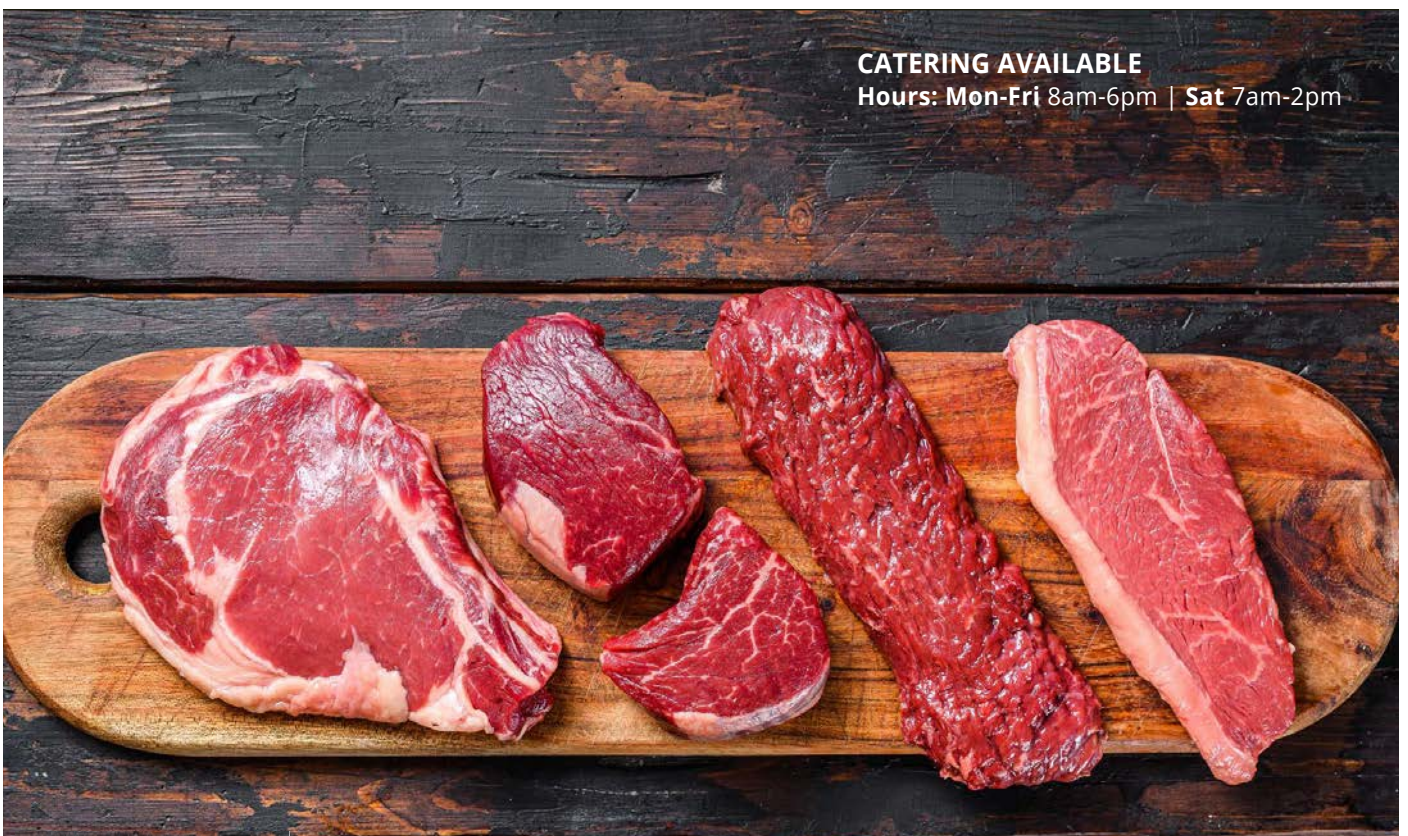
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IT WAS A TEAM EFFORT THAT GAVE FORCH ANOTHER CHANCE AT LIFE.

*This is a story with a potentially tragic outcome that was thwarted by quick thinking, skill and co-operation. It was life and death. It was touch and go. But thankfully it is a tale with a happy ending.*

# FORTUNE SMILES ON MILDURA SENIOR

**By Grant Maynard**

SIXTY-five-year-old Fortunata 'Forch' Panetta collapsed suddenly while attending her customary 6.15am Pilates class in August this year.

"It happened without any warning at all," she told local media recently.

"I consider myself reasonably fit, which many people have indicated helped my survival and recovery.

"I'm slowly getting back into things and getting better and stronger every day."

Fortunata, it seems, is aptly named as one of those attending the same class was off-duty nurse Lisa Nystrom.

Lisa's training kicked in immediately and she began CPR.

"It was an unlucky thing to happen to Forch, but lucky it happened when and where it did because we were there to help her," Lisa said.

"When I'm at work I've got monitors and a team behind me, but on this occasion I didn't have any of that. I just had to rely on my own instincts and knowledge.

"It absolutely highlighted the importance of knowing what to do in a cardiac arrest because there were no warning signs this was going to happen."

Lisa was ably assisted in her efforts by fellow Mildura Base Public Hospital employee Krista Hall.

"I was performing the mouth-to-mouth resuscitation in between Lisa's compressions," Ms Hall told *Heartbeat*.

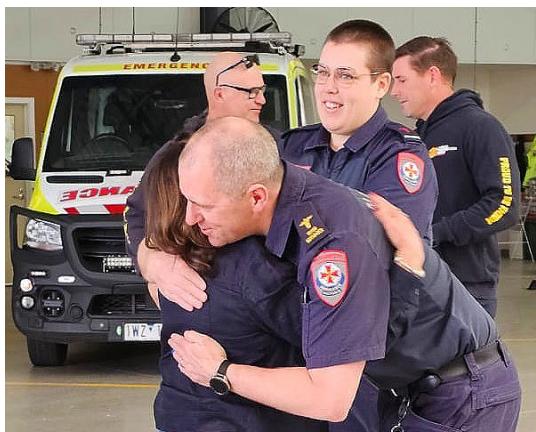
"When we became aware that Forch was in trouble, everybody worked together to revive her.

"While it was upsetting to see, at the time you don't think about that. It's a matter of getting on with the job. Knowing CPR is something everyone should learn."

Members of the class were in the process of applying the Pilates studio's AED when Ambulance Victoria crews arrived.

"For every minute that CPR is delayed during a cardiac arrest, survival decreases by 10 per cent," MICA paramedic Craig Stack explained.





AN EMOTIONAL FORCH REUNITING WITH A PARAMEDIC WHO HELPED SAVE HER LIFE.



KRISTA HALL, LISA NYSTROM, FORTUNATA 'FORCH' PANETTA AND AV MICA PARAMAMEDIC CRAIG STACK AT THE REUNION.



THE AMBULANCE VICTORIA CREWS WITH FORCH AT THE REUNION IN MILDURA.



FORCH SAYING THANK YOU TO THOSE WHO HELPED SAVE HER LIFE.

"Their (class members) knowing what to do in an emergency and doing CPR, and the place having a local defibrillator was invaluable to give Forch a chance at survival.

"The high-quality compressions she had received meant her heart rate remained in a shockable rhythm, so as soon as we arrived we applied our defibrillator and delivered three shocks, continuing compressions in between."

It was another fellow class member Grace Weaving who had called Triple Zero.

"We were about 15 minutes into the class, and it had all been normal. Then, completely out of the blue, Forch just fell back," Grace said.

At first, the group thought Forch had fainted, but it quickly became apparent that it was a life-threatening emergency.

"Two women in the class immediately began CPR as we realised this was really serious," Grace said.

"I said I would call the ambulance—I'd never had to call Triple Zero (000) before.

"It was surreal. It's not something you expect to happen in that environment and to a woman who was so fit and healthy."

Those involved have since reunited to recount their recollections of the day while

for Forch it was also an opportunity to thank all those who had assisted her.

"Having a reunion like this is quite unusual and fortunate for us," Craig said.

"It's not something we get to do a lot, and it's motivating to know we're in the right job and we're having an impact on people's long-term health."

Once paramedics had stabilised Forch, she was transported to Mildura Base Public Hospital before being transferred to The Alfred Hospital, where she received intensive treatment and spent nearly three weeks in hospital.

"I was in the right place," she contends. "If it had happened anywhere else there might not have been anybody to begin CPR, and I probably wouldn't have survived."

She described the reunion as "a bit overwhelming but beautiful too".

"I was a bit nervous about reuniting with everyone, but it's been wonderful. I'm very grateful. The ambos are amazing... as is the stuff they do," Forch said.

"If I had of been at home by myself or even at work, they say there's only a 10 per cent chance for survival and you don't know if anyone there will know how to do CPR or have a defibrillator nearby... And it was good having a nurse in the class too."

Recovery, Forch says, has been "a slow process".

"But I'm getting there. I'm a strong person and I like exercise, so I've been going for walks with my husband."

Ms Panetta's husband, Frank, is hopeful that more people across the Sunraysia community will become aware of how important it is to know CPR.

"We knew the basics of it, but unless it happens to you there's a lot you're not aware of. Education is critical, especially for saving people's lives," he said.

"I'm so incredibly grateful. I thank God that it happened where it did and that all the emergency services were able to respond so quickly."

Every day, around 21 Victorians will suffer a cardiac arrest and only one in 10 survive.

Victoria has the best cardiac arrest survival rates in Australia and third best anywhere in the world, thanks to a high level of bystander intervention - meaning early access to CPR and defibrillation.

*Heartbeat* wishes to thank Ambulance Victoria and the Sunraysia Daily for allowing the republication of some of their editorial content in the compilation of this article.





HEARTBEAT VICTORIA CELEBRATED ITS 40TH ANNIVERSARY AT PRINCES COURT VILLAGE ON SEPTEMBER 5 THIS YEAR.

# CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMMUNITY

*At the heart of every healthy community are organisations whose volunteer's dedication and giving of their time helps make a difference. One such organisation is Heartbeat Victoria's Mildura Chapter, who readers of this magazine will be familiar with.*

**By John Dooley**

HEARTBEAT Sunraysia seeks to boost disease awareness and support services while celebrating 40 years of good works

On September 5, this year the organisation celebrated their 40th anniversary at Princes Court Village.

The event was well attended, with Mildura Base Public Hospital (MBPH) - Medical and Community Services, Clinical Director General Medicine and Specialist Physician General Medicine and Cardiology Dr Bernhard Kuepper amongst the guests.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death



globally and in many regions, including Australia and accounts for 13 percent of deaths around the world annually, and it

was the leading cause of death in Australia for 2023.

Despite awareness campaigns and free programs Shane Warne Legacy Health Check and our local, CPR courses run by heart attack survivor, Graeme Tulloch and his 'Hands on Heart Australia' organisation, there is simply not enough being done to raise the awareness of how devastating heart disease can be, and its wide-ranging effects on patients, their families, carers and the wider community.

MBPH will soon open its Public Cardio Unit, which will offer cardio screening and treatment for heart disease, at no cost to the patient with a Medicare card.





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# A NEW CHAPTER FOR MILDURA AIRPORT

## CONNECTING PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Mildura Airport is proud to welcome our new Chief Executive Officer, Andrew Elliott, whose roots in regional Victoria – from Ballarat to Geelong – have instilled in him a strong understanding of the importance of community connection and regional opportunities. Andrew brings with him not only a deep respect for the role regional airports play in linking people, places and possibilities, but also a genuine passion for aviation's role in shaping vibrant, connected communities.

That connection between aviation and community is nothing new to Mildura. Many decades ago, Mildura played a pivotal role in training Royal Australian Air Force pilots during the Second World War – a legacy that remains a proud part of our airport's story. This enduring bond continues today, most recently with a visit from the RAAF No.1 Flying Training School (IFTS), whose pilots expressed a clear desire to strengthen ties with the Mildura community, inspire interest among the younger generation to explore careers in the Australian Air Force and military and build a lasting partnership with our airport.

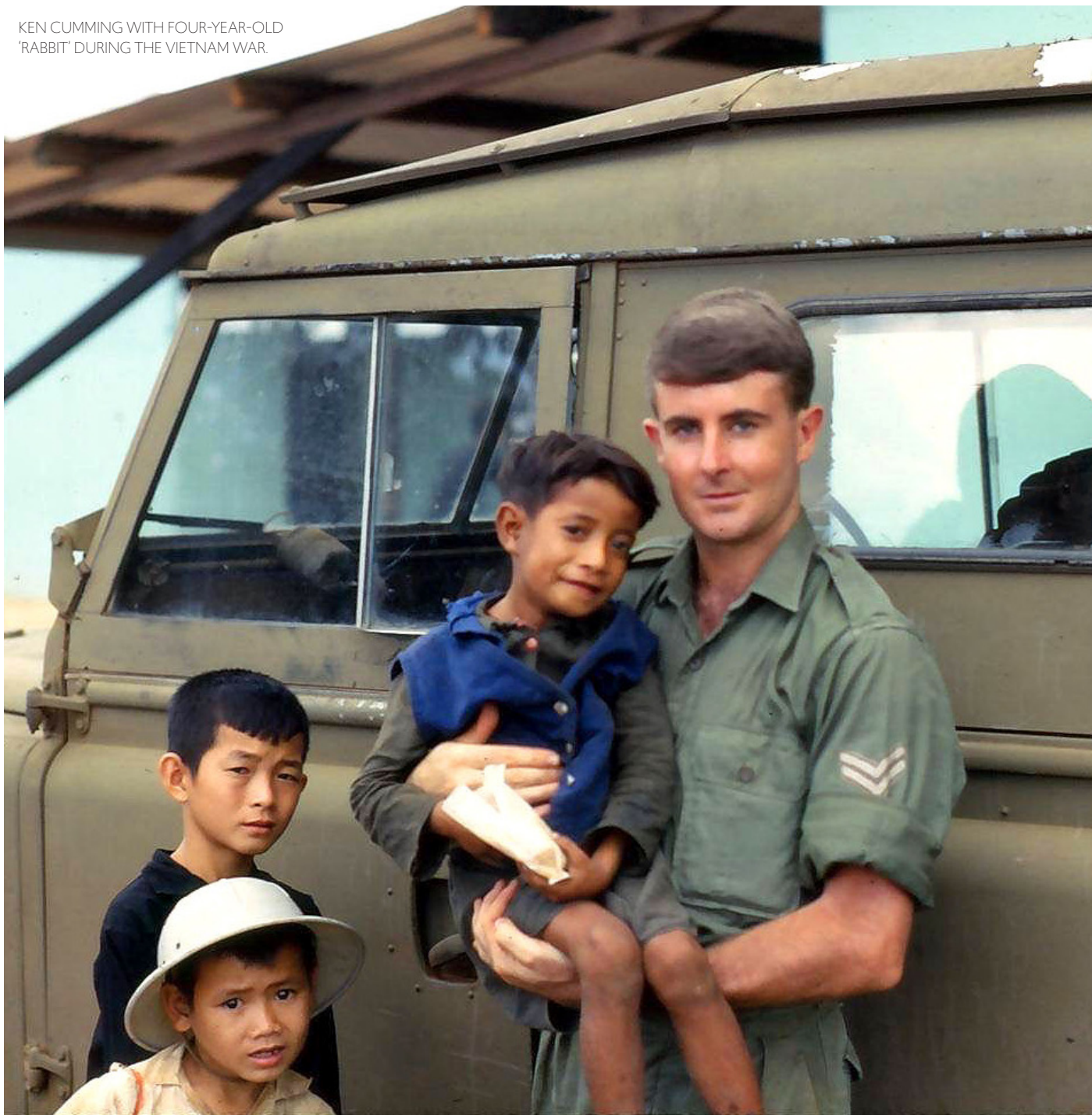


As we look ahead, our focus under Andrew's leadership is on sustainable growth – building on our strong relationships with existing airlines while working to attract new routes and new opportunities that will connect our region not just to greater Australia, but to the world. By strengthening these connections, we're investing in a future that celebrates both our proud aviation heritage and our exciting potential for tomorrow.





KEN CUMMING WITH FOUR-YEAR-OLD  
'RABBIT' DURING THE VIETNAM WAR.



*This is a story born on the battlefield during the Vietnam War. It is a story spanning almost 60 years, a tale of hardship, courage, compassion and friendship. It is an amazing story discovered by former Mildura newspaper editor ALAN ERSKINE during a recent month-long visit to Vietnam.*

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# THIS IS...THE STORY OF 'RABBIT', THE VIETNAM WAR, AND THE AUSSIE DIGGERS

AUSTRALIAN diggers, including Warrnambool's Ken Cumming, were used to being either on active duty seven days a week, or doing community civic aid work in villages and towns close to their Army base of Nui Dat during the Vietnam War.

Active-duty patrols by Infantry and Engineers soldiers were fraught with danger. The North Vietnamese Army, and in particular their guerrilla arm the Vietcong, were everywhere, infiltrating villages, intimidating and threatening village elders and others to help them - or else!

But the Aussies had a reputation for helping and protecting many villages and their inhabitants, including the small village of Hoa Long, just a few kilometres from the Aussie base camp at Nui Dat.

Ken in particular was a big help, using his training as a medical and dental assistant to carry out free basic community medical and dental work for needy villagers, using portable equipment powered by generators.

"I became quite accustomed to assisting these poor people every month, and part of my heart stayed in Vietnam after finishing my tour of duty and going home," Ken said. He recalled that during visits to Hoa Long in their distinctive Australian Army vehicles, they would frequently be met by young children, who would warn them with the words; "VC come, VC come."

Among them was a little boy the Diggers nick-named 'Rabbit,' because he could run like a hare.

The four-year-old's real name was Pham Van Hoa, and time and again the youngster would greet the incoming Aussies with his shouted warnings.

"The VC were actually in the village at the time," Ken recalls, so 'Rabbit' and the other kids were risking their lives by warning us." Ken said the Aussies knew very little of young Hoa's background, other than the fact he was orphaned, and was being raised by an Aunt.

Ken and his fellow Diggers often fed Hoa with their Army rations, and slipped his Aunt a few VND (Vietnamese Dong) to help make life a little easier.

Ken finished his tour of duty in January, 1968, aged 22, and returned home to resume civilian life.

He wasn't to know that a few weeks after his departure, little Hoa was badly injured

when his village was the centre of a fierce firefight between Australian and Vietcong forces during the Tet Offensive.

Ken was told many years later, in 2018, that Hoa had been caught in a deadly cross-fire, and was badly wounded in the stomach, head and arm.

He would have died had it not been for the Aussies organising a medivac helicopter flight to the Australian Army Hospital in Vung Tau, where surgeons operated to save his life.

After three months, Hoa had recovered sufficiently to be returned to his Aunt's care.

To save reprisals from the VC, she was told he had been saved not by Australian Army surgeons and nurses, but by the Vung Tau public hospital.

The war ended for the Aussies after more than a decade, the years flew by, and Ken busied himself with work as an optical technician, and later at the Nestle coffee manufacturing industry in his home town of Warrnambool, raising a family, doing volunteer work with the local RSL, and tending his prized veggie patch.

But he never forgot Hoa, the little boy who had repeatedly saved him and his mates.

So 50 years later, in 2017, Ken started trying to find 'Rabbit,' hoping he had survived the war.

"I had no luck searching for him from Australia," Ken said, "but in 2018 a veteran mate asked me if I had tried facebook.

"So I signed up, and posted a message world-wide with the heading, 'Searching for a boy called Rabbit,' complete with an old photo of the two of us."

Ken was inundated with replies, so much so that he had trouble answering them all.

"It took just three weeks to find Hoa, confirming that he was alive and well, and still living in the

Baria Province of Vietnam, on the semi rural outskirts of Hoa Long not far from Long Tan," he said.

So in December of 2018, Ken organised a trip to Vietnam with all 11 members of his family for an emotional reunion with 'Rabbit,' as well as the man who helped track him down, a Vietnamese retired school teacher and lawyer named Nguyen Van Nguyen, along with his work colleague and friend Vu Van Thuc.

Ken learned that Hoa had married a local village girl, Le Thi Minh, had fathered three children, and was also now a grandfather of five.

Before the trip, Ken made up an A4 size photo album as a gift for 'Rabbit,' featuring photos of them both, along with pictures of Hoa's village that were taken during Ken's tour of duty.

"It created a lot of interest and excitement among Hoa's family," Ken said.

"None of them had ever seen photos of 'Rabbit' when he was an orphan running around the village."

The 2018 visit ended with an emotional farewell, so when Ken learned about the popular Vietnam trips being organised by a fellow vet, Mildura's Stan Middleton, he signed up for the 2019 tour, started some more fund-raising with the help of Stan and fellow vets, and was again re-united with his new Vietnam friends.

The author, although not a Vietnam vet, also met Hoa and Nguyen earlier this year when I joined a month-long tour of Vietnam organised by Stan and his Vietnamese-born wife Sinh, who used to do secretarial and interpreter work for the Aussies during the war.

Our tour group of 35 visited Hoa and his family near Baria, on our way to the famed Long Tan Memorial.

The house was immaculate, the fruit trees thriving, and the cattle looked to be in peak condition.

Along our amazing 2025 journey, which criss-crossed Vietnam from top to bottom, I found there was more to the 'Rabbit' story than met the eye.

I learned that as well as carrying injuries from the war, Hoa had suffered a stroke, resulting in no strength at all in his right arm, and with him also walking with a pronounced limp.

For many years, 'Rabbit' and his family lived in a tiny shack on a small plot of land and the most basic of facilities, with Hoa barely making ends meet as a cattle herder by looking after some cattle owned by other villagers.

Ken said that when he saw how Hoa and his wife Minh lived, in their two room very modest home, using a plastic table and chairs, with no running water and having to sleep in hammocks, he got Nguyen to ask if Hoa would like some help with extensions to their home.

"They were delighted at the offer," Ken said, "so while I was on the Middleton tour in 2019, my family and I donated \$5300 for extensions, and fellow vets chipped in another \$700.





LATEST REUNION TWO YEARS AGO  
BETWEEN KEN AND 'RABBIT'.



'RABBIT' IN 2018.



THE COW WITH BONUS CALF PAID FOR BY  
KEN CUMMING AND FAMILY.



BUILDING WORK AT 'RABBIT'S' HOME, PAID FOR BY KEN CUMMING AND FAMILY.



“Nguyen got a quote from a local builder, and the end result for Hoa and Minh was the addition of a new kitchen, dining room, a western toilet complete with septic system, a shower room, awnings onto the front and rear of their house, and a submersible electric water pump to transfer water to a tank on the roof, to be gravity fed into the house taps.”

Prior to these extensions, ‘Rabbit’ and Minh shared a kitchen and bathroom in their eldest daughter’s house next door.

When the renovations were finished in July 2019, there was \$1700 left in the building fund. So Nguyen helped Hoa and Minh choose and purchase a double bed, a proper dining table and chairs, a television set, some carved lounge room chairs, a proper (stocked) crockery and cutlery cabinet, and some bedroom furniture.

Ken also organised the purchase of six tropical fruit trees, and in November 2019 was on hand to help plant them in Hoa’s garden.

Ken also wanted to do something to improve the income from Hoa’s working life, so he and his family, friends and fellow vets started buying some young cattle that Hoa could call his own.

They weren’t cheap - at the time the same price as in Australia - between \$1200 and \$1600 a head (about 20 million Vietnamese Dong), but at last count Hoa now has 10 cows in his herd. The last one, purchased last year, was in calf, so that was an added bonus.

Ken also put together another \$1800 to extend Hoa’s cow shed to accommodate his growing herd.

They remain in regular contact, especially as Hoa and Minh unofficially ‘adopted’ Ken and his wife Julie at the first reunion in December, 2018, and likewise Ken and Julie ‘adopted’ Hoa and Minh, along with their kids and grandkids, as their Vietnamese family.

Over the past seven years, each time Ken has returned to Vietnam, a very close bond has developed, with Hoa and Minh becoming part of the extended Cumming family. Nguyen has also become a highly trusted friend, organiser and interpreter.

Stan and Sinh’s 2025 Vietnam tour was the sixth they had organised since 2011, with the largest group size of Vietnam vets, family and friends usually numbering around 40. They were all done virtually at cost, thanks to negotiations directly with a Vietnam travel provider, and Vietnam airlines.



KEN AND ‘RABBIT’ DURING AN EMOTIONAL REUNION IN VIETNAM IN 2019.

As a way of giving something back, tour participants are invited to make a donation that goes directly to former Vietnamese employees of the Australian base at Vung Tau, members of their family, and special cases such as ‘Rabbit.’

The tours end with a gala dinner, where the former employees, many now in their 70s and 80s, are formally introduced, along with their work background, and then handed an envelope containing varying amounts of cash, depending on their circumstances, but usually between \$350 and \$600, a small fortune to them.

‘Rabbit’ was one of the honoured guests at the 2025 dinner, and there wasn’t a dry eye in the house as his story was told. (We also had a whip-around during his home visit, raising about one million Dong for Hoa’s gas supplies for cooking).

Over the years, Stan and Sinh have also raised many thousands of dollars to be sent via Western Union for the most needy cases, and also to pay for headstones for former Vung Tau employees who have passed away since the war.

As Stan said on tour; “Most of them are extremely poor, so this is one way of thanking the Vietnamese who were very good to us during the war.”

Over the years the Aussie groups, led by Stan, have raised in excess of \$150,000 for their former employees. There are no

administration costs, so the Vietnamese families get the full amount.

Stan told me the 2025 tour was his last, as he is “running out of puff.”

But as some of the Vietnam vets told me; “That’s what he said five years ago, just before Covid.”

Regardless, Ken Cumming is organising his own trip, he’s just not quite sure when, “maybe in a few years.”

“I would love to catch up with Hoa and Minh, also Nguyen and Thuc again, along with their families and my other friends in southern Vietnam,” he said.

And sponsoring and hosting the family for a trip to Australia is not out of the question. “I currently coach four of their grandchildren with their school English lessons three nights a week via Google Meet (formally Skype),” Ken said.

“We would need an interpreter, so whichever Vietnamese grandchild achieves the best English language marks at High School, I will host them a free holiday with their grandparents Hoa and Minh as a reward for study achievement.”

*FOOTNOTE: In March this year, almost 58 years after first meeting Hoa, Ken Cumming celebrated his 80th birthday. In January this year, Hoa celebrated his 62nd birthday.*



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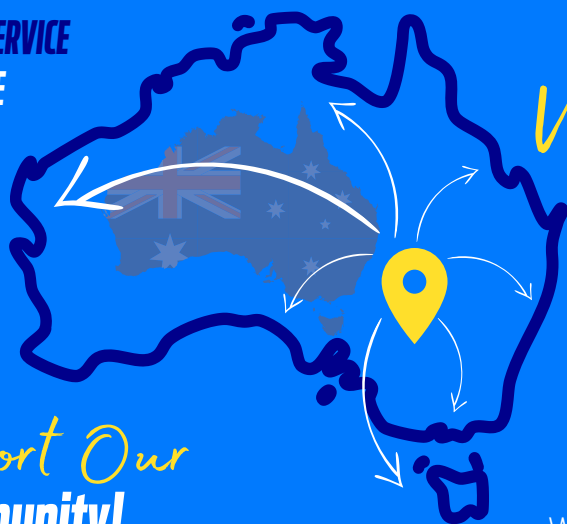


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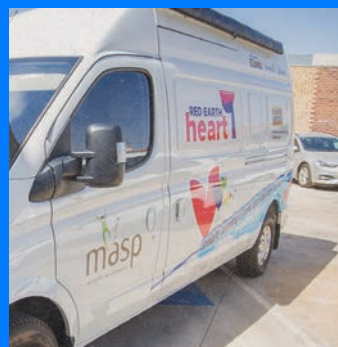
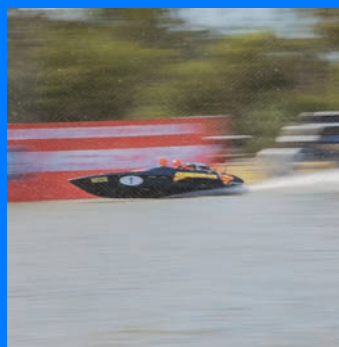


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# Celebrating our 10th edition

*Heartbeat* magazine continues to go from strength-to-strength with a growing readership indicative of the magazine's finger on the pulse of our community.



'FROM little things big things grow,' sings Aussie music legend Paul Kelly. It's a sentiment shared by all here at 'Heartbeat'.

From the first modest *Heartbeat* offering in June 2023, the Mildura Base Public Hospital Foundation-sponsored publication has matured markedly, and it keeps on growing... and going, to the point that we are now publishing bumper Issue No.10.

With a readership of more than 30,000, the magazine is circulated online around the country while the printed version has become a much-anticipated publication across Greater Sunraysia.

The frequency of publishing has now settled nicely into a quarterly pace, and it is an informative and entertaining magazine that we are proud to say is "hitting the spot" with readers.

It also helped that two of the hospital's staff – Foundation Editor, John Dooley, and Executive Director Engagement & Support Services, Heath Kendall, have both been working journalists in the past and readily accepted the challenge to launch a new publication.

Shortly after its debut edition, *Heartbeat* expanded its coverage beyond the hospital and health sector. While health remains a central focus, the magazine soon featured a diverse range of informative and entertaining community stories that deserved attention and that might not otherwise have been told.

Welcoming readers to the first edition of the magazine, Foundation Chairman, Ross Lake, said there was "always something exciting happening at the hospital" or with the Foundation and its activities "so we thought it was time we shared the good news with all of our staff, our Foundation Friends and the Northern Mallee community".

"The MBPH Foundation is grateful for the great generosity of our many wonderful sponsors and advertisers," Mr Lake continued, "Without whose support, the publication of this magazine would not have been possible, and we thank them for their valuable contribution."

"I hope you enjoy reading *Heartbeat* as much as we enjoyed producing the publication."

With that, the magazine was launched. The first 64-paged edition was a good

indication of the spirit the magazine was to carry through all subsequent editions, with articles ranging from 'Sarah's story of survival' and 'Caleb's remarkable tale of survival' through to the opening of the hospital's new Clinical Trials and Research Unit and the success of that year's annual KC Society Alfresco Luncheon.

The first two stories, headlining the edition, highlighted the heart-warming and aspirational human side of medicine and hospital care.

Sarah Young, 18, was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit at Mildura Base Public Hospital (MBPH) due to respiratory difficulties and required ventilator support. Such was the severity of 2023's Influenza strain.

Meanwhile, it was a highly emotional reunion when 19-year-old Caleb Bowers was reunited with the MBPH team who saved his life.

Caleb returned to the hospital with his mother, Karen, to meet the team who saved his life last year (2022) after he suffered a traumatic head injury, the result of being struck by a car while crossing Deakin Avenue.

*Heartbeat* has become a wonderful vehicle for the Hospital and Foundation to announce ground-breaking and potentially lifesaving initiatives like the launch of the MBPH Clinical Trials and Research Unit.

*Heartbeat* was also there when the Mildura Base Public Hospital Foundation hosted its first major event for the year - the KC Society Alfresco Luncheon on Friday, May 5 - which was a wonderful success, raising almost \$150,000.

An integral part of MBPH Foundation, The KC Society was established to honour Mildura Surgeon Kevin Chambers and help assist rural doctors realise their dream of practicing medicine and advance them in their training.

*Heartbeat's* Spring 2023 issue expanded to 92 pages. It was testament to the overwhelmingly positive community reception the first edition had received.

This edition contained stories as varied as an historical pieces as varied as the tale of the now long-gone Werrimull Bush Nursing Hospital and the life and times of long-time Mildura motor trader Garry Davison.



SARAH CERTAINLY HAD SOMETHING TO SMILE ABOUT, THIS WAS THAT DAY SHE WAS DISCHARGED AND COULD GO HOME TO HER FAMILY.



CALEB BOWERS AND MUM KAREN PHILLIPS.



MBPH FOUNDATION CHAIR ROSS LAKE, TERRY WELCH AND MBPH BOARD MEMBER QUINTON NORTON.



GUESTS AT THE KC SOCIETY LUNCHEON ENJOYED A THREE COURSE MENU PREPARED BY 400 GRADI & STEFANO'S CAFE.



STUDENTS FROM SIX SECONDARY SCHOOLS ATTENDED THE NURSING & MIDWIFERY CAREER INFORMATION SEMINAR AT MBPH.





DR. NABREES SINNALEBBE'S LIFE BEGAN IN SRI LANKA ON A PATH FAR REMOVED FROM THE CORRIDORS OF MILDURA BASE PUBLIC HOSPITAL.



ALAN AND JUDITH RODGERS.



GLITZ AND GLAM AND CELEBRITY WERE CERTAINLY THE THEME AT THE SECOND ANNUAL MBPH FOUNDATION GALA BALL, ABOVE, AND GOLF DAY, BELOW, WITH ALMOST 400 PEOPLE ATTENDING THE HOLLYWOOD-THEMED EVENT AT CLUB DA VINCI.



The edition also showcased the first phase of MBPH's exciting \$5.4 million Theatre Upgrade Project; the work of 'Garlic Nick' Diamantopoulos; the departure of hospital board chair Mary Rydberg and the Mildura visit of The Big Red Kidney Bus.

Meanwhile, the hospital was completing the first phase of an exciting \$5.4 million Theatre Upgrade Project thanks to \$1 million funding provided by the Victorian Health Building Authority to enhance Endoscopy equipment.

Affectionately known as 'Garlic Nick' our story about Nick Diamantopoulos focussed on his revolutionising the garlic industry globally... and all from a factory at Iraak.

The first of what was to become a step away from *Heartbeat's* purely medical arena focus, *Heartbeat* interviewed Garry and Reuben Davison. The Davison name is synonymous with Sunraysia's motor trade -- first it was the industrious Garry and now it is his son, Reuben, building the family business.

*Heartbeat* announced in the same edition that after almost three years as MBPH board chair, Mary Rydberg was stepping down, leaving the top post satisfied with the direction the organisation was heading.

Mary took the MBPH reins at a critical and historic time, leading the organisation through not only the COVID pandemic, but also as the hospital worked to re-establish its identity as a publicly managed healthcare service.

Meanwhile, introduced in late 2014, KidneyHealth Australia's 'Big Red Bus' has been a game changer for people requiring regular kidney dialysis treatment. The bus travels to locations across New South Wales and Victoria so that people can enjoy a well-deserved holiday whilst still receiving haemodialysis.

The bus is the size of a luxury coach and *Heartbeat* turned the spotlight on the initiative while it was in Mildura for six weeks during June and July of 2023 at the Big 4 Holiday Park in Deakin Avenue.

Dr Nabrees Sinnalebbe (now MBPH Chief Medical Officer), was the focus of the lead story for *Heartbeat's* third edition launched in early 2024, our story detailing his life from political legacy to medical leadership at MBPH.

"In the midst of Sri Lanka's civil unrest and born into a family steeped in political service, Dr Sinnalebbe's life began on a path far removed from the corridors of MBPH where he now serves as deputy chief medical officer, *Heartbeat* told readers,

"His journey, spanning continents and cultures, is a testament to resilience, adaptability, and an unwavering commitment to service.

"As he navigates the complexities of healthcare administration at MBPH, his journey is a living embodiment of the hospital's core values and a beacon of inspiration for the community he serves." We then detailed the continuation of MBPH's theatre upgrade project which included the exciting introduction of the state-of-the-art greenlight laser technology.

"This ground-breaking advancement in medical technology is set to revolutionise the field of prostate surgery," our story revealed.

Then we met Mildura's Alan Rodgers, then 74, who has been a kidney dialysis patient since 2018.

But, as we revealed, this hasn't allowed the thrice weekly, life-saving treatment to dent his love of travel, nor his desire to get out on the road.

In a feel good environmentally friendly story, we detailed a MBPH-initiated recycling program re-purposing surgical grade blue towels that diverts 8000 of them from going into landfill annually.

This initiative "has been made possible with co-operation of The Christie Centre and their 'Life Skills' team who now have the program up and running".

In another of our 'people stories' and under the headline 'A tribute to a true gentleman' we honoured well known former Mildura restaurateur and Rendezvous Restaurant owner for 60 years Geoff Harding.

Then it was glitz, glam and celebrity as well reviewed the second annual MBPH Foundation Gala Ball and golf day events.

Almost 400 people attended the Hollywood-themed gala event at the Club da Vinci with guests be greeted by fire jugglers and acrobats as they arrived for what more than a few described as the Northern Mallee's 'hottest ticket' event.





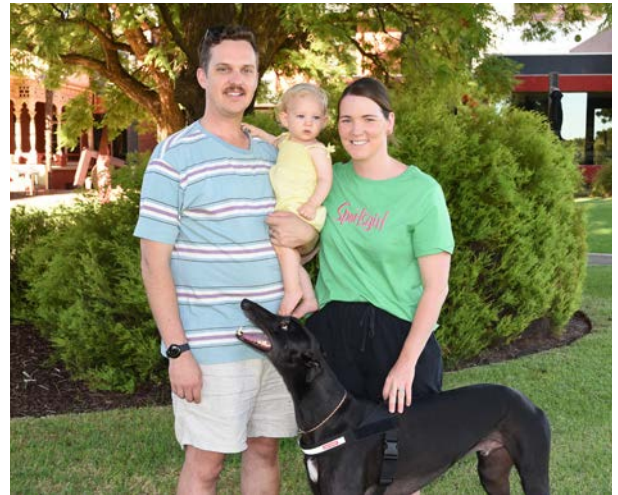
JULIE MITCHELL OF OUYEN IS THE FIRST PATIENT ADMITTED UNDER THE INNOVATIVE NMH PROJECT.



NICOLAS WORKING ON ONE OF HIS 'COLOURS OF MILDURA' PAINTINGS.



ROCCO PUTS HAVELOCK THROUGH HIS PACES ON THE TRAINING TRACK.



BRAD AND CHRISSIE CAREY WITH BABY MIA AND PABLO.



TRACEY LAWSON STANDING IN FRONT OF A PICTURE OF THE ROXY THEATRE'S GALA REOPENING NIGHT.



SMALL TOWN IN THE HEART OF THE MALLEE WITH A BIG COMMUNITY SPIRIT.



ROBINVALE-EUSTON, A RICH MULTICULTURAL SUCCESS STORY.



DR MARY BETH MACISAAC.



Inside guests enjoyed an amazing assortment of local produce prepared by celebrity cook Stefano di Pieri in conjunction with the incredible team from Club da Vinci while the wines that accompanied each course were supplied by the Forbes family's Zilzie Wines.

Meanwhile, it was an appearance by former Hawthorn champion and media star Dermott Brereton that was the highlight of the Foundation golf day held at Coomealla.

Dermott entertained the crowd at the completion of the day with stories from his footballing past while offering insights into the modern game.

Finally, we helped mark a very special month for La Trobe University's Mildura campus. The campus celebrated 20 years of campus central – the Brian Grogan building; turned the first sod to kickstart the construction of its new \$4.97 million nursing clinical labs while announcing a generous donation had been made by the McCall MacBain Foundation to the Mildura campus to support a program to help bridge the higher education gap for Mildura Senior College students.

By *Heartbeat's* 84-page fourth edition, the publication was gaining solid readership traction with its story variety being a real strength.

The edition lead was an expose of the Northern Mallee Health Project, featuring Ouyen's Julie Mitchell – the first patient admitted under the innovative program

Mrs Mitchell, expressing her admiration of, and gratitude for, the program, emphasised the profound impact it would have on patient outcomes and community well-being. "This is just a great program and will really have a big impact for this community and allowing people to return to Ouyen to recover – it's simply amazing!" she said.

In another feature story, MBPH's Dr Mary Beth MacIsaac had three words of advice for anyone who would listen: "Get into medicine!"

"I didn't come from a medical family. I think that is part of why I am keen to encourage people from our community



BROOKE SHELLEY PHARMACEUTICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA'S CREDENTIALLED PHARMACIST OF THE YEAR. PHOTO: AUSTRALIAN PHARMACIST

who are not from a medical family to go into medicine," she said.

The Canadian-born doctor's road to medicine certainly wasn't a straight one, and neither was her journey to Mildura.

Meanwhile, we found out being a butcher and a harness racing trainer at the same time is quite an achievement for anyone, let alone a young man who is yet to turn 19.

In another of our popular 'people stories' we met then 18-year-old Rocco Villiva who works alongside his father Ronnie in the family business – 'The Butcher' – located in Langtree Avenue, Mildura.

Rocco left school at 15 to become an apprentice to his father and not long after developed an interest in harness racing after being invited to visit a local pacer training facility in early 2022.

Through the pages of this edition, we visited the farming community of Ouyen a town with much to offer those playing tourist, a highlight being the town's the recreational lake – the pride and joy of the community.

Through another story we met Chrissie and Brad Carey, a couple who connected with other greyhound

owners via social media and also while walking their greyhound 'Pablo' and were inspired to found the Mildura greyhound walking group, boasting more than 20 members.

And we revealed MBPH had been the recipient of a prestigious award recognising the success of a fledgling efficiency program that has already delivered a raft of positives.

At the same time, we learned that patient MBPH had received a welcome boost with a donation from the *Heartbeat* Victoria Sunraysia branch. Turning to the arts, we covered an exhibition of paintings by former Melbourne artist Nicolas Chen who moved to Mildura with his wife -- MBPH Psychiatrist Dr Simone Zhang. The exhibition featured a new body of works titled 'Colours of Mildura'.

*Heartbeat's* next edition was released in the winter of 2024, its pages packed with another smorgasbord of interesting stories from the hospital, the wider medical arena and across Greater Sunraysia.

Leading the 'charge' was pharmacist Brooke Shelley's story under the headline 'Brooke's prestigious award a true recognition of excellence'.



The Mildura Base Public Hospital (MBPH) Foundation will change how skin cancer screening is done by introducing Australia's first mobile skin cancer screening vehicle, *Heartbeat* revealed. (Since then the Screening Vehicle project has been expanded to include cardio and breast cancer screening).

Then *Heartbeat* visited Wentworth. The town on two rivers. Home of the world's first tractor monument and headquarters for all 26,269 square kilometres of the sprawling Wentworth Shire.

But *Heartbeat* found there is so much more to this historic river town and the wider Wentworth Shire which is home to about 8000 people, the majority of them being clustered in the towns of Wentworth, Dareton, Buronga and Gol Gol along the Murray River.

Under the headline 'Christie Centre celebrates 70 years of evolving service to the community', we profiled this dynamic community umbrella that supports a number of social enterprises. Those enterprises include the Mildura Chocolate Company, the AroundAgain recycling/reuse operation, an internationally accredited confidential document destruction service, the ArtRageUs graphic arts studio and the GrowAbility plant nursery.

Sunraysia's emergency services were under the spotlight at a May (2024) event highlighting both professional career and volunteer opportunities that *Heartbeat* was happy to cover for its readers.

We also took a peek at La Trobe University's online study initiative.

"With increased access to online study, local nurses can upskill, specialise and develop their leadership capability via postgraduate study without having to travel to Melbourne or Adelaide," we informed readers.

*Heartbeat* readers also met Dr Bruce Rodan, the subject of another of our popular people stories.

Bruce arrived in Mildura with his family not long after his 1st birthday, the son of Dr Brian Rodan, who was an ophthalmologist and mother Barbara, a radiographer.

After graduation from medical school,

Bruce wanted to do more than the standard medical career, the catalyst for him completing a master's degree in Public Health at Harvard University.

"That no doubt took a fair bit of courage for a boy from Mildura to quit his medical career and head off to the USA where he finished up working in the White House as a science advisor to the President!" we revealed.

Meanwhile, we also reported that success of 2024's annual Chaffey Festival and Mildura Day celebrations far exceeded the expectations of organisers.

"The highlight of the 2024 festivities was a sell-out gala evening held on Friday, May 31, at the Powerhouse complex," our *Heartbeat* story trumpeted.

And finally, we met the swimming sensation and son of oncologist Dr Jose Leal and his doctor-wife Carolina.

Joaquin Leal joined the Mildura Swimming Club soon after arriving in our city early in 2023, and to give you some idea of the St Joseph's College student and then 14-year-old's credentials as an up-and-coming talent in the pool.

As the year rolled on, so did the work on the next *Heartbeat* edition...the publication's sixth and coming out in Spring last year.

Leading the latest edition, and under the headline 'When practice makes perfect', was our story about MBPH Addiction Specialty Nurse Practitioner, Leighlan Phillips.

At a time of doctor and allied health worker shortages, highly qualified nursing staff are a real asset to any hospital, our story told readers.

"NPs provide patient-centred care, focussing on disease prevention, living a healthy lifestyle and understanding patient's health concerns," Ms Phillips said.

We also profiled car racing great Larry Perkins and the amazing survivor Michael Chambers who attributes Victoria Ambulance Service paramedics, and the doctors, nurses and staff of Mildura Base Hospital for saving his life – not just once, but "many times over".

MBPH's Executive Director Clinical Operations and Chief Nursing & Midwifery Officer Katrina Allen was also the subject of another *Heartbeat* story.



SEN'S ANDY MAHER, MBPH CEO TERRY WELCH WITH ANTHONY McDONALD-TIPUNGWUTI AND MELBOURNE TIGER'S ANDREW GAZE.



KULDEEP & AUSTIN WORKING AT THE GROWABILITY NURSERY.



DR BRUCE RODAN WITH WHITE HOUSE COLLEAGUE, THE US PRESIDENT'S SCIENCE ADVISOR AND DIRECTOR OF THE WHITE HOUSE'S OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY, DR JOHN HOLDREN.



FORMER WENTWORTH MAYOR MARG THOMSON.



CHAFFEY TRAIL REFERENCE GROUP MEMBERS AT THE POWERHOUSE.



MICHAEL CHAMBERS IS STILL LIVING THE DREAM AFTER HIS DEATH DEFYING EXPERIENCE.



CHRISTIE CENTRE INC. BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER JOE SIMONETTA AT THE SPARK KIOSK.



MBPH ICU CRITICAL CARE CLINICAL NURSE CONSULTANT GREG PLUMMER CALLS TIME ON HIS STELLAR CAREER.



There's an oft heard maxim about each day being an opportunity to learn something new, but few people have taken it heart with as much enthusiasm as Katrina.

Another sterling career highlighted in this edition was that of Dr Philip Webster.

We reported that his retirement from general practice marked the end of an era. (As it turns out Dr Webster is still assisting in the practice to help ease the GP shortage in the town).

We also farewelled nurse Greg Plummer. It was 40 years ago that he commenced working in the wards of the then Mildura Base Hospital, in Thirteenth Street.

This was the start of a rewarding career, which would see him dedicate his life to serving in his community's hospital.

Sport was on the agenda with our coverage of the inaugural One Agency MBPH Foundation Festival of Sport.

On October 5, we proudly reported,

ONTARIO MEDICAL CLINIC GP PHILIP WEBSTER IS STEPPING BACK FROM DAILY CONSULTING BUT WILL STILL BE SERVING THE COMMUNITY.



FORMER MILDURA BASE HOSPITAL NURSES CHRIS BOWMAN, SISSEL MARTINUWSEN, ROBYNNE WILSON, MILDURA BASE PUBLIC HOSPITAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CLINICAL OPERATIONS CHIEF NURSING AND MIDWIFERY OFFICER KATRINA ALLEN, GAIL MOTTRAM AND LYDIA PETRIC.



MBPH CEO TERRY WELCH FOUNDATION COMMITTEE MEMBER MARK THORNTON MTCHS BOARD CHAIR MARY RYDBERG MTCHS CEO FRANCES PEART & MBPH BOARD CHAIR FRANK PISCIONERI.



more than 2000 enthusiastic sports fans flocked to the Mildura Sporting Precinct for the Festival featuring top-tier A-League football (soccer) action from both men's and women's teams.

Meanwhile, we helped publicly unveil MBPH's new Patient Transport Vehicle — 100% funded by the Foundation.

"The new transport vehicle will serve the communities of the Northern Mallee, including Ouyen, Robinvale, and Wentworth," we informed readers.

"This initiative will provide a more cost-effective and efficient way of transporting patients from the hospital to their residence or primary place of care. Importantly, this vehicle will help alleviate the burden on local ambulance services and ensure that more patients can be transferred safely and promptly without long wait times," MBPH CEO Terry Welch said.

Heartbeat was also there for a reunion of former Mildura Base Hospital

ONE AGENCY A-LEAGUE FESTIVAL OF SPORT A SUPER SUCCESS!



LARRY PERKINS WITH THE V8 SUPERCAR ENGINE PHOTO V8 SUPERCARS.



trainees with eight of the original 12 members of 'School 70' coming together to celebrate and renew old friendships.

We also announced the resumption of radiology services at the Ouyen Hospital, described as "a welcome development and another example of Mallee Track Health and Community Service delivering care closer to home". The resumption of the X-ray service after a decade, means that patients who would otherwise have to travel or be transported to Mildura Base Public Hospital for their X-ray, can now have their images taken locally.

The Mallee Track Health and Community Service was also in the news with the opening of its antenatal clinic at the Ouyen Hospital.

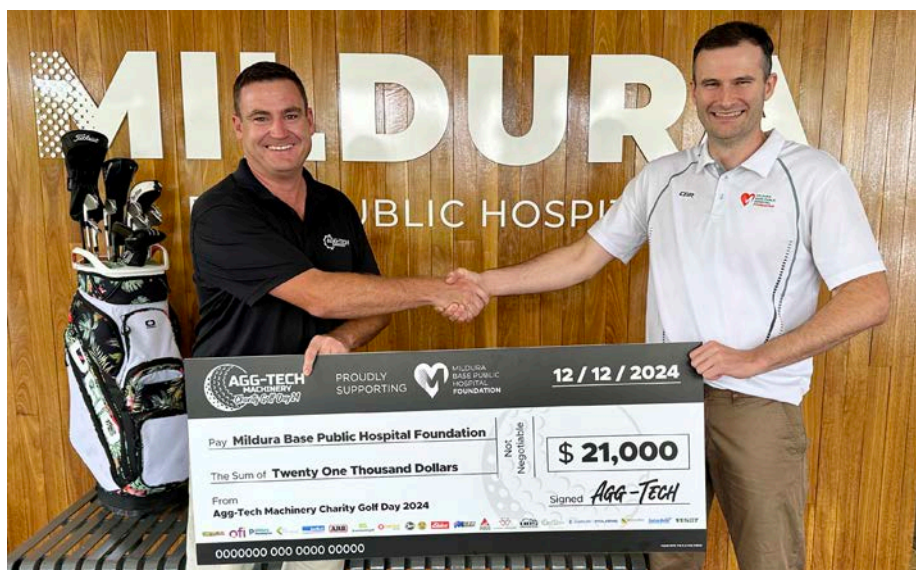
Heartbeat reported the uptake of the service by pregnant women in the region utilising a 'close-to-home service' had far exceeded expectations.



L-R MBPH STAFF SPECIALIST PAEDIATRICIAN & DIRECTOR OF CLINICAL TRAINING & ADJUNCT LECTURER AT MONASH RURAL HEALTH, DR PETER BEGG, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR HIEU PHAM, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF MONASH RURAL HEALTH'S NORTH WEST VICTORIA REGIONAL TRAINING HUB, MONASH RURAL HEALTH DIRECTOR, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR FIONA WRIGHT, INTERN OF THE YEAR AWARD RECIPIENT, DR AKHIL SAHNI, WITH MBPH CEO TERRY WELCH.



MEDICAL STUDENT OLIVER SHARMAN SPENT HIS SUMMER BREAK WORKING AS A TEAM MEMBER IN THE MILDURA BASE PUBLIC HOSPITAL KITCHEN.



ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7, A CHEQUE FROM THE PROCEEDS OF THE GOLF DAY WAS PRESENTED TO THE FOUNDATION BY AGG-TECH MACHINERY'S BUSINESS MANAGER, ALEX BARBER, WHICH WAS RECEIVED BY MBPH ACTING CEO, MATTHEW JUKES.



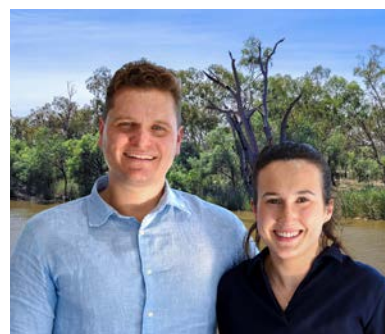
DR GLEESON IS A KEEN AVIATOR WHO WILL USE HIS OWN BEECHCRAFT BONANZA TO FLY TO OTHER REGIONS SUCH AS BROKEN HILL WHERE HE PRACTISES.



SUNRAISIA FARMERS & MAKERS MARKET COORDINATOR KYLIE DEW.



JIM DOUGLAS WORKING ON ANOTHER ONE OF HIS JIGSAW PUZZLES.



MONASH RURAL HEALTH YEAR 4C MEDICAL STUDENTS DAMIANO TOMASSONI & KATE BRACCHI.



LENORE BRYAN RELAXING BY THE MURRAY RIVER IN MILDURA.



DARETON MEN IN A SHED MEMBER GREG WOOD HAS BEEN WORKING ON THE RESTORATION OF A SABRE JET FIGHTER FOR MORE THAN THREE YEARS.





A DEPICTION OF THE NEW MOBILE SKIN CANCER SCREENING VEHICLE.

By the time we started preparing *Heartbeat's* seventh edition, and the first for 2025, the team behind it was really hitting its straps.

The continued support for the publication was gratifying and the story ideas continued to flow.

Our lead story headlined 'The ultimate award is one judged by your peers' profiled talented young Mildura Base Public Hospital Intern Dr Akhil Sahni and his 'Monash University North West Victoria Regional Training Hub Rural Talent Award - Intern of the Year 2024' award win.

We also met Oliver Sharman, a future doctor who spends his university breaks working in the kitchen at the hospital.

At the time of writing Mildura-born and raised Oliver was in his final year of the Bachelor of Biomedical Science (Medicine) at La Trobe University's Albury-Wodonga campus.

In the wake of its recent name change to include 'makers', *Heartbeat* joined Sunraysia Farmers & Makers Market coordinator, Kylie Dew, at Jaycee Park on the Mildura Riverfront to get the lowdown on what has changed. This year the market celebrates its 20th anniversary.

We also featured a progress report on

Australia's first mobile skin cancer, cardio and breast cancer screening vehicle, a \$2.5 million initiative spearheaded by the MBPH Foundation.

Dubbed 'a game-changer', the fully equipped mobile healthcare unit is designed to improve accessibility to skin cancer screening no matter where people live.

The updates continued as we revisited MBPH's Clinical Trial Unit. The facility, now more than two years old, is located on the ground floor of the Specialist Clinic adjacent to the hospital.

Recreation Was also in the fame for this edition with *Heartbeat* showcasing the Foundation's charity golf event and *Heartbeat* editor John Dooley waxing lyrical about the attractions of summer in Sunraysia.

We also sought out what is to become the impressive welcoming exhibit for the RAAF Memorial and Museum at Mildura Airport.

The RAAF CAC-27 Avon Sabre jet fighter was gifted several years ago to Mildura's RSL sub-branch and more recently it has undergone a stunning restoration by members of Dareton's Men in a Shed (MIAS).

The Sabre will never fly again, but the impressive restoration ensures it looks

for all intents and purposes like it could! And while on history, we also took a peek at the soon-to-be-released seventh volume of the 'Mallee's living histories' series.

"More than six years ago, local identity Vernon Knight was approached to help an elderly lady record and publish her memoir. The experience was so positive and impactful, Vernon built on that simple idea to develop what has now resulted in the publication of six books, detailing the life stories of more than 80 individuals," we informed readers.

"Since the publication of the first book in 2019, 39 writers have volunteered their time to meet and chat with the 88 storytellers."

We met Mildura Health Private Hospital's accomplished GP, GP Endoscopist and GP anaesthetist, Dr Tom Gleeson, often dubbed the 'flying doctor' for his love of flight and Dr Ryan Sheridan, a GP registrar at Ontario Medical Clinic.

And finally, we tuned our spotlight on a La Trobe University Mildura initiative that allows local students to undertake a Nursing and Midwifery double degree. The learning pathway was put in place following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the University and the Hospital 2021.





MBPH NURSE  
HANNAH  
O'HALLORAN IS A  
SHINING EXAMPLE  
OF WHAT CAN BE  
ACHIEVED LOCALLY.



JEAN GRAY'S STORY IS ONE OF INTRIGUE,  
DEDICATION TO COUNTRY AND HER  
CONNECTION WITH THE MILLEWA.

MBPH PATIENT  
TRANSPORT  
VEHICLE OFFICER  
STEVEN MATULIC IS  
A 40-YEAR VETERAN  
EMPLOYEE.



MEET ROBINVALE DISTRICT HEALTH  
SERVICES CEO RO ENEVER.



WHEN AN UNIMAGINABLE TRAGEDY STRUCK KATRINA UMBACK AND HER TWO YOUNG BOYS IN 2019  
IT WOULD TAKE HER ON A JOURNEY TO ADVANCE HEART HEALTH CARE.



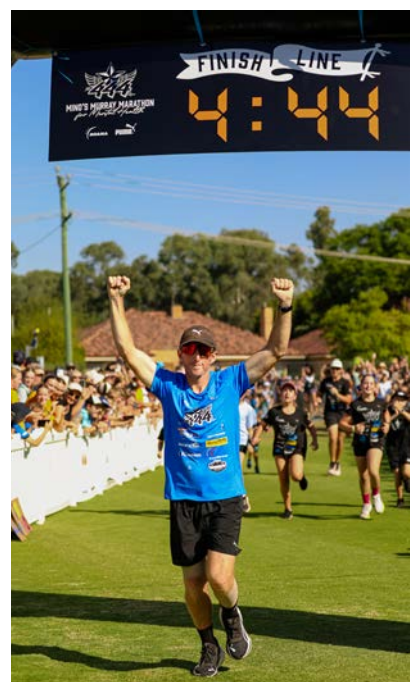
BEN DEPARTS FROM THE ENTRANCE OF THE  
MBPH AT 4.44AM MONDAY MARCH 3.



SURGEON KEVIN CHAMBERS.



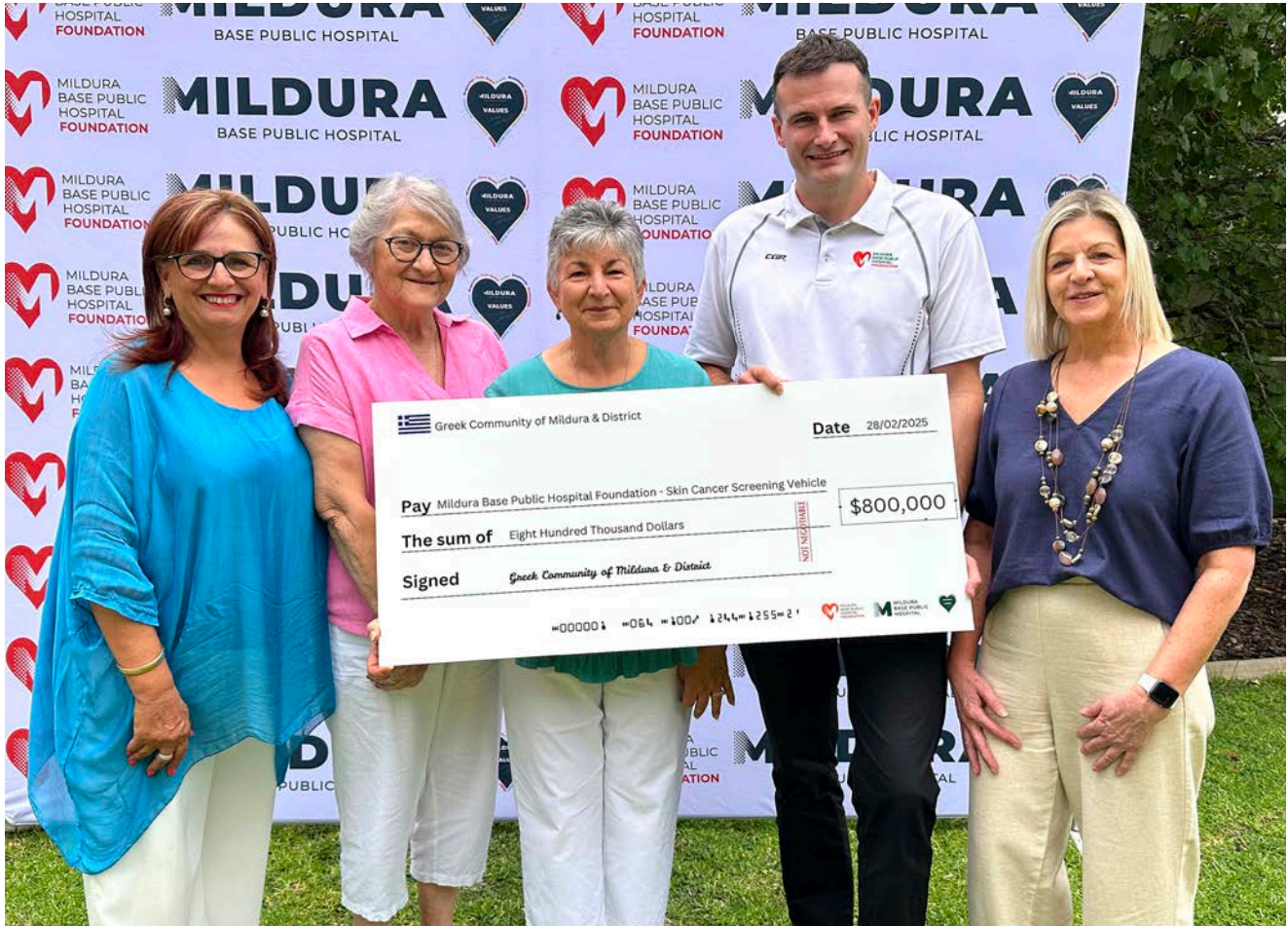
AUTHOR VERNON KNIGHT AT THE LAUNCH OF  
HIS NEW BOOK 'ESPERANZA' AT THE MILDURA  
LIBRARY IN EARLY MARCH.



A TRIUMPHANT AND EXHAUSTED MINO  
CROSSES THE FINISH LINE.



L-R GREEK COMMUNITY OF MILDURA AND DISTRICT SECRETARY HELEN KAMVISSIS, PRESIDENT HELEN BOUNIAS, TREASURER HELEN TAOUSAKIS, MBPH ACTING CEO MATTHEW JUKES AND MBPH BOARD DEPUTY CHAIR TARA WILLIAMS AT THE PRESENTATION OF A CHEQUE FOR \$800,000 TO THE MILDURA BASE PUBLIC HOSPITAL FOUNDATION FROM THE GREEK COMMUNITY OF MILDURA & DISTRICT ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28.



This year's second edition, or Number 8, featured a heart-warming story of how Mildura's Greek community gifted the MBPH Foundation an extraordinary donation of \$800,000. The money was the proceeds from the sale of the Greek Community of Mildura and District's Hall and land on Elizabeth Avenue.

We covered the SuniTAFE 'Class of 2024' graduation across all campuses, with more than 300 students graduating from 40 different study areas, with an additional 198 apprentices completing their education during the 2024 academic year.

And we also publicised the launch of author Vernon Knight's book 'Esperanza', a fascinating look at the deaths of Captains James Cook and James McIntosh, and the survival of Ernest Shackleton, William Bligh and Mary Bryant.

The incredible story of Ben 'Mino' Welch's crusade, captured the hearts of our readers. The '444 Murray River Marathon' charity run by 40-year-old Echuca builder. Ben set-off from

the front entrance of the MBPH at 4.44am on Monday, March 3, for the first leg of a 380km marathon run to Echuca. Ben's mission was to raise funds and awareness for the National Youth Mental Health Foundation, headspace.

Heartbeat also met Mildura's Katrina Umback, who spoke about facing the sudden and devastating loss of her husband, Scott, who succumbed to a heart attack while awaiting an emergency flight to Melbourne. He was just 42.

"I was completely blindsided. I had no idea he could just have a heart attack and die," Katrina recalls. "It's been a defining moment in my life."

She was named the 2025 Mildura Rural City Council Citizen of the Year in recognition of her efforts to raise awareness about heart disease risks.

We also profiled a Robinvale District Health Services CEO Ro Enever - a health professional with a wealth of experience gained in many different settings who reckons she has now found her "perfect role".

A large contingent of golfers hit the fairways at this year's sold out Mildura Base Public Hospital (MBPH) Foundation Golf Day, held at the stunning Coomealla Golf Club and while glorious weather and an unforgettable culinary experience set the stage for the third annual KC Society Lunch, hosted along the picturesque Deakin Avenue footpath. Held in memory of the late Mr Kevin Chambers and featuring an array of gourmet offerings created by two of Mildura's finest dining establishments - 400 Gradi and 27 Deakin - the event raised more than \$150,000 towards a new MBPH cardiac unit.

We paid tribute to a host of long serving and dedicated MBPH staffers who called time on their careers, some of those spanning more than four decades, while writer Phil Kettle caught up with Rick Stephens. Born in 1951, and formerly from Red Cliffs, Rick is a musical icon in Germany where he has lived for the past 27 years.



MBPH ACTING CEO MATTHEW JUKES ACCEPTED A \$10,000 CHEQUE FROM NOAH HANDY AND LUKA LOWERY FROM G.J. GARDENER HOMES.



MBPH EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CLINICAL OPERATIONS AND CHIEF NURSING AND MIDWIFERY OFFICER KATRINA ALLEN WAS OVERJOYED WHEN THE FIRST IVF BIRTH TOOK PLACE.



WHILE LOCAL FORMER SPORTING CHAMPION AND LEGEND JAMES ALOYSIUS WALDER'S DAYS OF PLAYING SPORT MAY BE OVER, IT WOULD BE HARDER TO FIND ANYONE WHO IS A KEENER SPORTING FAN.



AMERICAN ARTIST JOHN FALCON CALLS MILDURA HOME THESE DAYS. PHOTO: ROHAN MORRIS WORKSPACE 3496 RED CLIFFS.



GOOD VIBES FOUNDERS CARLO CIRILLO AND ERIC OGUZKAYA AT THEIR JULY EVENT.



CELEBRITY COOK STEFANO DE PIERI, LEFT, HAS BEEN WORKING ALONGSIDE MBPH KITCHEN STAFF TO PREPARE THE NEW MENU.



MELBOURNE VICTORY WENT HEAD-TO-HEAD WITH ADELAIDE UNITED ON OCTOBER 2.



That brings us neatly to edition Number 9 - an 88-pager packed with people, events and good news.

The people that made this edition's pages included celebrity cook Stefano de Pieri who was working alongside MBPH kitchen staff to prepare the new menu; inspiring Mildura Snap Fitness dynamo Joel Coates; SuniTAFE nursing student Gabrielle Davis; local former sporting champion and legend James Aloysius Walder; Mildura artist John Falcon, whose art reflects his surroundings — typically landscapes, animals, people, flora and fauna; Aboriginal artist and a proud Kamilaroi woman from the rich black soil and waterhole country around Moree, in Northern New South Wales, Melinda Cain; and Denis Ryan, the man who will be forever remembered for lifting lid on Mildura's most shameful secret – the collusion of a senior policeman, a clerk

of courts and the Catholic Church to shield a paedophile priest.

Community events in the spotlight included a preview of the A-league clash here in Mildura between Melbourne Victory and Adelaide United for this year's One Agency A-League Festival of Sport charity fund-raiser at the Mildura Sporting Precinct and the upcoming Lenny Ktavitz concert at the same venue; a look behind the scenes for the lifestyle group 'Good Vibes' and its riverfront fitness and wellness meet-up; a review in pictures of the MBPH Foundation's 'Paddock Club' event at the Mildura Racing Club's bet365 Mildura Cup meeting; the Balloon Training Camp hosted during the second week of the July school holidays this year; and this year's NAIDOC Week MBPH event marking a powerful milestone - 50 years of honouring and elevating Indigenous voices, culture, and resilience.

Meanwhile, there was good news on a number of fronts, including recognition at the 2025 Victorian Rural Workforce Agency (RWAV) Health Awards.

Then there was the first baby born in Mildura as a result of MBPH's IVF program, reckoned to be "truly historic". And finally, we were able to reveal construction was forging ahead on the Mildura Base Public Hospital (MBPH) Foundation's state-of-the-art mobile health screening truck.

The latest milestone includes the installation of the external walls, bringing the ambitious multi-million-dollar initiative closer to reality. Once complete, the mobile clinic will offer skin, breast, and cardiac screening, three areas where early detection can dramatically improve patient outcomes and, ultimately, save lives. And that brings us up-to-date. We hope you enjoy Edition 10!



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# TRAINING MILDURA'S FUTURE HEALTH WORKFORCE



[monash.edu/rural-health/mildura](https://monash.edu/rural-health/mildura)

**Monash Rural Health Mildura**  
231–237 Thirteenth Street, Mildura  
E: [mrh-mildura@monash.edu](mailto:mrh-mildura@monash.edu)



PILATUS PC 21 AIRCRAFT IS PART  
OF THE ROULETTE SQUADRON  
BASED IN RAAF EAST SALE.



# RAAF TOP GUNS HIGH FLYING TRAINING TRIP TO MILDURA

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*Sunraysia residents were given a rare opportunity to witness future Royal Australian Air Force pilots in action when Mildura Airport hosted a community day on October 24.*

**By John Dooley**

THE Royal Australian Air Force's No.1 Flying Training School (IFTS) from its East Sale base was resident in our region throughout October as part of a training program known as 'Exercise Millewa-Mallee Sunset'.

"The RAAF is proud to bring our training operations to Mildura and to engage with the local community," a RAAF spokesperson said.

"Community events like this allow us to showcase the skills of our trainee pilots, while also strengthening the connection we have with regional Australia." Speaking to local media, Mildura Airport CEO Andrew Elliott said he was delighted to partner with the RAAF in hosting the community day.

"It's a unique opportunity for residents and visitors to experience the professionalism of the RAAF first-hand, while also celebrating the strong relationship that

has developed between Mildura Airport and IFTS."

Mr Elliott said the community day was an exciting occasion for the Mildura region, bringing together aviation, community spirit and the next generation of RAAF pilots.

"Mildura Airport looks forward to future visits to continue to build on a partnership established earlier this year between the RAAF and Mildura Airport," he added.





RAAF NO.1 FLYING TRAINING SCHOOL PILOTS AND INSTRUCTORS.

Those attending the open day were treated to aerobatic flying displays while on the ground they were able to get up close to the aircraft and chat with the RAAF crews.

*Heartbeat* was privileged to meet with the Commanding Officer of IFTS, Martin Keer, and the RAAF pilots who were in Mildura training.

We were given a tour of the school's four Pilatus PC-21 aircraft, housed in a hangar at the airport after being effectively grounded on the day we visited because of high winds and dust sweeping across the region.

"As a flying training school we are responsible for training Australian Defence Force pilots from the Air Force, Army and Navy.

The IFTS aircraft arrived in Mildura on Sunday, October 19, with the instructors, support staff and the students driving up via Bendigo.

The group was in Mildura for two weeks, during which time the pilots flew training sorties that necessitated the planes travelling long distances away from Mildura.

"We're flying up to 150 miles away on navigation sorties," Wing Commander Keer explained.

"The sorties the guys have been doing are low level, the pilots getting up to just a couple of thousand feet as they get airborne before dropping down to just 250 feet and travelling overland as far as Swan Hill, or down towards Horsham.

"We've got other directions as well, other routes that go to the north as well."

*Heartbeat* asked the Wing Commander how long it takes to fully train a pilot to fly the PC-21 aircraft.

"For example, if they have come from the Australian Defence Force Academy or Officer Training School - let's look at the Officer Training School - they'll spend just 12 weeks from day one to commission," he said.

"They will then ideally come to us straight away and do 14 months with us. That's from the first sortie ever flying the aeroplane, all the way up to the 'Wings Test', as it's called. That's where we decide whether or not the students are worthy of the award of wings and that flight is normally done by me or my deputy - the chief flying instructor."

*Heartbeat* asked what speeds the training aircraft were capable of reaching.

"We generally fly around at low level at 240 knots, that's four miles a minute and we will go up to 300 knots quite easily, that's five miles a minute, which is still well below the maximum speed of the aeroplane but it's reasonably quick for a propeller aeroplane," Wing Commander Keer explained.

*Heartbeat* also met with some of the pilots in training, including Pilot Officer Luke Tarlinton.

"I grew up in Sydney, completed high school as a student normally would, and then in Year-12, I put in an application to join the Air Force," Plt Off. Tarlinton said.

"A week or two after I finished my final exams for high school, I got an offer to join the Air Force as a direct entry officer - an aviation candidate - to start officer training

at the Sale RAAF base in March, the year after I finished high school."

Plt Off Tarlinton said he had never been in a light aircraft before he joined the Air Force.

"I started my officer training on March 1, 2024, last year for three months and then started at IFTS," he said.

"The experience has been everything, and more, than I expected and I've loved every bit of it."

"It's great to just be able to jump in a plane and fly around and learn. Waking up every day going, 'I can't believe I get paid to fly a plane and learn - it's way better than going to a university in my opinion!'"

*Heartbeat* also had a chat to Flight Lieutenant Tom Bennie who said he had wanted to be a pilot from an early age.

"I just always wanted to be a pilot since I was a little kid but, when I finished school, I joined the Air Force in a different role," he explained.

"I was in the 'Mission Aircrew' career path for a number of years. I was a weapons systems officer in the F-18 program before this role.

"I've been in the RAAF for almost 12 years now and I just kept applying for pilot training and I eventually got the approval."

*Heartbeat* asked Flt. Lt. Bennie what his message was to budding young pilots.

"I'd say, never give up. People will tell you no, but just keep trying anyway," he said.

"You'll might hear 'No' many times, but don't accept that as an answer and keep cracking on. You'll eventually get there."





FLYING OFFICER GABBY CLARKE SPEAKS WITH ONE OF THE VISITORS TO THE AIRPORT'S OPEN DAY.



PILATUS PC 21 PERFORMS AN AEROBATICAL MANOEUVER OVER THE MILDURA AIRPORT AT THE OPEN DAY.

"I really like the flying, but the part that makes it so enjoyable for me is the people I work with.

"We're all really keen to learn more and do things better and drill down into what we could have done better. I really like that kind of culture."

As *Heartbeat* discovered, being a pilot in the RAAF today is no longer the domain of young men. Flying Officer Gabby Clark is a young lady who loves life in the fast lanes of the sky!

Asked about her impressions of Mildura, F.O. Clark said: "Honestly, we got here on Sunday, and it was 35 degrees and sunshine. It was beautiful," she said.

"It's a very nice change from the normal Sale weather - overcast and freezing cold.

"But the wind we are experiencing today, has kind of made us feel a bit at home."

*Heartbeat* asked F.O. Clark what led her to a flying career.

"I've always been interested in aviation," she said. "I'd watch the planes fly over at an air show or something, and go, 'Wow, that's amazing'!

"I never actually thought that I would be able to do it myself, until I had a mentor tell me that I should give it a crack. So, I gave it a crack and went to the Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra where I completed an Arts Degree before starting pilot training a couple of years after that."

F.O. Clark told *Heartbeat* that she had now been training for about 12 months.



FLYING OFFICER GABBY CLARKE WITH LEADING AIRCRAFTWOMAN NAOMI LUTTRELL.



AN EXCITED YOUNG MILDURA BOY GIVES THE OPEN DAY THE THUMBS UP.



FLT. OFFICER REECE WILLIAMS WAS ON THE AIRPORT'S APRON CHATTING TO THE AVIATION ENTHUSIASTS ATTENDING THE OPEN DAY.



RAAF FLYER ANSWERING QUESTIONS ABOUT PC 21 THE TRAINING PROGRAM.



THE PILATUS PC 21 AIRCRAFT DESIGNATED TO PERFORM AERIAL DISPLAYS TAXIING READY FOR TAKE OFF.





PILOT OFFICER LUKE TARLINTON, COMMANDING OFFICER OF 1FTS, WING COMMANDER MARTIN KEER AND FLIGHT LIEUTENANT TOM BENNIE IN THE HANGAR AT MILDURA AIRPORT



PILATUS PC 21 COCKPIT THE AIRCRAFT HAS TWO CREW THE PILOT IN TRAINING AND THE INSTRUCTOR SITS BEHIND.



PILATUS PC 21 COCKPIT WITH THE EJECTION SEAT MECHANISM IN VIEW.



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"That includes two months of 'ground school' and we started flying in January this year," she explained, "And we're already doing low-level navigation at 75 metres above the ground and at 500kph!

"The learning curve is pretty phenomenal and it's so exciting. Every day is just new. It's amazing."

F.O. Clark said when a student is in training, they are effectively a university student.

"You get to do military training on the side as well as in your uni holidays and they'll pay you a pretty sweet salary with some super as well. And there's no HECS debt," she said.

"It's a great deal. They'll pay for your degree in exchange for your return of service after the degree. I went straight in when I was 18, and so it was a pretty sweet deal straight out of school - getting paid to go to uni."

I ask F.O. Clark what she would say to any

young girl who might be aspiring to do something different in life?

"I think it's really common for women, in particular, to feel that the guys have got it all sorted. That they've got the confidence, and they know what they're doing. Well, quite honestly, you know just as much as them," she said proudly.

"In my case, it took one of my mentors to tell me that I should try it, because I had no belief in myself that I was able to do it. But, I'm still here, still kicking and having a great time.

I very much encourage anyone to do it if they're just a little bit interested."

Asked if she might be at the controls of an F-35 one day, F.O. Clark said: "Well, maybe. We'll see how I go. I'm due to graduate in about February next year, so stay tuned and I'll let you know!"

Heartbeat also had the pleasure of chatting to Leading Aircraftwoman Naomi

Luttrell who explained that she was a 'Supplier' and part of the support team visiting Mildura.

"I'm based in Sale, and my husband has been in the RAAF for 22 years. I have only been 'in' for a relatively short period with March next year marking my third anniversary," she said.

"My role entails working in logistics and support," she said. "If you need a spare part, we order those and get them in. You might want stationary. Whatever it is, we obtain that. It's basically a procurement role."

*Author's note: My special thanks to the Commanding Officer of Number One Flying Training School, Martin Keer and the RAAF pilots who were in Mildura training, for taking time to speak with Heartbeat and also to Mildura Airport's administration for its assistance in facilitating the opportunity.*



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RIDING HIGH, COURTNEY IS LAUDED BY HER TEAMMATES.



*Courtney Wakefield looks back on her time as an AFLW trailblazer.*

# DREAM BIG AND PLAY TO WIN

**By Grant Maynard**

WIFE, mother, farmer, champion netballer and pioneering women's footballer. Courtney Wakefield epitomises a person with 'many strings to her bow'.

Courtney grew up in outback NSW and now lives with husband Tom, daughter Tilly and son Sid on Top Hut Station in the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area, about 100 kilometres north of Mildura. She readily acknowledges to being a child of the wide-open spaces, and jokes that Top Hut is equivalent to 25,000 MCGs! The reference to football's holiest of holy

grounds opens the door nicely to talk about one of the most important aspects of her life - her pioneering AFLW career with Richmond Football Club.

In the abridged story of her career, Courtney was contracted by Richmond during the early part of the 2019 expansion club signing period in May of that year and made her debut wearing the No.8 guernsey against Carlton at Ikon Park in the opening round of the 2020 season.

The Richmond Club's player profile describes Courtney as a "high marking forward with a reliable set-shot at goal".

"Wakefield is one of the AFLW's great success stories," it continues.

180cm (5 ft 11 in) Courtney won the team's inaugural goalkicking award in 2020, after kicking four goals in her first six-match season and won it again in 2022. She went on to be selected in the 2021 AFLW All-Star stats team, after leading the league for average tackles inside 50 in the 2021 AFL Women's season, totalling 2.2 a game. In November 2022 Courtney announced her retirement from football.

"AFLW feels like a lifetime ago now, but growing up I was all football and netball," Courtney told *Heartbeat*.



"I'm a country girl through and through. The old saying that you can take the girl out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the girl probably sums me up to a tee to be honest."

Courtney grew up on Mount Dispersion Station with her parents Pat and Debbie Healy.

"We breathed football and netball. Growing up in a small country community sport was the heartbeat of that community. So that's what we did. It was ingrained in me from a young age.

"I obviously met Tom later and moved not far from home to Top Hut Station where, you know, before establishing an AFLW career we had created a beautiful life at Top Hut."

Courtney can trace the roots of her AFLW career back to an advertisement she saw on social media for a Richmond Football Club-sponsored 'Come and Try' day being held in Bendigo during 2017.

"At this stage I was still pregnant with Sid, crazy to think about that now," she said.

"And at the time I thought it was a 'come and try' day for the AFLW team but when I got there, I found out that it was for the VFLW!"

"I had played football as a youngster until I was too old to play contact football with the boys. So, then I swapped to netball, but it was always a bit of a dream to play football, and I certainly didn't want to die wondering," Courtney said, explaining that AFLW or VFLW, she was going to give it a go!

And she did, but not without a hurdle or two.

Sid, by the time the come and try day rolled around, was just seven weeks old, but Courtney decided to "pop along" taking both Sid and Tilly!

"I remember it was a really hot day, and I hadn't registered. I didn't realise I had to register. Kate Sheehan, who was then head of women's football, could have easily turned me away but thankfully she didn't," Courtney recalls.

"Given the distance I'd travelled and with two kids in tow, she gave me the opportunity, and I think we both made the most of that opportunity in following years."

Richmond's VFWL berth morphed into a fully-fledged AFLW team in 2019, and Courtney's football career well and truly took flight, making her debut in the expanded AFLW competition in 2020.

At this time, she was making a



COURTNEY WITH HUSBAND TOM AND CHILDREN TILLY AND SID.

1200-kilometre round trip from Top Hut to Melbourne to play each week.

"Yeah crazy, I know," she shakes her head ruefully.

"Now that I've stopped - and obviously we still travel a lot - but not those distances. I now often think: 'How on earth did we make that work?'"

"But it was a once in a lifetime opportunity. My crack at playing AFLW. You leave no stone unturned.

"And if that means travelling those kilometres - sometimes twice a week - you, do it.

"I had an amazing support network, starting with Tom back home and his family and my extended family in Bendigo. It really was top shelf support for me, and Tom and the kids.

"And without those guys it certainly wouldn't have worked. I just had to have the heart to give it a crack, and they allowed me to do it."

Courtney recalls that her initial VFLW commitment to training wasn't as onerous

as it was to become when she and the Richmond team stepped up to the AFLW.

"VFL wasn't as big a commitment, but it was big enough for me given that I had two young kids," she recalls.

"I did a lot of my VFLW pre-season training at Top Hut and for that I was very thankful, but I certainly worked hard.

"It probably made me work harder because I knew what the girls at the club were doing and I wanted to get back there and be in tip top shape.

"So, I did have to work that little bit harder, but it paid off. Absolutely."

Stepping up to AFLW took some doing - a greater commitment of time and energy for sure, Courtney says, "But it was also the realisation of a long-held dream."

"And for such a long time it was just a dream," she recalls.

"Tom always shakes his head because he knew as soon as I signed up for that opportunity, then that's what we were going to do because I was pretty, you know, strong willed and stubborn, as he'd say.





COURTNEY HANDLES THE PRESSURE AS WELL AS SHE DOES THE BALL.  
PHOTO RICHMOND FOOTBALL CLUB.



TOP HUT STATION ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF LAKE.



WINNERS ARE GRINNERS!

"I grew up being a Richmond supporter my entire life. So, to join the Richmond Football Club and go inside those four walls... and then to know and experience what happens in the building of a football program... because at the time our women's program was only just starting out.

"To see what goes on behind the scenes and everything... it was eye opening but probably not as much at the time as it is now because they were doing it for us, and we were directly involved."

Courtney is aware of her status as a pioneer of the women's game and "to have been a part of that, and to build a legacy as part of the Richmond Women's Football Club program for the players who have followed, yeah, it is something really special."

Being part of a cohesive team to drive a new sport forward is a point of pride for Courtney.

"It's pretty special. I was probably, you know, one of a kind in that program at

the time given where I lived and my family situation. I was the only mum at the time in the group," Courtney recalls.

"So, there was, you know, a lot of respect shown to me and my situation.

"But that was returned. I have a lot of respect for those girls and the staff who allowed me to be a 'teammate at a distance' at times.

"And you know, the friendships you make are important because you go through some really high highs, and also low lows, as a football team and to have, you know, girls by your side who are there to share that with you is special.

"We've formed some really special friendships along the way that are still really strong now."

Considered one of the best of the league's best key forwards in her playing days, *Heartbeat* asked about the pressure to kick goals.

"Not being overly tall, I had to play 'above my height' at times. My role was to shift higher up the ground and give the girls

around me opportunities at ground level.

"And I really thrived on that opportunity.

"Just make it a contest, as dad always says.

"You know, it's pretty simple. You see the ball you get the ball.

"That was my mentality playing football. And yeah, I think, it worked really well."

Making the All-Australian team in her final season was a well-deserved accolade for Courtney.

"That was a really special achievement and acknowledgement," she says.

"I don't think we do it for the personal accolades along the way, but they're a reward for getting to do what we love, and I did.

"I had a really strong offseason, probably my first injury free offseason that year and just went in knowing it was going to be my last year.

"So, I kind of threw everything I had at it, and the team went really well that year.

"We played finals that season and my role was similar to what I just described, and I really enjoyed that.



"I didn't kick a hell of a lot of goals. I think I might have been 4th or 5th in the goal kicking for the league that season, but my marks and contested groundwork... and the tackles probably were of high standard for a tall forward and to be rewarded with an All Australian was pretty special."

Courtney retired from AFLW football after the 2022 season, returning to netball on a local level and winning the coveted 2023 Jackie Hawkins Medal for Sunraysia Football and Netball League's A Grade Best and Fairest, as well as the premiership. She was modest about her triumphant return to local sport.

"There's obviously no place like home and keep in mind that I played netball long before I played AFLW and was reasonably successful before I went on to play in football," Courtney said.

"Tilly's playing netball now, so she obviously watches, you know, monkey see, monkey do. So, I want to be setting a good example for her.

"But yes, to come back into an already strong A Grade netball team was like going from a high to a high to be honest.

"From All Australian to come back to Wentworth and go through the season undefeated, play finals and win the premiership, and to win the League's Best and Fairest. It was all very special.

"I've already touched on personal accolades. It's a reward for getting to do what we love. But to win a premiership with those girls was special.

"So yeah, I'm very fortunate for the opportunities that I've had, and continue to have.

And I always say, you're a long time retired so you've gotta make the most of opportunities while you can."

So, does Courtney's sporting life keep going forward from here?

"Yeah, yeah, I think so. While the body holds up," she says.

"You're a long time retired."

"Playing AFLW you learn really beneficial habits for your mind and body, and they put you in really good stead moving forward.

"I've been driving myself to keep up those standards that will allow me to compete at a really high standard.

"There's a lot of young girls coming through the SFNL at the moment and being a part of one of the most successful teams in the League for a long time is exciting.

"Yes, we're on the top at the moment, but we're not up there, you know, standing on



THE SERENITY OF TOP HUT STATION WALLS OF CHINA.



COURTNEY IS AT HOME IN THE BUSH ON HER BELOVED TOP HUT STATION.

a pedestal looking down on the rest of the competition.

"We want the rest of the competition to come up with us and make it really great.

"So, we're focused on working hard but and I want to drive the competition in a really positive manner.

"I live by the motto of quality human first, athlete second. And I want to set a really good example of that for the people around me.

"You know, you can achieve great things, but at the end of the day you're a beneficiary of where you come from, how you've been brought up and what you've done growing up.

"I've obviously got mum and dad to thank for that, the way they brought me up and to lead by example.

"So, like I said, now I've got two young children watching everything that I do and I believe I have created a pathway for them in terms of football and netball and opportunity."

Summing up her sporting career spanning the past 20 years, Courtney told *Heartbeat* that she felt "really fortunate, but not lucky".

"Because I've worked really hard for the opportunities and the success that I've had," she said.

"I certainly feel fortunate to achieved what I've achieved. To have been successful at sport and now as a mum is particularly rewarding.

"So yeah, like I said, not lucky because I've worked hard, but I feel extremely blessed to have been given the opportunities that I've had and having had the support of the Sunraysia region for a long time.

"That's been really special."

To listen to the *Heartbeat of the Mallee* episode, scan the QR code or visit <https://www.mbphfoundation.org.au/episode-10-courtney-wakefield>





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THANKS TO THE BOSTON SCIENTIFIC SPINAL CORD STIMULATION SYSTEM TRAVIS HORSFALL CAN ENJOY A WALK ALONG THE MILDURA RIVERFRONT DESPITE HAVING TO ENDURE CONTINUOUS PAIN.

# LIFE CAN BE HARSH AND NOT FAIR, BUT...

*Travis' story is an inspiring tale of one man's determination to overcome adversity.*

**By John Dooley and Grant Maynard**

IT might be fate; it may be karma or even the result of the free will-fuelled choices we make. Attribute it to what you like, but life is inclined to throw each of us the odd curve ball as we navigate our way in the world.

However, those inevitable trials and tribulations are by no means distributed equally. Some people face challenges – mental, emotional or physical - many of us will never know.

Take Merbein's Travis Horsfall as a case in point.

A workplace accident 12 years ago saw his world irreparably changed, and his life thrown into a turmoil many of us will never know.

Born at Mildura Base Hospital, Travis grew up at Merbein South where his parents grew grapes for dried fruit and almonds on their 21-hectare (53 acres) property.

Born into the 'blockie' lifestyle, Travis was an active youngster, energetic teen and a hard-working grown man.

"I worked on the property all my young life, driving the tractor, pulling out and rolling on, picking grapes and working on the cart as well as slashing and weediciding. The works," he told *Heartbeat*.

He attended Merbein South Primary School, riding his pushbike in every day, followed by Irymple Tech, catching the bus .

"I went to Year 10, but I wasn't very academically inclined and when Fisher's supermarket rang and offered me a job, I took it," Travis recalls.



At that time, Travis worked for Merbein identity and supermarket owner Bill Fisher until he was 18, before going to work for the dried fruits co-operative in town. There Travis was a jack of all trades, from fruit sorting and packing through to driving the forklift.

He then had a succession of jobs including stints with Stanley Wines at Buronga as a cellar hand and in the warehouse; with Hertz car rentals at Mildura Airport and later Thrifty; and later in Natural Resources and Environment with Parks Victoria as a PFF - Project Firefighter – a direct result of his firefighting experience as a volunteer with the Merbein CFA branch before becoming a driller's offsider with a minerals exploration company working in both NSW and South Australia.

Returning to Mildura he helped clear the land and lay the foundations for what was to become Mildura's marina.

That was followed by a stint working on the Calder Freeway upgrade near Bendigo.

"If you go down the highway and see Blackjack Road, that's the section I worked on," he revealed.

Travis continued building roads including the Deer Park Bypass in Melbourne and then played a role in the construction of the infamous North-South Pipeline, also known as the Sugarloaf Pipeline from Yea to Yarra Glen before moving on to laying railway sleepers.

Then came a day Travis can never forget. December 30, 2013. While working on rail upgrades around Sunshine a freak accident resulted in a catastrophic back injury that left him crippled and in constant pain.

He doesn't like to talk about the mental and emotional trauma and the 'brain fog' he constantly experiences as a result of this ongoing situation.

What he will tell you is that he is not keen on ketamine infusions and that painkillers can cost a lot of money.

However, a visit to a Melbourne-based pain specialist was to change his life for the better. The specialist recommended Travis trial a pain control device that relied on electrical stimulation to block pain signals to his brain.

"We tried it and it worked well. Got good results," Travis recalls.

Based on that, the decision was made to make it permanent and implant the necessary wiring.



LUCKY TO BE ABLE TO WALK TRAVIS KEEPS UP HIS EXERCISE AND A DIET REGIME THAT HAS SEEN HIM SLIM DOWN FROM A MASSIVE 123 KG TO 82KG, WHICH IS THE WEIGHT HE WAS WHEN *HEARTBEAT* MET WITH HIM RECENTLY.

"I've got multiple leads up to the lumbar region of my back, but at first they still weren't cutting the mustard. So, a further investigation was done, and it was decided to put another four up top ... peripheral leads they call them."

Dubbed a Boston Scientific Stimulator (SCS), the innovation delivers electrical pulses directly into Travis' spinal cord.

"It's a bit like a TENS (Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation machine)," he explains, and like a TENS he can change the settings... by remote.

"I can adjust it. A bit like one of those massagers that puts tingles through your feet.

"I've got to have it on for the rest of my life, and I have two batteries in my body to run it. They'll have to get changed at some point.

"I've heard different stories. I've heard they can last 12 or up to 20 years.

"But who knows. They've been in for 10 years as it is."

The device allows Travis to walk, albeit

with the assistance of a walking stick and still with pain, but at least he is upright, he told *Heartbeat*.

"It's better than lying on your back all the time," he says.

Travis does not have fond memories of being bedridden.

"My mental health was terrible... mainly because I wasn't able to work. I was used to working all the time," he told *Heartbeat*.

"I didn't want to live. So, I sought help."

"I've tried to turn my life around and to think of the positive in everything. And so, what I would say to anyone experiencing a debilitating condition, in spite of that, it is possible to live a productive life, particularly with the support of family and friends, which is what has helped me immensely.

"It's been 12 years now, you know, and you get used to it. You learn to manage it because you can't take painkillers forever.

"Well, I'm still on painkillers, but not as many as I would have to be if I didn't have this Boston SCS implant."



Travis is a keen angler and an avid follower of Australian motor racing. His accident and subsequent injury certainly robbed him of his ability to pursue his love for being a part of the car racing scene, something he had been involved with for years leading up to his accident and an experience he was keen to share.

"We had a family friend from Merbein - John Thompson or J.T. Thompson, who worked for Shell at the time. He was responsible for the signs for the Shell girls, and the fuel for the racers.

"I used to go along to the tracks with him, and they'd give me a triple A pass. I didn't have to pay for anything, but I'd be there five o'clock in the morning cleaning the replica race cars on display for the foot traffic... the foot traffic that ensured the display cars were covered in dust by the end of the day.

"Then I usually walked around with the Shell girls handing out posters and stickers and then go on to have lunch with them in the VIP tent.

"It was fantastic," Travis recalls.

"And I met quite a lot of the drivers of that era and others who were involved in Motor Sports."

Those drivers included his hero 'The King of the Mountain', Peter Brock.

"In 1987, I think it was, I sat in his BMW race car. I just loved Brock.

"And for my 21st birthday I got a card signed by a lot of the drivers including Mike Raymond, Steve Johnson and Alan Jones. Awesome!

"I've still got the card."

Travis has been to most of Australia's better known racetracks including Malala where he recalls "sitting there in Two Wells with John, Margaret and Rick Kelly having breakfast before heading out to the track". "That was when Todd was doing Young Lions," he recalls.

"Yep, been to most of the tracks. Only place I haven't been to Western Australia. I've never been over to the West. Not for work. Not for a holiday, and not for any races." But he's not ruling out getting there someday.

Maybe for a spot of fishing, his other declared passion. And, he has photographic evidence that he is doing alright at that too.

Travis is also active in the Merbein community assisting Rotary and other local organisations while keeping his interest in cars alive with a couple of classics of his



TRAVIS HAD ONE OF HIS REPLICA BROCK COMMODORES ON DISPLAY AT THE SUNASSIST MOTOR SHOW.



TRAVIS' REPLICA PETER BROCK HOLDEN COMMODORES.



THIS AUTOGRAPHED CAP IS ONE OF TRAVIS' TREASURED PIECES OF MEMORABILIA FROM THE SUPERCAR RACING DAYS.



TRAVIS CAN CONTROL THE INTENSITY OF THE STIMULATION APPLIED TO HIS SPINE WITH HIS TWO REMOTE CONTROL UNITS.



THE BOSTON SCIENTIFIC SPINAL CORD STIMULATOR (SCS) IS A DEVICE DESIGNED TO HELP MANAGE CHRONIC PAIN BY SENDING ELECTRICAL IMPULSES TO THE SPINAL CORD, WHICH BLOCKS PAIN SIGNALS FROM REACHING THE BRAIN.

own, including an example of the Brock VK Commodore Group A.

"Brock had to build 500 of the 'Blue Meanies' and sell them before he could race them," Travis explains. This was required to meet international Group A racing homologation requirements.

"I also have another Commodore - a VL Calais - which is going to be like my Sunday driver car."

Travis enjoys taking his rare replica Brock Commodore to local car shows and watching the delight on the faces of the

youngsters he allows to sit in it. "This was made possible thanks to the restoration undertaken by team at 'CARS n THINGS restos' in Mildura.

Those reactions are priceless, he says, while hoping that the experience encourages younger generations to enjoy motorsport like he does.

Travis' indomitable spirit is proof that despite what life throws at you, there are ways to overcome the setbacks and go on to enjoy a meaningful and fulfilling existence.





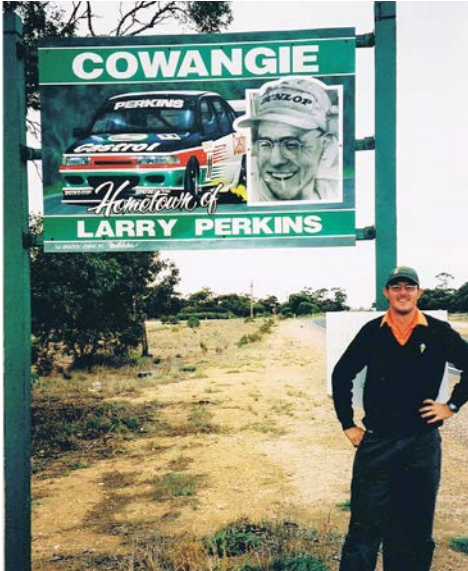
TRAVIS' FIRST CAR



FORD SUPERCAR BEING PREPARED FOR AN UPCOMING RACE.



TRAVIS WITH CHAMPION RACING VETERAN DICK JOHNSON.



TRAVIS STANDING BESIDE THE LARRY PERKINS SIGN IN THE TOWN OF COWANGIE.



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MCGRATH CANCER CARE NURSES DANIELLE BIRTHISEL, LOUISE JAMES & NICOLA HARDIE.

# MILDURA'S MCGRATH CANCER CARE NURSE SERVICES EXPAND

*McGrath Cancer Care Nurses provide free care and support to people experiencing cancer and their family.*

**By John Dooley**

FOR 20 years, the McGrath Foundation has given their all to the issue of breast cancer and achieved so much for many. And through it all gained a lifetime of knowledge.

Now, the proven positive impact of the way they care has led them to a new vision. They are now expanding their care to all embrace all cancers. And they need the community to help them achieve this.

The Foundation raises money to fund McGrath Cancer Care Nurses right across Australia, delivering world-

leading clinical, psychosocial and emotional support to people with any type of cancer throughout their treatment. Because no one should go through cancer without care.

## HOW THE MCGRATH FOUNDATION BEGAN

Jane McGrath is the late wife of Australian cricketer Glenn McGrath and it was Jane's vision that created the McGrath Foundation in 2005.

Jane's public experience with breast cancer and the impact of her own breast care nurse set the first mission for the Foundation: to ensure that every family

experiencing breast cancer would have access to a breast care nurse, no matter where they lived – for free. This meant placing 250 McGrath Breast Care Nurses in communities across Australia. Jane passed away in 2008, having secured funding for 50 McGrath Breast Cancer Nurses and with the Foundation set to carry on her mission.

Since then, thanks to the support of the Australian public, they have turned stadiums, sporting clubs and businesses pink to raise money, and met their first mission.

Each January, the Foundation celebrates Jane's memory and her legacy at the Sydney Pink Test.



## MILDURA'S MCGRATH CANCER CARE NURSES

*Heartbeat* spoke with Mildura Base Public Hospital (MBPH) based McGrath Cancer Care Nurse, Louise James who supports people experiencing advanced breast cancer, whose new four day a week role is funded by the McGrath Foundation.

"I support private, public and community patients and I am based at MBPH Specialist Clinic, where I work alongside the McGrath Cancer Care Nurse Early Breast, which is a full-time position," Louise said.

Louise told *Heartbeat* about her career experience in oncology, which dates back to 2013, when she was a McGrath Breast Care Nurse.

"That was the title used back then and I was nurse number 86 and we now have 302 McGrath Cancer Care Nurses," she explained.

"My background is in Emergency Nursing, an area I worked in for 13 years. I am a Midwife and I also worked in chemotherapy at MBPH for seven years, prior to applying for this job."

"The McGrath Foundation supports us to attend conferences and to continue our studies so that we can keep up-to-date with the ever-changing treatment modality with breast cancer in particular. And we all get together every two years for a workshop and discussion sessions.

"The Foundation is incredibly supportive. We have a Clinical Psychologist who we can reach out to for any issues, such as caring for younger patients whose situation can be very complex and sometimes sad situations arise when families lose their son or daughter, mother, grandfather or other loved ones. And there is also a Nurse Clinical Lead we can consult, for example, when we are setting up new services."

McGrath Cancer Care Nurse, Nicola Hardie who supports people experiencing lung and colorectal, told *Heartbeat* about her role and what it means to be able to provide this care to patients at the MBPH Specialist Clinic in Mildura.

"I been in this role for two weeks now



JANE MCGRATH.

and prior to that I was one of the generic cancer care coordinators and MBPH," she said.

"I was attracted to this particular role because of the McGrath Foundation and I had also observed the work that Louise was doing over the last few years which I thought was so important.

"The Foundation also provide quite a structured approach to patient-centred care, which I feel is really important. I like their values, their care plans and the way they approach cancer services."

McGrath Cancer Care Nurse, Danielle Birthisel who supports patients experiencing breast cancer, has been a nurse for 12 years and previously worked in Oncology at MBPH, before working at Sunraysia Community Health Services for six years as District Nursing Palliative Care and Continence Manager.

"The McGrath Foundation position became available and I applied because I wanted to get back into patient-centred care and supporting patients through their journeys," she told *Heartbeat*.

"Being involved with patient care and being able to support them through their process and their diagnosis, is something that I find rewarding."

Louise added: "Being able to make such a huge difference to every patient we see is enough to reinforce to me that we are doing a good job".

"We are making a difference by giving the patient a plan, giving them someone to 'bounce off', to unravel and explain the medical terms that they are told because they see multiple health care professionals and sometimes their head is spinning," Louise said.

"We are fortunate to have the time to devote them, which is where our role differs from a ward or chemotherapy nurse, who are having to run to a schedule.

"If we need to spend an hour and a half with a patient and their families, treating them holistically and looking not only at their disease, but the other things that go on in their daily lives, we can do that."

If you would like to make a donation to the McGrath Foundation visit: [www.mcgrathfoundation.com.au/give/donate](http://www.mcgrathfoundation.com.au/give/donate).

*Heartbeat* wishes to thank the McGrath Foundation for their support with writing of this article and the provision of some of the content.



## EARL BRINGS CLANCY OF THE OUTBACK TO THE MUSICAL STAGE

ORIGINALLY from Mildura, Earl Marrows is a Green Room Award nominated composer, director, and writer based in Naarm (the traditional name for the Melbourne CBD). Earl has written music for all manner of dramatic forms including television, film and stage. A graduate of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts (Masters of Fine Arts - Musical Theatre Writing), Earl has written an array of original musical theatre pieces, including two major full-length musicals and five short works. Most recently he collaborated with the New Studio on Broadway and Bookwriter/Lyricist Carrie Caffrey to develop his new original musical *For Show* which has since been performed in Toronto, Canada as well as at acclaimed New York Cabaret Venue, 54 Below. Earl's musical theatre work has been selected to be a part of the Lincoln Centre Library "Broadway's Future Songbook" two years in a row. Earl's first full-length musical theatre piece "Holloway: A New Musical" was staged in October of 2018 in Melbourne and sold out every performance over a two-week run. He is also part of comedy musical theatre writing duo Marshall and Marrows whose two original musicals "Pining for Affection: A Tree Musical" and "Tone Death: A Ghost Musical" enjoyed full seasons as part of both the Melbourne Fringe Festival and the Melbourne International Comedy Festival in both 2018 and 2019.



COMPOSER EARL MARROWS.



# FROM LITTLE THINGS BIG THINGS GROW

---

*Not in my wildest of wild dreams could I have ever imagined what was to come when I first met Earl Marrows.*

**By Phil Kettle**

THIRTY-year-old Earl is the son of local Mildura identities Mark and Jo Marrows. Earl mentioned to me that he had been a fan of my books when he was a student. He surprised me, in that he remembered me as the author of books that he enjoyed reading as a very young student.

After showing Earl my latest book series 'Clancy of the Outback', he thought he might be able to turn the series into a Musical Theatre Production, but would need to read the entire series - which he did.

## **MILDURA PERFORMANCE...**

Fast forward 12 months. Thanks to the success of that first reading, 'Clancy of the Outback: A Musical Adventure' headed to the hometown where it had its origin for an on-stage performance on September 30, 2025, at the Powerhouse which was a huge night for the Mildura Premiere of 'Clancy of the Outback' the musical!

A full-house of almost 200 packed the theatre to witness and be entertained by what was described by the audience as an incredible, amazing, toe-tapping, good-time performance.

## **THE STORY...**

After a successful industry reading in Melbourne, Marshall & Marrows Productions, in partnership with 'Salty Theatre', treated Mildura locals an exclusive sneak preview of this dynamic, developing work.

The family-friendly musical adventure tells a universal story of home, acceptance and identity through a uniquely Aussie lens. 1200 kilometres from his old home, 12-year-old Clancy is thrown into the unpredictability of country life with his Mum and the bright, colourful inhabitants of The Overflow. From a pesky paddock

bomb to a baby kangaroo, a fearsome flood to a feral frenzy, Clancy will have to deal with all of the outback's challenges to find his place in the world.

Composer, Co-director Earl Marrows shared his take on the production: "With 'jokes for the parents', toe-tapping tunes and rich spectacle, with big-hearted characters, strong emotions and a whole lot of fun."

The reading in Mildura featured Grammy-nominated and ARIA winner Steven Gates (Tripod) and Green Room Award-nominated Ursula Searle (MTC's Fun Home), and other brilliant cast members and musicians.

The 'who's who' of Mildura, including then Mayor Helen Healey and MRCC CEO Martin Hawson, were part of the crowd who were entertained by this delightfully, colourful musical.

Speaking to *Heartbeat* after the performance Mr Hawson said the Clancy of the Outback series is a wonderful depiction of growing up in the Mallee, capturing farm life and the resilience and innovation that define the region's lifestyle. "During tonight's play reading, I was transported back to my own days driving our family EH Holden around the drying racks on our fruit block," Mr Hawson explained.

"The story beautifully illustrates how everyday Mallee life can feel like an exciting adventure to city kids.

"I'm genuinely excited to see the Clancy stories making their way to the stage, and who knows, perhaps even the big screen. We have great stories to tell, and this is just the beginning."

Councillor Healy told *Heartbeat* recently, that after watching the staged reading of Clancy of the Outback, she left the Powerhouse absolutely elated.

"I've spent the past few weeks raving about it to anyone who'll listen," she said. "I wasn't especially familiar with the

creative team's previous work, and I should have known better. Now I realise what a bunch of smart cookies they truly are. Not a word or action felt wasted.

"I was gobsmacked by the music, the script, the actors, the voices, the pacing, the proposed staging and evocation of place - every element landed. This musical is set to be a hit... and I'm thrilled it has such strong connections to Mildura."

For the creator and writer of the 'Clancy of the Outback' book series, Phil Kettle, the performance was an incredibly moving experience, brining tears to his eyes as he thanked the performers and producers.

"Having what I consider to be the pleasure of being able to watch Earl and his writing partner Dylan Marshall, who he has written several musicals with previously, turn the book series into a toe tapping, musical production, has been an absolute pleasure and one of the highlights of my life," an emotional Mr Kettle told *Heartbeat*.

Ursula Searle who played the character of Billy in the musical, said it is hoped the production can be seen around Australia and perhaps overseas.

"We want a tour it all around Australia," Ms Searle said.

"And we also think it would make a beautiful international show as well because, you know, people in America, Europe, and other places, don't have the opportunity to see this aspect of Australia and they want to see this part of Australian life. People often think it's about beaches and surfers and whatnot, but they don't see the country in its many other wonderful contexts."

As Clancy of the Outback: The Musical Adventure makes its way around Australia, entertaining folks of all ages, in a myriad of towns and cities, there's no doubt: From little things, big things grow.





PHIL KETTLE WITH DYLAN MARSHALL AND EARL MARROWS. THE AUTHOR DESCRIBED THE PERFORMANCE AT THE POWERHOUSE AS THE HIGHLIGHT OF HIS LIFE.



THE MUSIC WAS PERFORMED BY A GROUP OF TALENTED ARTISTS FROM MELBOURNE.



THE PERFORMANCE PLAYED TO A CAPACITY AUDIENCE AT THE POWERHOUSE.



COMPLIMENTING PHIL ON HIS BOOK CLANCY OF THE OUTBACK.



AUDIENCE MEMBER ENJOYING THE MUSICAL.



URSULA SEARLE BILLY.

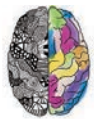


THE ANIMATED PERFORMERS WERE ALL IN FINE VOICE.



THE END OF THE PERFORMANCE AND A HUGE ROUND OF APPLAUSE.





Relational Minds

CHILD AND FAMILY MENTAL HEALTH CLINIC



## Providing Mildura Families with Holistic Family Therapy, Child Psychologist and Child Psychiatrist Services

Based in Pine Avenue, Mildura, Relational Minds Child and Family Mental Health Clinic provides professional support services for parents, caregivers and families struggling with the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children.

Specialising in **child and adolescent mental health assessments and supportive therapies**, we work with families and caregivers to promote positive emotional development in children and adolescents and provide supported pathways through recovery from mental illness.

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- ✓ Mental Health Nurses
- ✓ Psychologists
- ✓ Art Therapists
- ✓ Social Workers
- ✓ Family Therapists

### Our Location in Mildura

- 📍 4/125 Pine Avenue, Mildura
- ☎ 03 4050 4622
- 📠 03 8677 9624
- ✉ [mildura@relationalminds.com.au](mailto:mildura@relationalminds.com.au)

## Other Useful Mildura Services

Child and Youth Mental Health Service (CYMHS) is based at Mildura Base Public Hospital. It is the public mental health service that manages crises for the community. For mental health support, contact: 03 5022 3500 or 1300 366 375.

**headspace** - helping young people struggling with general life issues and mental health issues such as anxiety, depression. Contact: (03) 5021 2400.

### Helplines

Relational Minds is not an emergency service. If you need immediate help, please call:

- **Suicide Callback Service:** 1300 659 467
- **Lifeline:** 13 11 14
- **Kids Help Line:** 1800 55 1800
- **QLife** (anonymous and free LGBTIQ+ peer support and referral): 1300 555 727
- **Eating Disorders Victoria:** 1300 550 236 and the **Butterfly Foundation:** 1800 33 4673 - supporting people with eating disorders and body image issues



# A-LEAGUE VISIT ANOTHER PREMIER EVENT FOR MILDURA





THE Mildura Base Public Hospital Foundation was again proud to stage the One Agency A-League Festival of Sport in October this year, following the success of the inaugural event last year.

A-League powerhouse Melbourne Victory played Adelaide United in the charity fund-raiser held at the Mildura Sporting Precinct on Saturday, October 4. The exciting event attracted a large crowd of soccer fans who enjoyed a high standard, competitive match which saw Melbourne Victory victorious over Adelaide United 3-0.

A highlight of the two-day event was the children's football clinic held at the Aero Ovals football fields on Friday, October 3.

The clinic was hosted by the two A-League teams with players from each club participating, and it was a fantastic success.

Here are some pictorial highlights from the event.



SOME EXCITED GIRLS AT THE CLINIC GET A PHOTO WITH VICTORY'S COACH AND A STAR PLAYER.



THE TWO CAPTAINS TOGETHER IN A FRIENDLY MOMENT AT THE KID'S CLINIC.



THE TWO TEAMS WISH EACH OTHER LUCK AHEAD THE KICK-OFF.



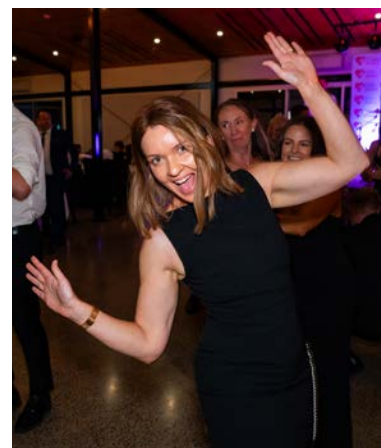
ONE AGENCY PRINCIPAL AND SPONSOR MARK THORNTON AND FRIENDS ENJOYING THE MATCH AT MSP.



THE GROUP PHOTO AT THE KIDS' CLINIC.



# FOUNDATION'S GALA BALL A GLITTERING NIGHT AT WILLOW AND IVIE!





THE annual Mildura Base Public Hospital (MBPH) Foundation Gala Ball attracted 180 members of the region's 'glitterati' who assembled at the beautiful Willow and Ivie in Nichols Points on Saturday, November 1, for what was a fabulous night out! Guests enjoyed a sumptuous three-course meal and drinks accompanied by live music. With dinner over the live auctions were conducted by One Agency's principal Mark Thornton. The event raised \$60,000 which will be directed to support the MBPH Foundation's Rural Imaging Screening Vehicle. Here is some of the colour captured by photographer ROB KLARICH at the event.







TIME FOR A PHOTO BEFORE THE FIELD TEES OFF.



IN FULL STRIDE ON ROUTE TO THE NEXT TEE AT MGR.



ONE OF THE FOURSOME TEAMS WHO COMPETED AT THE AGG-TECH CHARITY GOLF DAY.



AN APPROACH SHOT TO THE GREEN PLAYED ON THE 1ST AT MILDURA GOLF RESORT.



AGG-TECH MILDURA'S BUSINESS MANAGER ALEX BARBER (L) WITH WORK COLLEAGUE MATT BAILEY.

# MCLARDYMC SHANE - AGG-TECH GOLF DAYS SUPPORT THE RURAL IMAGING SCREENING VEHICLE

**By John Dooley**

MCLARDYMC SHANE Insurance Brokers began in 2007, when Don McLardy and Mike McShane merged their respective insurance businesses. The company recently opened their Mildura office.

*Heartbeat* spoke with McLardyMcShane's Founder and Director Don McLardy at their charity golf day held at Riverside Golf Club on Thursday, November 20, this year.

*Heartbeat* asked Don what had motivated his company's decision to support the Mildura Base Public Hospital Foundation and their Rural Imaging Screening Vehicle project.

"We are delighted to be holding our Inaugural Charity Golf Day in Mildura," Don said.

"McLardyMcShane is deeply passionate

about improving the lives of others and seeing positive change in action and that's why we are proud to be supporting the hospital's Foundation and their Rural Imaging Screening Vehicle project.

"We've helped to raise more than \$3 million for worthy organisations such as The Reach Foundation, Cure EB Foundation and FightMND and so this is not something that's foreign to us.

"Building thriving communities requires more than just a financial donation. That's why we get our people, our clients and our suppliers involved in initiatives. We're less interested in profit and more focussed on nurturing and protecting your people and your business. We truly believe that a thriving community is vital to the success of all businesses."

The event raised more than \$10,000 for the Foundation.

McLardyMcShane has more than 70 businesses across Australia and the group keeps growing and now Mildura has been added to that list.

## AGG-TECH GOLF CHAIRTY GOLF DAY SEES A BIG FIELD TEE-OFF!

FOR the second year in a row, the AGG-TECH Charity Golf Day was held at Mildura Golf Resort on Friday, November 21, and the weather couldn't have been better.

A field of more than 100 enjoyed a great 18-hole round playing Ambrose rules.

The event raised close to \$30,000, which will be donated to the Mildura Base Public Hospital Foundation.

These are some pictorial highlights from both golf days.





HEATH KENDALL, DON MCLARDY, TRACY DONALDSON AND MATT JUKES AT THE RIVERSIDE GOLF DAY.



GETTING SOME PUTTING PRACTICE AHEAD OF THE SHOTGUN START AT THE AGG-TECH CHARITY GOLF DAY.



THE GAME IS WON ON THE GREEN.



A NICE BACK SWING GETS THIS PLAYER OF THE MARK.



ENJOYING A COLD BEER BEFORE TEEING OFF.



YES! A MEMBER OF A LADY'S TEAM SINKS A PUTT.



DON MCLARDY AND HIS TEAM GET SET TO TEE-OFF.



MBPH FOUNDATION MANAGER JAKE ANSTEY HAS A PERFECT DRIVE OFF THE 10TH.



THIS TEAM LANDED ALL THEIR BALLS ON THE MARK.



MBPH ACTING CEO MATTHEW JUKES (C) CHATS TO SOME OF THE PLAYERS AHEAD OF THE GAME.



BRIEFING THE FIELD AHEAD OF TEE-OFF.





THE MCLARDYMC SHANE GOLF DAY AT RIVERSIDE GOLF CLUB WAS HELD IN PERFECT WEATHER.



I'LL BUY THAT!



OUR THANKS TO OUR WONDERFUL SUPPORTERS OF THE FOUNDATION.



ATTENDING THE FLAG ON THE GREEN.



ONLY THE BEST BALL GETS PLAYED.



MBPH EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF MENTAL DAVID KIRBY BLAST OFF ON THE 10TH AT THE MILDURA GOLF RESORT.



NOT TO BE OUT DONE MBPH ACTING CEO MATT JUKES TEES OFF ON THE 10TH.



ONE OF THE FIRST TO DRIVE OFF THE 1ST.



TEAR DROP FLAGS PROUDLY ACKNOWLEDGE FOUNDATION SUPPORTERS.





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# RED CLIFFS MEDICAL PRACTICE TOPS THE STATE FOR EXCELLENCE

*Every year Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) recognises a general practice in Victoria which stands out by the quality and delivery of services it provides to patients as well its contribution to community and the training of the next generation of GPs.*

**Article contributed by  
Sunraysia Medical Centre**

THIS prestigious award in general practice celebrates the most outstanding team of dedicated doctors, nurses and reception staff who work efficiently to improve quality of life and health of our community members.

This is the first time that a practice in Sunraysia receives this award.

Sunraysia Medical Centre has impressive state-of-the-art facilities and a patient-centred and community-minded approach.

The multidisciplinary practice undertakes community education and health promotion including to local ethnic

groups, and an annual Men's Health seminar at the Men's Shed. The practice has a proactive data-driven approach to patient care which has received 'Data Driven Clinical Excellence Award' in 2023. It has also participated in programs that address unmet healthcare needs in our diverse community, including an award-winning COVID-19 vaccination program.





L-R SITING: DR REYHAN HUSSAIN, DR H. YASSIN, DR DONALD HARTLEY, DR MEHDI SANATIPOUR AND DR ANUJA PATHAK

This is a great honour to receive RACGP practice of the year award for 2025.

Team at Sunraysia medical centre work together with our community to overcome many challenges facing general practice in rural Victoria.

Dedication and hard work of doctors, nurses and admin staff as well as partners in community helped Sunraysia Medical Centre achieve this award.

Sunraysia Medical Centre is part of community and takes part in many activities like health promotion at men's shed.

The innovative approach to health care with the support from Murray PHN allowed Sunraysia Medical Centre to provide world class care to rural patients who would otherwise be missing out.

Examples of these innovations are remote patient monitoring, nurse lead heart failure clinic and chronic disease care coordination for frequent visitors to emergency department.

"We would like to thank our lovely patients for their nomination of our practice and our partner organisations who provided their support for this nomination"

A winner is chosen from each state, and one national winner will be chosen from amongst the state winners.

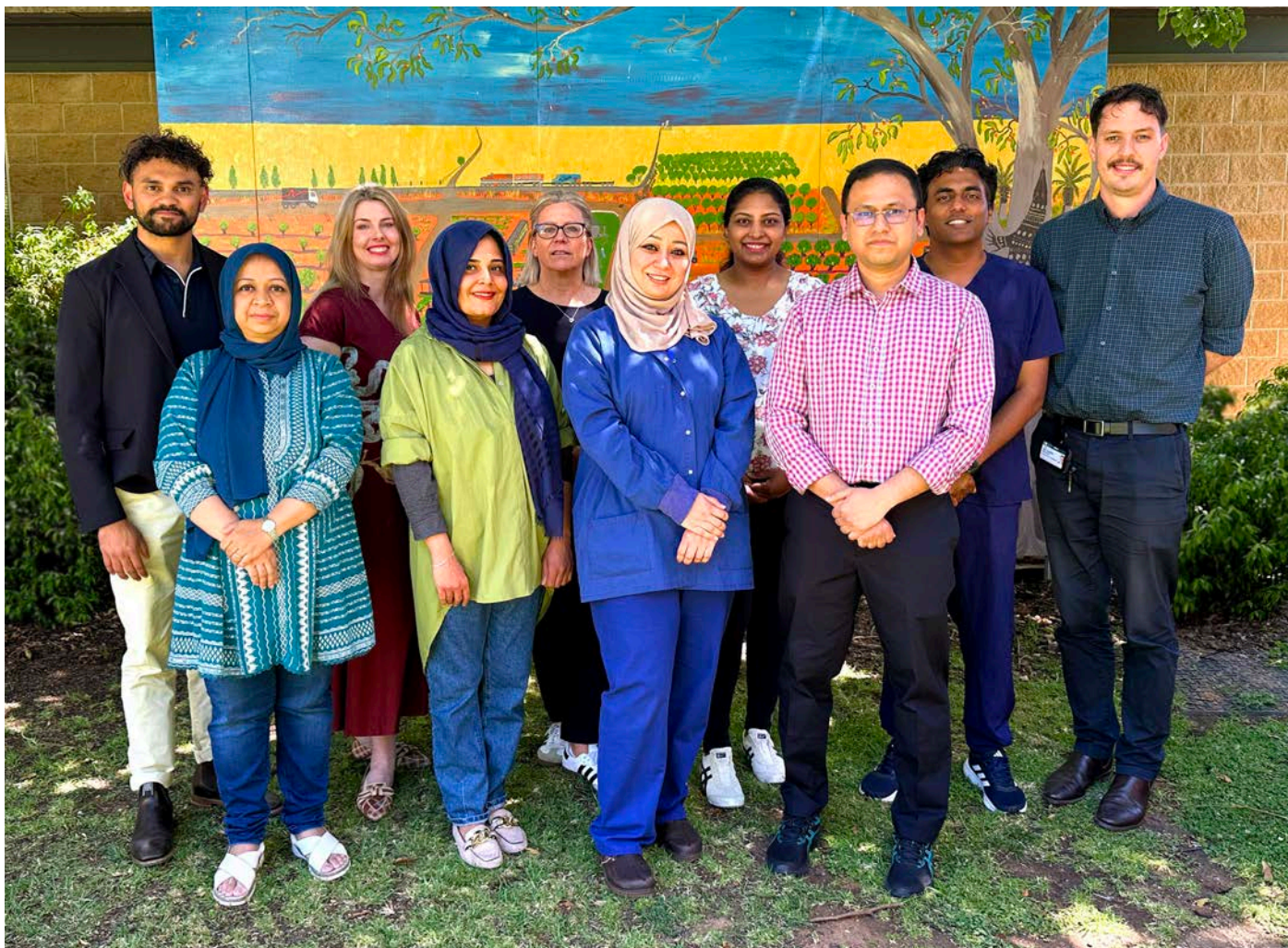
Sunraysia Medical Centre is in the running for national practice of the year award. *Heartbeat* wishes them luck.

#### LIST OF INITIATIVE BY SUNRAYSIA MEDICAL CENTRE TEAM:

- Female GP lead Implanon and IUD (Mirena) insertions clinics
- Youth-Focused School-Based Care through weekly "Doctors In Secondary Schools" program
- Men's Health Week program with contribution from guest speakers including prostate cancer specialist nurse, exercise physiologist and physiotherapist
- Award-Winning COVID-19 Vaccination Program (2021-2022): (in partnership with SCHS, MRCC and SMECC) administering over 1300 doses of vaccine afterhours. This initiative was recognised with a Victorian Rural Health Award in 2023

- Chronic Disease Care Coordination & ED Diversion (In partnership with Murray PHN), this project successfully diverted care back to the GP clinic.
- Nurse-Led Heart Failure Clinic: Implementing a Heart Foundation model of care
- Six-month supervised exercise program run by local exercise physiologists for Heart failure patients
- Remote Patient Clinical Parameters Monitoring in Rural Setting (With PHN support)
- Wellness Clinic for New Mothers and Babies: (in partnership with Mildura Base Public Hospital) comprehensive six-week postpartum checks for mothers and babies who do not have a regular GP
- Revolutionising Aged Care GP Services: (In partnership with Merbein Family Practice) our consortium now provides regular care to over 250 residents—more than 30% of all RACF capacity in the Sunraysia region.
- A Hub for Medical Education: (In partnership with Monash rural medical school).





L-R STANDING: JESS WHITE, DAKOTAH ROSEBOTTOM, JULIEANNE DAVEY, LARISSA PANARETOS, ECE TUNALI

# THE PROGRAM HELPING TO ENHANCE MEDICAL DOCTOR RECRUITMENT IN MILDURA

**By Dr Mary Beth MacIsaac and Dr Nabrees Sinnalebbe**

THE Workplace Based Assessment (WBA) program has been running at Mildura Base Public Hospital (MBPH) since 2023. It is a program for International Medical Graduates on the Standard Pathway to registration and is an alternative to the Australian Medical Council (AMC) Part 2 exam.

“Across the country, the pass rate for the WBA program is 90%. The program has had a 100% pass rate so far in Mildura, compared to the 24% pass rate for the alternative AMC Part 2 exam,” MBPH

Director of Medical Education Dr Mary Beth Mac Isaac explained to *Heartbeat*.

“We have a highly competitive selection process and recently chose a new group of candidates for the 2026 year ahead. Seven candidates were selected for 2026, which is the largest group we have chosen since our program started.”

MBPH Executive Director of Medical Services and Chief Medical Officer Dr Nabrees Sinnalebbe said the program solves a key problem for Mildura.

“It is improving medical doctor recruitment, strengthening our pipeline of high-quality candidates, and helping us meet our workforce needs,” he said.

“The WBA has made MBPH a preferred employer for International Medical Graduates, increased stability across our junior medical workforce and allowed us to attract stronger, more committed candidates to the region.”

The success of the Mildura program resulted in the Victorian Department of Health awarding MBPH a grant to support other health services to develop their own WBA program, through a hub and spoke model. So far MBPH has expanded the program to Swan Hill, and they are in discussions with Echuca and Southwest Health to extend the program to health services through the MBPH hub.



# Partnership Opportunities



There are a number of levels of involvement you may wish to consider in establishing a partnership with the MBPH Foundation.

Together, we can develop a tailored partnership or sponsorship to meet your expectations with opportunities including individual events, annual community or corporate partnerships and naming and recognition rights.

## JOIN OUR GROWING LIST OF SPONSORS



A partnership with MBPH Foundation is an opportunity to enshrine your family's name and or business in an institution that has served the community which you love and have contributed so much to.

## SPONSORSHIP LEVELS:

Partner	\$5k
Naming Partner	\$15k
Major Partner	\$25k
Premier Partner	\$50k

## NAMING RIGHTS OPPORTUNITIES

### Mobile Screening Vehicle

The mobile treatment and prevention vehicle will allow people living in remote areas access to treatment and screening.

### Patient Transport Vehicle

The MBPH Patient Transport Vehicle provides an opportunity to promote your brand as it travels around the Northern Mallee.

### Foundation Gala Ball

An opportunity to showcase your business's branding at this prestigious gala event.

### Corporate Golf Day

A great event that you and your business can be at the forefront of.

## BECOME A MBPH FOUNDATION COMMUNITY AND MEDIA PARTNER

Contact Jack Madaffer  
jmadaffer@mbph.org.au





L-R MBPH CHEF SUPERVISOR OWEN GENEBALLZO, MBPH SUPPORT SERVICES MANAGER SARAH LAY AND MBPH SAFETY FOOD ADVISOR NICOLE PENNY.

# A HEALTHY RECYCLING EFFORT

---

*Hospital turns green waste into a useful compost.*

**By Grant Maynard**

MILDURA Base Public Hospital has taken the proverb ‘waste not, want not’ to heart as it embarks on an innovative journey to revolutionise the way it deals with food and garden waste.

Described as a “ground-breaking initiative”, the hospital’s Food Dehydrator

Project aligns perfectly with its commitment to waste minimisation and a sustainable future, while also offering healthy cost-savings.

On average, MBPH produces about 412 kilograms of food waste per day. With 365 operational days per year, which equates to a staggering 150,000kg of food waste per year.

It also equates to 314,835kg of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and an estimated spend of nearly \$100,000 annually on waste collection and transport.

By using a food dehydrator and reducing its food waste to 10% of its original weight/size, costs can be reduced by 90% to about \$10,000 annually, MBPH Acting CEO Matthew Jukes told *Heartbeat*.



The resulting dehydrated product can then be used as fertiliser and compost in a range of settings as diverse as worm farming, aquaculture, horticulture and gardens, not least of the latter being the hospital's own.

"The cost of sending our food waste to landfill could be eliminated altogether," an enthusiastic Mr Jukes continued.

He also revealed that more than half of the hospital's current spend on general waste collection was attributable to food waste.

Mr Jukes enthusiasm for the project is shared by MBPH Support Services Manager Sarah Lay.

Sarah was happy to tell *Heartbeat* about a project she describes as "impressive".

It all started, she said, when the hospital successfully applied to Mildura Rural City Council last year for a grant to purchase a green waste food dehydrator.

"What we do is collect all the green waste from the kitchen," Sarah said saying that virtually all the scraps from the kitchen can be used.

But there's more, she revealed.

"Almost anything biological can be used including compostable packaging - things like cardboard, paper and napkins," she said.

"At the moment we are pumping through up to 400 kilos of waste a day," Sarah said, explaining that the equipment "dehydrates all the food scraps; mixes them; churns them, and turns them into what is basically a mulch or a fertiliser".

"What was waste is now being repurposed into something useful," she said.

"And that can help our communities. It could go to local farms, or it could go on our gardens here at the hospital.

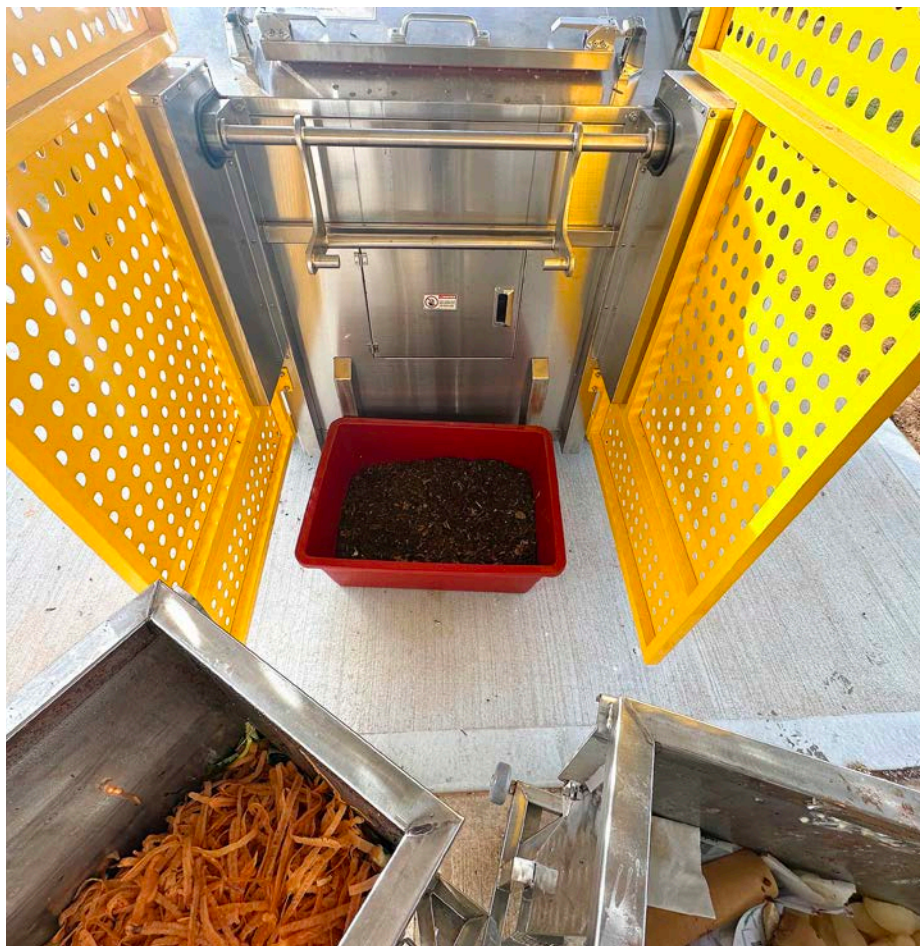
"It could become a revenue generating initiative for the hospital."

*Heartbeat* was a little surprised at the diminutive dimensions of the equipment. But looks can be deceiving it seems, with Sarah revealing the machinery can process about 350 kilos of waste in 12 hours.

She also revealed the supply of waste for processing was not limited to the hospital kitchens.

"Our maintenance team have green waste from the gardens like lawn clippings, prunings and leaves while much of the paper and cardboard comes from the café."

The machine cost \$120,00, not a huge expense in the big scheme of things and Sarah predicts it will virtually pay for itself in waste collection and transport savings



THE MBPH FOOD WASTE DEHYDRATOR IS ALREADY PROVING ITS WORTH.

during its first year of operation, or not too many months after.

While the hospital is keen to evaluate the resulting compost on its own gardens, there will be limit to how much it can use on-site.

"Eventually I can see us on-selling the compost to local growers or businesses who would have a need for it," Sarah said.

## HOW IT WORKS

Who better to explain the workings of the dehydrator than the manufacturer who, in its promotional material, explained: "To begin the process, simply insert food waste into the machine; no additives are required. This means there is no need for water, sawdust, or enzymes. The only requirement for the equipment is the input of electrical power to operate the motors and generate the necessary heat energy.

"The beauty of this system is that it can manage a wide variety of food waste. Everything from meat, fish, fruits, and vegetables to coffee grounds and even flower displays can be processed. Additionally, compostable napkins and paper towels can be included, but it is important to ensure that they do not exceed 20% of the total load.

"The dehydration process works by evaporating moisture from the food using indirect heating technology, which also ensures that the final product is sterilized and safe for use.

"Once the dehydration process is complete, the machine is easily emptied and is immediately ready to receive the next load of food waste.

"This efficient machine can be loaded and operated seven days a week, making it a highly convenient option for continuous use.

"The resulting compost can then be utilised for various purposes, such as enriching gardens, supporting worm farms, enhancing aquaculture, or even as a natural fertiliser, thus closing the loop on waste management and promoting sustainability."

And a final word from Mr Jukes.

"This is yet another fantastic initiative driven by our passionate MBPH team, made possible thanks to funding from the MBPH Foundation and the Mildura Rural City Council," he told *Heartbeat*.

"A huge congratulations to everyone involved, your commitment to reducing waste and improving our environmental footprint is commendable."





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FORMER STV8 MANAGER BRUCE MCLEAN  
WITH FORMER PRODUCTIONEMPLOYEE  
IAN MACWILLIAMS OUTSIDE THE  
ORIGINAL SUNRAYSIA TELEVISION  
LIMITED BUILDING IN DEAKIN AVENUE.

# 60 YEARS ON, SUNRAYSIA TELEVISION LIMITED - STV8 IS FONDLY REMEMBERED

*The arrival of television in Mildura heralded the beginning of an exciting era of living room entertainment  
– the town would never be the same!*

**By Grant Maynard**

HERE in 2025, it is hard to imagine that television has been anything but around forever.

And for our younger generations that is true. But there are older readers who will remember life before television, and an even smaller group who can recall playing an instrumental role in bringing screens to life in Sunraysia.

Opening night for Mildura's fledgling STV8 station was Saturday, November 27, 1965. A night to remember for those watching and even more so for those who had been working, for up to a decade or more behind the scenes, to establish the service here.

It is interesting to note that both STV8 and

ABC were to share transmission facilities at Yatpool.

The race was on as to who would be on the air first. In most regions it was the commercial station that was first to air, and this was meant to also be the case in Mildura. However, a last-minute delay in obtaining approval from the Australian Broadcasting Control Board, saw STV8 have to postpone its official launch from its initial date of Saturday, November 20, 1965. The ABC station, ABMV4, therefore claimed the position of first TV station declared open in the region on Monday, November 22, 1965. STV8 had managed to get its first test programs on the air by November 20, but in a rare show of support to its opposition, opted not to screen any test films or programs on

the Monday night so not to distract viewers from tuning in to the opening broadcast of ABMV4.

However, before we get deeper into that story, we need to backtrack for a little historical context - firstly on the world stage, and later here in Australia.

The Reader's Digest global history of television involves the transition from early mechanical systems of the 1920s to fully electronic systems of the 1930s.

It might be surprising to learn that the first commercially made electronic televisions, using cathode ray tubes (CRTs), were manufactured in Germany in 1934, while it was Britain's BBC that launched the world's first regular high-definition television service in 1936.



Black and white broadcasting became much more widespread after the end of World War II in 1945, with television broadcasting expanding rapidly, particularly in the United States, making television sets common in homes and businesses.

This, in turn, led to the introduction of colour television in the 1950s and 60s. Colour was first introduced in the 1950s but only became widespread in the early 1970s.

The 1970s and 1980s saw the introduction of cable and satellite television, which provided more channels and options for viewers.

The digital revolution of the late 1990s led to the transition from CRT technology to flat-panel displays like plasma and LCDs. In the 21st century, streaming services transformed viewing habits, and the advent of Smart TVs further integrated online content into television.

Meanwhile, as television began to flourish and develop rapidly elsewhere in the world, we here in Australia, were lagging well behind.

It wasn't until 1954 that the Federal Government formally announced the introduction of the two-tiered TV system - a government-funded service run by the ABC, and two commercial services in Sydney and Melbourne.

The 1956 Summer Olympics in Melbourne are generally considered to have been a major driving force behind the introduction of television to Australia.

But it was a struggle to establish television here. When the decision was made to go ahead with granting the first licenses in the early 1950s, post-World War 2 Australia was in a recession with severe shortages of labour and materials, and an underdeveloped heavy industrial base. In this context, a focus on TV was seen as a drain away from more fundamental projects.

There were also fears about the financial viability of the first television stations, and the prevailing view holds that this is why the first licenses were granted to established media companies who, it was thought, would have the means to underwrite television operations.

Mainstream television in Australia was launched on September 16, 1956, in Willoughby, New South Wales, with test transmissions by Nine Network station TCN9 Sydney. The new medium was

introduced by advertising executive Bruce Gyngell with the now-famous words: "Good evening, and welcome to television."

It was a month later that TCN9 Sydney officially commenced broadcasting - on October 27.

HSV7 Melbourne became the first television station to broadcast to viewers in Melbourne on November 4, soon followed by ABV2 then GTV9 on January 19, 1957. Sydney station ABN2 also started broadcasting in November.

Television in Australia has never looked back.

And that brings us neatly to the STV8 story as told to *Heartbeat* by Bruce McLean.

Bruce came to Mildura as an 18-year-old, his long media career beginning as an announcer with Radio 3MA, but with the introduction of television here in 1967, Bruce graduated to the new medium as a newsreader and compered STV8's first live variety show.

In 1974 he was appointed Station Manager and during this time managed the conversion from black and white to colour, and the formation of a network with television stations at Bendigo and in Gippsland.

He remained in the manager's role until he left the industry in 1988 to become Chief Executive Officer at Princes Court Mildura where he oversaw a major redevelopment of all aged care residential buildings, created the first dementia-specific unit in regional Victoria and played a leading role in the design and construction of Princes Court Retirement Village on the former Mildura Base Hospital site.

But, back to television.

"Wednesday, July 4, 1962, was a significant day for the Sunraysia and Mallee regions of north-west Victoria," Mr McLean began.

"Sunraysia Daily newspaper headlined with the announcement that a private company, Sunraysia Television Pty. Ltd. was sponsoring an application for a television licence for the Mildura area," he says.

In keeping with what was now an established pathway, the sponsoring companies were Elliott Provincial Newspaper Group Pty. Ltd., Sunraysia Broadcasters Pty. Ltd. and Sunraysia Publishing Company Pty. Ltd.

Many readers will realise that these companies were arms of the Lanyon family

media group, at the time the publishers of the Sunraysia Daily newspaper and owners of Radio 3MA amongst other media interests.

"The application proposed that the television transmitter would be at Yatpool, south of Mildura, where it would be co-located with the existing Australian Broadcasting Commission television transmitter," Mr McLean revealed.

"Television commenced in Australia in 1956 in both Sydney and Melbourne, but it was not until 1963 that the Post-Master General, who administered the Broadcasting and Television Act, advised that a commercial television licence for the Mildura area was to be granted. The station was to be known as STV8.

"The original formal application was made as far back as 1953 by Mr Charles Lanyon who became chairman of Sunraysia Television Limited, a public company formed to operate the television service with Mr Max Folie, the manager of 3MA Mildura to become the general manager at STV8.

"It was proposed that television programs would start to be transmitted in 12 months' time however that was delayed until late in 1965.

"In the meantime, work commenced on the television studios at 18 Deakin Avenue. The tower to transfer the programs from the soon-to-be-completed studio facilities to the Yatpool transmitter was the first thing to be constructed.

"That tower was to become a prominent landmark in Mildura.

"The studio complex was next. This building contained specially designed facilities for a studio, control room and technical facilities, film library for preparing and storage of programs and administration offices.

"With the completion of the building, it was time to install the essential equipment required to operate a television station. On hand to supervise the installation was the chief engineer, Alex Stewart who came to Mildura with previous television experience in Perth, and he was assisted by technician Bruce Batterham.

"The film library, under the experienced supervision of Leo Benedict from GLV 10 in Gippsland, was busy preparing for the start of transmission.

"Kent Smith, a Mildura graphic artist, expanded his skill set and learned to operate the studio cameras.





FOMER GENERAL MANAGER OF STV8  
BRUCE MCLEAN INSPECTS THE STUDIO  
WHICH IS NOW AN EMPTY SPACE.



BEHIND THE SCENES DURING THE ANSETT  
AIRLINES REGULAR WEEKLY SPOT ON STV8.



STV8 EMPLOYEE GEOFF WATERS OPERATES THE  
VISION SWITCHER IN THE ON AIR CONTROL ROOM.



STV8 STUDIO CAMERAMEN BOB KOVAC (L)  
AND GEOFF WATERS.



THE YATPOOL TRANSMITTER WHICH BROADCAST  
THE STV8 & AMBV 4 - ABC PROGRAMS.

"With that all was in place for the commencement of the start of television programs in the Mildura area."

Two of the first on-camera news presenters were Wentworth's Rod Tabrett and Ted Vardon.

While they were honing their skills off-camera, testing of the control desk and film projectors was in progress.

"Getting STV8 to the point of regular television programs was a very proud achievement for chairman of the Board of Directors, Charles Lanyon, and managing director, Max Folie," Mr McLean recalls.

The television transmitter site at Yatpool, 20 kilometres (13 miles) from the Mildura studio, featured a tall mast that was constructed to send the sound and vision to the expansive Victorian and New South Wales areas intended to be covered under the licence.

The signal from the Mildura studio tower to the transmitter at Yatpool was by a micro-wave link.

The transmitter was housed in a building designed to accommodate the ABC television service and shared with STV8 under a co-operative arrangement to share costs in what was then generally regarded as a remote regional area.

The STV8 transmitter was installed under the supervision of Mr Lanyon and Mr Folie with this vital piece of equipment provided by Astor-Television Engineering.

"With all the equipment in place it was now time to test the transmission to the homes that have installed television aerials in great anticipation of this exciting new medium coming into their loungerooms," Mr McLean told *Heartbeat*.

At first it was just a test pattern to enable technicians installing television sets to ensure that the picture was correctly being received. This was followed by a trial transmission of programs for three and a half hours each evening.

"For people who had yet to purchase a television set, shop windows at the television retailers were very popular," Mr McLean recalls.

He also revealed that at the time of the start of television in Mildura it was compulsory to have a television receivers' licence, and this was purchased from the local post office.

Finally, with all the hard work of establishing STV8 done and dusted, it was time to commence showing regular programs.

STV8's opening night was Saturday, November 27, 1965. Six decades ago!

Mildura's Kent Smith was working as a production assistant with STV8 for months before it first went to air.

But like many of his fellow employees he soon became a 'jack-of-all-trades' in an effort to be ready the station for its debut.

"I was doing a bit of artwork prep, setting up the office and helping however I was needed," Kent said.

"Everyone pitched in where they were needed. It was a very good place to learn a range of skills and work out where you wanted to concentrate your efforts."

Kent had been hired as a production assistant after gaining a valuable television grounding at BCV 8 in Bendigo.

He joined a diverse team that has been drawn from all over to set up Mildura's new station.

Kent moved to Mildura with his family aged 10 in 1956 – the year of the big flood, he recalls vividly.

He completed his final year of primary schooling here before going onto Mildura Technical College - his father was keen to see him pursue a career as an electrical engineer.

His college education complete and realising that electrical engineering wasn't for him – "not my cup of tea" - he went on to complete a two-year Diploma of Fine Arts with the tech college before moving to Bendigo after securing a position at city's BCV 8 television station.

"Bendigo was a pretty big operation and television there was very professional," he told *Heartbeat*.

Kent acknowledges he learned a lot in his time at Bendigo, but it was his first time away from home and he was boarding and missing his family.

"So, I talked to Dad, who was manager of the State Electricity Commission in Mildura. He knew Max Folie (STV8 manager) and I asked if he could ask if I could apply for a job at STV8," he explained.

Long story short he returned to Mildura and his BCV8 experience saw him start at STV8 as a general production assistant just as it was testing and gearing up for its debut broadcast.

"I probably wouldn't have got the job if I hadn't gone to Bendigo and gotten the experience," Kent acknowledges.

Interestingly, the memory of the first official station broadcast on November 27, 1965, is not etched in his mind.



"I was probably operating a camera on that first night, but I can't recall that," he said.

Kent surmises the station would have had its own 'welcome to television moment' with an address maybe by Max Folie, but he can't remember it.

A fascination for what the technicians were doing, before and after that initial broadcast would stay with Kent as his career opportunities flourished.

Kent explained that he soon turned his artistic flair to a range of endeavours at STV8.

He constructed and painted the live sets for example.

"We hosted and broadcast a range of live programs," he recalls, "And each had its own set."

Set examples include that for a football show, an agricultural show, the news of course and the Paddlewheelers children's show which will evoke fond memories for Sunraysia residents.

He was also charged with creating the advertisements for a list of now long-gone but not forgotten businesses like car dealers Stuart & Harrison and Mortimer Ford; department stores Bowring's, Maples and Shillidays, and Israel's Pharmacy.

Much of the advertising in the early days was hand drawn on cards, then converted to film for broadcast. Not unlike a slide photograph.

Filmed advertisements - with moving pictures - came a little later, Kent recalls.

Shot on location using 16mm camera, or in the studio and recorded direct on to video tape, the advertisements became increasingly sophisticated as the years rolled by.

One of the early advertisements Kent recalls was for American Fried Chicken, alerting viewers to the fact the fast-food outlet was coming to town.

"Well Mildura didn't have anything like that at the time, and we made quite a clever ad as I recall," he says.

On opening day there was long queue of prospective customers and Kent recalls the store sold out within the first half an hour.

"That was the power of television advertising back then."

Throughout his time at STV8, Kent acknowledges that tasks throughout the station were very much hands-on... all very manual.

As an example, he explained how the

advertisements were hand spliced into the film of a show for broadcast, citing 'Bewitched' as an example with the show's half-hour episodes freighted to STV8 to arrive on a reel of film.

"We would have to cut the film and splice in our own film containing with the advertisements," he explained. "Once the episode had aired, the advertisements would have to be cut back out of the reel - and then stored for next time they were to be used - while the film of the show was respliced together before sent back or onto another station," Kent recalls.

The potential for something to go wrong was enormous... and sometimes it did!

"But we had a good team that worked hard to overcome any hurdles, and it was a great place to work."

Kent continued to work at STV8 until late-1970/early 1971.

"It was time for a change, a new challenge," Kent recalls. "I felt I had done all I could at STV8."

By this time, his determination to succeed in cinematography was well and truly entrenched and he had devoted countless hours to honing his skills - often by creating station 'fillers' at STV8 to 'pad out' programming shortfalls.

Kent explained that when the station had exhausted upcoming program promos and paid advertisements, fillers were used to ensure programming maintained its tight schedule, programs traditionally beginning on the hour, or half hour. (See sidebar).

Leaving Mildura, Kent secured a cameraman's role with Adelaide's Channel 9 filming news and current affairs. From there he went on to found his own film production company - Kojo - in 1991.

That company is now a major, national business with a market presence across Australia in film, television, and live events. Kojo specialises in post-production, visual effects (VFX), and other creative services, with studios and offices in major Australian cities like Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne, and Perth.

It tasted major success with films like the Australian horror hit 'Wolf Creek' and has been involved in the production of sporting spectaculars for the AFL and international cricket events.

Now part of the international PYM Group, Kojo, according to its website, blends "strategy, creativity, production and technology to craft the perfect moments

where the story or experience completely consumes you".

Not bad for a young bloke from Mildura who was there when television made its much-anticipated debut here.

Fellow STV8 veteran Bob Kovac remembers his time with STV8 well. His is a name that was to become synonymous with the station.

Bob started work at STV8 in 1967 as a junior technician after gaining a grounding in electronics first with the PMG - Post Master General's department - and later with Mildura's Town and Country Television.

He recalls that just six months into his job with the PMG he asked his employer if he could be guaranteed a job in television. He had been inspired after watching the televised coverage of the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne shop windows.

His PMG superiors told Bob bluntly that jobs in the then fledgling industry were few and far between and he would have to wait.

Bob is not a 'waiter', and he promptly quit the PMG to join Mildura-based Town & Country Television "installing antennas and fixing television sets" to further his technical know-how and get a foot in the door of his preferred career.

Bob took to repairing televisions like the proverbial duck to water but did not have any formal qualifications. To remedy this, he took on correspondence courses through RMIT and the Commonwealth Department of Communications to finally complete his broadcaster's certificate which allowed him to work on "transmitters and all that stuff".

Bob joined the STV8 team in 1967 after replying to an advertisement for a junior technician.

He recalls it was an exciting time for all involved. Television was on the cutting edge of communications, and it was a new industry with much potential and plenty of challenges.

As a young technician, Bob recalls that he "enjoyed the challenge of the work".

"By then the station was broadcasting from late afternoon to 10pm daily, and switching over to the ABC for the news," Bob recalls.

A pay dispute a several years later saw Bob leave STV8 to join the Sunraysia College of TAFE team under Bob Cruise. There he used his growing skillset to set up the College's communications network.





STATION MANAGER BRUCE MCLEAN WITH GRAPHIC ARTIST AND CAMERAMAN KENT SMITH.



ANSETT AIRLINES JUNIOR FLYING CLUB WITH ROBYN WAKE, 10, HOSTESS GAIL SMITH AND JOHN DOOLEY, 12.



BRUCE MCLEAN COMPERING THE FIRST LIVE MUSIC SHOW ON STV8 IN JANUARY 1966.



BRUCE PRESENTS THE STV8 NEWS CIRCA 1966.



THE RHYTHM ROCKETS WERE SEEN REGULARLY ON THE TV SCREENS IN HOMES ACROSS SUNRAYSA.

While he was with TAFE, Bob recalls the technical side of things at STV8 weren't going too well and he was approached to return when new owner, businesswoman Eva Presser, took over.

She recognised his previous experience with the station's equipment as a key to her success and he returned. That was 1985, and Bob remembers his new boss being a shrewd business operator.

He continued to look after the station's electronic assets, including the Yatpool transmitter up until he left in mid-2000 when, by that stage, the station was being run by the WIN Corporation.

However, it wasn't long before he was back with the Corporation as a contractor.

"I did quite a lot of work with WIN and affiliated companies like Digital Distribution Australia for example," he said.

"WIN eventually sold these companies and after that I continued to work for the new owners."

Bob recalls working with quite a number of other engineers and technicians over the years he was with STV8. Familiar names include David Carson, who still runs his own electronics business in Mildura, Mike Hennessy and Peter Adams, who both went to work in television at Broken Hill when they left STV8.

Since leaving the station and WIN behind, Bob has continued to work in the television and telecommunications sectors.

Now aged 78, he continues to work as electronics engineer with Canadian-based BAI Communications. BAI design, build, and manage various communications networks, including radio, Wi-Fi, and private mobile networks across Australia with Bob's accumulated expertise being sought after.

Bob said he has never forgotten his roots, and how he was there when television in Sunraysia was in its infancy during the 1960s. He is quite chuffed that he played his part in helping it grow and mature in the decades that followed.

To view a feature video of the beginning of Sunraysia Television Limited scan the QR code or visit: <https://youtu.be/UOlgfNjMALA>



## THE FAMOUS FILLERS

STATION fillers were important to ensure STV8's tight schedule was maintained.

A few seconds here or there could throw out the timing that relied on programs going to air dead on the hour, or half hour.

One of those fillers was special, especially to Bob Kovac and Kent Smith, but also to another STV8 staffer Sue McGurgan who at one time was the host of the Paddlewheelers show.

The trio collaborated on what was, in its own small way, a film masterpiece.

The film showed a young Bob Kovac on his quintessential 1952 Vincent Rapide motorcycle riding in and around Mildura.

Filed by Kent, the idea to add the song and make it a forerunner of the music video, was Sue's, he says.

In its own small way, the late-1960s filler is a film masterpiece and was seen on STV8 for years. Kent filmed it using the station's 16mm camera, an instrument he was familiar with because he used it every other day to film advertisements and other station commissioned material.

What wasn't so familiar, he recalls, was the positions he had to get into to film sequences the cinematographer in him was happy with, including riding pillion with Bob!

Considering the equipment he used was, by modern standards rudimentary to say the least, Kent's filming skills stand the test of time.

Bob recalls the day the filler was filmed with great fondness, as does Kent and both have revisited the footage recently on YouTube.

And yes, Bob still has that Rapide.

*Heartbeat* acknowledges there are many other people who worked at STV8 all of whom made wonderful contributions to the station and the community. Many people benefitted from the unique training ground STV8 provided and they would often go onto to work in metropolitan television. Two of those people include Ian MacWilliams, who worked at BTV6 in Ballarat and then HSV Channel Seven and today he produces the Frames of History projects. *Heartbeat's* editor John Dooley also commenced his career in television at STV8 and then some years later joined GTV Channel Nine, after working at BTV6 for several years.

The YouTube version, a historical look back on the filler and its place in history, is narrated by Bruce Mclean and can be found at: <https://youtu.be/YsX8hOJxe3o>







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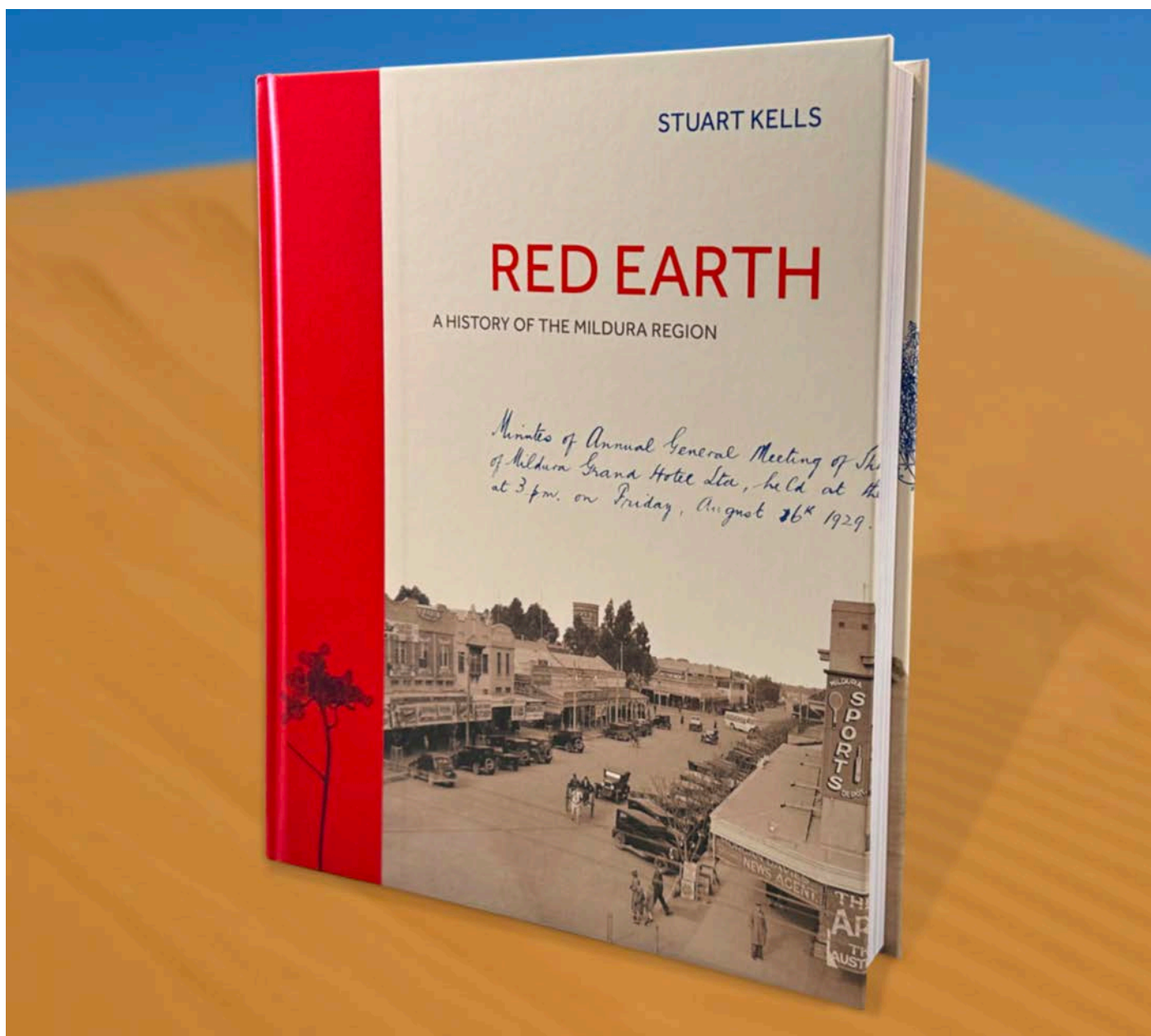
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# A BOOK THAT DESERVES TO BE 'RED'

*Definitive history of the Mildura region is a stunning achievement.*

**By John Dooley**

THE recently published 'Red Earth' is a fascinating, informative and educational study of Mildura's history and that of the wider Mallee region.

Mildura Rural City Councillor and former Mayor Helen Healy, writing the foreword for Red Earth quotes Australian

theologian, writer and distinguished professor Stan Grant: "We are produced by history, identified by history, oppressed, or empowered by history."

This, she says, resonates with the overarching aim of this book – "to capture important themes overlooked in previous tellings of our history".

"This is evident throughout Red Earth,

most particularly by capturing the region's Indigenous history, along with underexplored themes including the role and impact of women in the region, the riverboat trade, soldier settlement, broadacre farming, non-British immigration, the regional arts scene, and the towns of Ouyen, Merbein, Red Cliffs and Irymple."



The quality of the book was arguably guaranteed from the outset, being authored by experienced writer and academic Professor Stuart Kells, and backed by Mildura businessman, philanthropist and keen historian Ross Lake OAM.

Mr Lake, together with a group of enthusiastic locals that became the team behind the project, were the driving force behind the endeavour while Professor Kells came to the project having written on a wide range of subjects and having been published around the globe.

CrHealy continued in her foreword: "With an expanded capacity to investigate the past and expose embellishments and uncritical myth making, author Stuart Kells has countered the tradition of history being written only by the privileged or victors.

"Through broad consultation, learning and listening his text aims to ensure gaps are filled and, in the process, provide a more complete, nuanced and some would say 'warts and all' account of the region's history.

"Meticulously researched and thoughtfully presented, Red Earth offers a deep and multifaceted exploration of the forces, both human and environmental, that have shaped Mildura into the vibrant community it is today.

"The book title acknowledges the Latje Latje word for Mildura, meaning reearth, and explores the history of the idea of Mildura, examining the aspirations, plans and grand schemes since colonisation, underpinned by the ongoing idea of place and how this country becomes home.

"From the ancient presence and continuing cultural practices of First Nations peoples to becoming one of the most ethnically diverse regions in rural Australia, Red Earth explores the contemporary challenges we face and the triumphs when we succeed.

"Red Earth discusses the region's more recent history, including the importance of agriculture and horticulture, the impact of the two world wars, the region's branding as a tourist destination, and the growing diversity of its population.

"It includes analysis of its role as a cultural hub, delving into the arts and literary life of Mildura and examining the significance of reading, newspapers and arts events. Reflecting the community's deep appreciation for culture and creativity,



A CORROBOREE ON THE MURRAY RIVER NEAR MONDELLIMIN, PAINTED BY GERARD KREFFT 1858.



EARLY MORNING ON THE RED EARTH BANKS MURRAY RIVER AT YELTA.

the book documents the establishment of newspapers, the Mildura Arts Centre and a strong history of photography and artistic expression.

"Red Earth demonstrates how the region has consistently punched above its weight and been a place of innovation and adaptation. From ancient land and water management practices to the early colonial experiments with irrigation techniques, the forming of cooperatives and scientific research, it has always sought to push the boundaries with outside-of-the-square thinking and fostering 'can do' attitudes.

"This is not just a story of a place, but a story of the people who have made it their own: from the First Nations people who have been here for millennia, to the pioneers who carved a new life out of the Mallee, and onto the generations who followed and the migrants and refugees from 82 different countries, who innovated, adapted and contributed to the rich tapestry of our community."

During a recent chat with Mr Lake, he

told *Heartbeat* that it was important to acknowledge that the base funding of \$200,000 for the Red Earth project came in the form of a grant from Mildura Rural City Council, and that Mallee Family Care had also provided invaluable support for the project.

"It was extremely generous of council. It was at the beginning of COVID, and there was some state government money available 'in the system' that we were lucky enough to pick up," Mr Lake explained.

"Right from the beginning, we knew it was going to be a four-year project... and the agreement with council was that it would be completed within four years, but at that stage we had to find an author, a publisher and a distributor."

Easily said, but quite a task Mr Lake recalls, as the project teams first order of business was to engage with the Mallee region's historical societies.

"We had to link into the various historical societies within the municipality and around the region," he said. "The great





RED EARTH AUTHOR PROFESSOR STUART KELLS.



IRRIGATED VINEYARD MILDURA C.1920.



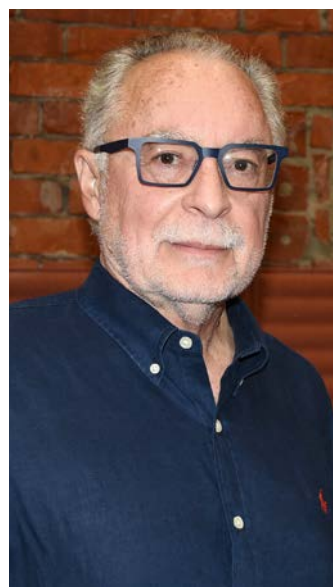
DR ABRAMOWSKI AND NURSING STAFF FROM THE MILDURA HOSPITAL 1905.



WB CHAFFEY AT A PUBLIC MEETING IN DEAKIN AVENUE MILDURA.



EIGHTH STREET LOOKING TOWARDS DEAKIN AVENUE MILDURA C.1946.



ROSS LAKE OAM.



STUDIO PORTRAIT OF A SWAGMAN, C.1887, BY JW LINDT.

thing is that most people in small, local historical societies are pretty passionate, and we had good support from all of them including Ouyen, Red Cliffs, Merbein and Mildura. That was a wonderful thing.” Mr Lake described the enormity of the task for the author as “challenging and possibly not be without controversy”.

“In many respects the rewriting of the history, or at the very least the revisiting of history can be a provocation,” he explained.

“That’s because we’re looking to replace the ‘standard water’ that’s been around since late 1937/early 1938 in the form of ‘Water into Gold’. Everyone knows Ernestine Hill.

“And there’s been a plethora of vanity publishing, if you like. Individuals examining specific aspects of the community’s development, whether that be agricultural, or the co-operative developments; or individuals just talking to people about their circumstances and history in the community.

“So, in the research for this book, there was a lot of disparate stuff that prompted a lot of collaboration and community support during those four years.”

Mr Lake said that another project, ‘Frames of History’, had been inspired by this process.

“It’s now on the cusp of producing it’s hundredth interview, on video in most cases, for an hour or more,” he said.

“This has been an exciting project that will bear fruit in time as well.

“So Red Earth has been the catalyst many magazine articles and podcasts, and it’s flowed onto more people picking up the pen and writing.”

Mr Lake explained how the project found an author and a publisher.

“The author - Stuart Kells - was suggested by Nathan Hollier, who was a Mildura boy originally, but at the beginning of this project happened to be the Executive Officer of Melbourne University Press (MUP),” Mr Lake said.

“Nathan suggested Stuart, and Stuart

came to meet us and the project proceeded from there. I have to say that he was one of the easiest, most generous, professional people I’ve ever worked with in any sphere of business or community.

“He was a delight to work with over the four years, and I find myself talking to him weekly still even though the project is complete.

“MUP was extremely generous, in large part due to a wonderful lady named Kathy Smith who came on board to assist with the project, agreeing to publish Red Earth under MUP’s ‘Miegunyah Press’ brand, which is like its premium label in many respects.

“At the same time, we also moved from what had been planned to be a paperback production to hard back.

“In addition, we increased the size of the book to 430 pages with more than 300 images. As a consequence, the quality of the end product lifted dramatically, which resulted in a beautiful book being published.”



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stuart Kells is enterprise fellow at the Melbourne Institute, University of Melbourne, and an adjunct professor at La Trobe University's College of Arts, Social Sciences and Commerce, and he has twice won the Ashurst Business Literature Prize.

He delivered the 2022 Murray Talk and was a guest speaker at the 2024 Chaffey Festival, both in Mildura.

*Heartbeat* spoke with Professor Kells prior to his speech at the Chaffey Festival last year and was asked why he was asked to write *Red Earth*.

"There are some specific contingent reasons as to why I have a basis for an interest and understanding and empathy with people in the region. I have been a regular visitor to Mildura for the past four or five decades and I have many friends here and have worked with local organisations including the CMA, TAFE, La Trobe University's 'Trust for Nature'.

"I grew up on the river further upstream, and for a while my family owned the paddle steamer P.S. Cumberoona, which has Mildura connections."

About *Red Earth* specifically, Professor Kells explained: "I think one of the key gaps in the previous histories - and when you remember most of the previous books written about Mildura books were penned in the 1930s and 1940s - was that they didn't say much about Merbein or Red Cliffs and certainly didn't say much about the growth of the region overall, so it is definitely time for a new one."



BLANDOWSKI CAMP



THE PADDLESTEAMER RUBY C.1855.



THE FABULOUS 'RHYTHM ROCKETS'.



SIX FURROW PLOUGH BEING TOWED WITH A SMALL BOY AT THE WHEEL, 1890, PHOTOGRAPHED BY JW LINDT.



MILDURA WAS PROMOTED AS A WINTER HOLIDAY DESTINATION TO RIVAL QUEENSLAND IN THESE 1930S ADVERTISING POSTERS.

## RED EARTH EXPLAINED

*Red Earth* explains 'Mildura' is an Indigenous word meaning 'red earth' or 'red banks', a reference to the stretches of red in the cliffs and banks of the Murray River east of its junction with the Darling.

"The striking colour comes from the high iron content in the soil," the book tells us.

In the nineteenth century, pastoralists adopted the name 'Mildura' for the large grazing run that had a Murray frontage of more than 48 kilometres. The station was originally called 'Tiertman', then 'Yerre Yerre', and finally (from 1858) 'Mildura'.

The station was part of the semi-arid Mallee region of Victoria. The word 'mallee' is another Indigenous word. It refers to country dominated by a squat and hardy eucalypt, *Eucalyptus dumosa*, that has low, scrubby branches.

The trees grow to a height of around eight metres, but their shallow roots often stretch horizontally for 10 metres or more to capture water from the dry, sandy soil. The soil stops waterholes from forming; there is little clay to prevent water from draining into underlying

aquifers. Only certain types of plant can tolerate the sand and the heat and the lack of water.

In the nineteenth century, foreign visitors to the Mallee noticed the flatness of the country, the predominance of sand, the evergreen saltbush and the ubiquitous porcupine grass.

Explorers and surveyors such as Charles Sturt and Thomas Mitchell described the region in gloomy terms that bring to mind William Dampier's 1699 description of the barren Western Australian coast.

Argus journalist Francis Myers, writing in 1890, called the Mallee a 'desolate, drought-stricken, heart-breaking wilderness'.

However, for 60,000 years or more, people lived and thrived in the region long before 'Victoria' existed. But then, as now, the river was a boundary, marking the line between cultural and language groups to the south, such as the Latje Latje and Wergaia people, and those to the north, such as the Kureinji and Paakantyi people.

Colonists remarked that many local Indigenous people were strikingly handsome and

remarkably tall - in part, it was speculated, because of the breadth of locally available food, especially fish from the river.

"When speaking of Indigenous cultural boundaries alongside the newer colonial ones, there is a danger of false analogy. Indigenous boundaries are not as linear or rigid as the municipal and administrative lines based on European law," *Red Earth* tells us.

"Even after Europeans claimed possession of the land and carved it up, the official boundaries were still to some extent flexible, and the geospatial status of the Mildura region was therefore still in flux.

"Squatters established the region's first pastoral runs in the 1840s - before the district of Port Phillip became the nucleus of a new colony, separate from New South Wales.

"The Mildura region at that time therefore lacked 'northernmostness' which came later as an attribute of the formal creation of Victoria."

*Red Earth* is available from Collins Booksellers in Mildura and may also be purchased online through MUP and Amazon while copies have also been donated to the Mildura Library.



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THE TRAIL OF LIGHTS IS PROVING TO BE A MUST-SEE  
DESTINATION FOR VISITORS AND LOCALS ALIKE.



# ISLAND'S BRILLIANT DISPLAY SHINES A COLOURFUL LIGHT ON MILDURA

---

*Locals play a vital role in how visitors experience our unique region.*

**By Jason Shields**

THEY proudly show off their favourite wineries, cafes and restaurants, highlighting Mildura's vibrant food scene, they share their favourite Murray River spots, explain its rich cultural history and create experiences that no tourism brochure can match. And this summer there is another major attraction locals can showcase to visiting

friends and family – the Trail of Lights installation on Lock Island.

The Trail, created by internationally renowned artist Bruce Munro, is an enchanting fusion of art and nature, integrating 12,500 firefly lights and 22 Gone Fishing sculptures with the natural beauty of the island and the river.

It is a quiet and contemplative experience, immersed within the art, one removed from the rush and stress of our daily

lives, and has attracted more than 11,000 visitors since opening in April, providing a big injection into the local economy.

But there is a market that remains largely untapped.

The Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) market in the Mildura-Wentworth is enormous, accounting for one-third of those who travel here, according to Tourism Research Australia.



“Our local residents are not just attendees; they are ambassadors whose personal recommendations and invitations drive visitation,” explains Sara Wrate, Manager of the LightState project.

The launch of the Fibre Optic Symphony Orchestra, or FOSO, installation in Wentworth presents a further opportunity to drive the visitor and local markets.

Ahead of the April 2026 relaunch of TOL+FOSO as a combined experience over two nights, a revised ticketing model will be introduced in time for the summer tourism season. This refreshed approach is designed to encourage locals not only to explore the TOL+FOSO installations themselves, but also to bring visiting friends and family along to enjoy the full journey together.

“We want to empower locals to promote the TOL and FOSO experiences within their networks, amplifying reach and building community ownership. where local wineries Chalmers and Zilzie are showcased

A targeted marketing campaign will be launched to coincide with the December release of TOL and FOSO tickets, reinforcing the value proposition and encouraging both local and visitor engagement.

The FOSO installation, set to open in April, will offer a different experience to the Trail of Lights. Set adjacent the ancient Perry Sandhills and Thegoa Lagoon, which have been used as a backdrop in many films and television shows, FOSO is an immersive artistic experience combining quintessential Australian imagery with cutting-edge.

The installation is synchronised with an original orchestral score composed by the renowned British composer Nainita Desai, elevating the viewer’s interaction with the art.

Ms Wrate says the two installations provided the region with a unique opportunity.

“As tourism continues to drive economic growth in regional areas, empowering communities to champion their own backyard and what we have to offer is more important than ever,” she says.

“When family or friends visit this summer, take them down to Rio Vista Park from 6pm where they can enjoy great food and drink at Jessica Rabbit Café or the TOL Bar where local wineries Chalmers and Zilzie are showcased and then take a stroll through the Trail of Lights.

“We are so lucky with our stunning weather

over summer that extends right through to the Easter period, which is always a boom tourism period for our region, so it’s a great opportunity to also visit Wentworth and FOSO at that time.

“And the Trail of Lights’ proximity to Mildura’s CBD also opens up easy access to dining options on Mildura’s Riverfront and Feast Street, so there are so many options for local people to act as ambassadors, support our small businesses on both sides of the border and ensure their visiting friends and family are left with a lasting impression of our region.”

For more information, including operating hours and how to buy tickets check out [mildura.com/lights](http://mildura.com/lights)

You can also follow [mildura.com](http://mildura.com) on social media for details on packages, special events, local community promotions and much more.

And as tourism continues to drive economic growth in regional areas, empowering communities play a vital role in shaping how visitors experience a town — and Mildura is no exception. When residents share their favourite spots, stories, and hidden gems, they help create authentic, memorable tourism experiences that no brochure can match. Acting as ambassadors, locals can boost pride, support small businesses, and attract return visitors through genuine hospitality and insider knowledge. As tourism continues to drive economic growth in regional areas, empowering communities to champion their own backyard is more important than ever. Whether it’s a friendly tip or a warm welcome, every local has the power to make a lasting impression. Sunraysia residents are proud to show off the best of their region.

Whether it be award-winning wineries, stunning Murray River experiences, our vibrant food scene or rich cultural heritage, locals have long played a crucial role as our most important tourism ambassadors. Trail of Lights on Loch Island

The VFR market is of particular significance in our region with 33.1% of visitors indicating they visited the Mildura Region due to visiting friends and relatives according to Tourism Research Australia data.

restaurants, cafes, walking trails, Mildura is best known for its stunning Murray River experiences, award-winning wineries, vibrant food scene, and rich cultural heritage,

Quiet, contemplative, immersive, memorable... the Trail of Lights installation on Lock Island has something for everyone.

The Trail, which opened in early April, offers a unique experience each time you step onto the path.

Created by internationally renowned artist Bruce Munro, Trail of Lights is an enchanting fusion of art and nature, integrating 12,500 firefly lights and 22 Gone Fishing sculptures with the natural beauty of Lock Island.

The result is a truly magical experience for locals and visitors alike, and one that is already making its mark as must-see.

Made possible thanks to a \$3 million investment through the Victorian Government’s Regional Tourism Infrastructure Fund, more than 5000 visitors have experienced the Trail since its opening night.

Tens of thousands more visitors are expected to take to the Trail, injecting millions of dollars into the local economy along the way.

The man behind the installation, Bruce Munro, is a British/Australian artist renowned for his visionary light installations that have captivated audiences around the globe.

From the iconic Field of Light at Uluru to the mesmerising Sensorio in Paso Robles, California, Munro’s creations transcend traditional art forms, blending creativity and engineering to craft dreamlike landscapes.

Through his installations, Munro explores themes of wonder, connection and the shared human experience.

He said Trail of Lights aimed to express his personal connection to the land.

“I have always felt that the land has a sense of energy to it,” Munro said.

“I really wanted to try and convey a sense of tranquillity and peacefulness, which is what Lock Island had when I first walked on it.

“Gone Fishing, meanwhile, is a symbol of people getting away from the stresses and strains of general living.”

With more than 3km of existing path networks to immerse yourself within the Trail of Lights, Lock Island is the perfect natural reserve to host the installation, according to Munro.

“It’s the first island I’ve ever had the pleasure to feature an installation on, so it’s been a very exciting process,” he said.





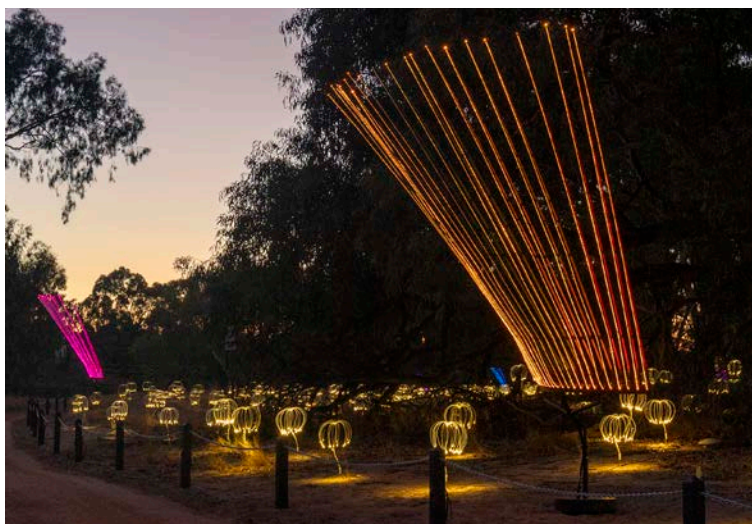
A GREAT FAMILY OUTING.



RIO VISTA PARK TRAIL OF LIGHTS ENTRANCE ARCH.



JESSICA RABBIT CAFE AT RIO VISTA PARK.



TOL © 2025 BRUCE MUNRO. PHOTOGRAPHY BY SERENA MUNRO.

"Mildura is an extraordinarily beautiful place. When I first visited the city, I couldn't believe that the locals had this wonderful walkway beside the river, with some wonderful buildings and galleries, Powerhouse Place... all very close to the city.

"It felt like discovering a jewel in the middle of nowhere."

Munro said there were plenty of reasons for people to visit Mildura – from great restaurants to the mighty Murray, wineries and everything in between.

It was his hope that Trail of Lights would simply provide the cream on top.

"I hope people extend their stay to enjoy all the region has to offer, including the Trail," Munro said.

The arrival of Trail of Lights has also led to the dedicated activation of Rio Vista Park, which has been transformed into an events space adjacent to Lock Island.

Food and a vibrant atmosphere are on offer thanks to the arrival of Jessica Rabbit Café, while a bar offering Chalmers and Zilzie wines and a selection of other beverages is also located within Rio Vista Park.

Mildura Cruises are also offering a sunset cruise on Friday and Saturday afternoons, cruising through Lock 11 downstream towards the sunset, offering views of Lock Island at dusk as the Trail starts to glow.

Those on board then disembark at Homestead Wharf and wander through the installation at their pleasure.

The Trail's proximity to Mildura's CBD has also been a win for local restaurants and hospitality providers, opening up easy to access dining options on Mildura's Riverfront and Feast Street.

Trail of Lights will be followed by Munro's second stunning major installation in the Mildura region later this year - the Fibre Optic Symphonic Orchestra (FOSO) in Wentworth.

FOSO, in contrast to the quiet and contemplative Trail of Lights exhibition, will be an interplay of colour and sound set adjacent to the ancient Perry Sandhills, accompanied by a full symphonic orchestral score, offering yet another unique experience, completing Munro's incredible vision to enhance the region's natural landscape.

Key message – if you haven't yet experienced get down to TOL – Visiting Friends and Relatives

Rio Vista Park – open from 6pm – TOL Bar and Jessica Rabbit Café

Launch of FOSO April – combination ticket is best value. Local ticket introduced.

The proposed blended pricing model is designed not only to increase revenue but also to drive higher visitation through targeted marketing and stronger local engagement. A key component of this strategy is recognising the vital role of the Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) market. The VFR market is of particular significance in our region with 33.1% of visitors indicating they visited the Mildura Region due to visiting friends and relatives according to Tourism Research Australia data. Local residents are not just attendees; they are ambassadors whose personal recommendations and invitations drive visitation. By making ticketing more accessible to locals, we empower them to promote TOL+FOSO within their networks, amplifying reach and building community ownership of the experience.





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# MOTOR SHOW'S PUT ON A GLEAMING DISPLAY OF CLASSIC COLLECTOR CARS



By John Dooley

HEARTBEAT attended two colourful Motor Shows recently the first was the Sunassist Motor Show held in September on the sporting ovals at the Mildura Senior College.

A huge range of vehicles in multiple categories were proudly on display by their classic car enthusiast owners.

The other event was the annual Goanna Run's Nowingi Place event which was a fantastic spectacular display attended by a large crowd who were also entertained by a live band which enticed some lively couples onto the stage for some colourful dancing!

We hope you enjoy the photos of these two events.

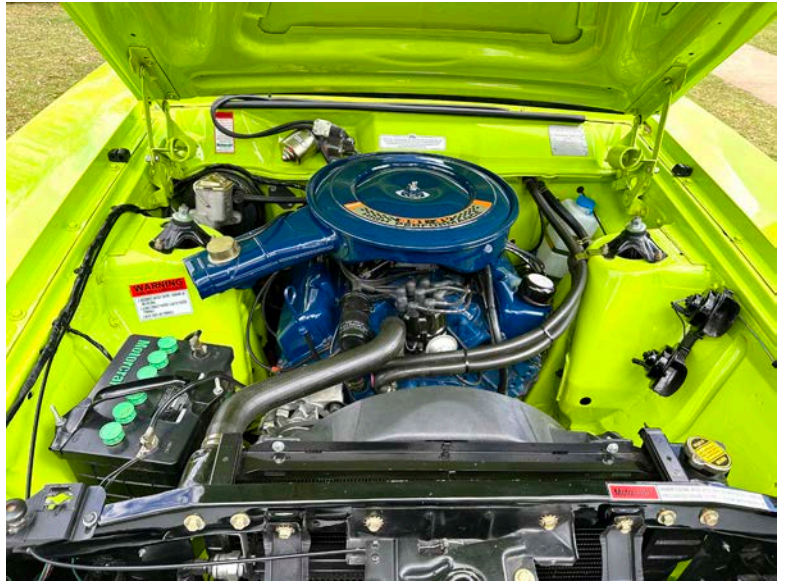


COUNCILLOR GLENN MILNE PROVIDES THE ON GROUND COMMENTARY FOR THE EVENT EACH YEAR.



TRAVIS HORSEFALL HAD HIS REPLICA BROCK COMMODORE ON DISPLAY AT THE SUNASSIST MOTOR SHOW THIS YEAR.











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MBPH ASSOCIATE NURSE UNIT MANAGER AND PERIOPERATIVE NURSE EDUCATOR JOHANNA 'JOHNNY' BAGACAY, LEFT, WITH MBPH EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CLINICAL OPERATIONS AND CHIEF NURSING AND MIDWIFERY OFFICER, KATRINA ALLEN.





# DEDICATION AND SKILLS REAP A RICH REWARD FOR MBPH REGISTERED NURSE

*For Mildura Base Public Hospital (MBPH) Associate Nurse Unit Manager and Perioperative Nurse Educator Johanna 'Johnny' Bagacay, the promotion to this role is something she is both delighted with and proud of.*

**By John Dooley**

ORIGINALLY from the Philippines, Johnny came to Mildura in 2012 and “fell in love with it immediately”.

“I have been here for 13 plus years,” Johnny told *Heartbeat*.

“I came here as a fully qualified Registered Nurse and I had the opportunity to meet with Katrina Allen, who was Perioperative Services Manager at that time and she saw that I had a specialisation that would allow me to join the theatre team.

“I have my husband and three children in Mildura with me and we love living here.

“The lifestyle here is so easy going, the traffic is light and the people are so lovely, as are at the MBPH the team who were all very supportive when I arrived here.”

Johnny explained to *Heartbeat* how she came to be chosen for her new role which carries with it more responsibility and seniority.

“In my previous role as an educator, I established a connection with the staff as well as with the doctors,” she said.

“They always come to me for education topics and things like that. In our down time we would talk about our new equipment, new policies and other clinical related matters.

“My aim in this position is to see that our team is successful and that will include cross-training nurses to be multi-skilled and in doing so, we will be in a position to fill gaps in our staffing level, if we have a shortage on any given day.

Additionally, I know that if we collaborate more with the doctors and maintain that relationship, the ‘silo effect’ will be mitigated. This means we will be in a better



MBPH ASSOCIATE NURSE UNIT MANAGER AND  
PERIOPERATIVE NURSE EDUCATOR JOHANNA  
'JOHNNY' BAGACAY.

position to cater for the health needs of our community.”

*Heartbeat* asked MBPH Executive Director Clinical Operations and Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer, Katrina Allen, about Johnny and her performance in her new role.

“Johnny was the first of our Filipino nursing imports and we’ve had quite a volume of our own community of nurses who were originally trained in the Philippines come through MBPH,” Katrina said.

Johnny’s the original of that cohort and she’s still here and I’m actually really proud of her and her progression through all of her learning leading to management.

“She’s gone from a shy nurse who moved here with her family, and while she’s still a little on the shy side, she has really moved ahead in her career. She’s done a brilliant job and I’m really proud of her and also proud of the fact that we were able to get her over here in the first place.”

Retention is such an important aspect of

staffing at MBPH and in Johanna’s case because of her skills, having her remain at the hospital for so many years makes her a real asset.

“Retention of our workforce, particularly in skilled roles, is so important,” Katrina explained to *Heartbeat*.

“This is a very skilled role and most people wouldn’t actually understand the operating theatre environment or realise just how skilled the people working in that area are.

And so, for us to have someone as skilled as Johanna grow through the ranks quite rapidly, and also support other people to come to MBPH and stay, is a wonderful thing.”

Relationship management plays a pivotal role in the theatre environment, which Katrina said is something Johnny is extremely adept at.

“All of those elements are so important to the running of a solid, strong, well-timed theatre that provides people with the right care, at the right time, in the right place,” Katrina said.

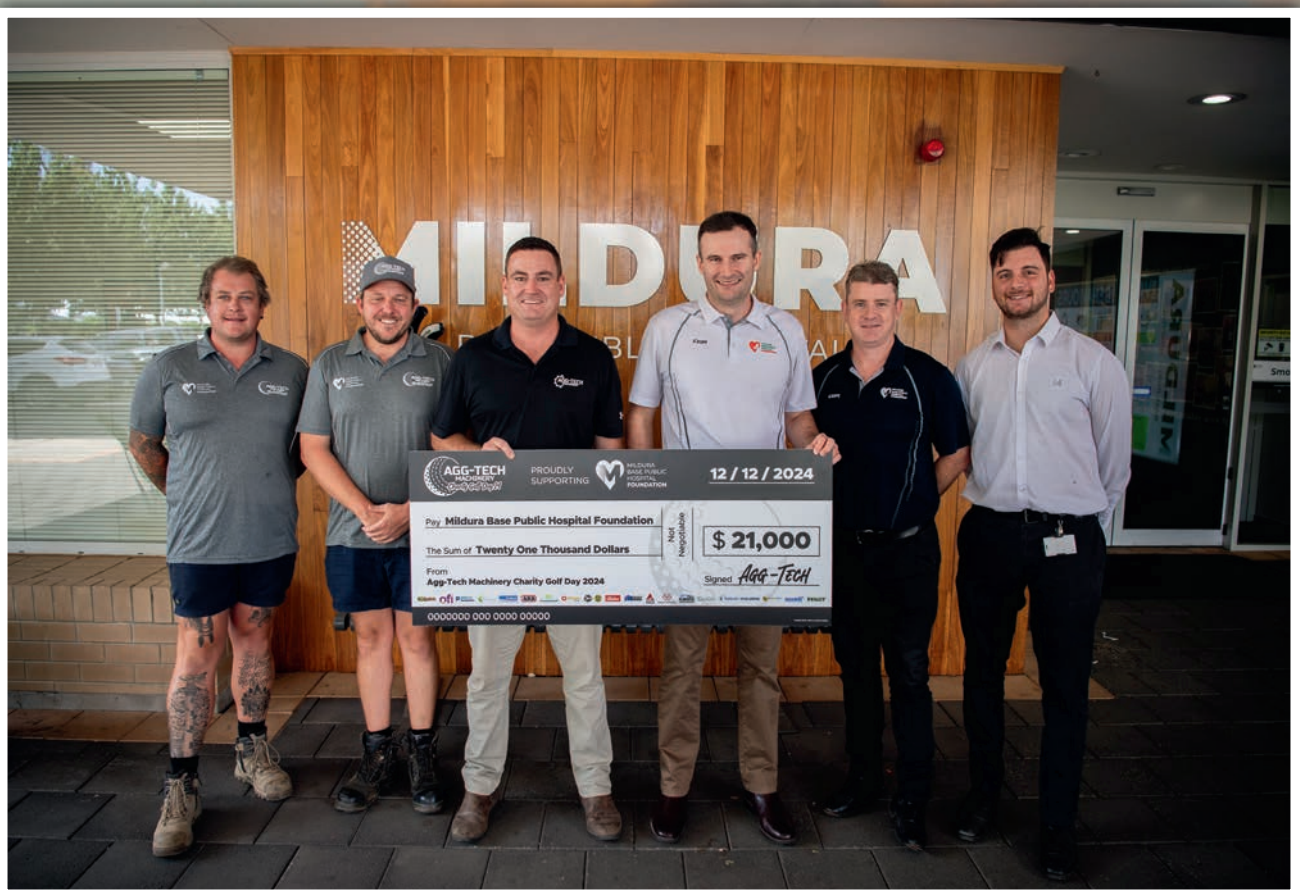
“Johnny does it really well and she leads from the front and as she describes it, “it’s the perfect formula”.

“You can know all the things about the theatre clinically, but it’s all of those other elements that are so important.”

If you are wondering where the nick name Johnny came from Joanna, explained that to *Heartbeat*.

“My peers and colleagues affectionately call me ‘Johnny,’ a playful reference to the song ‘Johnny B. Goode’ pun for ‘Johnny be good’. This nickname came about after several occasions where I managed an unusual influx of emergency cases on the floor and made us very busy,” she said.





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# ONE OF THE WORLD'S UNIQUE NATURAL WONDERS - KATI THANDA - LAKE EYRE IS AUSTRALIA'S LARGEST SALT LAKE

---

*REMOTE, recondite and remarkable all at the same time, Lake Eyre, officially known as Kati Thanda–Lake Eyre, is one of Australia's most iconic natural landmarks.*



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOANNE CONSTANZO.



AFTER A PERIOD THE FRESH WATER INFLOWS TURN SALTY AND ANY MARINE LIFE WILL SUCCUMB TO THE SALINITY.



SOME OF THE ARID TERRAIN FLYING ENROUTE TO WILLIAM CREEK.



**By John Dooley**

SITUATED in the remote heart of South Australia, the lake is renowned for its vast, shimmering salt flats and the extraordinary transformations it undergoes after rainfall events.

As the largest lake in Australia when filled, and the lowest natural point on the continent, Lake Eyre holds significant geographical, ecological, and cultural importance.

Lake Eyre is located about 650 kilometres north of South Australia's capital city — Adelaide and is nestled in the arid expanses of the Lake Eyre Basin. It is equally distant from the South Australia/Northern Territory border, sitting in the approximate centre of the State.

The lake itself covers an area of up to 9500 square kilometres when fully flooded, although it is usually dry or only partially filled.

The lake basin is fed by a network of waterways, including Cooper Creek and the Warburton River, but they only reach the lake during exceptionally wet years.

Lake Eyre is an endorheic, or closed, drainage basin. That means that water does not flow out to the sea. Instead, water either evaporates or seeps into the ground.

The lake bed lies about 15 metres below sea level, making it the lowest point in Australia, while the region's harsh, arid climate results in extremely high evaporation rates, causing the lake to remain dry for extended periods and leaving behind a crusty layer of salt.

Despite the harsh environment, Lake Eyre supports a unique ecosystem. When the lake has water, it becomes a haven for birdlife. Pelicans, banded stilts, and other waterbirds flock to the area in massive numbers, taking advantage of the temporary abundance of water and food. The surrounding floodplains and waterways are also home to a variety of plants and animals adapted to survive the extreme conditions.

Meanwhile, Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre is a place of deep cultural significance for the Arabana indigenous people, the area's traditional custodians.

The lake and its surrounds feature in Aboriginal stories and Dreamtime legends.

Lake Eyre has long fascinated explorers, scientists, and tourists alike. Its dramatic



KATI THANDA LAKE EYRE SHORELINE AND SURROUNDING TERRAIN.  
PHOTO COURTESY OF JOANNE CONSTANZO.



KATI THANDA LAKE EYRE NOVEMBER 2025. PHOTO COURTESY OF JOANNE CONSTANZO.

transformations after rain, from a blinding white salt pan to a shimmering inland sea, attracts visitors from across Australia and around the world.

The surrounding outback landscapes offer opportunities for scenic flights, photography, and an authentic 'Aussie adventure'.

Whether dry or in flood, Lake Eyre remains a captivating symbol of Australia's natural beauty and resilience, showcasing the remarkable diversity and adaptability of life in the country's arid heart.

*Heartbeat* was privileged to be invited to visit William Creek - the gateway to Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre in early September this year.

After arriving at Olympic Dam airport, the destination for employees working at Roxby Downs, the one-and-a-half-hour flight to William Creek in a Wrightsair Cessna 172, piloted by Alex West, followed.

The incredible expanse of the Australian outback landscape immediately impresses with spectacular arid terrain for as far as the eye can see. Eventually, the

William Creek community, including the hotel and airport come in to view.

After settling into my accommodation, and taking a quick look around, a little over an hour after arriving, I was preparing to go into the air again, this time to join a Wrightsair scenic flight over the famous Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre, which by then had been filling with water for months. The Cessna Caravan VH-SHW, conducting the flight, was the actual aircraft that intrepid aviator Dick Smith flew around the world five times. A 27,000 nautical mile journey across 20 countries!

Because the flight will be over water, regulations require that a life vest be worn by all passengers on the flight.

Travelling by road, the trip to the Lake takes a solid one-and-a-half hours on a heavily corrugated dirt road. Our flight has us over the Lake in less than 10 minutes.,

The enormity of this huge, inland sea is hard to comprehend. More than 180 kilometres from end-to-end, it is truly one of the wonders of the world.





ALEX PROVIDED GREAT COMMENTARY ON THE 1.5 HOUR FLIGHT TO WILLIAM CREEK.



THE RFS MEDICAL CLINIC AT WILLIAM CREEK AIRPORT.



A BIG THANK YOU TO ALEX FOR A BRILLIANT FLIGHT FROM OLYMPIC DAM TO WILLIAM CREEK.



THE ROYAL FLYING DOCTORS AIRCRAFT ARRIVES AT WILLIAM CREEK WHERE THEY HAVE A MEDICAL CLINIC ADJACENT TO THE AIRPORT APRON.



LOCAL YANKUNTJATJARA ELDER BOBBY HUNTER WHO WAS 18 WHEN, IN 1974, LAKE EYRE FILLED TO CAPACITY.

The combination of arid terrain and this vast body of water couldn't more contrasting.

Back on terra firmer again, it's time to head to the William Creek Hotel to meet 69-year-old Yankuntjatjara man Bobby Hunter, who was just 18-years-old at the time of the last, huge inflow into Kati Thanda Lake Eyre, that occurred in 1974.

"I first came in the area when Anna Creek Station was owned by a group which Kidman & Co – Sidney Kidman 'The Cattle King' was the main shareholder and my father and mother were 'horse people' bloke that managed the place at the time was called Dick Nunn," Bobby said.

"In the holidays, they used to take all me and a other lot of kids out to the stock camp and you'd learn how to tail cattle and later in life some kids would go back there to work when they left school and I was one of those kids.

"In the night time you'd train and ride horses, gather the cows in - it was hard work- but a lot of fun and I learnt a lot."

I asked Bobby about Anna Creek station,

which at its peak was the biggest in the world.

It's a massive place. It was bigger in the 60s though. They had another station hooked onto it because those three places were Anna Creek, Peak and Stewart Creek," he said.

"They were all 4,000 square miles in size – just huge."

I asked Bobby when was the last time he saw inflows into the lake like what we are witnessing now?

"1974 was the biggest that anybody had seen in my time," he said.

"I think it was the biggest in white man's history, but there were big floods in early 1938 and 1956 which were quite big.

"1974 came along, I was only 18. It had rained a lot in 1973 and because of that rain, the southwestern river system in Queensland was awash with water - the water holes, rivers and creeks were all full - there was a lot of water.

"And it continued to rain. It seemed to rain every couple of weeks from about the Australia Day weekend onwards.

"I went over to place in southwest

Queensland and it rained like hell there. Then we had to come back for a wedding at Anna Creek. And it was raining every couple of weeks and there were a lot of people planning on coming out here for the wedding and the roads were starting to become impassable.

"There were three bus loads people on their way here and they got stranded on the flooded road. In the end, they just got there an hour before the wedding started and they were stranded here for three or four days.

"The rain just kept coming and that was unusual out here - it's normally as dry as can be.

And so '74 came along and it did the same thing and the big flood ensued and the lake filled to capacity and flooded across the plains."

William Creek is situated on the Oodnadatta track 203 kilometres from Oodnadatta itself and the opal mining town of Coober Pedy is 166 k's up the road. Bobby told me about the railway line that used to pass through the settlement- it was the original Ghan train.





THE COOPER CREEK FLOWS INTO THE LAKE.



THE VOLUME OF WATER THAT HAS FILLED THE LAKE IS EXTRAORDINARY AND AVERAGES 6.5 METERS IN DEPTH.



4WDS APLENTY COME IN AND OUT OF THE WILLIAM CREEK CAMPING AREA EVERY DAY.



GHOST BAT 2025 DEFENCE.



RAAF DRONE.



WILLIAM CREEK IS LOCATED 250KM FROM THE WOOMERA ROCKET RANGE WHERE TESTING OF NEW WEAPONS WAS CARRIED OUT IN THE 1960S AND 70S.



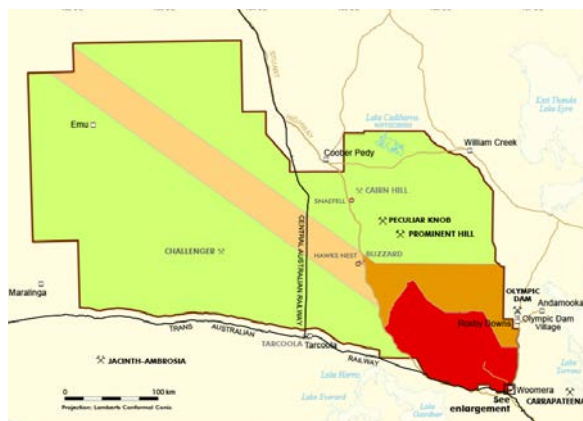
WOOMERA.



ANOTHER PIECE OF ROCKET FROM WOOMERA'S TEST FLIGHTS.



A PLAQUE DETAILS SOME OF THE HISTORY OF THE TEST FLIGHTS THAT TOOK PLACE AT WOOMERA AS FAR BACK AS THE EARLY 1950S.



WOOMERA ROCKET RANGE PROXIMITY TO WILLIAM CREEK MAP.

"There was a train line here once. It first got here in about 1887 and the rail head was up the road about 15 or 20 kilometres from here," he explained.

"Eventually, the line was extended and made its way up towards Oodnadatta, but it took quite a few years to get to there."

William Creek isn't just famous for its near proximity to Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre, it's also close to the Woomera Rocket range, which becomes apparent as you stroll around the grounds adjacent to the pub, where you'll see some old rockets that were fired from the range years ago.

The day I flew into William Creek from Adelaide, the airspace around the Woomera Rocket range was closed to air traffic, while a new drone, known as the 'Ghost Bat' was being tested by Defence Australia.

The Ghost Bat uncrewed aircraft is designed to fly as a partner with crewed Royal Australian Air Force platforms, serving as a pathfinder for integrating autonomous systems and artificial intelligence to form advanced human-machine teams."

THE Woomera Prohibited Area in outback South Australia became a shared

area with Aboriginal traditional owners, mining interests and pastoralists, who was allocated bomb shelters from the late 1950s.

With origins in 1947, the Woomera Prohibited Area, about the size of England, in South Australia's outback desert, remained in the 21st Century the largest land-based test range in the Western world with its number of rocket launches second only to NASAs at Cape Canaveral in Florida, United States of America.

On day two of my visit to William Creek, I was delighted to meet with former ABC





THE PUB WAS DOING A ROARING TRADE IN SEPTEMBER WITH MANY TRAVELLERS COMING OUT TO SEE THE INFLOWS INTO THE LAKE.



THE EXTERIOR OF THE WILLIAM CREEK HOTEL



THE WILLIAM CREEK COMMUNITY COMES OUT AT NIGHT.



RFS NURSES ENJOYING SOME RELAXATION IN THE BAR AT THE WILLIAM CREEK HOTEL.



BOBBY HUNTER SHARES A LAUGH WITH A 'BUSHY' CHARACTER IN THE PUB.



A COUPLE OF THE PATRONS ENJOYING A COLD BEER IN THE FRONT BAR OF THE WILLIAM CREEK HOTEL.



A YOUNG COUPLE FROM THE CITY VISITING THE REGION FOR A LOOK AT THE KATI THANDA-LAKE EYRE'S HUGE INFLOW.



VISITORS TO WILLIAM CREEK ENJOYING LUNCH AT THE HOTEL.



IRISH EYES ARE SMILING, KEVIN IS ONE OF THE MANY OVERSEAS WORKERS AT WILLIAM CREEK.



ROBYN IS ONE OF THE LOVELY STAFF WHO WORK IN THE BAR AND RESTAURANT AT THE PUB.



ONE OF WILLIAM CREEK HOTEL'S FRIENDLY STAFF - MOST OF WHOM ARE OVERSEAS TRAVELLERS ON WORKING VISAS.

TV Back Roads host, Heather Ewart, who was making a return trip to the region. Heather and two other lady friends had driven from Adelaide to William Creek to see the inland sea. I spoke to Heather about her visit and she recalled the last time she was in William Creek filming Back Roads. "It's wonderful to be back in William Creek," she said. "I was last here in 2017, with the ABC Back Roads camera crew. We had an absolute ball! Not too much has changed, except it does seem a lot busier.

"I guess that's with the water in Lake Eyre." Heather explained one of the other reasons why she and her friends had made the trip to the outback "This is a bit of a pilgrimage for us. It's a very special journey," she said. "Maria Lockyer is an old friend and we have a shared mutual friend, Sandy Leach, with us whose husband also was once an ABC reporter and foreign correspondent. And so, we're doing a girl's road trip together. It all came up, Maria had once said she never ever wanted to come out here to Lake Eyre after what happened,

but it all came up when we were at a wake following the funeral of an ABC colleague in Sydney recently. And I said, 'Look, I'm going to go back out there because I really want to see the lake with water in it. What do you reckon? Do you want to come?' "And low and behold, she said yes. And we've been having a really wonderful and really special time and I hope that it's quite healing for her." As you will shortly learn, Maria Lockyer is the widow of former ABC journalist and author Paul Lockyer, who along with two other colleagues, died in a helicopter crash near Lake Eyre in 2011.





MARIA LOCKYER WITH FRIEND AND FORMER ABC HOST OF BACK ROADS HEATHER EWART WITH A COPY OF HEARTBEAT.



THE ABC CREW AT LAKE EYRE BEFORE THEIR FATEFUL CRASH.



THE SITE OF THE ABC HELICOPTER CRASH IN AUGUST 2011.



THE 'A' TEAM FINISHED THEIR GAME OF POOL AND THEN POSED FOR A PHOTO FOR HEARTBEAT.



THE PUB'S DINING ROOM IS FULL OF ALL MANNER OF HISTORICAL MEMORABILIA.



MOOO!



MORE PIECES OF ECLECTIC COLLECTIBLES.

Heather spoke to me about her time as the host of Back Roads and her passion for the bush.

"I have a very deep passion for regional Australia. I grew up on a sheep and wheat farm in country Victoria and I feel like it becomes part of your soul," she said.

"The country really never leaves you. And even though I became a political reporter and had foreign correspondence postings with the ABC, I think you never ever forget your roots.

"It's been a great joy to me to be able to shine a light on all the marvellous rural and regional Australians out there who are doing really amazing things and especially places like this on the Oodnadatta track.

"One of the great things I gained from doing Back Roads, is all the many friends that I've made along the way. And even

coming back here, Bobby Hunter, who grew up around here and I think we featured in our special two-part series on the Inverter Track, has come back to visit us and take us around. And Trevor Wright, who owns the pub here and the many planes, is making a big effort to look after us."

Something not people would know, is that Heather is married to former ABC journalist and presenter, Barry Cassidy who hosted *Insiders* for almost two decades.

### THE TRAGIC EVENT THAT SHOCKED THE WILLIAM CREEK'S COMMUNITY

On August 18, 2011, ABC journalist Paul Lockyer, cameraman John Bean and pilot Gary Ticehurst died when their helicopter

crashed on a dark night near Lake Eyre.

The ABC crew had taken off from an island in the Cooper Creek inlet, about 145 kilometres north of Marree, for a 30-minute flight to a station for a planned overnight stay.

Two years after the accident, an air-safety investigation found that the pilot became disoriented shortly after take-off, resulting in the crash.

Paul Lockyer's widow, Maria Lockyer, spoke to *Heartbeat* about her visit to William Creek and the tragic event that killed her husband.

"We've just come out to have a look at Lake Eyre flowing again after 14 years, (in 2011, the Lake received some good inflows but not on the scale of the current event) which coincides with anniversary of Paul's, John Bean the pilot and Gary Ticehurst the cameraman's deaths," Maria said.





WRIGHTS AIR AND WILLIAM CREEK HOTEL  
OWNER TREVOR WRIGHT.



BOBBY HUNTER CHATS WITH FRIEND BRENDAN EBLEN.



A MILLION MILES FROM NOWHERE.



THE OLD GHAN RAILWAY.



THE ROAD SIGN ON THE OODNADATTA.



OLD GHAN RAIL TRACK. IMAGE  
COURTESY OF LESBARD.



OLD GHAN LOCOMOTIVE. PHOTO RAILWAY ADVENTURES.



A VISITING ADVENTURE MOTORCYCLIST GETS SOME  
ADVICE FROM BOBBY HUNTER ABOUT THE REGION.

I asked Maria about what had happened on that fateful day.

"They were filming the final in a trilogy of Lake Eyre and they'd already done two documentaries on it and then this was to be like the grand finale," she explained. I'd said to Paul, 'Why are you going out there a third time'? And he said, "It will be the grand finale - all the water's flowing." But unfortunately, the helicopter crashed. "They'd been to visit a man named Rex Ellis the night before, and a group that were camping with Rex, said they saw this plume of smoke about 10 minutes after they'd taken off and realised something had happened.

"A group including Rex and another two or three from the party, all trekked out to discover the crash site. I got a phone call in Sydney informing me of the accident and so it was all very traumatic and

initially they didn't know what the exact story was, but then gradually the news sort filtered through during the night and then by morning it was confirmed.

The next morning Maria, Heather and Sandy were going to take a flight over the lake and pilot Trevor Wright, planned to fly over the exact location of the crash site, something Maria was feeling apprehensive about.

"Obviously it's going to be a little bittersweet, but then I think that it probably will give me a better understanding of his Lake Eyre book and photos by actually seeing it in person. Paul spoke so much about William Creek.

"I'm looking forward to it in one way and my sons Jamie and Nick were both in agreement and thought it was a wonderful idea. It's been very difficult for them as well.

He will always be in our hearts and always with us and so I know he will be with me on this journey."

Following my interview with Maria, I walked over to the airport to meet Wrightsair owner, outback pilot Trevor Wright, who had just flown in from Horsham.

Trevor has been operating scenic flights over Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre since the early 2000s, and as I discovered, he also owns the local pub, touted to be one of the world's most remotely located watering hole.

Landing almost immediately behind Trevor's plane, was a Royal Flying Doctors' Beechcraft King Air, piloted by an all-female crew, flying an all-female team of medical clinicians into William Creek, to work at the RFS clinic located at the airport.





HEARTBEAT WISHES TO THANK WRIGHTSAIR OWNER TREVOR WRIGHT AND HIS TEAM FOR THEIR WONDERFUL HOSPITALITY.



THE CESSNA WHICH TAKES JOHN DOOLEY BACK TO OLYMPIC DAM AIRPORT.



ARABANA COUNTRY.



THE VIEW FROM THE AIRCRAFT ENROUTE TO OLYMPIC DAM AIRPORT.



ARABANA WOMAN.

Before heading back to the pub, I took the opportunity to have a chat to Trevor in a hangar out of the wind, which as I learnt, is unrelenting in the afternoons out here.

I asked Trevor how he happened to be living and working in William Creek.

"I'm originally from Boort in northern Victoria. I was brought up there and I was interested in aeroplanes in the my early 20's and started off with a home built one and then ended up buying a Cessna-a manufactured aircraft," Trevor said.

"And I decided to get the charter licences at the same time. I was working in the petrochemical oil industry and one day I was flying up to Alice Springs one day from northern Victoria and came over the top of William Creek.

I looked down and I saw these galvanised tin buildings. And I thought, 'jeez, I must call in on the way back because who would be eccentric enough to live out in the middle of the largest cattle station in the world in 50-degree heat, in the middle of nowhere, with 200 kilometres on dirt roads to the nearest town'?

"I dropped in on the way back and went into the hotel and the publican at the time, was a bloke called Peter Moore. He talked me into setting up a small flight business to conduct scenic flights over Lake Eyre." Trevor said that proved to be a fledgling business that didn't 'take-off' for some time. "We employed a young pilot and the business basically maintained the status quo for three or four years," he said.

"Peter and his wife then decided they'd take their four children back to Victoria so they could get a proper education rather than school of the air. That's when we took over the Hotel.

"I think the biggest achievement from my own personal point of view, is that over the last 12 years, I've given 400 young commercial pilots their first job in the industry.

It's such a hard industry to crack into and it's so expensive.

Today, we're running 'Cessna Caravans' out here, which are turboprops and they hold 13 passengers and we also fly the three-seater Cessna 162 and 172 aircraft. Trevor said they were currently enjoying a huge influx of visitors who have come out to see this rare event.

"I think the benefits of seeing the wide, open space out here, is an environmental privilege," he said.

"To be able to see where the water is draining into this huge lake which is 180km long and 50km wide – representing one sixth of the Australian continent is just spectacular.

If you do have the chance to come out here to see it - I, think it will be extremely worthwhile."

It's now beer o'clock at the William Creek Hotel, but the day's work is done yet, I am going to meet some of the visitors to have a chat and I also had a chance to speak to some of the RFS nurses who had flown into William Creek earlier for the video I am going to produce.

The hotel's dining room is packed to capacity every night as people enjoy the superb pub food.

Despite having just flown in to William Creek after a more than four-hour flight from Horsham, via Renmark for a quick refuel, Trevor is on the floor in the dining room serving, clearing plates and chatting to the patrons.

Bobby Hunter regaled the patrons with tales of his adventures in William Creek and Ann Creek Station – it was a great night.

Sadly, after two and a half days at William Creek, I had to say goodbye.

Up bright and early to climb aboard the Wrightsair 7am flight back to Olympic Dam to connect with the Alliance Airlines flight to Adelaide at 8.50am, I am driven to the airport by Bobby Hunter.

The flight takes me over some more amazing arid terrain and from our altitude of 2500 feet, it's possible to see some of the cattle grazing on the massive Anna Creek Station, which at its original size, was more than 45,000 square kilometres – That's bigger than Tasmania and Wales.

The sheer vastness of this amazing continent, the sixth largest country in the world, is simple something that has to be seen to be appreciated.

#### WATCH THE DOCUMENTARY

Visit: [www.mbphfoundation.org.au](http://www.mbphfoundation.org.au) to watch Heartbeat's video documentary on Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre & William Creek.



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