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REGISTERED
NURSE CAITLIN
PITT HAS
CLOCKED UP
15 YEARS OF
SERVICE.

INSIDE

- **LEE FINDS HER PLACE:** A doctor's desire to support Mildura's healthcare needs.
- **CREATIVE SUNRAYZIA OUTDOORS:** A weekend workshop of discovery and inner reflection.
- **MICHELE'S BRAVE FIGHT:** The story of a 12-year-old boy's battle with a rare tumour.

EDITION

12

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MILDURA
BASE PUBLIC
HOSPITAL
FOUNDATION

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THE HEART-WARMING STORY OF A
12-YEAR-OLD BOY'S BATTLE WITH A RARE
TUMOUR. **STORY: PAGE 16.**



MERBEIN BORN AND BRED AYDAN
RUSSELL IS A CAGE FIGHTING CHAMPION.
STORY: PAGE 38.



A WEEKEND WORKSHOP OF DISCOVERY
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THE MUCH ANTICIPATED ARRIVAL OF THE
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From our Foundation Chairman >>

It has been a busy and productive start to the year for the Mildura Base Public Hospital Foundation, with a number of exciting initiatives underway as we continue to focus on projects that strengthen and enhance our health service.

One of our most significant achievements has been the launch of our \$3.5 million multi-purpose screening truck. In just a few short months, it has already begun to make a meaningful impact. Recently, the truck was used to conduct skin checks for Mildura Rural City Council's outdoor staff, with 75 per cent of those screened referred for further investigation. We know that early detection of skin cancer is critical to successful outcomes, and this new capability will play a vital role in improving community health moving forward.

Our investment in cardiac services is also delivering outstanding results. The funding provided by the Foundation to

purchase cardiac equipment and establish a public cardiac service is ensuring that more people can access vital care locally and at no cost. The new cardiac unit is now fully operational, and we remain committed to supporting this important initiative into the future.

We are equally encouraged by the progress of the clinical trials and research unit, to which we contributed more than \$200,000. This program is gaining strong momentum, with several new trials now underway. We look forward to seeing this area continue to grow and deliver meaningful benefits for our region in the years ahead.

Our recent K C Society Lunch was once again a tremendous success, with more than 100 attendees enjoying a wonderful event catered by 400 Gradi. The day raised just over \$80,000 in support of the K C Society scholarships, which assist local students pursuing university degrees in medical-related fields. To date, we have provided more than \$35,000 to support these students, and we are especially proud to continue honouring the legacy of the late Dr Kevin Chambers.

I extend my thanks to all sponsors who supported this event,

as well as to the Chambers family for travelling from Sydney to join us and help mark the occasion.

Looking ahead, we are excited to host our Paddock Club marquee at the Mildura Cup on July 17, followed by our Halloween-themed Foundation Ball at the Grand Ballroom on October 31. These events are important opportunities for our community to come together and support the work of the Foundation.

Finally, I would like to thank all our sponsors, donors and supporters whose ongoing generosity makes this work possible. Your contribution continues to make a tangible difference in the health and wellbeing of our community.



Ross Lake
Chairman

INSIDE

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MBPH COOK
MILAN
KATTEL WITH
MBPH FOOD
SERVICES
MANAGER
SARAH LAY.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT AS MENU AND KITCHEN GET A REVAMP

« When you're talking hospitals it is rare that the kitchen rates a mention. That's despite the vital role the daily preparation of good food plays in the health of patients... »

WORDS
GRANT MAYNARD

REGULAR readers may recall that in Edition No. 9 we visited the MBPH kitchen to explore the innovative Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) meal ordering program.

Under this ordering system, any patient, family member, or clinical staff member can potentially order a patient's food from their mobile device by scanning a QR code at the patient's bedside.

In a nutshell this means patients, their family members or hospital staff can see a raft of menu options, including photographs of the food. Patients are also able to modify ingredients to suit their preferences.

"It's about real patient choice," MBPH Food Services Manager, Sarah Lay, told *Heartbeat* at the time.

"For a very long time, food services have been constricted. We've followed a range of instructions from dieticians and clinicians to meet nutritional guidelines and allergen controls," Ms Lay said.

"It's a highly governed area and a difficult one to change to because this is what we

have done for more than 20 years.

"However, the way we've structured the new inpatient menu allows patients to have options and full input into what they eat. The former system didn't allow for the same degree of alternatives."

In the same story we spoke to Mildura celebrity cook Stefano de Pieri who had been working with the kitchen team at MBPH to establish the new menu.

"I think that there was an acknowledgement at management level that the menu was more than 20-years-old and had been repetitious," he said.

"Now it's like we have reset the clock, going back to zero and starting again.

"It's not like we are destroying the past because, of course, all those mandatory requirements set down by the Department of Health are still there. It's just resetting the scene, simplifying, ensuring that the food is fresh and simple."

With an emphasis on fresh produce, the new menu will focus on sourcing the freshest available from the region and expanding

relationships with local growers and suppliers.

Health data shows there is a strong correlation between a patient's intake of fresh, highly nutritious food and their clinical outcomes. It is something the hospital's management is acutely aware of.

In this edition of *Heartbeat* we're revisiting the kitchen to talk to Sarah again, this time about how the kitchen has recently undergone "a major and much-needed upgrade" while also getting an update on the BYOD program.

The kitchen floor was a significant component of the recent upgrade works. It is the first time any of the kitchen floor has been replaced since the hospital opened at the turn of the century, Sarah explained.

Focussing on about two-thirds of the kitchen floor, the works focused on high use production and washing areas.

"These are the busiest parts of our operations, so improving them has made a real difference. It has created a safer, more practical environment for staff and helps to support better overall services for patients," Sarah said.

"What stands out most about this project is that it was delivered without disrupting daily operations."

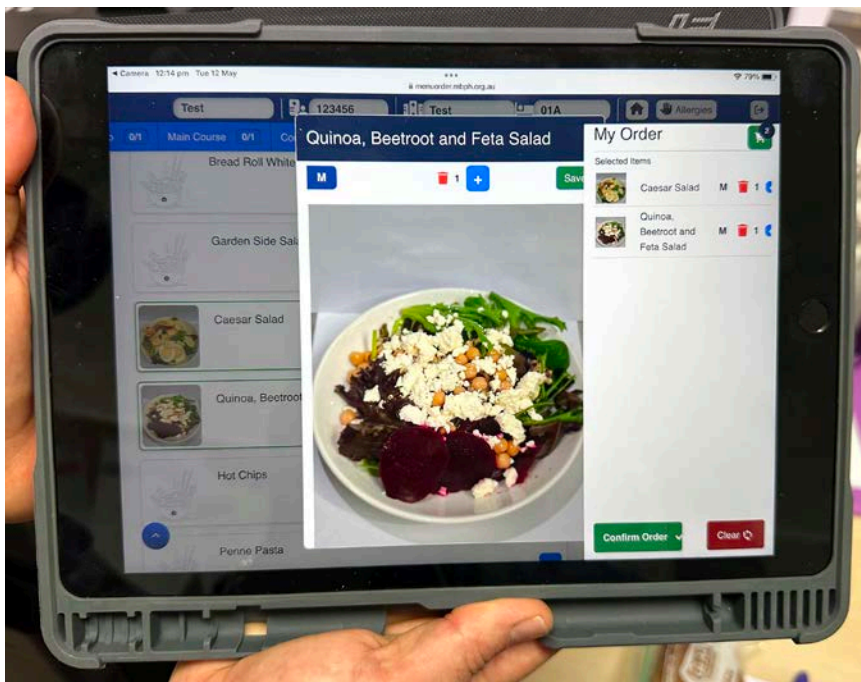
This, Sarah says, took careful planning and strong teamwork.

"The kitchen team managed to keep things running smoothly throughout. This included temporarily scaling back the menu and repositioning key equipment into unaffected areas so that meal production could continue safely and efficiently," she said.

Sarah also explained that to support meal continuity during the works, short-term measures such as disposable cutlery and crockery were introduced.

"Even so, the focus remained firmly on maintaining service standards, and patients continued to receive timely, good-quality meals," she said.

"The project was completed on



MBPH cook Daniel Mikec serving a meal to order.

schedule, a result that reflects the team's flexibility, coordination and commitment, especially during an intense heatwave, which added extra pressure to day to day operations."

Turning to the fledgling Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) meal ordering system, Sarah said it represented "another significant step forward in patient-centred care".

Launched on April 21 and being rolled out in stages - starting with Ward 5 and Midwifery - Sarah says BYOD is "changing how patients engage with food services".

"With their own device, patients can view menus, place meal orders at a time that suits them, and tailor choices to their preferences," she told *Heartbeat*.

"This puts greater control directly in their hands and improves the overall dining experience.

"Importantly, BYOD also gives patients the ability to rate meals and service in real time. This immediate feedback goes straight back to the production team, creating a live understanding of what is working well and what can be improved.

"It is a powerful tool for continuous improvement, helping refine menus, enhance service delivery and strengthen kitchen practices based on genuine patient experience rather than delayed feedback cycles.

"Together, these improvements reflect a forward-thinking approach where innovation, adaptability and patient choice come together to enhance hospital dining."



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HIKVISION



The Mallee's Living History's team at work on Book 8 and developing ideas for the October forum.

A STORY WELL WORTH SHARING



MALLEE'S LIVING HISTORIES WILL SOON SHARE ITS OWN STORY WITH INTERESTED COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA.

WORDS

TRACEY FORBES

AS Project Coordinator for Mallee's Living Histories, I welcome inquiries from individuals and groups wanting to replicate the 'model' of what has evolved in to a wonderful literary reflection of the richness of so many Mallee resident's lives.

The Mallee's Living Histories Facebook page and our website, clearly indicate a need and a desire for the model to be adopted and we are thrilled to be able to assist!

With the support of Mildura Rural City Council, our group is planning a forum which everyone is welcome to attend, either in person or via our livestream telecast.

The forum is scheduled for Saturday, October 3, with full details to be announced in coming weeks.

Keynote speakers include Peter Kenyon OAM from the Bank of Ideas; Dr Sean McDermott, Director of the John Richards Centre for Rural Ageing and renowned local author, Phil Kettle.

Whether attending in person or via live-stream, participants will be provided with all the resources needed to establish their own project.

Hopefully this information can be adapted to the needs of other communities in Victoria and other states.



Vernon Knight and Tracey Forbes have been steering the Mallee's Living Histories ship.

Now in its eighth year, Mallee's Living Histories has already published more than one hundred stories.

These stories not only pay tribute to an older generation, they also help others understand the importance of their contribution to the places where we live.

The group is hoping that the forum will attract those wanting to capture the stories of their parents or grandparents.

In some respects, there is an urgency attached to the gathering of stories. Tomorrow is often too late and how often have we said: "I wish I'd asked about this or that, when I had the chance".

Anyone wanting to register their interest early, can do so via the website www.malleelivinghistories.com.

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“I WANT TO GIVE BACK”

- DOCTOR LEE PETERSON FINDS HER PLACE IN MILDURA

WORDS

STEPHANIE STORER

DR LEE PETERSON FINDS HER PLACE IN MILDURA

GROWING up rurally in Launching Place, Dr Liela (Lee) Peterson always felt the pull towards a healthcare career.

“I wanted to give back to a small community, and I think I’m the kind of person who would thrive in a place where I can get to know my patients and their families,” Lee said.

Commencing her internship at Mildura Base Public Hospital this year, brings Lee closer to that calling.

It’s Lee’s second year in Mildura, having first come to the region as a final-year Monash medical student in 2025. Being closer to family in the west and the reputation of Monash Rural Health Mildura were strong drawcards.

She was also looking to live and work alongside her partner, a fellow doctor, and the pair chose Mildura to maximise their chances of being placed together. It was a decision Lee says “worked out perfectly”. A supportive environment, practical learning and high-quality teaching were named by Lee as highlights.

“The Aboriginal health teaching in Mildura is the best I could hope for. I think that Monash Rural Health Mildura is a leading

site for creating culturally safe students and doctors,” Lee said.

Having spent a year on placement at Mildura Base Hospital as a student and benefiting from the collaborative hospital teams and hands-on opportunities, remaining in Mildura for her internship was an easy decision.

It also offered unique elective rotations in psychiatry, anaesthetics and paediatrics not found in many other Victorian internships. The options in Mildura for rural generalist and psychiatry training were both appealing. Importantly, it’s the people and sense of community that kept Lee here.

“I have grown quite attached to Mildura and have a desire to do what I can to support Mildura’s healthcare needs,” Lee added.

Lee will spend the year completing five rotations, including emergency medicine, general medicine and general surgery. In addition to her role as an intern, Liela is secretary of the newly formed Mildura Junior Medical Officers (JMO) Society. A key factor behind the Society’s formation is the need to support junior doctors, particularly those new to the region.

“We’re keen to boost morale and make the junior doctor

experience as positive as possible, and hopefully encourage people to stick around in Sunraysia for longer,” Lee explained.

“A big focus for us is creating a friendly, inclusive environment where people feel supported both at work and outside of it. We will also act as a voice for JMOs, giving them a way to share feedback and be represented in educational and workplace discussions, while helping build a positive workplace culture and ultimately supporting good patient care.”

Lee is also supporting the next generation of rural doctors, providing bedside teaching to current Monash medical students on placement at the hospital. While she plans on spending another year in the hospital building her experience, a career as a rural generalist - keenly needed in communities like Mildura - is firmly in her sights.

“I am very fond of the idea of being a jack-of-all-trades family doctor, and have a dream of being able to care for multiple generations of family members,” Lee said with obvious passion. “I feel that completing advanced training in either Mental Health or Palliative Care would suit me and the needs of Sunraysia. We’ll see what happens in the next few years!”



Dr Lee Petersen takes a break from the wards at Mildura Base Public Hospital.



Lee with fellow Monash medical students at the Welcome to Mildura boat cruise in 2025.



Lee as a final year Monash medical student leading a Med-Toring session with Monash students.

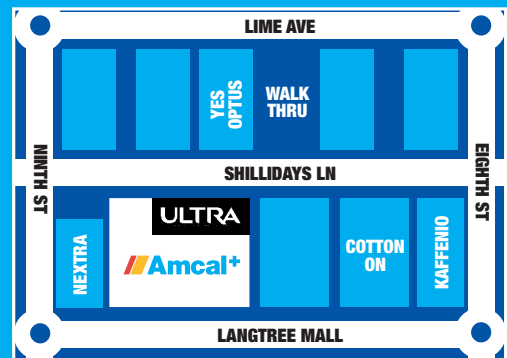
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AT FIRST GLANCE
CABARITA'S
MICHELE DICHIERA
LOOKS LIKE ANY
OTHER 12-YEAR-OLD.



MICHELE'S READY FOR FIGHT OF LIFETIME

« At first glance,
Cabarita's Michele
Dichiera looks like any
other 12-year-old... »

WORDS
VINNIE RODI

A YEAR 7 student at Merbein P-10 College, Michele Dichiera loves his sport – especially soccer, playing video games and spending time with his family.

Look closer, and you soon see that Michele, has unfortunately, had to endure more in his young life than most would in a lifetime.

It's a battle that is set to ramp up at an emotional and potential financial cost to his family over the coming weeks and months.

Michele was born with a giant cell angioblastoma in his right foot – an extremely rare, aggressive tumour that occurs in the soft tissue of children.

One of only 20 known cases worldwide, patients often present with a growing, painful mass, and while the tumours are often low-grade and malignant, which is the case with Michele, they can cause significant damage to the surrounding tissue.

“We've been assured that it won't metastasize or become cancerous, however it is extremely evasive, and has grown through his foot,” Michele's mum Raschelle said.

Michele is currently unable to bear any weight on his foot and requires a wheelchair to attend school.



The Dichiera family Rob, Romeo, Francesca, Michele and Raschelle.

All current treatments are proving ineffective, leaving his specialists in Melbourne with two options – a trial medication called ‘Cabozantinib’ – an oral tyrosine kinase inhibitor which they hope will heal the tumour, or, as a final resort, amputate Michele's foot.

While an approved, subsidised medication in Australia for other specific, advanced cancers under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), Cabozantinib is not currently available to treat giant cell angioblastom under the pbs.

As a result, the Dichiera's are facing monthly bills of approximately \$10,000 to utilise the drug in a last-ditch attempt to save Michele's foot.

“This latest flare up has been present for around 15 months, and it's just not healing, and we've been told it won't heal without this treatment,” Raschelle said.

“We have no idea how long Michele will have to be on the drug before we see any sort of result.

“The Royal Children's Hospital is trying to secure funding to access the medication on our behalf, while also applying to the government for approval,

“The Mildura Base Public Hospital Foundation has supported us with a \$10,000 grant, which will be an enormous help going forward, while Wings for Kids have also donated \$2000.”

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Michele's parents said his angioblastoma first presented as a bruise on August 18, 2013 – mere days after they brought him home from the hospital.

“Originally everyone thought it was a birthmark,” Raschelle explained. “It’s just got worse, and we eventually ended up at the Royal Children’s in Melbourne who biopsied it, which came back inconclusive.

“Over time it ulcerated down to his tendons and we eventually got a diagnosis of what it was following some genetic testing and numerous hospital visits and surgeries to clean the wound.”

Once diagnosed, Michele initially responded well to treatment, which included immuno-suppressants and surgeries to clear up the tumour, and allow the ulceration to heal.

It was a four-year journey filled with infections, long-term antibiotics, failed skin grafts, pain and mental anguish for Michele and his family.

“He was good for about five years and we thought we’d got on top of it – and then in January 2023 he developed a second ulcer,” Raschelle said.

“He had that wound for 10 months, and then we went through a cycle where it would heal for a bit and then open back up.

“Then this current ulcer occurred in February 2025 and it’s just been a rollercoaster, it’s all very scary – and all our hopes are on this drug.

“We’ve been advised that while this medication won’t be a miracle cure, if it can get the ulceration healed then that’s the best outcome.

“Our doctors have indicated that there are other medications and even chemo that they might be forced to try should the Cabozantinib prove ineffective, while there’s every chance that radical surgery will be required.”

Michele’s father, Robert, is a member of the Sunraysia Residential Services Inc. (SRS) family as part of the maintenance team – a role he’s had for the past 12 months.



The Boxing Cartel members Luke Hutchinson and Nick Wakefield with Michele Dichiera.

“SRS has been amazing for me and my family while dealing with this, and when they heard what Michele was going through and what we were facing, the first thing they asked was ‘how can we help?’” he said.

“We’re grateful for the support, and any help from the community to help Michele through this.”

The family is also in need of support to help Michele easily access school, with SRS to support advocacy efforts to get him the help and support he needs.

In late May, the much anticipated news the Dichiera’s were waiting for came. Michele had been approved to use Cabozantinib to treat his condition.

His specialists are now committed to trialing the medication for a six-month period to determine its effectiveness. They’re working with the Royal Children’s Hospital to potentially fund the first three months of treatment, with a hope to implement a cost-sharing arrangement from that point onwards. Should the medication work as intended, Michele could be on the medication for anywhere between two to three years to clear up the tumour.

COMMUNITY RALLIES TO THE CAUSE

The 2026, Mildura Riverfront Marathon Festival, saw SRS Active Support Leader, Garry Chahal, lacing up his runners to hit the course on Sunday, June 7, over the King’s Birthday long weekend, running not just for personal achievement, but for something far bigger.

And then on Saturday, June 20, members and coaches from the ‘Boxing Cartel’, traded their boxing gloves for running shoes, committing to a 24-hour continuous run at the Mildura Sporting Precinct to raise vital funds for Michele.

With every step taken over 24 hours, the Boxing Cartel hopes to bring Michele one step closer to the treatment he needs to potentially save his foot.

Michele’s mum, Raschelle, said the family had been “blown away” by the support already shown for Michele.

“It’s been overwhelming and amazing all at once,” she said. “No one likes asking for help, and we just feel very blessed by the support we’ve received and the well-wishes.

“We can’t thank SRS, the Boxing Cartel and everyone who has reached out or donated, enough for their support.”

SRS has so far raised more than \$20,000 to assist Michele and his family, with donations coming in from right across the country.

Michele’s local soccer club, Mildura City, C.H.A.I.L.L.S., local business Module Dezines, family members and SuniKids Dream have also offered support, hosting their own fund-raisers to support the family.

To learn more about Michele’s journey, visit www.srsinc.com.au/micheles-ready-for-fight-of-lifetime.

To donate and support the cause, visit <https://tr.ee/Michele>

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FLYING HIGH IN MILDURA

AT THE END OF MARCH THIS YEAR, MILDURA AIRPORT HOSTED A GROUP OF PILOTS AND THEIR AIRCRAFT FOR A WEEKEND TRAINING WORKSHOP AIMING TO UPSKILL THE KEEN FLIERS...

WORDS

GRANT MAYNARD

FLYING HIGH IN MILDURA

In all, more than 20 aircraft and 40 pilots and their partners from across Australia took part in an annual Australian Piper Aircraft Society skills update event, amongst them local pilots and aircraft including Mildura Aero Club president, David Seddon, and his Piper Arrow 3.

David told *Heartbeat* pilots, both male and female, had flown into Mildura from all over, many of them also bringing their flying partners.

“From as far afield as Tasmania and Queensland as well as South Australia,” he said.

“We come together for what we call a PPP, basically a pilot proficiency course. Those taking part learn about their planes, flight safety and what to do in emergencies... that sort of thing.”

Looking out onto the Mildura Airport apron at the rows of planes it appears a lot of society members are ensuring older aircraft from the 1970s, 80s and 90s are still flying.

There are few newer ones amongst members, David points out, but reckons it is good to see so many planes having a long life.

“As long as they are well maintained,” he says likening the older planes’ technology level to that of a Victa lawnmower.

A quick bit of research reveals that historically, Piper aircraft

have primarily been powered by horizontally opposed, air-cooled piston engines from manufacturers like Lycoming, Continental and Franklin.

Over its 85+ year history, Piper has evolved from using small 40-horsepower engines in the iconic J-3 Cub to utilising powerful turboprops and high-performance piston engines in their modern M-Class line.

Turning to the fly-in activities David explained that a riverboat dinner cruise catch-up would be the pre-cursor to workshop courses for both pilots and passengers.

“We do two courses,” he explained. “One is for the pilot. The other is non-pilots who also go flying regularly. Flying partners we call them.”

“The partners’ course is important in the case of an emergency,” he said.

“So, it’s a handy thing for them to learn basic skills like the radio.

“The partner might even have to land the plane in an extreme case.”

David was full of praise for Mildura Airport management and facilities.

“It’s a great airport now and we fit in well. We’ve got great friends over there (pointing to the airport administrative building) and we help each other out when we can. That is important.”

Another local taking part in the Society’s weekend activities was Andrew Kilroy, who moved to our region 13 years ago for work.

“I’ve been a pilot since 1993, and I started out learning in a Piper Warrior,” he said.

“I am here because I’m interested in continuously upgrading my skills.

“This event to me is a great way to compound, I guess, the skills that I have and learn new skills to foster continuous aviation improvement in our region.”

Andrew flies both recreationally and as a general aviation pilot.

He owns a Jabiru, but flies Pipers when he needs to, or chooses to.

“The cost of ownership for a Jabiru is a lot less than a Piper. So, I own a Jabiru,” he explains.

“But I get to fly both, so the skills that I’ll pick up this weekend will be fundamental in improving my skills as a pilot and increasing aviation safety in the region as well.

“I’m happy to see so many people engaging with this program.

“It’s not just a fly-in, social thing. I mean there is a bit of social activity, which is great, but it’s a serious thing too. It is a serious opportunity to build skills and learn new skills and in aviation that is very important for the safety of aviation in our region.”



Mildura Airport CEO Andrew Elliott, Piper aircraft owners, Andrew Kilroy, Garry Keller and Dave Seddon.



Piper Aircraft Society Mildura member Dave Seddon with his Piper Arrow III.

Meanwhile, Mildura Airport CEO, Andrew Elliott, described the Australian Piper Aircraft Society event as “a positive boost for the airport and the broader region”.

Mr Elliott said Mildura has a strong aviation community and the airport enjoys supporting aviation events of this nature whenever possible.

“It’s a great initiative,” he said. “I wasn’t really aware of it being more than a social event until I was filled in by members on just what it was all about.

“It’s a terrific resource for aero club members and part of Mildura Airport’s objective is to support community groups. It’s really important that we support groups like the aero club and make sure that we’re giving back to community in that way.”

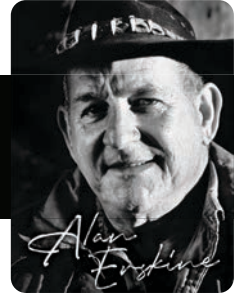


Despite its age the Piper Arrow III is still a beautiful aircraft.



The tail section of the Piper Arrow III.

ANOTHER IN THE SERIES BY AWARD-WINNING FORMER MILDURA JOURNALIST AND NEWSPAPER EDITOR ALAN ERSKINE. HE IS RE-VISITING SOME OF HIS MORE COLOURFUL CAREER STORIES FOR *HEARTBEAT*.



<< Barely in his teens, he started his business empire with an old rifle, a bicycle, some traps and a few ferrets. This is the amazing story of... >>

THE RABBIT KING OF AUSTRALIA



The rabbit king Jack McCraith.

WORDS
ALAN ERSKINE

It was planned as a simple, non-destructive move. There was certainly no evil intent...just another opportunity for pioneering Victorian grazier and sportsman Tom Austin to indulge in his passion for shooting.

Tom arranged for a small consignment of rabbits to be brought out to Australia from Europe. He met them off the sailing ship 'Lightning' on Christmas Day, 1859, and let them loose on his rural Victorian property.

The rest, as they say in the classics, is history.

Austin got his sporting wish.

In just the third year after the initial release, he was shooting thousands of rabbits. Within 10 years, Tom and fellow shooters were 'harvesting' more than 14,000 a year off his property alone.

A few decades later, rabbits had taken over the continent.

They over-ran the growing city of Melbourne and its sprawling

suburbs. They spread throughout the Wimmera and Mallee, the western district and Gippsland.

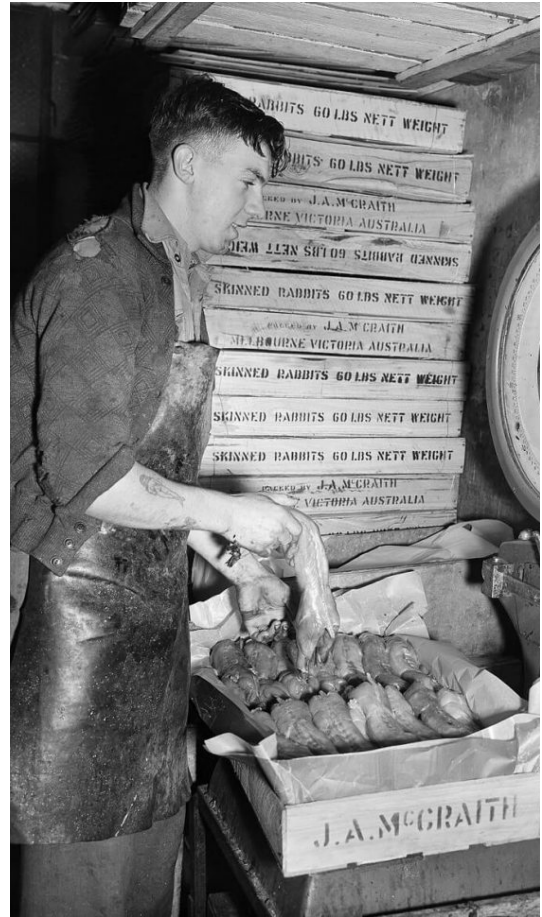
State by state they rapidly multiplied like, well, rabbits, until the only areas that were virtually rabbit-free were the harshest of deserts, and our giant lakes.

Enter the soon-to-be-crowned Rabbit King of Australia, Jack McCraith, a schoolboy growing up in the Melbourne suburb of Essendon when the rabbit plague began.

McCraith had only a basic education, but he was street smart, and knew the value of a dollar (a pound in those days).

He also didn't mind doing in tough, starting his career with an old bicycle, a .22 rifle, some rusty traps, and a few ferrets.

Young Jack started on the outskirts of Melbourne, gradually extending north, and within two decades controlled a rabbit empire that stretched the length and breadth of the nation.



The Jack McCraith success story is brilliantly told by author Catherine Wilson in her book 'The Rabbit King.'

At the height of his power, McCraith provided employment for thousands of Aussies and migrants.

He was responsible for the invention of the rabbit chiller - first tested at Morkalla, near Mildura - with an export business that reached far and wide, and a fortune in the multi-millions.

It has been estimated that McCraith exported at least 130 million rabbits in his first few decades of business.

In no time at all, Jack McCraith was spreading his empire far and wide, even as far as the Nullabor Plains. At one stage he had 250 rabbit chillers spread throughout mainland Australia.

John Andrew (Jack) McCraith's story really began when he saw his father and other grown-ups living off the rabbits that had infested Melbourne during the depression years.

Barely into his teens, young Jack

saw an opportunity to get into buying, processing, and on-selling. He killed and 'dressed' his rabbits carefully and with skill.

It wasn't long before Jack swapped the bicycle for a motorbike and sidecar, then a car, and then a truck. He worked long hours, travelled huge distances, but it paid off.

He also looked after his good shooters and trappers.

While some hard workers in other business enterprises of that era never fully paid off home mortgages in their lifetime, Jack was a home owner at 24. His wealth increased, his empire spread, and his rabbit processing factories grew bigger, and busier.

As outer Melbourne and its suburbs were 'shot out,' Jack encouraged his shooters and trappers to go further afield to find rabbits in big enough numbers to make a decent quid.

Hauling the rabbits by truck over long distances, especially in the summer heat, saw Jack suffer big losses, so he put on his 'thinking cap.'

He came up with the idea of a mobile chiller, taking the cool room to where the rabbits were the thickest, and keeping them under refrigeration for later transport. A chiller could operate anywhere there was power.

A refrigeration mechanic by the name of Dick Eckersley took on the task.

It took many months of trial and error, but the gamble paid off, and it started what turned out to be a profitable association between the pair, with more than 250 of the chillers put into production for McCraith alone.

To test the first chiller, McCraith pored over maps, looking for the harshest possible climate. He settled on Morkalla, a small settlement off the Sturt Highway between Mildura and Renmark. It was remote, inhospitable - and infested with rabbits.

The train from Red Cliffs came out to Morkalla once a week. McGaffin lined the carriages with straw for insulation, transferred the chilled rabbits from the cool room to the train, and off they went to the processing centre in Melbourne.

The chillers revolutionised the rabbit industry.

As well as using at least 250 himself, Jack sold some to competitors. After all, the rabbits of Australia were breeding faster than shooters could kill them. There seemed no end to this highly lucrative industry.

Everywhere that McCraith sent chillers, they were welcomed by the local community. Rabbits were not only a daily staple food source, they provided work for scores, sometimes hundreds, of people in each of these regions.

As well as setting up many shooting and trapping regions in person, McCraith had reliable people doing deals with shooters, trappers, truckies, and civic and business leaders. Everything was done on a handshake. McCraith never went back on a deal, was very astute in business, and was rarely conned.

If there was trouble in the field with any of his people, Jack would sort it out himself, usually with his fists. Distance was never a problem.

In down times, no-one was ever put off. McCraith found other work for them until business picked up, or until another contract was signed. He was absolutely mercenary in business dealings, and had very few close friends, but those he did have spoke of him with great fondness, and awe. He didn't talk much, but when he did, people usually listened.

Jack McCraith competed with three other big players in the rabbit business, the family-owned Smorgons, and two international giants of the industry - Borthwicks and Angliss. Jack was the biggest independent processor and exporter, but the other three were close behind.

The figures from those years give some indication of what the rabbit population was like. In the boom years, between them the Big Four would have exported around 800 million rabbits around the world, but mainly to the United Kingdom and the United States.

And don't forget home consumption - Rabbit, prepared in a multitude of ways, was a



daily food source for the then five million Australian population.

In 1948-49 alone, 50 million rabbits, worth four million pounds to Australia, were sent overseas. This was said to be worth as much as exports of mutton.

One of McCraith's winning moves in business was because he paid regular visits to his chillers, buyers and shooters every year, no matter the distance. In the Mildura region, Jack made regular trips by car to Birchip, Carwarp, Cullulleraine, Hattah, Ouyen, Morkalla, Pooncarie, Broken Hill and Menindee.

By that stage he had established 73 chillers in Victoria, 68 in South Australia and 48 in NSW. He hand-picked buyer representatives for their honesty, work ethic and loyalty, and many stayed with him for life.

And McCraith didn't just concentrate on rabbits.

He was quick to seize on other business opportunities. When he found out that the Spencer Gulf was renowned for its snapper, Jack arranged for fish supplies to be sent to his already-established stalls at the Melbourne markets.

Soon his trucks were bringing mixed loads of fish and rabbits back to Melbourne. Already very wealthy, the fish value-adding took him to a new level...but Jack was about to become even richer.

In 1953, McCraith had some of his best people move into the Karoonda region with their chillers, and over the next decade, they could barely keep up with the supply of rabbits.

Jack made sure he had good staff to

look after his best interests. Soon there were semi-trailer loads of rabbits moving between Karoonda and Melbourne. Twice a week for at least 10 years.

They averaged about 25,000 pairs, but often that soared to 50,000. The township prospered, with jobs for hundreds of people. McCraith got rich beyond his wildest dreams. It was the most profitable depot he had ever established, hence the naming of his Essendon home.

But it wasn't all smooth sailing. Keeping control of an Australia-wide empire, chillers, trucks, equipment and personnel was not without a fair share of problems. Fire, breakdowns, sabotage, poaching, walkouts, drought, flooding and theft - McCraith sorted most of it out in person.

The rabbit industry started slowing in the 1960s, but there was no stopping McCraith. He got to know the Broken Hill busman Jack Absolom, and they went into the kangaroo meat industry together.

Absolom had told friends how they met. McCraith had phoned, wanting to do business, but Absolom was short of money, and passed this fact on to Jack.

Within three days there was 10,000 pounds in Absolom's account. That was how McCraith worked, out of instinct, and trust. The two became firm friends, and spent many a Christmas together.

All types of men worked for McCraith through the years. Some were on the run from the law, others from their wives.

A few were businessmen gone broke, others couldn't take the pressure of city life. One bloke

who worked the Pooncarie region was a former bank manager. His bank pay had been around 10 pounds a week. But a day's rabbit trapping often yielded four pounds, and some shooters were earning 20 pounds a night. They made big money, and they spent big, mostly on grog and gambling. Most shooters could earn enough money in a year to buy a house outright. Few ever did.

Jack McCraith wasn't that fond of a drink, but he didn't mind a gamble. A world-class shooter, he bet on live pigeon shoots, clay targets, horses, and anything else that moved.

Shooting was the only thing he won on, having collected more than 80 titles nationally over the years. He bet on billiards, and often tossed a coin to decide who was paying for what.

One popular story had him meeting another successful businessman at the local newsagency each morning. They would toss a coin to see who was paying for the papers. Two multi-millionaires, tossing for the price of a newspaper.

Cars were another passion. Jack owned dozens of them. He owned a succession of Jaguars, a DeSoto, Chevrolet, Pontiacs and in 1954 bought Queen Elizabeth's 'back-up' Daimler during her Victorian visit. Jack drove it around the block a few times, then sold it to Bullen's Circus.

Gambling and cars weren't his only problem. The Tax office wanted a large slice of the action as his empire grew. McCraith always dealt in cash.

He paid his buyers and shooters in cash, but export money had to be accounted for in the proper manner. When Tax inspectors did a lengthy audit, they said he owned them about 126,000 pounds.

Jack wrote a cheque for 70,000 on the spot, and paid off the rest by instalments.

Even the introduction of myxomatosis into Australia in the 1950s failed to put much of a dent in the McCraith empire, although it caused an uproar in some circles.

The virus had wiped out almost the entire European rabbit



population, wild and domestic. McCraith saw the virus as one of the cruellest things ever invented. He hated to see rabbits suffer, laying by the side of the road or wandering in circles, eyes puffed up as a result of myxo.

It was nothing to see piles of up to 10,000 dead or dying rabbits.

Jack saw it as not only cruel, but a terrible waste of a valuable food source. He travelled thousands of kilometres to find areas unaffected by myxo. His travels ended on the Nullabor Plain, where he found that rabbits were bigger, sweeter and in greater numbers than most parts of Australia.

One of his biggest operations was on Bulloo Downs, 18,000 square kilometres of country near the borders of SA, NSW and Queensland.

At one stage there were 27 chillers on the property, with 110 personnel shooting and trapping. Some truckies were travelling more than 3000 kilometres to collect Jack's rabbits.

The beginning of the end for the rabbit industry in Australia came from an unexpected source - China. The communist government encouraged all families to breed a few pairs, which the government then regularly collected for export, at a far cheaper rate than McCraith or others.

In the end they dominated world markets - still a familiar story today.

The final nail in the coffin was a revolution in the chicken industry, with battery farming on a huge scale. This allowed millions of

chickens to be produced at low prices.

Jack tried to get in on the act, but couldn't get a licence off the government. Higher wages and tighter health restrictions didn't help.

McCraith sold his last business premises in Melbourne around 1980. The people who bought it went broke.

McCraith had been the last real exporter of rabbits, out of the 64 who were operating at the height of the plague.

He lived long enough to see rabbit numbers again begin to surge, before the release of the deadly Calicivirus, developed on Wardang Island off the Yorke Peninsula in South Australia, and which proved even more deadly than myxo.

Whenever the subject of rabbits is brought up by old-timers in private or business discussions, the name Jack McCraith, The Rabbit King, is spoken of with respect, and awe.

Footnote; It has been estimated that at the height of the rabbit plague, the pests were causing at least \$600 million damage to the environment annually (several billion in today's figures).

There was at least one reported case of a station tank (small dam) providing water for 300 sheep in one paddock, but where 21,000 rabbits were taken in three nights shooting, trapping and/or poisoning.

In 1934, one grazier near Ivanhoe poisoned around his house tank, and the next morning collected 18,000 rabbits. They were a natural enemy of the grazier, for good reason.

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L-R Student Facilitator Rhiana Willet, Senior Coordinator of the program Chloe Milne, and Student Facilitator Emma Falvo.



Charlee with her Nana.



L-R Student Facilitator Rhiana Willet with Senior Coordinator of the program Chloe Milne.

PHILANTHROPY ENABLES PATHWAYS TO EDUCATION FOR MORE REGIONAL STUDENTS

« Across regional Victoria, higher education has not always felt like the obvious next step for school leavers... »

WORDS
REBECCA CROSSLING

Distance, financial pressure and limited access to information have long shaped participation in further study for regional students, while many have not had the confidence or support to fully explore educational pathways after school.

Through La Trobe's Regional Pathways Program, philanthropy is helping change that. By addressing the longstanding education gap between rural and metropolitan students, the program helps more young people see higher education and training as achievable. It also helps to build a pipeline of home-grown professionals who will stay and work in their local communities.

The Regional Pathways Program reflects the University's broader commitment to improving educational access and opportunity through its 'Make Your Impact' philanthropic campaign, which invests in initiatives that expand

opportunity and strengthen communities.

By supporting students in their final year of high school, the program helps build aspiration, academic readiness and confidence, helping them to better understand the opportunities available to them. Importantly, it does not prescribe a single outcome for students or insist that they go on to tertiary study. Instead gives them the option, and the freedom, to explore futures that might include university, TAFE, or other training pathways.

The program commenced in Albury-Wodonga in 2017 and expanded to Shepparton in 2019, with support from the Gillespie Family Foundation. In 2024, philanthropic support enabled the program to launch in Bendigo and Mildura, with the McCall McBain Foundation contributing \$350,000 to support an inaugural cohort of 20 students at Mildura Senior College.

Building on this, a further \$1million contribution from the McCall McBain Foundation in 2026 has supported the expansion of the initiative, funding 100 scholarships and state-wide wraparound programs, including the Pathways to Education and Knowledge (PEAK) Scholarships.

The program now extends beyond Mildura Senior College, operating at Coomealla High School, Red Cliffs Secondary College and Robinvale P-12 College, with students from Dulka Yappata at SuniTAFE joining this year as well.

Philanthropist John McCall MacBain recognised the impact of the program, noting the significant increase in education participation among students involved.

“In some high schools, only 10 to 15 per cent of students were going on to university; with the Pathways Program that’s jumped to 65 to 70 per cent. You don’t often see that level of impact,” he said.

Nursing student Charlee says the Pathways Program was transformative in helping turn her interest in healthcare into a career pathway.

“I’m really glad that I did it because it’s helped me so much... It eased my way into uni and made everything feel less overwhelming,” she explained.

That transition was further supported through a PEAK Scholarship, providing \$5000 per year for three years of study.

Senior School Regional Pathways coordinator in Mildura, Chloe Milne, sees that shift in students firsthand.

“Watching students discover their pathways and grow as learners has been incredibly rewarding. It’s inspiring to see them take initiative by asking questions, exploring opportunities, and uncovering their passions through the program,” Chloe said.

“As a former regional student, I understand firsthand how challenging it can be to navigate tertiary pathways. I’m proud to be able to support local students as they make important decisions for their future.”

Beyond improving access to higher education, initiatives like



Charlee in the simulation ward at La Trobe University Mildura campus.

the Pathways Program and PEAK Scholarships help students feel more confident and connected once they arrive at university.

“It’s motivated me to do more learning outside of what I normally would,” Charlee said. “It makes you want to make the most of the opportunity that’s been given to you.”

Support extends beyond funding. Facilitators, coordinators and peer mentors play a critical role in helping students build confidence.

Current La Trobe student and program facilitator Rhiana works directly with students across Sunraysia.

“I’m currently studying a Diploma of Rural Health, a pathway into second year of a Bachelor of Nursing at La Trobe Mildura,” she said.

“I love working in the program - meeting students, helping them explore pathways and supporting them by sharing my own experience to show that further study is achievable.”

Year 12 Mildura Senior College student Charlotte said the program helped her feel more prepared and confident as she approaches the end of her schooling.

“I’d describe it as a way to better

understand yourself and your options,” she said. “It’s not about pushing you into one path — it helps you figure out what’s right for you and supports you along the way.”

La Trobe Mildura Head of Campus, Dr Sandy Connor, said the University was deeply grateful for the support and the opportunities the program creates for regional students.

“What we’re seeing through the Regional Pathways Program is that when students are given the right support early, they are far more likely to pursue further education in a way that suits them,” Dr Connor said.

“Since 2023, around 70 per cent of participants are now pursuing higher education - a significant shift in communities like Mildura where fewer than 13 per cent of adults hold a university degree.”

As nursing student Charlee reflected, the impact of the program is deeply personal.

“It means a lot knowing that people — locally, nationally, and even internationally - believe in regional students,” she said.

“Programs like Pathways and the PEAK Scholarship make further study feel possible.”

NEW LOCAL STREAMING CHANNEL RETURNS THE NEWS AND FOOTY

WORDS

GRANT MAYNARD

WITH regional newspapers slowly disappearing and television networks providing scant or no coverage of local news, the opportunity to fill that void was identified late last year.

'Sun City Streaming' was born out of an idea to reinstate local television news services along with sport, current affairs, arts scene and agricultural programs.

Launched in April this year, Sun City Streaming is now available on YouTube and other social media platforms.

It brings with it a welcome variety of new programming to television screens across Sunraysia and the Mallee including 'Sun City Local News' and the 'Footy Super Show'.

A 'philanthropic community co-operative' of local businesses is supporting the concept, providing monthly financial sponsorship. Tasco Petroleum Australia, Ray White Mildura, Chemist Warehouse Mildura and Fisher Developments are all proud supporters of Sun City Streaming.



Will Callow and Sam Kerridge host the Footy Super Show.



Sun City local news presenter Caitlyn Morgan.

With plans to launch a book show and a current affairs program titled, 'Straight Talk' - providing a platform for local issues to be discussed and debated - the channel is "here for the community" say proponents.

Sun City Streaming managing editor, John Dooley, described the growing absence of local news in regional centres as "a real concern".

He told *Heartbeat*: "As a former newspaper editor it is concerning that in a place like Mildura (and other towns across Victoria and indeed in every state) that there is virtually no local news "or the coverage is very limited".

"Whilst the Sunraysia Daily is doing a wonderful job continuing to publish a printed newspaper, if you look at many other regions across Victoria papers have been disappearing or moving to a digital, subscription-based platform.

"My background in television news and current affairs was gained working with the Nine Network and Sky News, so I consider I have the experience and ability - thanks to the generosity of our sponsors - to bring real local television news and a footy show back to Sunraysia."

Sun City Streaming can be viewed on Facebook or YouTube @ YouTubeSuncitystreamingAU.

The Footy Super Show - hosted by Will Callow and Sam Kerridge - is posted on Thursday evenings, with the local news bulletin scheduled for Friday evenings.

"Already the channel's following is building significant viewer numbers," Mr Dooley said, "And the plan is to keep that growing."

Watch Now On  YouTube

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www.suncitystreaming.com.au



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Sean Higgins a 260-game AFL veteran, MBPH CEO Terry Welch and Executive Director of Engagement and Support Services Heath Kendall.



Brad Johnson and Matt Jukes survey the hole before teeing off.



Putting practice is always a good start to the day.

MBPH FOUNDATION GOLF DAY

The 2026 MBPH Foundation golf day attracted a solid field.



Some friendly banter before the competition got underway.

THE sun was shining and the barbeque was sizzling for the Mildura Base Public Hospital Foundation's annual fund-raising day of golf.

The Foundation Golf Day venue was again at the Coomealla Golf Club with a field of more than 80 keen golfers in teams of four contesting the Ambrose 18-hole event.

Funds raised this year were earmarked for the Foundation's state-of-the-art mobile screening vehicle, with the combination's distinctive Volvo prime mover making its debut at the event.

MBPH CEO Terry Welch was

looking forward to teeing off, but even before he could take a swing, he was presented with a Foundation donation cheque for \$32,000 from Agg-Tech Mildura.

Agg-Tech sponsored another successful golf day late last year and the cheque represented the proceeds from that popular event.

Each year, the Foundation golf day features special guests from the sporting world. This year, the stars were out in force, including former Bulldogs, Kangaroos and Cats star Sean Higgins, a 260-game AFL veteran, along with Carlton greats Anthony Koutoufides and Ange Christou.



The foundation screening truck is powered by this Volvo prime mover.



MBPH CEO Terry Welch hands the microphone to MBPH board member.



The MBPH Foundation team accepts a \$32,000 cheque - proceeds from last year's Agg Tech Golf Day.



One of the teams takes time out for a photo.



An impressive practice putt in the back ground the equally impressive screening truck Volvo prime.



The One Agency team were keen to make an impression on the course.



MBPH CFO Matthew Jukes (R) watches his team teeing off.



Always the destination ahead of tee-off - the MBPH kitchen put on a great BBQ.



This 'awesome foursome' acquitted themselves well on the fairways.

KC SOCIETY ALFRESCO LUNCHEON RAISES A TANTILISING SUM!

WORDS

JOHN DOOLEY

KC SOCIETY ALFRESCO LUNCHEON RAISES A TANTILISING SUM!

THE Mildura Base Public Hospital Foundation's fourth KC Society luncheon was held on Friday, May 1, this year. The weather Gods provided the perfect day to again be on the pavement under the vines and umbrellas outside of 400 Gradi. The gourmet Italian restaurant served a magnificent three-course menu, accompanied by a range of fine beverages including Zilze wines which was enjoyed by more than 100 guests.

Special Guest Speaker for the afternoon, was Sport and Exercise Physician, Dr Andrew Jowett, from the Olympic Park Sports Medicine Centre.

Dr Jowett, entertained the guests with some hilarious anecdotes, but he also spoke about some of the injury risks associated with contact sports.

He is passionate about his role with Olympic Park Sports Medicine Centre and the concept of multidisciplinary sports medicine. Dr Jowett completed 14 seasons as a doctor with Collingwood FC in 2009 and he maintained his involvement in elite teams by joining the Hawthorn FC medical team in 2012. He also served as team doctor for the Australian Socceroos from 1996-2006, continued to advise FFA on medical matters including the



A table of Foundation supporters enjoying the alfresco lunch.

medical structure of the A-League before joining Melbourne Victory as medical director in 2014.

MBPH Terry Welch said the event again raised an amazing amount for the KC Society.

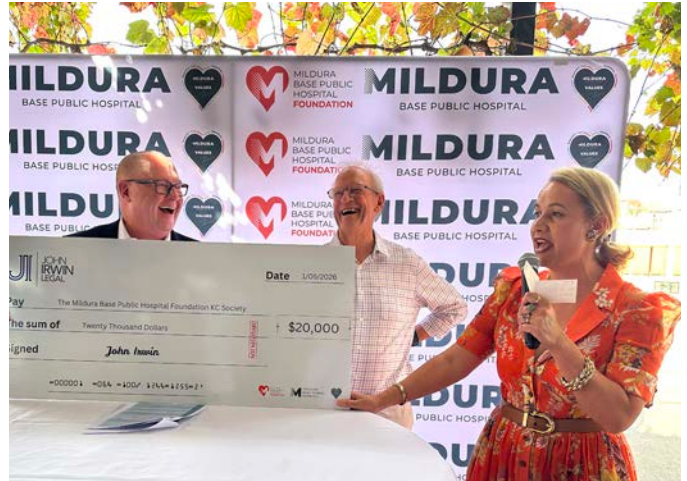
"It looks like we've raised about \$85,000 and it's just truly remarkable," he said. "It never ceases to amaze me how generous this community is and the continued commitment from a day like today, supporting our local community and enabling young people to seek a scholarship in medical education, which is the purpose of the KC Society established in honour of the late surgeon Kevin Chambers.

"It has been wonderful to have Andrew Jowett join us today and for people to hear from him. He's a refreshing storyteller and his background with Socceroos and AFL Football is remarkable. And it's also wonderful to see the Chambers family here again and there was a very generous bid from one of the family members in our auction.

"Kevin Chambers of course, is so synonymous with Mildura in regard to health and surgery and what he did for us is just incredible. His legacy will live on forever with such an amazing purpose through the KC Society."



MBPH Specialist Physician General Medicine and Cardiology Dr Bernhard Kuepper with Cardiac Liaison Clinical Nurse Consultant Emma Bath.



Kevin Chambers daughter Jas Chambers thanks Mildura Solicitor John Irwin for his \$20,000.



400 Gradi served a magnificent range of appetising food at the KC Society Luncheon.



Guests including Dr Donald Hartley (centre) listening to the key note speakers.



Member for Mallee Dr Anne Webster delivered a speech on the status of the health in the Mallee region.



MBPH Foundation Chairman Ross Lake, left, with MBPH CEO Terry Welch with Dr Andrew Jowett.



MBPH CEO Terry Welch with Mildura Wentworth Community Chamber of Commerce and Industry CEO Peter Alexander.



Three of many luncheon guests enjoying a great day out.



AYDAN RUSSELL IS FIGHTING HIS WAY TO THE TOP

DOWN FOR THE COUNT AYNDAY WINS A CHAMPIONSHIP FIGHT IN MELBOURNE IN JUST ONE MINUTE AND THIRTY SECONDS.

AYDAN RUSSELL IS FIGHTING HIS WAY TO THE TOP

« He's an impressive young man who is dedicating his entire being to his chosen sport – cage fighting. He's a Merbein boy from a modest background with plenty of heart... and a great story full of grit and determination. »

WORDS
JOHN DOOLEY

THIS story, Aydan tells me, starts on November 21, 2002... his literal birthday.

“I was born in Mildura, but my mum and dad split up soon after,” he explains, and he moved away from Sunraysia.

“We lived in Hamilton for a bit - that's where she's from – but I pretty much grew up in Melton, living there until I was seven, but I was back and forwards to Mildura during that time for holidays because I had family here... lots of cousins.

“I started my primary schooling in Melton, but I always said I wanted to return to Mildura because I enjoyed it here.

“I was fortunate that mum did eventually allow me to move here. She had done all she could, and she's a great person but it was decided I would move back here with my dad.

“I moved here halfway through Year 2 and went to Irymple South Primary School up until year 6.

“I didn't really enjoy school because I got bullied so I ended up playing most of my junior footy at Merbein.

“A few of my cousins went to Merbein as well and Dad and I and my step mum Tracy did eventually buy a house

out here and the decision was made that I would move schools too and I then went Merbein Primary School. And it was so much better.

“I made a heap of friends. It was awesome,” Aydan recalls.

From Merbein Primary he graduated to Merbein High and completed Year 10.

“I always wanted to become an engineer, my interest fuelled by my uncle who is a welder by trade and I admired him and what he could do.

“So, throughout Year 10 I was doing three days of school, one day of work with an engineering mob, and one day at TAFE.

“And I loved it.”

His workplace boss at the time was impressed with Aydan's dedication to his work and was keen to have him join the team once his schooling was complete.

But all did not go according to plan.

“I didn't sign any books for senior college and unfortunately it got too late to organise that after mt boss came to me and told me that unfortunately he didn't have enough work to take me on.

“Luckily my step mum was a supervisor at Australian Vintage Winery, so she got me a job out there.

“I was 16 doing shift work and making good coin. Going from apprentice wages at \$11.50 an hour to about \$20 an hour was the highlight!”

Our story to date sees Aydan overcoming some life hurdles that may have well crushed a lesser spirit, but he had developed a solid work ethic and had a determination to succeed.

“I had a few different jobs here and there after that. I just used to get bored with them and I didn’t find anything I really liked.

“It was about that time I started Taekwondo. My cousin, my dad’s cousin and my dad used to do it when they were younger.

“My dad’s cousin was a black belt - one of the youngest in Australia

“So, some of my cousins and I started training and then my auntie and uncle and another two cousins all joined up. And then my step-mom as well!

“We all loved it. We would all go and train together. That was fun.

“And I really started enjoying it.

“Got to yellow belt, then to green and won a few Victorian and Australian titles; he says casually and without a hit on bragging.

He also revealed that at one time he had the highest kick of any Australian junior at 2.2 metres “or something like that”.

Exact details sometime escape Aydan, and it is indicative of his casual approach to his not insubstantial achievements.

And then, for the first time in history, the Taekwondo world titles were staged in Australia and in Melbourne.

“They allowed coloured belts to compete as well and I was a green belt at the time, Aydan recalls.

“So, I signed up to compete and got there. This was just after I left school and the same year I started working.

“I ended up fighting a guy that I had lost to in one of the Victoria title fights and I beat him.

“That felt pretty cool too... as well as winning a world titles,” he adds.

“I enjoyed Taekwondo a lot, but

getting towards 18-years-old I wanted more.

“Taekwondo is good, but like it’s not hard punches. Everything’s sort of pulled back.

“You can throw your punch as hard as you can, but on impact it’s pulled back to lessen the blow.

“It’s all under a sort of a controlled rule and therefore has some limitations.”

Aydan had been watching a growing number of UFC fights.

“And I loved it... and Conor McGregor. Conor McGregor was the man,” he says.

So, at 18 Aydan I signed up with the Mildura Martial Arts gym under Mick Maloney.

“Great, great guy,” Aydan says. “He’s a coach from the get-go. I loved it.

“I was obviously a newbie and going too hard and stuff, but I loved it.

“This was what I had been looking for but within the first month of training I broke my thumb.”

That slowed Aydan down quite a bit, and then COVID hit and gym training had to be suspended.

That meant Aydan had to wait a “year or two”.

After COVID, I signed back up, got back into it and within six months I had my first fight.

“I was still reasonably good with my kicks and stuff like that, but I obviously had to get my footwork and everything else in order.”

Fast forward six months and Aydan is set for his first fight.

“My first fight was in Adelaide. I think I started training at around 90 kilos, on fight night I was down to 66!” he recalls.

“I looked like an absolute skeleton.”

Aydan lost his first fight, but that only made him more determined to win his next.

That didn’t happen either.

“Lost my first three fights,” he says.

And that made him hungry.

He says he soon realised this new

fighting isn’t as easy Taekwondo had been for him.

“I was starting to second guess myself. Like, should I keep going? I was down in the dumps on myself.”

He went back to the basics of training with his coach Jesse Medina ensuring he never was allowed to rest.

“Just absolutely grinding, constantly grinding,” he recalls of that time.

“I got really lean, focusing on my diet, training, strength and conditioning.

“I signed up to a strength and conditioning coach. I paid for a dietitian. Fully going in on it,” is how he describes it.

“I wanted to win.”

He left Mildura’s recognised gyms and trained in a smaller group of just three in “a little shed... a six by six shed,” he says.

“With just three of us it was hard. We had hardly any sparring partners, so it was hard to get the rounds in with different styles.”

But the ‘hard yards’ paid off and Aydan won his fourth fight.

“I felt on top of the world. I was the king,” he says.

Aydan started 2026 with another hand injury which he describes as “a bit unfortunate because I haven’t been able to hit anything”.

At the time I spoke to Aydan, he may not have been able to hit anything, but his conditioning and strength training continues.

At the time Aydan was unsure of when and where his next fight will be. It depended a lot on how and when his hand recovered.

But regardless of what and when Aydan’s fighting future holds, you can be sure he will be there, giving it his all and never backing down from a challenge.

As *Heartbeat* was about to go to press news came from Aydan made his ‘Professional’ debut on June 13 in Melbourne and it was a brilliant outcome. Aydan achieved a decisive victory over his opponent, winning the fight is a stunning one minute and 30 seconds - **A STAR IS TRULY BORN!**



Aydan with his two dogs Kova and Otis.



Aydan and his coaching support team celebrating his victory.



The referee's decision crowns Aydan the champion.



Aydan in action during the competitive round.



Hail the victor Aydan Russell.



Aydan and his fiancée Rommany Dichiera enjoying a day of cricket at the MCG.



Aydan's 2002 tattoo depicts his birth date.

AYDAN RUSSELL IS FIGHTING HIS WAY TO THE TOP

YOU'RE MORE 'CLOSE-KNIT CLASS' THAN 'JUST THERE TO PASS'

THAT'S A LA TROBE KIND OF PERSON



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MORE

MILLEWA PIONEER PARK CELEBRATES 40TH BIRTHDAY

WORDS

MELINDA HINKSON

IN the early 1980s, on a trip to Ballarat, Millewa community stalwart Margaret Kelly visited Sovereign Hill. Inspired by the place, she returned home with a plan to activate her community to build a memorial to the farming pioneers of the Millewa. Margaret's vision had a key point of difference to Sovereign Hill. The Millewa Pioneer Park would create an authentic experience by relocating disused original buildings from across the district.

And so, an idea quickly turned into reality. Six abandoned blocks at Meringur were identified as an ideal site. With support from Mildura Council, land titles were amalgamated and rates were waived. Enthusiastic volunteers fronted up to working bees. They planted sweeping lines of 500 native trees, and installed plaques honouring pioneer families. A few "old bits of farming machinery" were brought in to pique curiosity where the park fronts the Millewa Road.

More interesting donations and rescues followed. Simpson's Cottage. The Kulline Hut, built in the 1840s by pastoralists John and Jessie Crozier. A retired Telstra Exchange building from Lake Cullulleraine. A State Government Office building along with its collection of original settlement maps and State Rivers and Water Supply Commission records.

Werrimull's original police lockup. The old Carwarp railway station. A milking shed.



Former Millewa resident Heather Yates about to cut the cake with Werrimull farmer Ian Arney.

Huff's Bakery oven — lovingly restored in time to crank out delicious hot scones and pizzas for this year's heritage month visitors. Two churches. A school classroom began its life at Kurnwill in 1928, was shifted to

Meringur in 1945 when Kurnwill closed, and donated to the park in 1998 when Meringur school closed. Not every relocation was successful. The Meringur Railway Station fell to pieces during its short journey.

Heather Yates recalled that “once people saw that we were serious, things started pouring in” — old CWA books, deb ball and wedding dresses, footy jumpers, family photos. A huge old projector that had shown films in the 1920s. A chaff shed, all manner of farm machinery, a full Blacksmith’s shop, railway guards’ vans, sidings and signage, and the list goes on. One visitor confessed that years earlier he and his mate had nicked the sign off an engine that had since been installed in the park. They gifted it. A bicentennial grant enabled the creation of “Shadows of the Past” sculpture installation. With its formal unveiling the park attained status as the National Memorial for Pioneers of Dryland Farming.

That a community would undertake such time consuming and painstaking work to create a village to memorialise their forebears, just six decades after they commenced farming, indicates the passion of people for their place and its history. It also indicates an astonishing pace of change across the century since farming commenced here.

The first generation of farmer-settlers moved into the Millewa from 1923, after the Victorian government opened up 600,000 acres of land for permanent agricultural settlement. Blocks of a square mile were allocated. Vast areas were cleared of Mallee scrub and woodland. Cropping paddocks were sown and the infrastructure to support a burgeoning agricultural community quickly grew up. Working by hand with the aid of bullocks and horses, houses, sheds, stockyards and fences were erected. Butcher shops, bakeries, general stores, post offices, schools and a hospital were built to cater to the needs of a growing population. By 1925 many Millewa towns had 300 or more residents. Hundreds more itinerant workers were building railway lines, water supply channels, roads. Buildings were constructed with locally abundant limestone and Mallee pine. Pine was so widely used due to its strength and termite resistance that locals have come to fondly describe the timber as the “Bunnings’s store of its time”.

Farming in this low rainfall country was a tough gig. When drought hit, coinciding with the Great Depression, many settler-farmers walked off their farms, never to return. Some attempted to enlist in WWII — soldiering, they imagined, would give them a break from the brutal work of farming, as well as a new pair of boots. But their enrolment applications were rejected. Primary production was essential national service, and they were sent back to their farms. Three disastrous years followed. In the subsequent reallocation of land, just a quarter of the initial 800 dryland farmers remained.



Young and old alike enjoying the special Millewa Pioneer Park occasion.



Dr Melinda Hinkson.



Mildura vintage vehicle club member Jenny Lloyd.



A stallion carved from Murray pine.



Another railway carriage and relic of a bygone era.



Visitors to the Pioneer Park gather.



An old Vic Rail parcel carriage.



The saddlery shed.



The old railway station.



Simpson's cottage.



A collection of living in the Millewa photos.



Bedroom in Simpson's cottage.



Millewa Pioneer Historical Society president Peter Kelly, left, with Millewa grain grower Ron Hards.



At its peak, in 1930, there were 600 farms across 15 parishes, and 1700 school children enrolled in 38 district schools. There was a railway line connecting Red Cliffs to Morkalla by way of bag loading site stops at Pirlta, Merrinee, Karawinna, Werrimull, Bambill, Yarrara and Meringur, and Karween. A thriving social life centred on tennis, card games, football, basketball, cricket and dancing. It was not uncommon for members of a family to spend a working day clearing an acre of ground, then to unwind by heading to their court for a game of tennis, or, if the family was big enough, cricket.

By the 1980s, when Trish Kelly and her husband and their young children settled down at Meringur, they still had plenty of neighbours at a similar stage of life. "We had so much fun", Trish recalls. The 1980s also saw the birth of the Landcare movement. Concerned with the challenges of tackling soil erosion and rabbit infestation, Millewa-Carwarp was the second Landcare group formed in Australia, leading the charge on land renovation as an integral part of farming practice. Farm trial sites were established. A 140km electric fence was erected to separate the national park from the farming lands to assist in kangaroo control. Ron

Hards recalled that "everyone played their part. One Mildura fuel company was offering farmers a free 44-gallon drum of diesel if they were doing sandhill reclamation work".

In the period between the 1980s and 2000 the number of farms in Australia halved as farm size continued to scale up. Reflecting the dramatic decline in the Millewa population, by 1998, Werrimull was the only school remaining in the district.

For many who left or had strong childhood memories of visiting grandparents, the lure to return to the Millewa remains strong. "It's the memories that draw people back", suggests Trish Kelly. "This place reminds people of the glory days, when life was simpler. The sense of community out here was huge."

The park's success is owed to the contribution of an army of volunteers over the decades. 18 months ago, a new group took on running the committee and has been breathing fresh energy into the place.

Collection and digitisation of Millewa history and family history have been driven by Glenda Fox and more recently Colleen Barnes. The park's website is being developed to promote

the park, hold district and family histories, and make precious archives available to people who cannot visit.

Maintaining integrity of buildings is an ongoing challenge, requiring financial support as well as donations of labour by talented tradespeople. An urgent and expensive priority is to repair white ant damage in Simpson's Cottage. As committee president Peter Kelly wryly observes, "it's remarkable that something that cost us nothing to put up will cost \$20,000 to repair."

Glenda Fox, one of the longest serving committee members, doesn't beat around the bush: "Without volunteers we wouldn't have places like this. With less and less people living in the Millewa, we are trying to keep a bit of our history here. If anyone can help us, please do".

Millewa Pioneer Park is open to the public 365 days a year. For more information visit www/millewapioneerpark.com.au.

Dr Melinda Hinkson is the Adjunct Associate Professor Climate Change Adaptation at La Trobe University Bundoora Campus, a social anthropologist, a research leader with wide ranging interests and expertise and a farmer who lives in the Millewa.



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COMPASSION THAT HAS STOOD THE TEST OF TIME

« Mildura Base Public Hospital (MBPH) has been fortunate over the years to attract more than a few dedicated nurses, nurses who have put in the ‘hard yards’ and provided some welcome staff roster stability as well as a familiar face for returning patients. In this edition we honour them »

WORDS
JOHN DOOLEY

THEY work in many different areas of the hospital, but they have at least one thing in common besides being a nurse – they have been there a long time.

Five of them have clocked up 30 years or more at MBPH, and another six 15 years and more.

Three decades at the one workplace is a laudable achievement, and even 15 is becoming increasingly uncommon as people change workplaces more often now than in the past. They may be seeking improved promotional prospects, better remuneration or making a strategic move to further their career. They might also be seeking a better work/life balance, or they could be wanting to work for a company whose mission, ethics, or culture better matches personal beliefs.

Whatever the reason, people tend to move jobs a lot more often than in the past. That is what makes the dedication of this nursing cohort to MBPH all the more unusual as it is welcome.

It was clear when talking to the hospital’s long-serving nurses that there were common vocational themes, not least of them being a ‘calling’ to the job. The overwhelming majority of those we spoke to recall being very young when setting

their heart on becoming a nurse.

The 30-year cohort started their respective careers at the Old Mildura Base and made the transition from there to the present Ontario Avenue site, as well as the management transition from public to private and back to public.

Another commonality was working through the COVID 19 pandemic and the extra pressure and challenges that imposed. But they all came through. Vastly more capable and experienced. We are fortunate to have them.

Both the 30-year and 15-year cohorts have reached a milestone that the hospital’s Executive Director Clinical Operations & Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer, Katrina Allen, reckons deserves recognition.

She attributes the longevity of so many staff to the hospital’s workplace culture, particularly in latter years but even when the hospital was run by a private company.

“They’ve all worked through a period where the culture was very different to what it is now and they’ve obviously thrived under two different regimes. And they’re still here,” Katrina said.

“So, the thing I love about these nurses and our nurses in general is their dedication.



30 years of nursing service to the Base hospital cohort: Tanya Green, Rebecca Goss, Kylie Harry, Jodie McMutrie & Joyce Zara.

Whether they end up in an administration role or on the ward, they've got to be dedicated.

"It really is about dedication, because every single one of these people has had to do further education."

The first 30-year plus veteran we met was Jodie McMutrie, Behaviour Management Nurse (BMN) in the hospital's mental health Consultation Liaison Team.

"I had nurses in my family, so I always wanted to be a nurse and I've never regretted it. I love being a nurse," Jodie explained when *Heartbeat* asked how she got into nursing as a career.

She, like many of her cohort, started their nursing at the Old Mildura Base Hospital in 13th Street and made the transition to the then new hospital in Ontario Avenue without too much fuss.

"We were really excited," she recalls of the move. "New building, new everything, so we were quite excited to come down to the new place, and we got a bit of a say, especially in mental health, about how the place was built, so we were looking forward to moving in."

She has also borne witness to the transition from public ownership to private ownership, and then back again.

"We didn't notice too much on the ground, really, but we are certainly glad that the base is now publicly run again," Jodie said.

"I'd absolutely recommend nursing. I've never regretted it. Nursing offers many avenues. I started off as a general nurse, and now I work in mental health.

Unlike many of her peers, the hospital's theatre Associate Nurse Unit Manager Joyce Zara did not know she wanted to be a nurse from an early age.

"I just thought; What can I do with my life? and nursing was an option," she said.

"So, I thought I would give it a go, and I've loved it ever since."

Another 30-year veteran Kylie Harry works in MBPH's Chemotherapy Department as a Clinical Nurse Consultant and an Associate Nurse Unit Manager.

"I started my career here at Mildura Base Hospital back at the old hospital as a graduate nurse in 1996," she says adding she

has been at MBPH "most of that time."

"I worked in intensive care for about 12 years before I was fortunate enough to get a position in oncology and I've now been part of a fantastic team here for the past 15 years.

"We simply have an amazing team."

Associate Nurse Unit Manager on Ward 2, Rebecca Goss, says she feels all her 30 years on the job, but for different reasons than you might think.

"I guess it does feel like 30 years," she told *Heartbeat*, "But I have loved my nursing and many of the huge changes that have happened during those three decades. The changes we've experienced from the old hospital to the new hospital are quite significant.

"But I am still happy to wake up each day and continue to nurse."

Nursing runs in the family for MBPH's Dialysis Unit Associate Nurse Unit Manager Tanya Green.

"My mum was a nurse, and so was an aunty," she says.

So, it appears Tanya's destiny was to become a nurse.

"I was always interested. I guess I always had an interest in caring for people.

"So, I pursued that and here I am 30 years later."

Now we turn to the nurses who have clocked up 15 years or more, all of them too transitioning along with the hospital from private to public ownership and surviving the very real challenges of the COVID 19 pandemic.

The first is Bree Crook who describes herself as "an angel in maternity".

"I still feel like I'm very young, but in an old body," she laughs when considering her milestone.

About her work she says: "I think maternity is a good area to work in because there's so much diversity and you get to work with women from the very start of their pregnancy and see them become mothers."

Karen Morish is also a registered nurse and registered midwife who has been a fixture at MBPH for 17 years.

Karen started her nursing career in 2004 as an Enrolled Nurse before transitioning over four years to registered nursing.

Ward nursing was followed by a hospital nursing administrative role for five years before she thought it was time for "a big life change" and opted for midwifery.

Amy Weir is the nurse unit manager of MBPH's Intensive Care Unit (ICU).

She grew up in Ouyen with a farming background before heading up to "the big smoke of Mildura to do my training at La Trobe".

"And I guess, to be honest, I'm where I am today because I feel like people believed in me more than what I believed in myself because I wasn't ever meant to be in ICU," she said.

"When I was completing my grad year, I was really struggling. I just wasn't sure where I wanted to be and where I wanted to end up.

"And then the grad nurse coordinator said to me; 'I think you're suited to ICU'.



L-R Louise Marozzi, Kerry Morrison, Staci Watson, Caitlin Pitt, Aimee Weir, Brie Crook.

"I guess that moment changed the whole trajectory of my nursing career and 15 years later I'm still in ICU."

Caitlin Pitt is a specialist melanoma nurse and the clinical nurse consultant on MBPH's newly launched mobile skin screening truck.

"I did a mixed graduate year, so I worked between Ward 2, 3 and the Emergency department (ED) she says of her early years," she said.

"I worked in ED for a decade and worked my way up to Associate Nurse Unit Manager.

"Then I had kids and could not continue shift work, so I went to Patient Safety and was working as the Patient Safety Officer in the hospital's Quality Team.

"From there I moved back to oncology, doing the specialist melanoma role and now I have taken on a role working on the screening truck which dove tails with my melanoma experience. Hospital coordinator and registered nurse Stacey Watson trained at Flinders University before moving back to Mildura and the Base Hospital.

A local through and through, Stacey worked Wards 2 & 3 and the Emergency Department (ED) before moving back to Ward 2 as a casual while she "travelled the world".

Her wanderings over for the foreseeable future, she took a permanent position on Ward 2 before that split to also encompass Ward 6.

"I became an ANUM for Ward 6 and moved across to become hospital coordinator two or three years ago," she told *Heartbeat*.

She has vivid memories of the COVID 19 years, as do all her peers.

"It nearly ruined all of us I think," she said candidly. "That was very hard nursing."

"But my take on nursing is that you've got to be dedicated. You've got to love it, and you do it because you want to do it."

Louise Marozzi is a Ward 3 stalwart having worked in that ward for all her 15 years at MBPH.

She is currently the ward's Clinical Nurse Specialist and Associate Nurse Unit Manager.

"I chose nursing early, having been hospitalised a lot as a kid," she explained.

"I thought that would be a great vocation for me, so pursued it as my career.

"And I suppose I've stayed at the base because of the great support from the staff here, particularly the managers that I've had."

CROSS BORDER CHAMBER SETS A NEW AGENDA FOR THE SUCCESS

WORDS

JOHN DOOLEY

A LARGE cross section of Sunraysia's businesses and community leaders attended the recent launch of the Mildura-Wentworth Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MWCCI) held at the Mildura Powerhouse Precinct on Tuesday, March 24.

Guest speakers included business leaders from both sides of the Murray River, including Business NSW general manager of membership, strategy and partnerships, Dan Macias, and Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry chief executive, Sally Curtain.

Ms Curtain spoke glowingly about the emergence of another chamber of commerce in the region.

"My organisation is really delighted and thrilled to be part of this really clever initiative," she said. "What we're hoping to do tonight is not just about relaunching the chamber, it's about something bigger. It's about restoring the voice - the voice of business here in this wonderful region."

MWCCI CEO, Peter Alexander, was delighted with the attendance and the diversity of people attending the launch saying it was a wonderful time for the region to see so many people, from both sides of the



MWCCI CEO Peter Alexander welcomes guests to the economic outlook breakfast.

river, coming together with a mutual desire to see some positive initiatives and outcomes. "What a great turnout. I think just under 200 people have attended tonight, including lot of business owners," he said. "We have solid support from both sides of the river. The guest speakers were just brilliant. While our main objective is about

engaging businesses, but not only the nuts and bolts of business, it's about demonstrating that we are here to make a significant contribution to the region. We are about being one region - one voice. A voice that doesn't just only represent the Mildura and Wentworth partnership, but it includes the partnership of other support groups."



The MWCCI launch at the Powerhouse Precinct.



By involving Wentworth in the new chamber, it is hoped to shine a light on the many stakeholders and businesses who can bring ideas to the table and benefit from the collaborative approach the chamber is taking, proponents say.

Daniel Linklater is one of the Wentworth steering committee members who is passionate about the cross-border collaboration being successful.

“I think, like a lot of things we’re better off... we’re stronger when we work together,” he said.

“By working together, we’ll have more economic clout and more reason to be listened to. That’s why I think it’s a really good idea.”

Mildura Rural City Council Councillor Rebecca Crossling also attended the launch and was equally enthusiastic about the opportunities the MWCCI can bring to the region, and how it can complement council’s economic development strategy.

“Whilst council’s Economic Development Strategy focuses on five pillars where we can influence economic development, they are quite different to the chamber’s day-to day initiatives aimed at supporting individual businesses,” Cr Crossling said.

The fact that Wentworth represents a significant businesses, collectively producing an output of \$10.35 billion, is something that is not lost on the MWCCI.

Mildura solicitor John Irwin is known for his strong advocacy in advancing the region and has some ‘big-picture’ projects that he has put onto the agenda for serious discussion.

Speaking to *Heartbeat*, he said: “We are actually - you and I and the other 170 people gathered here - witnessing history. Never before have this many people come together with excitement knowing that this Chamber of Commerce is going to make changes in the future,” he said. “I’ve never felt quite so excited since I proposed to my wife. She turned me down the first time too, but that’s another matter!”

Following the success of the launch and chamber membership being embraced widely, MWCCI hosted an Economic Outlook Breakfast at the Quality Mildura Grand Hotel on Wednesday, June 10.

Like the launch, it was well attended with more than 100 businesses and community stakeholders and chamber members coming together to listen to keynote speakers including Bendigo Bank’s Chief Economist, David Robertson.

David spoke about the general state of the economy, both federally and at a state level, and made 10 predictions about the future including where interest rates may go.

He was then joined by Member for Mildura, Jade Benham, for a Q&A session moderated by Peter Alexander.



The Business Breakfast.



WORDS
JOHN DOOLEY

ATTENDING CULLULLERAINNE'S MUSIC FESTIVAL PROVES A SOUND DECISION

ATTENDING CULLULLERAINNE'S MUSIC FESTIVAL PROVES A SOUND DECISION

Photo: Christian Zagar



Photo: Christian Zagar

It was a perfect night for an outdoor performance.

THE annual Cullulleraine Music Festival once again proved a musical feast for the large crowd who attended.

The venue was Cullulleraine's beautiful lakeside Johansson Memorial Reserve with the event spanning the weekend of March 20 to 22.

The majority of those attending either camped by the lake, took advantage of the on-site cabins or opted for a caravan pulled up conveniently close to the action.

The festival is a community-based, not-for-profit event that attracts local, national and internationally acclaimed artists and proving to be a perfect vehicle for showcasing the local region.

A range of market stalls, children's activities and a selection of food stalls complemented the great music from a host genres.

Organising committee president, Paul Clark, was delighted with how this year's event unfolded.

He said a favourite act this year had been the Moovit Sunraysia Line Dancers Company, who entertained the crowd with a dazzling performance.

And, for those who love their Irish music and wider Gaelic culture, the Sunraysia Celtic Sessions Lively Recital was just 'the toe-tapping ticket'.

The Cullulleraine Music Festival 26 organisers and performers can be rightly proud of this year's event. Enjoyed by a host of locals and visitors alike (including yours truly), we can now look forward to next year's event with anticipation.



This gentleman was getting into the spirit of the day.



Jason Gowers about to enjoy some of the great food on offer at the event.



The Moovit Sunraysia Line Dancers Company group was a big favourite amongst the crowd.



This year's Cullulleraine Music Festival attracted a huge crowd.



Irish toe tapping music was enjoyed behind the main stage performances.



Sunny Luwe was a sensational hit with the Saturday afternoon fans.



Clint (above) and Cat (left) from the Cat and Clint duo were another popular act.

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YOU CANNOT OUTRUN DIVINE DESTINY

WORDS
JOHN DOOLEY

Zac McDonald
can be truly
proud of his
achievements.

« How the partners who own and operate Mildura's Blk Mlk specialty coffee café on Deakin Avenue came to be in business together is a story with enough play plot twists and turns to keep a mystery novelist happy, but in the end you cannot outrun Fate »»

FATE, it is notably said, will not be denied and for business partners Zac McDonald and Patrick Keogh there is no denying that.

Theirs is a long and elaborate story of two lives seemingly predestined to be intertwined, but not without twists and turns that would make a mystery novelist proud.

One of our protagonists was born in Wangaratta, the other in Mildura, meeting for the first time as toddlers. And, as you will see, they have been in an and out of each other's lives ever since.

"Our grandmas lived across the road from each other," Patrick explained, "So we were playing together before we knew how to speak.

"That is astonishing to me," he says in hindsight.

And that's where their journey to the Blk Mlk partnership began.

Their paths diverged once they reached school age. Zac attended Sacred Heart Primary and then St Joseph's while Patrick went to the Lutheran School followed by Mildura Senior College by way of Chaffey Secondary College.

But they crossed paths time and time again on the sporting field.

"He's Mildura," Patrick says nodding at Zac, "And I was Imperials," explaining their football club affiliations and going some way to explaining what was to become an intense sporting rivalry.

And then to cricket.

"He played for Mildura West, and I played for Mildura Settlers," Patrick says.

The rivalry grew. In fact, the pair weren't that fond of each other growing up, Zac recalls. But he also recalls there was an immense amount of respect fuelled by their meetings as adversaries on the football or cricket ground.

Then they parted ways for many years.

"We didn't really have too much to do with each other during our early adulthood because he moved away and so did I," Patrick said.

Both went off to university. Zac to Melbourne and Patrick to Darwin.

Zac didn't take too well to academia and instead decided to follow his interest in food into the kitchen of an Italian restaurant.

He thrived there but decided that a formal chef's qualification wasn't for him. Maybe it was because this was during the COVID 19 pandemic and his apprenticeship schooling had him "learning to cut up onions up by video".

He recalls COVID as a "weird time," and it was probably the main catalyst for his decision to ditch any formal training and learn by doing.

"I decided I could learn more, and more quickly, on the job," he said.

His time in the kitchen "enhanced my love for food... I was just in love with increasing my skills," he recalls.

"I worked my way up that way at a much faster rate than I would have if I had attended school in my opinion."

His experience went onto to

encompass a range of kitchens and cuisines.

Although not a 'qualified' chef in the usual sense of the word, Zac is of the belief that anyone who can cook successfully and run a commercial kitchen deserves to be called 'chef'.

With the pandemic consigned to history he travelled, spending time in Europe getting what he describes as "a taste of different cuisines" and the skills necessary to be able to make a wide range of dishes.

Then, weary after four years of working and travelling away from Sunraysia, he returned to Mildura.

"I moved back here to be around my family. I missed the family and Mildura too funnily enough."

Meanwhile, Patrick's story contains some interesting twists and turns of its own.

Born in Mildura, he spent his first few years here before moving to Bendigo.

"Dad was with the National Australian Bank (NAB), and we moved around a bit," said.

Interestingly, Zac's mum also worked in the banking sector, racking up 25 years with Westpac Bank. It is another of those links Zac and Patrick share.

Patrick moved back to Mildura when he started high school at Chaffey Secondary College and went onto Mildura Senior College.

Next was uni.

By this time, he told *Heartbeat*, he had fallen in love with sports and physiotherapy.

"I was right into sport at the



Aleshia-Kate Bradshaw Blk Mlk Cafe team member.



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time and decided on a sports science degree at Darwin's Charles Darwin University."

Darwin was a long way from home, but Patrick was familiar with the northern outpost.

"I went up there to initially to play cricket because the cricket off season here (winter) is their dry season and cricket season up there.

"I went up there to play cricket and fell in love with the place."

But Patrick found his degree course wanting.

"I just didn't really love it as much as I was hoping," he said simply.

He returned home to Mildura.

That's when he started at Blk Mlk as an employee.

"I first started working here around the time COVID hit," he explained.

"I ended up being here for a couple of years under interesting circumstances....sort of in and out

of COVID... it was a weird time for everyone."

The 'COVID was a weird time' observation is another thing the partners share.

Patrick packed up once more and headed back to Darwin with intentions of picking up his sports science course where he had left off.

"But I still couldn't find the passion I was looking for, and I came back to Mildura and went back to working at Blk Mlk.

"So, it's sort of the place that I've come back and forwards to."

Now, two years into a teaching degree and loving university study, he is presently taking a sabbatical as a new father and partnering Zac at Blk Mlk.

So how their partnership come about?

"That is really interesting," Patrick says. "I came home for to do a teaching placement out at Nichols Point and was working here on the weekends just to fill in time

only to find 'Zac Mac' had snuck in while I was away and he was working here too!"

With Zac and Patrick now both employees at Blk Mlk the stage was set.

"I like to think of it as divine timing," Patrick says.

The two began talking, comparing notes and as Patrick puts it: "Zach was pitching me all these ideas, which were all fantastic.

"I sort of thought hell, what can we do? He's coming up with all these ideas, and it was phenomenal.

"And, then we got to the experience that I've got with cafes.

"I had worked here and I loved it. And returned because of that, Patrick recalls.

"So, I said: Why don't we, you know, why don't we just do this?"

"You've been here. I've been here."

That was late last year.

Two weeks later the pair made the then owner an offer.

“And now here we are...”

As a quick aside, Patrick credits his café experience with helping his teaching.

“A lot of my teaching skills are because of my interpersonal skills, which I’ve learned

at the café. Just love people I guess.”

He has also made a recent return to football, pulling on the boots for Gol Gol.

“Haven’t played footy since 2019,” he reveals, but he is really enjoying his time at his new club.

It is also why Blk Mlk café shuts at noon on Saturdays, the pair reveals.

“Gotta get the football in,” they say as one, acknowledging they are both “big football people”.

Zac is also playing, but for Mildura. At least competing in different leagues ensures the pair are unlikely to renew their rivalry as foes on the football field.

But back to the café.

It’s all just worked out the pair tells *Heartbeat*.

“It’s amazing. Life, it works in funny ways,” Patrick muses.

He then launches into an explanation of ‘invisible string theory’.

“My girlfriend told me this, so it’s sort of cute, but it’s the theory that explains that there’s an invisible string between the people who are meant to be in your life,” he begins.

“And circumstances draw that string closer and closer until you finally meet.

“You can’t tell me there’s not something going on behind the scenes,” he concludes as he considers how his and Zac’s life journeys to date have resulted in them becoming business partners as well as firm friends.

A little surprising considering their sporting rivalry over the years?

“Just goes to show even the greatest of conflicts can be resolved,” the pair jokes.



Patrick and Zac have formed a solid business partnership.

Maybe the pair should try their hand in sorting out the Middle East!

Since taking over the partnership has put their heart and soul into the enterprise and acknowledge that they have come long way in a short time.

But they also acknowledge it has been no ‘walk in the park’.

The Mildura café scene competitiveness and the prevailing economic climate - to name two hurdles - have provided plenty of challenges.

Mildura, they say, is “unbelievable for hospitality”.

“The best food and wine in Victoria, in my opinion,” Zac elaborates.

The partners have worked hard to make Blk Mlk a welcoming, safe space for all its customers.

“This place has always just been a safe hub, I suppose, a meeting place for people and we have just elevated that to another level,” Zac says.

“We’ve really homed in on making someone’s day... or going out of our way just to say hello.

“Patrick’s a big believer in the fact that you have the chance to make someone’s day in this industry.

“And to me, I think great service is the greatest privilege I have to give to a customer. To give someone a great coffee or great food... that’s 100 per cent what it’s about for me.

“We treat this like our Mecca, our home... and we want people to come into our house and have a great experience,” Patrick explains.

“So, if a customer is on their way to work we probably have about five minutes to make their day. Whether that’s a coffee, a friendly hello or one of the best sandwiches you’ve ever had in your life coming out of that kitchen, or maybe all three...

“You come here to have a good time and to leave with a smile and that’s what we really pride ourselves on.”

“Nothing complicated, just simple,” Zac adds.

“In a world so busy and complicated these days, it’s nice to come to something nice and simple and you know what you’re going to get.”

Asked as motivated young entrepreneurs whether they had any advice for others in their age group thinking about going into business for themselves they simply said: “If you don’t have a dip, how are you ever going to know?” while describing themselves as “Two young blokes giving it a crack.”

Blk Mlk Specialty Coffee is located at 51 Deakin Avenue, and open 6:30am to 2pm Monday to Friday; 8am till noon on Saturdays (during football season), and 8am till 2pm on Sundays.



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CREATIVE SUNRAYSIA: IT'S ONLY NATURAL: CONTEMPLATING LANDSCAPE WORKSHOP WITH PAUL KANE

WORDS
ROHAN MORRIS

IT'S ONLY NATURAL: CONTEMPLATING LANDSCAPE WORKSHOP WITH PAUL KANE



Sky Garden is a beautifully peaceful place.



Quiet, inner self contemplation makes for a serene picture.



Paul Kane is joined by Creative Sunraysia member Stefano de Pieri.



Donata Carrazza was a workshop participant and is a Creative Sunraysia founding member.

CREATIVE Sunraysia recently presented a unique and deeply reflective cultural experience at Sky Garden with acclaimed artist and educator Paul Kane. Titled: *It's Only Natural: Contemplating Landscape*, the gathering invited participants to slow down, reconnect with place, and engage with the landscape through observation, conversation and creative inquiry.

Held within the peaceful surrounds of Sky Garden, the event brought together artists, creatives, community members and curious minds for an afternoon centred around contemplation and connection. Rather than a traditional workshop focused on outcomes or technical skill development, Paul Kane guided participants through a thoughtful process of looking, listening and responding to the environment around them.

The setting itself played an important role in shaping the experience. Sky Garden, with

its open skies, extensive native plantings, sculptures, and sense of quiet, provided the perfect backdrop for an event that encouraged people to pause and become more aware of the landscape and their relationship to it. Participants were invited to move through the space slowly and intentionally, observing changes in light, colour, sound and atmosphere. Through guided discussion and reflective exercises, Paul encouraged attendees to think beyond the surface of the landscape and consider the emotional, cultural and historical layers embedded within place.

Throughout the session, Paul drew on his extensive artistic practice and experience working across multi-disciplinary practice and contemporary landscape interpretation. He spoke about the importance of attention, stillness and curiosity in creative practice, and how landscape can be understood not simply as scenery, but as something lived, remembered

and continually changing. His approach encouraged participants to trust their own observations and personal responses, rather than searching for a “correct” interpretation.

One of the most powerful aspects of the afternoon was the collective reflection that emerged among participants. Conversations unfolded naturally as people shared memories, impressions and emotional responses connected to the environment around them. The event created space for meaningful dialogue about the mallee landscape, regional identity, environmental awareness and the role creativity can play in helping communities better understand the places they inhabit.

“Paul reminded us that we are energetic beings and that environments can have their own innate sentience. Our garden walk was an invitation to bring our presence and focus to the more-than-human world and to use our senses to notice what is



Participants in the workshop enjoy the quiet contemplation.

around us. In our busy lives, it was grounding and nourishing to simply be with nature and observe its gifts.” Donata Carrazza, Workshop participant and a Creative Sunraysia founding member said.

Creative Sunraysia sees events like this as an important part of building a more connected and culturally engaged region. Rather than focusing solely on large-scale performances or exhibitions, the organisation is also interested in creating intimate and informal experiences that encourage deep forms of participation and reflection. It’s Only Natural demonstrated how arts and culture can foster wellbeing, conversation and a renewed appreciation for the unique environments of Sunraysia.

The afternoon also engaged Creative Sunraysia’s broader vision of seeing creativity as something embedded within everyday life and regional identity. By bringing respected artists like Paul Kane into accessible community settings, the organisation aims to create opportunities for people of all backgrounds to engage with contemporary creative practice in meaningful ways.

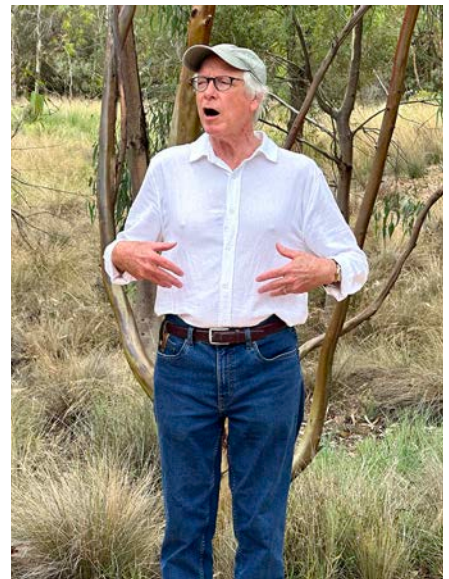
Feedback from attendees highlighted the value of simply being given permission to slow down. Many spoke about how rare it is to spend uninterrupted time quietly observing the landscape or engaging in reflective conversation without distraction. Others commented on the calming and restorative nature of the experience, and the importance of creating cultural events that prioritise connection over consumption.

As Creative Sunraysia continues to develop its program of events and initiatives across the region, the success of It’s Only Natural: Contemplating Landscape, reinforces the appetite for thoughtful, place-based cultural experiences within the community. The event reminded participants of the importance of slowing down, being present together, and giving attention to our surroundings, in an increasingly fast-paced world.

Creative Sunraysia extends its thanks to Paul Kane for his generosity, insight and guidance throughout the afternoon, and to everyone who attended and contributed to such an enriching and memorable gathering at Sky Garden.



Mildura Rural City Councillor Helen Healy enjoys some ‘quiet time’.



Acclaimed artist and educator Paul Kane presented It’s Only Natural Contemplating Landscape.

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MBPH STAFF JOIN IN THE BIG FREEZE MND CHALLENGE



WORDS

JOHN DOOLEY

MBPH STAFF JOIN IN THE BIG FREEZE MND CHALLENGE



The look on their faces says it all... well done lads!



Brad Johnson and Terry Welch with Big Freeze Mildura Convenor Mia Collicoat and MBPH staffer Jake Anstey.

ON FRIDAY, May 15, the Mildura Base Public Hospital's courtyard was the venue for a Mildura Big Freeze Ice Challenge, which saw CEO Terry Welch and Foundation Manager Jake Anstey nominated to participate in an ice-cold bucketing courtesy of some other staff members! Ahead of his icy cool down, Terry Welch spoke to *Heartbeat* about how he was nominated.

Well, I have to thank Brad Johnson from Johnson's Trucks for my participation in today's Big Freeze," Mr Welch said.

"Jake Anstey and I have been nominated to do the MND Ice Bucket Challenge. In about 10 minutes, I am going to have some freezing icy water poured over my head, which a lot of people are looking forward to!"

Mr Welch and I talked about Neil Daniher's endurance and determination to fight the hideous condition.

"It's just a terrible thing that's happened to him, but he's made it his quest in life, and it's probably one of the most inspirational things of our generation," Mr Welch said.

"I think I've got 12 of these beanies

now, and rightly so. It's about continuing the research component into finding a cure for MND."

Mildura's Mia Collicoat was at the MBPH Ice Challenge and also spoke to *Heartbeat*.

"We started the Mildura Big Freeze two years ago in honour of my mother, Helen, who passed away to MND a couple of weeks after the first Big Freeze. My role is organising everything, getting everyone all together and trying to get the community to really come together on the day," she said.

Fantastic. And Brad Johnson then told me about his company's involvement with the cause.

"We're always trying to get involved in the community events and I was actually nominated by two of my mates and a customer, Mark Wilson from Mildura Waste and Reuben Davison from the Davison Group. And when they reached out and said, we've nominated you, you've got to do it!" Brad said.

"It's a great cause for the community and it's a bit of fun along the way and that's why I thought I'd nominate Terry and Jake!

And then came the moment everyone was waiting for Terry

and Jake copped the bucketing that they had coming to them – courtesy of their willingness to participate!

Held to support the campaign to find a cure for motor neurone disease, MND, the hospital event was part of a broader fundraising effort that culminated at the Imperial Football Netball Club on Saturday, June 16, where it was hoped the funds raised would reach the target of \$50,000. They ended up with more than \$57,000!

Sadly, it was just nine days later that Neale Daniher lost his battle with MND.

The former AFL player and Australian of the Year, passed away on May 25 at the age of 65.

His family confirmed his death, and he was remembered with a state funeral on June 10, at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Neale Daniher, was a hugely significant figure in the fight against MND, co-founding the FightMDN charity, which has raised more than \$115 million for research.

If you would like to make a donation to this worthiest of causes, visit: www.support.fightmnd.org.au.



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THE WELCOME MAT IS OUT AT WERRIMULL

« It might be known further afield as Victoria's 'most outback hotel', but for Sunraysia locals it is just a hop, skip and jump down the road. *Heartbeat* can certainly recommend a visit for the friendly welcome, good food and a cold beer. »

WORDS

GRANT MAYNARD

It is regarded as Victoria's 'most outback pub', and it is certainly long drive north for those travelling from the State's southern reaches.

But for the locals living in our region - those more familiar with a long drive to get almost anywhere - it is a welcoming watering hole that is "just around the corner".

'It' is the much-loved and much-storied Werrimull Hotel. A thriving oasis of convivial friends, good food and a cold drink surrounded by wide expanses of Millewa farming paddocks.

The pub is the centre of the small town it takes its name from, 10 kilometres west of Karawinna and 10 kilometres east of Bambill. Those are two other small communities known to those living in the region but not by many living beyond.

For more context, Werrimull is 79 kilometres (49 miles) west southwest of Mildura and, at the 2016 census, the town and surrounding area had a population of 112, declining from 320 in 2011.

The pub has seen its fair share of licensee names above the front door, and for those not in the know here is some hotel history.

A quick Google search reveals the Werrimull Hotel, widely celebrated as 'Victoria's Most Outback Pub,' is an

"iconic corrugated steel bush watering hole" that has served as the social heart of the remote farming community since 1938.

The Millewa region was opened to wheat and barley farming in the early 1920s and the Werrimull township grew rapidly with a post office and railway connection established by mid-1924.

But, while the community built a bush nursing hospital, police station and churches, it still lacked a central, licensed social gathering point. That changed in 1932 when the pub was built, and it presumably did not stand empty and idle until a license was granted in 1938.

The first publican is recorded as being a gentleman by the name of named H. Cramp, and over the proceeding decades the pub has evolved alongside the community it served and sometime between 1967 and 1971 the then publicans famously remodelled the front bar into the distinct horseshoe shape that today's patrons will recognise.

Over the decades the historic building endured extreme elements unique to the Victorian outback including severe dust storms and intense mouse plagues until it looked like the COVID-19 pandemic would sound its death knell.

Like many regional venues the pub faced an uncertain future after closing its doors during the pandemic. At that time, it had passed down through many different operators. The number was put at 21 at the time, with all contributing something to its much-storied and colourful history.

However, the pub was not done. It reopened with new operators following the pandemic and now, the name above the front door is that of latest licensee Dean York.

He is the pub's 23rd and also the chef.

"I get to spend most of my time in the kitchen," he quipped when *Heartbeat* visited recently.

"Every now and again I get out to pour a beer, but I'm mostly in there," he says pointing towards the kitchen.

"I'm in there cooking the 'parmies', steaks and whatnot."

Heartbeat points out that the dining room seems to have had a facelift since it last visited.

"It's amazing what a couple of tablecloths can do... that's basically all we've really done to it," Dean says.

"And I suppose it's always a very family-oriented atmosphere here," he says going some way to explaining the pub's attraction for diners.

That, he says, and: "We're the only place in town, so all the families out on the farms come in here to socialise."

So, what else can diners expect on the menu?

"I just do basic sort of pub food, you know, and that's pretty much what our diners want... parmies, steaks, a roast of the day, that sort of thing.

"Oh, and schnitzels."

Every now and then Dean does expand his repertoire.

"I'll put a fancy sort of special on, usually during the week, but for the most part it's just basic sort of pub food... seeing as though we are a pub!"

Dean told *Heartbeat* he has been a chef "for about 35 years" working in pubs, restaurants and resorts.



Diners and drinkers:
Dave Pickering,
Malcolm Lynch,
Jamie Harmer,
Joanne Harmer and
Lorraine Phillips.

"Yeah, you name it, I've pretty much cooked for it," he says.

And about it being 'the most outback pub in Victoria?'

"That basically means we're the furthest pub from the Melbourne GPO," he explains.

The other half of the pub's latest 'management team' is Dean's dad, Lyle. The pair has been running the hotel for the past two years, taking over in mid-2024.

Before coming to Werrimull, Lyle was a publican in Charlton and prior to that he, and his late wife had a string of pubs in South Australia.

He shifted to Sunraysia to be closer to son and his daughter and worked at Mildura's Gateway Hotel before joining Dean at Werrimull.

Lyle is enthusiastic about the hotel and how it has been fairing.

"It's fantastic," he says. "It's been going really well."

But he admits things have slowed down in the past couple of months.

"It's laid off a little bit. I think that's interest rates and/or petrol. People aren't travelling as much as they were.

"It usually picks up a bit now over the footy season, but we're looking after ourselves. We've got it."

Lyle is full of praise for his son and the cook.

"He's really good at what he does," he says simply.

And not content to rest on their laurels, the pair is planning a facelift for the pub.

They've reinstated the beer garden and "done up out the front and put in some new sheds out the back".

Next is the lounge area. It will get a new ceiling and a fresh coat of paint.

"We'll probably have to close for about 10 days while we do some of the renovations so the pub will be still open, but the lounge and meals will be off .

"It's just not worth trying to keep it going in full while the work is going on," Lyle explained.

For our readers information and if our story has got you thinking about a visit (and we recommend it) the hotel is closed on Mondays, and open on Tuesdays from 3pm for meals that night.

Then it's lunch and dinner on Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

Lunch only on Sundays.

"We try to close about six on Sundays, but that doesn't bloody happen a lot of times," Lyle remarks.

Oh, and Dean will do you a takeaway meal if that is more convenient.

The Werrimull Hotel has now entered its latest chapter, standing proud as a resilient monument to Australia's pioneering history, retaining its authentic bush character, cold beer, good food and famous Friday night meat raffles.



Dean York is the publican and chef at the Werrimull Pub.



Some of the locals kicking back on a Saturday afternoon enjoying a few beers and the footy on the bar television.



Visitors to the pub can purchase some souvenirs including polo shirts, caps and stubby holders.



The pub food is tasty and great value particularly the 'must have parmi'.



The counter where the meals are ordered in the pub's dining room.



Werrimull Hotel publican Lyle York pours a great beer.



Werrimull grain grower Ian Arney and his son Ethan take a break from their pool game.



Lola Maloney enjoys a soft drink ahead of starting her shift at the pub



Mildura RSL Sub Branch Manager
Of Veteran Services Paul Mensch.



The Dareton Men's Shed team restored the sabre fighter jet over a period of nearly four years.



A WELL DESERVED NEW HOME FOR MILDURA'S HISTORIC RAAF MUSEUM

WORDS
JOHN DOOLEY

ON Sunday, May 31, the Mildura Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) museum held the official opening of their new home at Mildura Airport.

A large crowd of aviation enthusiasts were at the airport for the historic occasion which marked a long-time ambition of the Mildura RSL's to have an appropriate venue at the airport opened for this significant collection of WWII memorabilia to be housed.

The event commenced with the cutting of the ribbon, presided over by Wentworth Shire Mayor Daniel Linklater, Mildura RSL sub branch Veteran Services Manager Paul Mensch and Member for Mallee Dr Anne Webster.

Heartbeat spoke to Mr Mensch about the museum and the work involved in moving it from its previous location at the airport.

"When we decided to take this space over, we knew we had to put some work in to be able to do it justice," Mr Mensch said.

"The RSL then committed to financially to put together what you see here today. And it's going to give us space to continue to grow."

Mr Mensch said that the RSL



L-R Wentworth Shire Mayor Daniel Linklater, Mildura RSL Sub Branch Manager of Veteran Services Paul Mensch and Member for Mallee, Dr Anne Webster.

believed it was important to continue to show the story of what happened here 80 plus years ago.

"Of course, number two OTU was the training RAAF base in Mildura during World War II, which is something a lot of people don't know as well as understanding that a lot of men died during that training program," he explained.

"It's something that we feel strongly about, to continue to tell the story of the 58 pilots and ground crew who passed away during those war years. We've got

the memorial at the airport, which is dedicated to those pilots. But the room over in the corner there puts a face to those young men."

The memorabilia from the original Number 2 Operational Training Unit that was based at Mildura Airport during WWII forms, the basis of the magnificent

Operated by volunteers, the RAAF museum is open from Friday to Sunday between 10 am and 2pm do yourself a favour and pay a visit you'll love the experience!





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SCREENING TRUCK TO REVOLUTIONISE EARLY DETECTION OF LIFE THREATENING AILMENTS

WORDS

HEATH KENDALL

SINCE its launch in April, Rural Imaging Australia's multi-purpose screening truck has been actively travelling across the region, delivering essential diagnostic services to some of the State's most vulnerable communities.

Providing breast, skin and cardiac screening, the service has already made a significant impact. During recent visits to the Mildura Sporting Precinct, more than 75 per cent of people who

underwent a skin check were referred for further investigation, highlighting both the demand for and importance of accessible screening in regional areas.

Sunraysia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in Victoria. By delivering these services locally, Rural Imaging Australia is not only improving health outcomes through early detection, but also ensuring communities can access potentially life-saving care closer to home.

From July, the screening service will expand its reach across regional Victoria, New South Wales and the Riverland in South Australia.

Mildura Base Public Hospital Chief Executive Officer Terry Welch said the benefits of the service were already being seen in the community.

"We are already seeing the difference this service is making," Mr Welch said.



Members of the Mildura and District Greek Community at the farmer's market - their \$800,000 donation helped make the screening truck a reality.

“The high number of referrals following skin checks highlights just how important it is to bring these services directly to people, particularly in regional areas, where access can often be limited.”

“Early detection is critical when it comes to conditions such as skin cancer and heart disease. Having a mobile, multi-purpose screening service means we can identify potential issues sooner and connect patients with the care they need as quickly as possible.”

Mr Welch said the initiative demonstrated the power of collaboration and innovation in healthcare delivery.

“By working in partnership with Rural Imaging Australia, we are helping to remove barriers to care and ensure people in our region receive timely, potentially life-saving treatment without the need to travel long distances.”

The continued rollout of the screening truck across regional Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia will further extend its reach, supporting communities that have traditionally faced challenges in accessing specialist diagnostic services.

Mildura Mayor Ali Cupper, left, meets with Mildura Base Public Hospital Foundation Committee Member Mary Rydberg at the farmer's market.



The MBPH Foundation Screening Truck visited the Sunraysia Farmer's & Maker's Markets and the public's interest was enormous.



L-R MBPH Foundation member Jack Madafferi, CEO Terry Welch, Chemist Warehouse Mildura Managing Partner Eric Oguzkaya with Foundation Chairman Ross Lake inspect the truck.

As the program expands, its early success in Sunraysia underscores the vital role mobile health services can play in improving outcomes, particularly for vulnerable and remote populations. By bringing screening directly to the community, Rural Imaging

Australia and Mildura Base Public Hospital are helping to detect conditions earlier, ease pressure on hospital services, and ultimately save lives.

To make a donation to help with the ongoing costs of the multi-purpose screening truck visit www.mbphfoundation.org.au.

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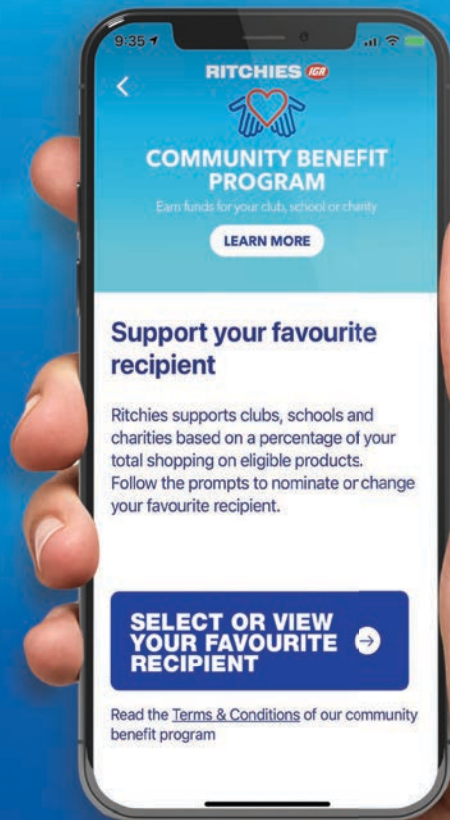
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One Agency Mildura is celebrating a significant milestone in 2026, marking five years of serving the Mildura and wider Sunraysia community.

Built on a people-first approach and strong local knowledge, the agency continues to grow, recently welcoming **two experienced professionals** to the team — **Tyler Martin** and **Donna Brown**.

Tyler joins the business with expertise across commercial and residential real estate, supported by a background in construction and a practical understanding of property. A Mildura local, he brings clear communication and strong negotiation skills to his clients.

Donna strengthens the property management division with 17 years of industry experience. Well respected within the local market, she is known for her proactive management style, attention to detail and commitment to protecting her clients' investments.

Director **Mark Thornton** said he is proud of the team's continued evolution.

*"Reaching five years in Mildura is something we're incredibly proud of. With the addition of **Tyler** and **Donna**, we continue to build a dynamic team focused on delivering exceptional results for our clients and community."*

As One Agency Mildura looks ahead, the focus remains on growth, innovation and providing trusted real estate guidance across the region.

