

MELTON & MOORABOOL



Star Weekly

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A market open to all

A not-for-profit market all about building confidence, connection, and community spirit is making its way to Bacchus Marsh this November.

The Bacchus Marsh Makers Market is built on the idea of supporting makers with disabilities from the local community through a hassle-free, stress-free, safe, and welcoming environment where anyone is welcome to pitch in and get involved.

The homegrown makers market is set to take place at the Bacchus Marsh Public Hall on Sunday 29 November between 10am and 2pm - but market organiser and operator Kassandra Gillespie said there's still plenty of stalls up for grabs.

"Anyone is welcome to come, with the stalls aimed at supporting those with special needs," she said. Kassandra said she wanted to bring something back to the community where she first started as a local maker, giving it a go to sell her products.

Kassandra Gillespie is hosting a market at Bacchus Marsh Public Hall aimed at supporting those living with disability. (Damjan Janevski) 575831_06

Cash for freeway

More cash is flowing for the long-awaited Western Freeway upgrade, with the state government committing half a billion dollars for the project.

On Sunday, Premier Ben Carroll announced \$550 million to improve safety and reduce congestion on the freeway.

Melton council has long been calling for the freeway to be upgraded between Melton and Caroline Springs.

According to council, the Melton to Caroline Springs stretch of the freeway is used by 86,000 motorists daily - including more than 5400 trucks. Modelling predicted this would rise to 110,000 vehicles daily by 2031. While a business case for the upgrade was jointly funded by

the state and federal governments prior to the 2022 federal election - and completed in December 2024 - there was no further progress on the project until the federal government pledged \$1 billion before the May 2025 federal election.

In February this year, the council wrote to the state government asking for a timeline for the upgrade and a scope of works.

The joint \$1.5 billion in funding will be used to add 30 kilometres of new lanes between Melton and Caroline Springs, including widening the freeway to three lanes in each direction between Ferris Road and Hopkins Road.

The freeway would also be expanded

to four lanes in each direction between Hopkins Road and Ballarat Road.

Interchanges at Ferris Road, Leakes Road, and Hopkins Road will also be upgraded, while a new half interchange at Mount Cottrell Road would provide a Ballarat-bound exit and citybound entry.

The Hopkins Road interchange would receive additional lanes across the bridge to Neale Road, improved citybound connections, and new traffic lights intended to improve access for surrounding communities.

The project would also introduce a consistent 100km/h speed limit between Ferris Road and Ballarat Road, the state said.

However, motorists would continue to contend with existing congestion while the major works are delivered, with design development, site investigations, and planning approvals under way. No firm date has been provided for completion of the upgrade.

Temporary traffic lights are also planned for the Leakes Road interchange following community concerns, with the lights expected to be operational by early 2027.

Melton MP Steve McGhie said the upgrades worked to address safety and congestion concerns for local motorists.

"People in Melton deserve roads that are safer, more reliable and less congested," he said.



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Alarm as bird flu flies in

By Jack O'shea-Ayres

A case of H5 bird flu was detected in a Greater Crested Tern in Moorabool. The first confirmed detection of H5N1 Bird Flu was detected in the Moorabool Shire on Friday 21 August, with further reports currently being investigated by Agriculture Victoria. H5 bird flu (H5N1, a strain of highly pathogenic avian influenza) is an infectious disease which can affect wild, farmed, and pet birds. Currently spreading globally, Victoria's first case of H5 bird flu was detected in Portland in late July. The H5 strain of bird flu reportedly

spreads easily, can kill large numbers of wild birds, usually leads to poor outcomes for infected birds and mammals, and currently has no effective treatment to combat it. Australia's leading bird conservation body, BirdLife Australia, said an outbreak of H5 bird flu in Australian birds could be catastrophic, as one in six Australian birds are already facing the threat of extinction. Principal research fellow of Biosecurity at the University of Melbourne, Richard Bradhurst, said Greater Crested Terns accounted for a large proportion of the H5N1 detections in Victoria. "This is largely due to their tight-knit social nature which speeds the transmis-

sion of diseases," he said. Although not currently detected in poultry, Professor Bradhurst said detections of the virus in places like Moorabool posed a serious health risk to the commercial poultry industry. "Inland detections of H5N1 are significant indicators of spread and increased risk to the commercial poultry sector," he said. "As the presence of H5 bird flu expands in wild bird populations, the likelihood of spillover into the commercial poultry sector also increases." While near impossible to manage the spread of the disease among wild bird populations, Professor Bradhurst said re-

porting sick or deceased birds remained crucial. "Birds that have died from H5 bird flu remain infectious and carcasses pose a threat to other wild birds, scavengers, and off-leash pets," he said. "It is very important to reduce the likelihood of wild birds interacting (both directly and indirectly) with backyard poultry and their food/water." Residents have been told to avoid any contact with sick or deceased birds they come across and to report any sightings to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA). Details: Emergency Animal Disease Hotline, 1800 675 888, or vic.gov.au/birdflu.

Funding for new Diggers Rest centre

A new childcare and community centre is coming to Diggers Rest. Sunbury MP Josh Bull recently announced the Diggers Rest Children's and Community Centre, which will include kindergarten facilities, maternal and child health services, and a library lounge. It will be built in Civic Street. The library lounge will be the first of its kind across the Melton municipality, and will extend council's library services into the growing Diggers Rest community and create a welcoming space for residents to read, learn and connect. The kindergarten will offer up to 237 places to local three-and-four-year-olds. The new centre, which will be located close to Diggers Rest Primary School, has been jointly funded with \$9 million from the state government's Building Blocks Partnerships Fund and a further \$6.989 million from Melton council. Mr Bull welcomed the announcement for the Diggers Rest community. "This new children's and community centre in Diggers Rest will give more children in the area the chance to attend a great local kindergarten, where they can learn, play and make new friends," he said. Melton ayor Lara Carli said the new services will benefit the community. "The Diggers Rest Children's and Community Centre will become a vibrant community space that will support local families and provide opportunities for learning, wellbeing and social connection for many years to come," she said. "It will be a place where children can learn and grow, families can connect, and our community can access a



Melton council mayor Cr Lara Carli with Sunbury MP Josh Bull at the site of the new Diggers Rest Children's & Community Centre (Supplied).

range of services in one welcoming location." Melton council said that construc-

tion is expected to begin in late 2026, with the centre anticipated to open in early 2028.

CWA to remain at Darley hub

The Country Women's Association (CWA) Bacchus Marsh branch will continue its community work from the Darley Civic and Community Hub under a new two-year lease approved by Moorabool council. Councillors unanimously supported the new agreement at their 2 September meeting, allowing the CWA to continue using part of the facility at 182 Halletts Way, Darley, for meetings, craft, catering and other community activities. The lease will cost the organisation \$1 plus GST a year, with the agreement also including an option to extend for a further year. The new arrangement will expand the branch's access to the premises, allowing it to use the space from Monday to Friday between 8am and 5pm. The CWA has occupied part of the civic and community hub since 2017, with its previous agreement having expired. Council officers recommended continuing the heavily subsidised arrangement because of the community benefit delivered by the CWA's activities. The Country Women's Association of Victoria is a member-based, not-for-profit charitable organisation whose principal purpose is to provide direct benevolent assistance to disadvantaged and vulnerable women, children and families across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote Victoria. At a local level, the Bacchus Marsh branch provides a space for community members to connect through activities including craft, catering, meetings and community programs. The CWA has advised its activities are not limited to members, with residents across Bacchus Marsh encouraged to participate. The organisation describes its local branches as groups of women from all walks of life brought together by a desire to get involved in, support and give back to their communities.

The CWA also maintains a presence at the monthly Ballan Farmers Market, where community members can learn more about its work and activities. Council said continuing the lease would support social connection, skills development and community participation, aligning with its Council Plan priority of improving access to services for all communities. The new lease will provide the Bacchus Marsh branch with greater certainty and expanded access to the Darley facility as it continues its community-focused work.

Community input sought on recreation reserve play space

Melton's families and residents are being invited to help shape a new play space planned for Mt Atkinson East Recreation Reserve. Melton council is seeking feedback on the first draft design plan for the play space, which is being supported through the state government's Growing Suburbs Fund. The project aims to provide children and families with an inclusive place to play, connect, and spend time together as the Mt Atkinson community continues to grow. Residents can provide feedback on their preferred play items, as well as the general look and feel of the space. Community input is expected to help shape the play space and ensure it meets the needs and ideas of local residents and park users. Council will review community feedback between September and October before developing a revised concept plan. A second round of consultation, including a community drop-in session, is scheduled for April next year, with the

final design expected to be released in September 2027, while construction is currently scheduled to begin in January 2028. Feedback on the initial concept can be provided through council's online survey or by emailing conversations@melton.vic.gov.au. Consultation closes Sunday 20 September. Details: <https://conversations.melton.vic.gov.au/mt-atkinson-east-recreation-reserve-play-space>.

A commitment to safety

By Jack O'shea-Ayres

Eureka's Liberal candidate for this year's state election, Emma Muir, has pledged to increase access to Bacchus Marsh police station if the Coalition is elected to government. Her pledge comes after the Liberal Party committed to recruiting 3000 more police officers for frontline service and to fill existing vacancies with an additional 1500 police officers back in April if it wins government. Ms Muir said Bacchus Marsh residents deserved to feel protected by police. "We all know someone who has been a

victim of crime in the past few years," Ms Muir said. "For too many families, crime is no longer something that happens to someone else - it has affected someone we know. "Bacchus Marsh deserves to be a safe place to live, work and raise a family." The latest Crime Statistics Agency data showed a significant rise in crime across the Moorabool shire, with recorded offences increasing by 23.9 per cent in the year to March to 3436 offences. "With crime rising across Moorabool, we need a government that takes community safety seriously," Ms Muir said.

"[We] will increase access to the Bacchus Marsh Police Station and make sure our police have the support, resources and powers they need to keep local families safe." But Eureka MP Michaela Settle said the state's current police force numbers had already been bolstered. "We've built Australia's biggest police force to put more police where they're needed most including the recruitment of 200 more PSOs and 400 reservists to keep Victorians safe," Ms Settle said. "Reservists are already keeping stations open longer and every one of them on shift

means more police on the beat." The Liberal party also committed to introducing the Break Bail, Face Jail initiative, which aims to deliver stronger bail laws and harsher consequences for repeat offenders. "When someone breaches their bail conditions, there need to be consequences," Ms Muir said. "Break Bail, Face Jail will put victims and community safety ahead of repeat offenders. "We will make sure serious criminals face serious consequences." The plan also includes an early intervention and rehabilitation program.



Christopher Schildt emphasised the importance of foster care in the community. (Damjan Janevski). 575728_01

Caring for kids who crave connection

The theme of this year's Foster Care Week, Sunday 13 to Saturday 19 September, is 'Open Doors. Open Hearts. Open Opportunities.' The week encourages Victorians to explore how caring for a child may fit into their lives. Western suburbs resident Christopher Schildt became a foster carer four years ago finding fulfilment in helping those in need. He is an accredited therapeutic trainer who currently has two children in his care.

"I had the will to give back something and make a difference," he said. Mr Schildt emphasised the importance of "connection over correction," stating "a lot of behaviour comes from trauma and being rigid or disciplinary can only reinforce that. The most important thing is showing them consistently that you're that safe adult." The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare and Fostering Connections says foster carers are needed from diverse backgrounds, varied family

structures and different stages of life to give children and young people care and support. Chief executive Jamie Crosby said, "every day, foster carers provide safe, stable and nurturing homes for children and young people who cannot safely live with their parents. They welcome children into their homes, providing safety, stability, and care during an important time in their lives". Details: 1800 013 088 or fosteringconnections.com.au

Have your say on road closure

Moorabool residents, community members, and road users are being invited to have their say on the future of Howards Road in Navigators. Moorabool council is seeking the community's feedback on a proposal to discontinue a section of Howards Road in Navigators linked to the Dunnstown Quarry. The section under consideration is an unsealed government road reserve between 144 Dunnstown-Yendon Road, Dunnstown and 89 Ditchfield Road North, Navigators. The proposal has been submitted by Boral Quarries and is linked to the approved expansion of the Dunnstown Quarry. The quarry expansion has recently received planning approval from the minister for planning, with the road reserve set to be impacted by the proposed works. Council said community feedback is expected to help inform its decision on whether to proceed with the road discontinuance based on its use and its projected impact on local residents and community members. Residents, locals, community members, and users of the unsealed road are being invited to make their submissions outlining their views on the proposed road discontinuance, with all submissions received by council set to be considered before a final decision, or potential road closure, is made. Feedback can be provided through Moorabool council's online community engagement survey until Sunday 19 September. Details: <https://tinyurl.com/35mbz-jvu>.

Rosella takes flight as new street name

A section of Bacchus Street in Maddingley could be renamed Rosella Close. Moorabool council unanimously voted in favour of beginning a 30-day consultation process on renaming the eastern section of Bacchus Street at its 2 September meeting, which is currently unsealed and blocked to through traffic by bollards. The proposed name, Rosella Close, was put forward by a community member and has been assessed as meeting Council's Place Naming Policy and Victoria's 2022 Naming Rules. Council officers said the change could improve public safety, particularly for emergency services, postal services and motorists who have experienced confusion caused by the existing road layout. The proposed name also has a local connection, with the area identified as natural habitat for the crimson rosella.

The eastern section is separated from the sealed portion of Bacchus Street at Powlett Street and does not provide through access to Werribee Vale Road. Three street addresses would be affected by the proposed change, including two residential properties and a Southern Rural Water address. Council will now seek written submissions from the wider community and directly consult affected landowners and residents. A meeting will also be held for submitters wishing to address council directly, with a further report to be presented after consultation. Community members are invited to provide feedback on council's website until Sunday 4 October. Details: <https://haveyoursay.moorabool.vic.gov.au/bacchus-street-proposed-renaming>.

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SAM RAE

Labor Member for Hawke
Minister for Aged Care & Seniors

Authorised by Sam Rae MP, 316 High St, Melton VIC 3337

Sunshine trader ‘on edge’

As part of an ongoing series on the causes and solutions to crime in the west, Glenn Fisher asked a local business owner whether they felt safe in their area.

Sunshine business owner Julie Tran told Star Weekly the “street has changed” and that she was “on edge” most of the time.

“Eighteen years ago when my husband and I started this business, I felt safe. But the street has changed,” said Ms Tran, who runs the Thuan An Vietnamese Restaurant in the Civic Green area of Hampshire Road.

“Now there are people hanging about drinking alcohol in public from concealed containers, others who are on drugs, and general anti-social behaviour, and those people attract similar people to the area,” she said. “And the kids and teenagers who gather in groups obviously have no parents or guidance from anyone.”

Ms Tran said after sunset, the area felt especially ominous.

“There used to be a lot of parallel parking available out the front of the shops, but that is gone now,” she said, and business operators and staff now had to walk to their cars at the back of the shops, many times through small laneways in the dark.

“I’m always on edge now,” Ms Tran said.

“Even if nobody is around, there’s something in the back of my mind when I walk to my car and I’m always looking over my shoulder.

“My female staff always get accompanied



Sunshine trader Julie Tran. (Damjan Janevski) 575884_05

to their cars or get picked up right out the front of the restaurant.”

Premier Ben Carroll recently announced the recruitment of 150 extra Protective Services Officers (PSOs) to patrol shopping centres around Melbourne, that announcement coming just days after the tragic death of Sunshine grocer Van Viet Truong, who died after he was attacked on 1 August while trying to stop a robbery across the road from Ms Tran’s restaurant.

Ms Tran said since then, there seemed to be extra police and city compliance officers in the Sunshine business district on most days, but “we know it won’t last”.

Ms Tran said members of the Sunshine

Business Association had held multiple discussions with police, Brimbank council and Laverton MP Sarah Connolly following the tragedy to try to get more police presence on the streets, while Mr Carroll had also visited the business precinct in the days after Mr Viet Truong’s death.

Mayors from Brimbank, Maribyrnong, Hobsons Bay, Wyndham and Melton came together recently to urge the state government for more visible, local police across Melbourne’s west, with recorded crimes having increased a combined 12.7 percent across Melbourne’s west so far this year.

A state government spokesperson said Labor had built Australia’s biggest police

force to put more police where they were needed most and that 200 more PSOs and 400 more reservists would be recruited.

PSOs will be able to patrol in more places where there was crime and anti-social behaviour, such as local shopping strips, the spokesperson said.

“We’re also establishing a \$10 million Local Community Safety Infrastructure Fund for councils to strengthen their security including in Melbourne’s west,” the spokesperson said.

“The fund will back councils to purchase practical upgrades such as CCTV and improved lighting to make community spaces safer.”

Three firefighters take on 28 floors for cancer support

By Jack O’Shea-Ayres

Three of Eynesbury’s best will embark on the stairs of the Crown Metropol on Saturday 12 September, raising vital funds for cancer research and crisis support.

Firefighters from the Eynesbury fire brigade are set to take part in the 13th annual Melbourne Firefighter Stair Climb where climbers will battle a gruelling 28 floors in up to 25 kilograms of operational gear and breathing apparatuses.

This year’s stair climb marks the second for firefighter Adam Warren, who said it was fellow firefighter and event veteran Mark Willingham who gave him the nudge to take part for the first time in last year’s event.

“While it was one of the most physically challenging things I’ve ever done, I’m proud to be coming back again this year,” Mr Warren said.

“The causes supported by the Stair Climb are ones I hold close to my heart, so being able to challenge myself while raising money and awareness for them makes it all worthwhile.”

Taking part in his fifth stair climb event this year, Mr Willingham is certainly a seasoned veteran.

He said the support of his crew made this year’s event all the more enjoyable and encouraging.

“I really enjoyed the personal challenge linked up with raising funds for fantastic causes,” he said.

“We have a good little crew getting prepared with a bit of friendly banter to challenge each other to push further along the way.”

For firefighter Riley Clark, this year marks his first stair climb.

“I wanted to do something that would



Eynesbury firefighters Adam Warren, Mark Willingham, and Riley Clark will soon embark on the 28 floor challenge of the Crown Metropol in this year’s annual Firefighter Stair Climb. (Damjan Janevski). 571556_05

challenge me and support the community by raising funds for charity,” he said.

He said the event held particular importance due to the heavy toll firefighters can carry.

“Firefighting takes a huge toll on physical and mental health especially, and it’s important to be able to get the support,” he said.

Mr Warren shared that same notion.

“Firefighters are often called to people on some of the worst days of their lives,” he said.

“We’re everyday members of the community who can attend confronting inci-

dents...knowing there is support out there, along with people working to fund research, raise awareness and break down the stigma around asking for help, is incredibly important.”

Mr Willingham said it was the causes the stair climb aims to support which keep him coming back year after year.

“Having done a few climbs now I know it’s really tough, and I’ve gone through my usual rollercoaster of emotions questioning why I choose to do it to myself,” Mr Willingham explained.

“...then remembering those worthy causes is why.”

All three firefighters encouraged everyone to donate.

“If you’re able to donate, please do,” Mr Willingham said.

“All the money goes to amazing charities and it’s definitely worth donating if you can,” Mr Clarke said.

“Every donation, no matter the amount, helps fund vital cancer research, mental health support and suicide prevention services that can change and save lives,” Mr Warren said.

To donate and show support, visit: <https://www.firefighterclimb.org.au/station/cfa/eynesbury/>.

‘Justice is served’: Family

By Tara Cosoleto and William Ton, AAP

The family of a loved 16-year-old boy murdered in a shopping centre stabbing are relieved justice has been served.

Oscar Hamilton was killed in September 2024 at Woodgrove Shopping Centre in Melton.

His killer, now aged 17, had denied he was guilty of murder, claiming he only wanted to confront the other boy rather than seriously hurt him.

But a Victorian Supreme Court jury on 1 September returned its guilty verdict after only two hours of deliberations.

The teen looked down as he learnt his fate, while Oscar’s family and friends cried.

Outside court, they said they were

deeply relieved at the jury’s decision.

“Justice is being served,” relative Caz, who declined to provide her surname, told reporters.

The jury was told Oscar, 16, was seated in the centre’s outdoor area with his girlfriend and friends when his killer, then 15, approached and asked to speak to him.

The younger boy wanted to confront Oscar over allegations of sexual assault, crown prosecutor Erin Ramsay told the jury.

A day earlier, the accused killer’s former girlfriend, whom he had dated for a week, had disclosed claims Oscar had assaulted her.

CCTV footage played to the jury showed the pair talking for about a minute before

Oscar turned around and walked back to his friends.

The killer followed, pushing one of his friends out of the way and threatening to stab them all.

The teen then called his ex-girlfriend and asked her if what she had said was true, Ms Ramsay said.

Oscar denied doing anything wrong before the younger boy grabbed him by the collar, pushed him and then stabbed him three times in torso, including the chest.

The 15-year-old ran from the scene while Oscar’s friends called triple-0 and people performed first aid.

Despite their efforts, Oscar died at the scene.

Defence barrister Richard Edney ar-

gued his client did not intend to kill Oscar and he had only wanted to confront the other boy over the allegations.

He said the teen’s remorse after the killing, where he told others he “didn’t mean to do it”, indicated no intention to kill or cause really serious injury.

But a person’s regret did not mean they lacked intention in the heat of the moment, the prosecutor said.

The teen had brought a knife and had stabbed Oscar to vital areas including his chest, Ms Ramsay noted.

The teen will face a pre-sentence hearing at a later date.

Lifeline 13 11 14

Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 (for people aged 5 to 25)



Melton Station at dawn. (Supplied)

Melton station open, line crossing free

The newly upgraded Melton Station has opened its gates to passengers, marking a major milestone for the Ballarat Line and the now level-crossing free Melton precinct.

Following months of upgrades and construction works, the new elevated station ran its first Melbourne-bound train at 5.07am on 1 September.

The station features four platforms, with two capable of servicing nine car VLocity trains to run from next year, which is expected to boost capacity by 50 per cent during peak times.

Trains are now running on two new

rail bridges over Exford and Coburns roads, which the state government said would make travel safer and more reliable.

More commuter car parking is expected to open in the coming months, bringing total car spaces to more than 900 at the new site.

Transport Minister Vicki Ward said the new upgrades are needed to future-proof the station for electrification.

Built in preparation for Melton electrification, the longer platforms will allow Metro services to use two of the

platforms in the future and for electric trains to be housed at the newly constructed Cobblebank stabling yard.

Melton MP Steve McGhie called it a “game-changer” for local residents.

“The new Melton station is a real game changer for our community, making it easier for people to catch the train and get to where they need to go,” he said.

Once fully completed, the new station will feature an air-conditioned waiting room, upgraded toilets, and a seven-bay bus interchange.

Community feedback sought on redesign of Melton parks

The Melton community is being invited to have their say on eight Melton parks earmarked for redesign.

Melton council is seeking community feedback on plans to redesign eight local parks and play spaces, with work expected to begin during the 2026-27 financial year.

Early draft designs have been prepared for seven reserves including Addicott Way Reserve in Taylors Hill, Fairhaven Reserve in Melton West, Maud Jan See Chin Reserve in Melton, and Springside Recreation Reserve in Caroline Springs.

Stefan Drive Reserve and Windsor Gar-

dens in Caroline Springs, along with Fay Street Reserve in Melton South, are also included in the consultation.

Council said feedback would help determine whether the draft designs were heading in the right direction and identify any changes which may be needed before the projects progress.

Residents are being encouraged to provide input on preferred play experiences and themes, types of play elements and activities, and the general aesthetics of each space.

However, the location of the play space

within each reserve will not be open to change, while technical, safety and compliance requirements and elements needed to meet council standards and servicing needs are also outside the scope of the consultation.

Planning and design work for Cambrian Way Reserve is still underway, meaning it is not included in the current consultation.

More information on the Cambrian Way project is expected to be provided as planning progresses.

Details: <https://tinyurl.com/3fwfre8s>.

Battling the dry with recycled water

Farmers in Melbourne’s west have been given greater access to a reliable, year-round water supply to support their farms through a new recycled water initiative.

The first stage of the state government’s Western Irrigation Network is officially complete and is expected to help strengthen water security for local farms so they don’t entirely depend on rainfall.

The network has been delivered by Greater Western Water (GWW), which will supply about 2.4 billion litres of recycled water to farms in Parwan-Balliang in its first year, helping to irrigate around 1500 hectares of farmland.

The network includes more than 28 kilometres of pipeline, connecting the Melton Recycled Water Plant to the farms near Bacchu Marsh.

The project has also led to the construction of a pipeline under the Werribee River, three transfer pumping stations, and a one billion litre winter storage dam.

With the taps now on, the first farms are already reportedly seeing the benefits of the reliable alternative water source, helping farms grow crops to support livestock recently impacted by a drought affecting the whole state.

The project is expected to deliver up to 18 billion litres of recycled water a year to even more of the region as more farms come on board for additional stages of the project.

The project has been delivered through a joint funding by the federal and state governments, through the National Water Grid Fund and the private agribusinesses, who are the network’s foundation customers.

Water minister Michaela Settle said the new and improved recycled water structure allowed farmers to be more resilient during times of long drought.

“We’re delivering water infrastructure to improve water resilience for farmers in a drying climate, unlocking opportunity in our regional communities and economies,” she said.

“Increasing the use of recycled water puts more water to productive use while protecting our precious drinking water supplies for where they’re needed most.”

Hawke MP Sam Rae said the project aimed to transform the otherwise dryland farming area into a thriving region.

“By connecting the Parwan-Balliang agricultural region to recycled water, the WIN project has the ability to transform this dryland farming area into a thriving agricultural region, independent of rainfall,” he said.

The new reliable water supplies are expected to help farmers manage dry conditions, strengthen their farms, and prepare for the future.



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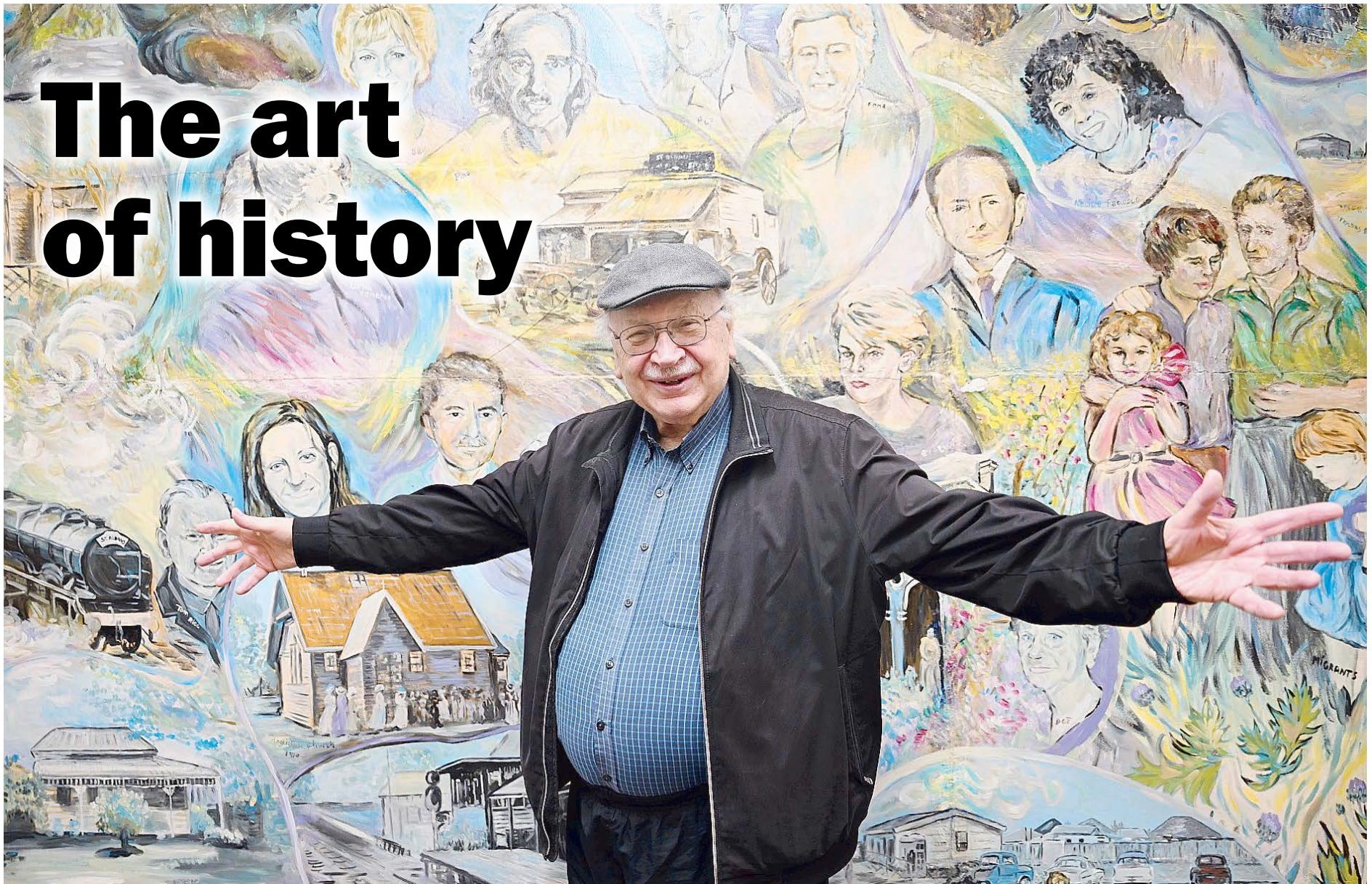
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Joseph Ribarow in front of the Visions of St Albans mural. (Damjan Janevski) 572871_01

History and art is more than packed museums and prestigious universities. The Tin Shed in St Albans knows this is the case, and has spent the last few decades putting together a thorough archive of the brilliant culture that was forged in the western suburbs. Sebastian Conidi spoke to local historian Joseph Ribarow about his process and how he built a rich tapestry of records and oral history over time.

When we think of history our minds may immediately go to ancient Roman Emperors, Greek philosophers or medieval knights rolling around in the mud. Often, however, our own history faces a danger of becoming easily obscured. For many residents of Melbourne's western suburbs, family history is not a simple linear line. It is not uncommon to have only one or two generations that grew up in a completely different country with a different language and way of life.

Documents get lost, people forget to write things down and the general pace of life leaves little time to keep clear records. We may know who Alexander the Great or Julius Caesar were without ever knowing the name of a great-great grandparent.

There is a comprehensive record of history being completed in Melbourne's west and it's not a university library. The St Albans Community Tin Shed is home to an archive of invaluable community history, centred around the lives of local artists who brought craft and imagination to the area.

In the hall lies the mural Visions of St Albans, a dazzling artwork originally conceived by Thea Dukic that celebrates the art and artists embedded in St Albans past. This art however does not stand alone. It is brought alive by rich documentation that has been collected over time.

Joseph Ribarow has been recording St Albans history for decades. He edited the Oral History From the Tin Shed Archives which features an incredibly thorough account of the suburb, spanning all the way back to the 1860s.

Ribarow was born in Germany in 1948 and settled in St Albans in 1951. He was

first involved with the youth centre in his teens in the 1960s, eventually becoming more involved in the history in the late 1990s.

"If we don't record who the people are, we lose them," he said.

Ribarow's turn to volunteer history work was influenced by the passing of his sister who died of cancer at 52.

"She was a long-term volunteer here. In families we think we'll write about family history later."

Ribarow was determined to record his own family's history in her memory.

"Because she spent so much time here as a volunteer, I came looking for information. That's when I came across the oral history studies that had been done previously and were gathering dust in the archives."

Ribarow was aided by long-time Tin Shed member and former coordinator Elsie Haggbloom as they began to restore materials that had been stowed away.

As Ribarow was recording history, he came across the works of Pino Calati.

"I was rummaging around for stories, and suddenly found these paintings [by Calati]."

Calati was an artist and sculptor born in 1916 in Pulsano, Italy. He and his family emigrated to Melbourne's west in 1949. Calati made a name for himself in the St Albans community through his art classes which he ran from the 1970s to the 1990s.

Calati's own work covered a wide range of local structures including the St Albans bungalow, St Albans native plant reserve, Sacred Heart Presbytery, Errington Reserve and St Albans presbyterian church.

"It's art of a particular locality, a particular neighbourhood, a particular era," Ribarow said.



“If we don't record who the people are, we lose them”
- Joseph Ribarow

Haggbloom said Calati had a likeable personality.

"He would always offer people some of his lunch. He was very warm. He really encouraged his art students," she said.

Working as a carpenter by trade, Calati devoted himself to teaching and creating in his spare time. He contributed to a number of exhibitions across the west.

St Albans Community Youth Club chairperson Richard Carthew noted how Calati's diverse origins influenced his art.

"He grew up in the southern part of Italy where the history was influenced by the Greeks and Romans, and later on the French and Spanish. It's never monocultural, there's a lot of influence," he said.

Calati's work has now found a new home with Brimbank council, which was gifted the works by the Tin Shed last month.

It is clear the Tin Shed's care for local artistry and history has influenced a fruitful artisan culture in St Albans. As I was conducting the interview in the office, an art group was painting in a workshop.

"That is purely coincidental," Carthew remarked.

"We did not manipulate that at all."

The archival work done by the St Albans community youth club is a testament to the importance of recording both local and family history. The Tin Shed continues to run an arts and craft workshop on Monday mornings from 10am-noon, showing dedication to the cause.

In his dystopic magnum opus 1984, George Orwell remarked that "who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past".

History is much more than kingdoms and empires or leaders and battles. It is a chance to understand who we are and where we come from.

The greatest stories are not necessarily always of great conquerors or epic battles, rather they are found in the humanity of everyday lives before us. There may be many great stories that are lost to time, either because someone has forgotten to write something down, or a box of documents has been left to collect dust in a garage.

The work of the Tin Shed is a testament to the importance of local history. In keeping a comprehensive archive, the area pays tribute to the brilliant work that has come before whilst continuing to keep arts and culture in the west alive. It is a reminder that we should strive to remember those that came before us so that - ultimately - we can understand ourselves.

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North Western Titans Baseball Club secretary Murray Ryan, Cr Julie Shannon, mayor Lara Carli, North Western Titans Baseball Club president Belinda Murphy, deputy mayor Phillip Zada and Melton MP Steve McGhie. (Supplied)

Batter up as new cage opens

Baseballers in Melbourne's outer north west have scored a home run with the completion of a new batting cage at MacPherson Park in Melton.

The new facility has transformed the previous one-lane cage into a two-lane training space creating more opportunities for local players to train, develop their skills, and enjoy the game of baseball.

With 85 junior and senior players, the batting cage is considered a huge win for the North Western Titans Baseball Club, which has been a powerhouse in the Victorian Baseball League since 2012.

Melton MP Steve McGhie was joined by Melton mayor Lara Carli, and representatives from the North Western

Titans Baseball Club to officially open the batting cage on Friday 21 August.

Mr McGhie said as a major hub for baseball, MacPherson Park deserved to be upgraded to allow better access to local players.

"MacPherson Park is a major hub for baseball in Melbourne's north west," he said. "It's wonderful that players now have access to modern baseball facilities that will encourage greater participation for all, from the little leaguers to seniors."

Council invested more than \$226,000 to bring the upgrades to life, with Sport and Recreation Victoria contributing \$175,082 through the Local Sports Infrastructure Fund Community Facilities Stream.

Briefs

Melton tobacco shop fire

A man is fighting for his life after suffering severe burns in a suspected firebombing at a Melton tobacco shop early Thursday 3 September morning. Emergency services were called to The Boss on High Street about 2.50am, where the man was found nearby and airlifted to hospital in a critical condition. Police allege two people entered the store after arriving in a white ute and poured accelerant inside before setting it alight. A second person is also believed to have suffered burns. A vehicle later found burning at Hopetoun Park is believed to be linked to the attack. Police are investigating the incident as targeted.

Bacchus Marsh murder charge

A 75-year-old Bacchus Marsh man has been charged with murder following the death of a woman at a property in Connor Street. Emergency services were called about 3.30am on Wednesday 26 August after a 41-year-old Bacchus Marsh woman was found deceased inside the property. The man was arrested at the scene and taken to hospital under police guard. He was charged with murder on Monday 31 August. Police allege the man and woman were known to each other.

FOR BREAKING NEWS, VISIT

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Students dig Book Week

Diggers Rest Primary School students have celebrated Children's Book Week.

The students dressed up for a Book Week parade at the school on Friday 4 September, before the winners of the school-wide short story competition were announced, which the school's English learning specialist Ben Payton said was all a big success.

"It was a celebration of reading, writing and storytelling at Diggers Rest Primary School, which was fantastic," he said.

"Throughout the week students enjoyed visits from local authors, and we had students participate in a short story competition as well, with the week finishing up nicely with our Book Week parade which the kids go absolutely nuts for."



Students Karolina, Hannah and Olivia.



Students Alice and Finn.



Book Week Parade at Diggers Rest Primary School (Pictures: Supplied).



Students Abby and Sage as Bananas in Pyjamas.



Grade four teachers Amber Volkov, Nicole Baddeley, Lisa Teuma and Mel Scerri.



Student Christie.

Hybrid trains promised

By Jack O'Shea-Ayres

The state opposition is promising new hybrid trains for Melbourne's west if it wins November's state election.

The coalition has committed to investing \$1.7 billion for 25 hybrid diesel-electric trains for the Melton and Wyndham Vale lines.

The investment would lead to the delivery of suburban rail services for Melton and Wyndham Vale passengers, while paving the way for potential City Loop services every hour during peaks on both lines, in-

creasing capacity by more than double, the coalition said.

Both lines are serviced by smaller V/Line VLocity trains and were originally promised electrification in 2018 and 2022.

It's a system opposition leader Jess Wilson slammed the current state government for.

"Labor has twice promised and twice failed to deliver the modern train services communities across Melton and Wyndham Vale deserve," Ms Wilson said.

"Our plan will deliver metro-quality train services to Melbourne's west soon-

er - meaning more trains, more seats and greater capacity."

However Melton MP Steve McGhie defended the west's public transport system, saying current and forthcoming upgrades had already improved operations.

"We have added over 120 additional services on the Melton line and as of next year we will increase the capacity by 50 per cent due to the introduction of 9 carriage trains," he said.

"We will be delivering electrified trains to Melton - that's why we have built a four-platform station at Melton."

He also hit out at the Liberals' transport policy, claiming the plans for trains in Melbourne's west lacked clarity.

"The Liberals' policy on trains in the west seems all over the place," Mr McGhie said.

"It was only a couple of months ago Matthew Guy said he would take trains from the Melton and Wyndham lines and put them on the Warrnambool line - now they are saying hybrid trains."

The Coalition also said its plan doesn't rule out full electrification of either line, but delivers electrified train services sooner.



Mt Atkinson residents Panny Kankariya and Jaksha Shah from Melbourne's growing west face hours-long delays when relying on transport in Melbourne's west. (Damjan Janevski) 571273_05

Hybrid trains welcomed

The opposition's plan to run hybrid trains to Melton and Wyndham Vale has been welcomed, but stakeholders say electrification and a repurposed bus network remain top priorities.

The opposition's \$1.7 billion plan would incorporate 25 hybrid diesel-electric trains for the Melton and Wyndham Vale lines.

WoMEDA executive director Giulia Baggio said the major investment must be matched with a re-designed and properly connected bus network.

Melton council said it supports any proposal that delivers more rail services and greater capacity for commuters along the Melton rail line, but is interested in understanding more details about how the proposed hybrid services would operate and when they would be delivered.

Council also said while hybrid trains could provide a short-term boost to capacity, the proposal must still support the full electrification of the Melton rail corridor.

Melton mayor Lara Carli said the Melton rail line must be duplicated and fully electrified by 2030, in line with Infrastructure Victoria's recommendation, with additional stations at Mt Atkinson and Thornhill Park.

"Our residents deserve to have efficient, frequent trains with increased capacity."

LeadWest also welcomed the proposal, but also called for electrification of the lines and new stations at Mt Atkinson and Thornhill Park.

On the Wyndham Vale line, LeadWest also wants new stations at Truganina, Black Forest Road and Sayers Road.

Clear transport pathway needed: Commuter

The recent \$1.7 billion plan to deliver 25 new hybrid diesel-electric trains to Melbourne's west has reignited debate over how quickly the region's rail network can address growing commuter demand.

The plan is expected to more than double capacity on the two lines, which are currently serviced by smaller V/Line VLocity trains.

However, Mt Atkinson resident Jaksha Shah said commuters needed more than

additional capacity, with reliability and access to stations remaining major issues.

Despite living within two kilometres of the railway line, Ms Shah said it could take 25 to 40 minutes to reach a station.

"A longer train still needs to turn up," she said.

Ms Shah said she had experienced cancellations, overcrowding and journeys lasting hours during disruptions.

She called for a clear, funded pathway to electrification, new stations in growth areas and better bus connections.

"Both have proposed intermediate solutions while we wait, and those improvements are welcome - but they shouldn't replace a long-term commitment," she said.

"Electrification is already long overdue, so the bigger question for residents is: when will that future actually arrive?"



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The missing milko mystery

Williamstown amateur historian Barb McNeill is Star Weekly’s history columnist. This week she tells the tale of a missing milkman and the mystery of a body that washed up at Williamstown.



Joseph Elsum, 55 years old and married - sometimes happily - to Sarah, was strolling along The Esplanade, Williamstown, on Saturday 8 March, 1890, when he found a body floating among the rocks near Bunbury’s Baths.

Ten years previously, Sarah had proceeded against him at the Williamstown court for maintenance, and the bench had ordered 5 shillings a week for 12 months with costs. Still bitter about his wife’s unreasonable behaviour, Joe had a shrewd idea who the body might be, a man who had evoked his strong sympathy - one Patrick Blewitt, who had run away from his missus the previous month.

The police were notified of the apparent drowning, and Constable Gardiner conveyed the body on a cart to the morgue. The news alerted a woman in Collingwood who read the description of the deceased, decided that it fitted her missing husband to a whisker and was preparing to claim him as her own. Shortly afterwards, she was only too happy to read the papers’ later editions about a positive identification in Williamstown, and announced that Mrs Blewitt was more than welcome to him.

Mrs Margaret Blewitt quickly arranged the funeral with Mr Shepherd, local undertaker, after which she attended the inquest and identified the deceased by a burn mark on his hand.

Dr Hector MacLean, who had performed the post mortem, said there was no mark of any burn on his hand or anywhere else.

Constable Gardiner, who knew the milkman, said it was somebody else. The local lighthouse keeper agreed with Constable Gardiner, as did others who knew the milkman well. This was not Patrick Blewitt, though who he was, nobody could say.

Others, however, including the Blewitts’ 10-year-old daughter, swore that it was the milko from Little Nelson Street now Aitken Street) and nothing would budge them, The jury ignored the deniers, found that the deceased was indeed Patrick Blewitt, and returned an open verdict.

Thankfully, Mrs Blewitt gathered her brood and set off to bury her husband.

Meanwhile, galvanised by a strong conscience, Constable Gardiner expressed grave doubts about the corpse’s identity to the coroner, Mr Samuel Candler. So insistent was the policeman that the coroner hastily scribbled an order for the body’s immediate return to the morgue and the inquest was adjourned until May.

Alas, the body of the deceased was at that moment approaching the cemetery in a fine hearse drawn by beautifully plumed horses. By the time the order was brought by a panting Constable Gardiner, the service was over and clods were being shovelled over the coffin.

The corpse was disinterred without further ceremony, packed once more into the hearse and briskly returned to the morgue.

Soon afterwards, Mrs Blewitt travelled to the city and attended the office of the Colonial Mutual Assurance Company, intending to cash in on her late, lamented husband.

These gentlemen, however, had heard of the goings -on in Williamstown about the deceased’s dubious identity and were



Barb McNeill. (Damjan Janevski) 432421_03

determined to hang onto their cash.

Mrs Blewitt had enough of this nonsense. Wouldn’t a wife identify her own husband, even if he had besmirched that title by buzzing off and leaving her in the lurch?

She spoke to her solicitor and commenced an action against the company for payment of the 300 pounds. In the end, the cranky widow made things so hot for them that in self- defence, the gentlemen agreed to pay her the cash on 3 May. That was a bit more like it! Her good temper restored, Mrs Blewitt marched back home, and there to her horror beheld the ghost of Patrick Blewitt.

With a scream like a knock-off whistle, she seized a chair, intending to belt the daylight out of the apparition, until it spoke. There was no mistaking that voice. It was Patrick the milko, fully alive and extremely angry.

He had, he explained, been spurred to leave her following a blistering argument about money. Using the alias John Lewis, he had spent the last few weeks slogging away on the railways in a one -horse Gippsland town so remote from civilisation that it didn’t have newspaper or postal deliveries. On returning to Melbourne, he learned that he was presumed to have been drowned.

What was going on, eh?

Then it was Mrs Blewitt’s turn to be angry as she envisioned 300 pounds slipping from her grasp. Suddenly, she remembered something. After Mr Blewitt had vanished from the marital home, she had taken out a warrant to slug him for desertion, and that warrant had yet to be executed.

Two days later, Mr Blewitt was cooling his heels in the Williamstown cells, awaiting his ordeal in court. Then a visitor was announced, a man waving an invoice for services rendered. Poor Mr Blewitt almost had a fatal seizure, for his visitor was none other than Mr Shepherd, undertaker, demanding payment for the funeral arranged by Mrs Blewitt.

It mattered not a jot to Mr Shepherd that Mr Blewitt was still alive. The funeral had been conducted as per agreement - hearse, horses, plumed headdresses, the works. Mr Shepherd was determined that he had the law on his side.

Mr Blewitt rudely contradicted him. The contract was for his burial, and he hadn’t been buried, which should’ve been obvious even to a fool like Mr Shepherd. It was the government’s problem, not his. Mr Shepherd was tersely dismissed.

Meanwhile, Mrs Blewitt was regretting

her rash decision to punish her husband and meekly asked the Bench if she could withdraw her charge. Mr Aitken J.P. demurred. “Are you sure that this man is your husband? You’ve made mistakes before, you know.” She was certain.

“I’m happy to have him home again, providing that he provides money for me and the children.”

Was this agreeable to the defendant? It was. Henceforth, he would be a model husband and father. “Case dismissed.”

“A question, Your Worship.” Mrs Blewitt piped up. “I arranged the funeral in good faith, believing my husband to be dead. Now I’m being harassed by Mr Shepherd, demanding payment for the funeral. I don’t have to pay him, do I?”

Mr Aitken frowned. “Of course you must pay,” he replied brusquely.

Arm in arm and most displeased, the reconciled couple left the court and there, waiting outside and ready to pounce was the very determined Mr Shepherd, still waving the invoice and yapping for his money. It was sourly paid out of Mr Blewitt’s savings, plus his wages as a railway labourer.

So, who was the drowned man? The missing husband from Collingwood? The jury is still out on that one.

A village where learners grow and progress together

At Global Village Learning, a four-year-old and a twenty-year-old are at very different stages of life. They need different challenges, different levels of independence and different kinds of support. But they can still belong to the same community.

That idea sits at the heart of GVL. Across their time at GVL, learners move through four Developmental Learning Hubs. The age ranges deliberately overlap because development does not happen neatly according to a calendar. Learners grow and progress at their own pace, with increasing opportunities for independence, leadership and contribution along the way.

But Developmental Learning Hubs are not walls.

Throughout a learner's journey from four to 20, there are opportunities to connect, collaborate and build relationships with young people of different ages. Mixed-age learning is an important part of our Montessori-inspired approach. Younger learners can see what is possible by spending time with older learners. Older learners have opportunities to mentor, lead and contribute.

And sometimes the learning flows in the opposite direction. A six-year-old can

have an idea a sixteen-year-old has never considered.

That is the point. We are building a village, not a collection of separate classrooms.

Learning happens within Learning Hubs, but community happens across GVL. It happens through EDventurous Projects, shared spaces, community activities and the countless informal moments that make up a day. It happens when learners create together, solve problems together and help one another.

We play together too. And we eat together. Our Healthy Food Program is more than providing a meal. Sitting around a table, sharing food and conversation with people of different ages is one of the simplest and most powerful ways to build relationships and community.

At GVL, we believe young people thrive when they experience agency, mastery and community connection.

From four to 20, a learner will grow and change enormously. Their interests will change. Their capabilities will develop. Their independence will grow.

But throughout that journey, one thing remains constant.

They are part of the Village.



Learning Together

Different ages. Different journeys. Shared experiences. One community.

Want to learn more? Visit gvl.vic.edu.au to submit an Expression of Interest.



MY PLACE

Maureen Mohr is a longtime resident of Melton who grew up in Footscray. Last year, Ms Mohr was inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women, recognised in the Local Champion category for her work as a compassionate and tireless community leader. Jack O’Shea-Ayres spoke with Ms Mohr about her connection to Melbourne’s north-west, what she loves most about where she lives, and how it felt to be recognised for her work in the community.

What’s your connection to Melbourne’s north-west?
I grew up in Footscray so I have lived all my life in the west.

What do you like about where you live?
I like the quiet. We have great neighbours, and the diversity of people all around is terrific. There is a lot to do for all ages, if only people would go out of their way to find out what’s on and where.

What, if anything, would you change about where you live?
I am pretty happy with the progress in Melton at the moment. It’s been a long time coming but it’s happening now with the railway crossings about to be gone. The new railway station and the hospital are both greatly needed - and perhaps a little work on the highway and surrounding roads would be great to see, but I am sure it will happen.

Where is your favourite local place to spend time?
I like walking around our botanical gardens and chatting to those I meet along the way, and a coffee at the library is always good, as well as checking out what exhibitions may be on there at the time.

Tell us something people would be surprised to know about you.
One thing people might be surprised to



Maureen Mohr.
(Damjan Janevski)
561756_02

know about me is my volunteering work among the community. I love being able to do the volunteering work I do, especially with Vinnies soup van - through that we have made a connection with Woodlea Islamic Network as they are doing similar work in the area. By giving out meals to those that are in need or just lonely sometimes, it’s great learning from the various groups. I would love to see more young people getting involved in volunteering in the area. During 2025 I was inducted into the Women’s Leadership Board as a local Champion, which was a very special honour.

COMMENT STARWEEKLY.COM.AU



Make a fuzzy pom pom friend

Each month, Stephanie Martinez will share an exciting craft project designed to inspire and spark creativity. Stephanie starred in the first season of Making It on Network 10, where she discovered and ignited her passion for crafting. Join Stephanie as she explores the endless possibilities of crafting and turn everyday materials into something extraordinary. This month, Stephanie is creating fuzzy friends.



Stephanie Martinez.



Fuzzy pom pom friend

Materials
Coloured yarn
Coloured foam
Googly eyes

Equipment
Scissors
Glue Gun
Pom pom template

Step 1: Create your pom pom template: Draw two matching circles onto cardboard. Draw a smaller circle in the centre of each and cut it out to create a ring. Cut a small wedge from each ring to make wrapping the yarn easier.

Step 2: Place the two cardboard pom pom templates together. Wrap yarn evenly around both templates until the centre hole is almost

completely filled and there is no room to wrap any more yarn.

Step 3: Carefully cut the yarn all the way around the outer edge, inserting the scissors between the two cardboard templates.

Step 4: Slide a separate piece of yarn between the cardboard templates and tie a knot. Remove the cardboard templates. Save them to make more pom poms.

Step 5: Cut shapes from foam sheets, such as feet, moustaches, ears, wings, or other fun features to create your character. Use a hot glue gun to attach foam pieces and googly eyes to your pom pom.



Scan the QR code and follow the links for more creative fun.

Ask R U OK? any day urges Tony

For Bacchus Marsh's Tony McManus, asking someone "R U OK?" is about much more than a single day on the calendar.

After losing his brother Mick to suicide, Mr McManus turned his grief into a commitment to helping others speak openly about mental health.

Now a sought-after speaker for Beyond Blue and R U OK? across south-east Australia, Mr McManus is urging people to make checking in with friends, family, colleagues and teammates part of everyday life.

This year's R U OK? Day will be held on Thursday 10 September with the theme 'Ask R U OK? Any Day' encouraging Australians to keep meaningful conversations going throughout the year.

Mr McManus said his own experience had reinforced the importance of breaking down the stigma surrounding mental health.

"After the loss of my brother and getting through a rough period with my own mental health I have become passionate about increasing awareness and reducing the stigma about mental health in our community," he said.

"My strongest message is that it's okay to open up and talk about anything that is troubling you. Whatever the issue is, a solution is available to either fix it or to manage it."

Mr McManus said simply asking the question could give someone the opportunity to talk about what was weighing on them.

"Asking the R U OK? is so important. It can provide an opportunity for your friend, family member or work colleague to share and get what may be top of their mind at the moment and deal with it in a supportive



People around the country will mark R U OK? Day on 10 September.

conversation," he said.

"This is much better than not dealing with it and letting the concern fester and become overwhelming over time. A problem shared is a problem halved."

R U OK? says its research shows nine in 10 people who are asked if they are okay report feeling grateful, cared for and supported, while one in four people may hesitate to ask even when they think someone is struggling.

For Mr McManus, social connection is also an important part of tackling loneliness and isolation.

"Social connection, particularly through

engaging in volunteering or mentoring, is a great way of tackling the problem(s) of isolation, loneliness and disconnection in our community," he said.

His advocacy has included successfully lobbying the Geelong and Hawthorn football clubs to play annually for the AFL Beyond Blue Cup, using the reach and social connections of sporting clubs to promote conversations about depression and mental health.

The idea came after Mick's funeral, when his widow suggested supporting Beyond Blue in his memory.

Mr McManus said the suggestion gave



Tony McManus.

him a way to channel his grief into something that could help others.

He pitched the idea to then Geelong Football Club president Frank Costa, who supported it and helped introduce him to Jeff Kennett, then chairman of Hawthorn and Beyond Blue.

The AFL Beyond Blue Cup went on to become a vehicle for mental health awareness across football, with the concept spreading into interstate, regional, urban and rural leagues, as well as soccer and rugby.

"It was a powerful way of using the social connection that sporting clubs provide for men (and women) to be a conduit for messages to increase awareness and reduce stigma," Mr McManus said.

R U OK? says the 2026 campaign is designed to reinforce that support should not be limited to one day, with regular conversations helping people know they have someone they can turn to when life becomes difficult.



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FROM THE ARCHIVES

Star Weekly looks back through the pages of our predecessors



30 years ago
4 September, 1996

Melton's thoroughbred horse breeding industry is expected to inject more than \$200 million into the local economy over the next 10 years.



20 years ago
5 September, 2006

Police are investigating a vandalism spree in Ballan that left residents and the council with a damage bill of more than \$5000.



15 years ago
6 September, 2011

Melton resident Travis Skewes's vision in his left eye won't ever be restored, but he has some comfort knowing that the person who fired a nail gun at his head has been punished.



10 years ago
6 September, 2016

Stacey Matthews was cycling in Toolern Vale last year when she was knocked off her bike in a hit-run incident.



Gisborne Vintage Machinery Society members Chris Dixon, Len Redway, Ian Northcott and John Beaty, and Theo the dog. (Damjan Janevski) 573848_01



Just Dancing organisers Emilia Rossi and Marina Domoney. (Damjan Janevski) 573369_03



Dotty, 4, with mum Katy Rayney and brother Lincoln, 9. (Damjan Janevski) 573106_05



Laverton P-12 College student wellbeing officer Sef Agahzaman (front), with students Brooklynn, Bella, Duler, Ben, Elina and Pauleen, and music teacher Mark Hunter. (Damjan Janevski) 574423_04



Werribee Orchid Club president Alex Christou. (Damjan Janevski) 574809_04



Local residents concerned about lack of parking and overall traffic management around new West Tarnet train station. (Damjan Janevski) 574420_01

Faces of the west

Each week Star Weekly photographers are out and about capturing the people and events across Melbourne's western suburbs.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

WANT YOUR EVENT LISTED? Community Calendar is made available free of charge to not-for-profit organisations to keep the public informed of special events and activities. Send item details to Star Weekly Community Calendar, Corner Thomsons Road and Keilor Park Drive, Keilor Park, 3042, or email to westeditorial@starweekly.com.au by 9am Wednesday the week prior to publication.

Bacchus Marsh Makers Market

The Bacchus Marsh Makers Market is on the lookout for stallholders. Local makers looking to sell their own handmade products are encouraged to rent a table on Sunday 29 November at the Bacchus Marsh Public Hall for \$15 for one table or \$25 for two. The Bacchus Marsh Inclusive Makers Market is a not for profit market aimed at raising awareness and support for those with special needs.

■ [Kassandra Gillespie](mailto:Kassandra.Gillespie@outlook.com), 0425 115 441, kgillespie@outlook.com.

Bacchus Marsh Flower and Garden Show

Save the date for a local family event on the weekend of 24 and 25 October 2026. Flowers, Produce and Photo Competitions, Plant Sales, Children’s Activities and more!
■ <https://www.bmflowershow.org/>

Menopause Support Group

A welcoming space where women can connect and share experiences, and explore practical ways to navigate this stage of life with confidence. The group meets weekly on Mondays from 1pm – 2.30pm.

■ rebeccah@djerriwarrh.org or 8746 1000

Origami Club

Discover the art of transforming simple paper into beautiful shapes and designs. A welcoming group to slow down and craft with others. The group meets fortnightly on Fridays from 10.00am – noon.

■ rebeccah@djerriwarrh.org

Melton Sew Creative Group

The Melton Sew Creative Group meets at the Arnolds Creek Community Centre every second Wednesday from 10am to 2pm. People can come along to socialise with like minded people for a chat whilst doing their own craft work over a cuppa. You can bring along your own machines and equipment to make something creative. Participants can learn from each other whilst making new friends in a relaxed setting at Arnolds Creek.
■ meltonsewcreative@gmail.com

Zonta Club of Melton

Zonta is an international organisation bringing women together to support women & girls in the Melton area. The Zonta Club of Melton meets on the first Monday of each month at Melton Country Club, Reserve Road, Melton. Meetings include guest speakers, projects on the go and other social events.

■ [Jane, 0447 291 049](mailto:Jane.0447291049@zontaclubofmelton.org.au) or info@zontaclubofmelton.org.au

Melton South Community Centre

Melton South Community Centre offers a range of Social Groups. Free Men’s Fella-ship Group on Wednesdays 1.30-3pm, Neighbourhood Group for ladies on Wednesdays 1-3pm \$2 per week, Free Knit & Natter on Mondays 10am-12pm, Free Community Garden group on the last Thursday of month 1:30-3pm, Free Community Singers group on first and third Tuesdays 12.15-2pm, Free Al-Anon Family Groups on Fridays 7-8.30pm, and Free MelMarsh Prostate Cancer Support Group on the first Thursday of the month between 12.30-2.30pm. 41 Exford Road, Melton South
■ 9747 8576, msccentr@bigpond.net.au.

Bacchus Marsh Philosophy Club

Bacchus Marsh Philosophy Club is a



This week’s photographer’s choice picture is of Werribee Orchid Club’s first show in seven years at Werribee Racecourse. (Damjan Janevski) 575090_01

welcoming discussion group exploring life’s big questions in a thoughtful, relaxed, and respectful way. No background in philosophy is needed, just curiosity and a willingness to listen, reflect, and share ideas. These facilitated sessions encourage people to think more deeply about topics that matter, hear a range of perspectives, and enjoy meaningful conversation in good company. They take place every second Saturday at the Lerderderg Library, 215 Main Street, 10am - 1pm.

■ [Andy, 0498 549 177](mailto:Andy.0498549177@p4e.au), andy@p4e.au

Hillside Probus Club

Hillside Probus Club is currently open to new members. Membership is open to retired and semi-retired professional and businesspersons and others with a similar background. The group meets from 10.30am-12.30pm every first Thursday of the month at the Watergardens Hotel, 431 Kings Road Taylors Lakes. There are no upper or lower age limits and the club is for men and women, couples and singles.

■ hillsideprobus@gmail.com

North Western District Pipe Band

The North Western District Pipe Band meets

every week at the Diggers rest Bowling Club and are looking for any pipers or drummers out there retired or beginners for social play outs.

■ [Hank, 0412 169 576](mailto:Hank.0412169576@p4e.au)

Volunteer with L2P

Help a disadvantaged young person gain essential driving hours by becoming an L2P Volunteer Driving Mentor. A few hours a week can make a life changing difference. Full training and support provided, with the car and all expenses covered.

■ 8746 1000, L2P@djerriwarrh.org.

Computer Classes

Computer classes are available at the Melton South Community Centre. From absolute beginners, to being safe online, Canva and more.

■ 9747 8576

Sewing in Melton

If you love sewing, head on down to the Melton South Community Centre. Bring along your machine and materials and make new friends as you swap tips and work on your own projects. 9.30am-3pm every Tuesday. Each session costs \$5.

■ 9747 8576

Melton South Community Singers

Singers of all levels are welcome at the Melton South Community Singers. This free and friendly group meets at the Melton South Community Centre and rehearses to perform at local venues and events. The group meets from 12.15-2pm on the first and third Tuesday of every month.

■ [Sue, 0400 082 413](mailto:Sue.0400082413@p4e.au)

Community band

The Greater Western Community Band meets every Thursday from 7.30-9.30pm. Located at the Bridge Road Community Centre, Strathulloh (Melton South). The band is available for events. Brass, woodwind and percussion players are always welcome.

■ [Sally Hamond, 0401474582](mailto:Sally.Hamond@0401474582@p4e.au)

God, movie and chat

A free community event is held every second Friday with a film with spiritual themes screening followed by a discussion. All thoughts are welcome. Tea, coffee, and popcorn are provided. The event is hosted at Holy Trinity Anglican Church Hall, 19a Gisborne Road, Bacchus March.

■ bacchusmarshanglican.org.au

Deeply human monologue

Written by Emma Dennis-Edwards and directed by Candy Bowers, Funeral Flowers is a raw, lyrical, and deeply human monologue about growing up, fighting back, and finding hope where it seems impossible.

The story follows 17-year-old Angelique, who dreams of being a florist. For Angelique, flowers serve as an escape from bullies, the care system, and the reality of her mum serving time. Inspired by the true story of Tottenham community leader Gina Moffatt, the production explores social inequality, self-discovery, and the human ability to create beauty in the midst of struggle.

Winner of the Scotsman Fringe First Award at Edinburgh Festival, the play now makes its Australian premiere.

Presented in partnership with Red Stitch Actors Theatre, the production will be staged at the St Albans Bowery Theatre.

A special evening performance is scheduled for Wednesday 9 September. The Wednesday night show includes supper at 6:00 pm, the performance at 7pm, and an interactive question and answer session at 8pm.

Additionally, two dedicated school-only shows will run on Wednesday 9 September, from 1.30pm to 2.45 pm, and Thursday 10 September, from 10.30 am to 11.45 am. School bookings can be arranged by emailing bowery@brimbank.vic.gov.au.

The play is not suitable for children under 14 due to strong language and mature themes. For support, patrons can contact 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732).



Salesian College Sunbury students will have their work featured in an exhibition. (Damjan Janevski) 575473_04

Salesian students shine in new exhibition

Sunbury's young talent will be on display for the inaugural Savio Visual Arts Exhibition at Salesian College.

Salesian students from years 7-10 will feature in a curated collection of works, from visual arts, visual communication design and photography, providing students with an opportunity to showcase their work.

The event, a first of its kind for the school, will also provide students with an authentic opportunity to exhibit their work in a professional, public-facing setting while sharing their creativity with family, friends and the wider community.

Visitors will be invited to explore the exhibition trail throughout the halls of the Rupertswood Mansion, encountering works that demonstrate creativity, technical skill, innovation and personal expression, while enjoying canapes and beverages.

Families, friends, alumni, prospective families and members of the wider community are welcome to attend and help support the next generation of Sunbury artists.

Visual arts teacher Kara Richards invited the community to see the students' hard work.

"The Savio Visual Arts Exhibition is

a chance to see the Salesian value of Excellence brought to life through the creativity, skill and dedication of our young artists," she said.

"We want our community to come along, see what these students are capable of, and help us celebrate the incredible work being created across the College."

The Savio Visual Arts Exhibition will be held on Wednesday 16 September from 6-8pm at Salesian College Sunbury.

Tickets will be \$7 per person, and are available to purchase online.

Tickets: events.humanitix.com/savio-visual-arts-exhibition

The King is back at The Plough

The King is returning to Myrniong this October.

Elvis Presley fans can relive the music and magic of the King when award-winning tribute artist Damian Mullin brings Elvis Forever to The Plough Bistro in Myrniong on Saturday 3 October.

Following a successful previous performance at The Plough, Mullin is set to return in full swing to the stage for a royal evening celebrating one of the world's most iconic entertainers.

The four-hour dinner and show will feature some of Elvis' greatest hits, with Mullin bringing the King's unmistakable sound, charisma and energetic stage presence back to life.

Guests can settle in for an evening of classic songs and timeless favourites while enjoying a three-course dinner, making the event a night out for both local music lovers and foodies.

Whether you've been a royal attendant of the King for decades, or you're simply looking to enjoy a memorable evening set to the tune of Elvis' greatest hits, this night's for you.

The performance will run from 6-10pm, giving audiences plenty of time to enjoy the dinner, entertainment and the nostalgia of Elvis' legendary catalogue.

Tickets are \$95 per person and include the three-course dinner and show.

With Elvis' greatest hits on the menu alongside a three-course feast, Elvis Forever offers a chance to spend a Saturday night dining, singing along and stepping back into the golden age of rock 'n' roll.

Tickets: <https://tinyurl.com/3f6ar5fd>.

Tune into animal audio for a unique encounter with wildlife

A constellation of radios will spark an uncanny encounter with the animal world in Newport at the end of this month when the world premiere of The Enormous Radio takes place at The Substation.

The latest work from innovative documentary theatremaker Roslyn Oades and internationally acclaimed sound artist Bob Scott, The Enormous Radio features a ring of old radios, replete with glowing dials, crackling speakers and twitchy

antennas that somehow transmit messages from wildlife.

"I have interviewed humans from all walks of life from professional boxers to nursing homes to schoolies on the Gold Coast," Oades explained.

"I wanted to turn my attention to Australia's wildlife."

A member of Australian Wildlife Sound Recording Group, Oades has an extensive catalogue of documentary field recordings

which provide key source material and inspiration for The Enormous Radio. With assistance from editor Sarah Walker, Oades feeds these animal recordings into voice enhancement software, instructing it to translate as if they were spoken English.

The result is an uncanny aural and textual language that taps into our human desire to communicate with the animal world.

Old radios are central to the work,

reflecting the vital role they still play for Australian communities in emergencies and natural disasters.

Oades and Scott are long-time collaborators, with their previous theatrical installation, The Nightline, appearing at the Malthouse Theatre just last month.

The Enormous Radio is on at The Substation from 30 September-10 October.

Tickets: <https://thesubstation.org.au/program/the-enormous-radio>



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- Optus is proposing to upgrade an existing mobile phone base station on Existing Lattice Tower at Bald Hill, off Swan Road, Darley VIC 3340 (M0053 Bacchus Marsh).
- In summary, the upgrade will comprise of: Removal of four (4) existing panel antennas, Installation of four (4) new antennas, Installation and relocation of ancillary equipment and Installation of temporary antennas to be used during construction.
- We invite you to provide your feedback or request further information by contacting us at: Wannan Bao, Indara, 02 9495 9000, community@indara.com or Level 1, 110 Pacific Highway, St Leonards NSW 2065. We will accept submissions until 5pm on Thursday, 24 September 2026.
- For more information, please visit www.rfnsa.com.au/3340002.

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SPORTS QUIZ

- 1. What is the 100m world record time set by Usain Bolt, in Berlin in 2009?
- 2. Is Australian athlete Ellie Beer a sprinter or a long-distance runner?



Usain Bolt

- 3. The late Tony Mundine boxed professionally in which four weight divisions?
- 4. After 442 Collingwood games, which player is set to continue his career with the Gold Coast Suns?
- 5. Which European country won the right to host the 2026 FIBA Women's Basketball World Cup?
- 6. Which Melbourne player was announced as captain of the AFL's 2026 All-Australian team?
- 7. After retiring in 2024, defensive tackle Aaron Donald has returned to play for which NFL team?
- 8. Which ice hockey team did Newcastle Northstars defeat 2-1 to win the 2026 AIHL championship?
- 9. Vern Cotter is head coach of which Super Rugby team?
- 10. Which US golf professional won the 2026 Tour Championship?

- 11. What medieval sport involves charging with lances on horseback?
- 12. How many sports were played in the very first Olympics in the summer of 1896?
- 13. In which US city was basketball invented?
- 14. Which country's men's rugby team is known as the All Blacks?
- 15. How many holes are there in a standard round of golf?
- 16. Which Collingwood player missed a game-winning set-shot after the siren against the Western Bulldogs in a recent wildcard final?
- 17. Prior to this year, have the NZ Warriors ever won an NRL minor premiership?
- 18. What is the most recent team without an animal in their nickname to win an AFL premiership?
- 19. Which tennis player recently lost their Grand Slam first round winning streak of 78 matches?



The Sydney Marathon

- 20. Which two nations are currently competing in the Rugby's Greatest Rivalry Test series?
- 21. Which free-to-air network will broadcast NBL Basketball games in Australia in 2026/27?
- 22. Prior to 2026, in what year did Melbourne Storm last fail to qualify for the Finals series?
- 23. Which Australian cricketer recently hit No.1 in the Test bowling rankings for the first time?
- 24. In what year did Fitzroy play its last game in the AFL before merging with Brisbane?
- 25. How many teams currently make up the Super Netball league?
- 26. The Australian MotoGP race will be held in which city in 2027?
- 27. Who is the most recent recipient of the Norm Smith Medal?
- 28. Jett Cleary recently debuted for which NRL team?
- 29. In what year was the Sydney Marathon first held?
- 30. The Kennedy Community Centre is the new home ground of which AFL Women's team?

1109 1. 9.58 seconds 2. Sprinter 3. Heavyweight, cruiserweight, light heavyweight and middleweight 4. Scott Pendlebury 5. Germany 6. Max Gawn 7. Los Angeles Rams 8. Canberra Brave 9. Queensland Reds 10. Scottie Scheffler 11. Jousting 12. Nine 13. Springfield, Massachusetts 14. New Zealand 15. 18 16. Tim Membrey 17. Yes (2002) 18. Melbourne Demons (2021) 19. Novak Djokovic 20. South Africa and New Zealand 21. Nine Network 22. 2010 23. Mitchell Starc 24. 1996 25. Eight 26. Adelaide 27. Will Ashcroft 28. New Zealand Warriors 29. 2000 30. Hawthorn



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Kluger keeps on keeping on

By Alistair Kennedy, Marque Motoring

Toyota Kluger is a semi-luxury seven-seat family SUV that has been on sale in Australia since 2003.

Like most other model updates Kluger has grown in size progressively through its life and the latest (fourth) generation, launched here in mid-2021, and is no exception coming in at just under five metres in length.

Note that the Kluger name is only used in Japan and Australia. It's the Highlander in all other markets but that name had already been taken by Hyundai for some of its top-spec variants.

Kluger was given an upgrade in early 2023 that saw the previous, thirsty, V6 petrol engine replaced by a more fuel efficient 2.4-litre turbocharged four but quickly changed to a hybrid only powertrain.

The upgrade also added remote access through Toyota Connected Services and an enhanced multimedia system.

The MY2025 Kluger comes with three trim levels: GX, GXL and Grande, all with all-wheel drive. At the same time there have been a couple of price increases with the GX now selling for \$62,140, GXL for \$71,930 and Grande for \$85,135. All before on-road costs.

Standard equipment across the range includes smart entry and start, manual front and rear dual-zone air conditioning, rain sensing wipers and automatic lights, and seven USB ports.

GXL and Grande models gain power heated front seats, tri-zone climate control, synthetic leather upholstery, power tailgate and satellite navigation with the latest generation multimedia system.

The Grande Hybrid that we tested adds a panoramic moonroof, hands-free operating power tailgate, front seat ventilation, head-up display, a 360-degree all-round view monitor, leather-accented seats and an 11-speaker JBL premium audio system.

Styling

Aimed clearly at family buyers, styling is neat and attractive without anything that's likely to turn heads. The large stacked trapezoidal grille has the Toyota badge at the top centre with a blue trim to identify the hybrid's electric component.

The grille is complemented by slimline LED light clusters with integrated daytime running lights and LED fog lights.

In profile, there's a tapered roofline with



With nearly a quarter of a century behind it Kluger has established itself as one of the best seven-seat family SUV on the Australian market. (Supplied)

integrated rear spoiler, rising beltline and windows with blacked-out B-pillars. Side mirrors have been moved lower on the door panel to improve forward visibility and reduce blind spots.

The rear follows through with a wide stance, slim LED taillights and large lower skid plate.

The GX and GXL ride on 18-inch alloys, the Grande gets 20-inch Chromtec wheels.

There's a choice of five body colours: Eclipse Black, Frosted White, Liquid Mercury (grey), Atomic Rush (red) and Saturn Blue.

Interior

The interior of Kluger features quality materials and soft touch surfaces. The dashboard houses the instrument cluster, central touchscreen display and separate air-conditioning and audio controls.

GX comes with fabric seats, GXL gets synthetic leather and Grande premium leather.

The lower centre console incorporates the transmission lever, drive and AWD mode select switchgear if needed, electronic park brake and two large cupholders.

Storage throughout the cabin includes a 15-litre centre console box, overhead glasses holder, front door bins with 700ml bottle holders, rear door bins with two 700ml bottle holders and eight cupholders.

Two large shelves, one in front of the passenger the other in the centre of the dashboard, are perfect for storing phones, wallets, keys etc.

Access into the second and third row two-seat bench is made easy with the fold down levers for both rows located on the outer shoulder of the seats, which, for the

third-row seats, also automatically folds the head rests in one action.

There's excellent head and leg room in the second-row seats which can slide forward to increase third-row legroom. Middle row passengers also get ceiling-mounted air vents, air-conditioning, controls and two USB-C ports.

Boot space with all seats in place is a reasonable 241 litres. With the third-row seats folded flat, this increases to 552 litres, while folding the second row 60/40-split seat back as well reaches 1150 litres.

The rear hatch is powered for GXL and with a 'kick sensor' for the Grande.

A removable luggage cover, standard on all models, can be stored under the luggage space deck when not in use.

Engines/transmissions

Kluger Hybrid combines a 2.5-litre Atkinson cycle petrol engine with three electric motors that generate a combined output of 184kW including 142kW from the engine.

Peak torque is 242 Nm with fuel usage listed at 5.6 litres per 100km.

Electronic (e-CVT) continuously variable transmission sends power to all four wheels.

There are three drive modes: Sport, Normal and Eco, selectable via a lever on the centre console.

Safety

Kluger was last tested by ANCAP back in June 2021 and received the maximum five-star rating.

Standard features include seven airbags including a driver knee bag but not one in the front between occupants.

There is autonomous emergency braking that can detect oncoming vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists, a reversing camera that includes a camera cleaning system activated via the rear screen washer switch. In GXL versions, the camera display offers normal and wide-angle images and incorporates active guidelines.

There is a 360-degree panoramic view camera but only in the Grande.

Other safety features across the range include adaptive cruise control, lane keep assist, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert and Isofix child anchors in the outer rear seats.

Driving

Built on the same Toyota New Global Architecture platform as the RAV4 and Camry, Kluger delivers a balance of ride and handling, resulting in a premium feel on the road.

Although it does come with all-wheel drive, the Kluger isn't a serious off-road vehicle - the similarly-sized Prado fills that gap in the Toyota range. Rather it's aimed at those looking for a medium to large station wagon to carry the family.

Compared with the previous generation Kluger, the current model offers a substantial improvement in driving stability, roadholding and comfort on all surfaces thanks to newly developed front and rear suspension set-ups that provide responsive, smooth handling.

Ride comfort is also enhanced by a new Body Control system that controls drive torque to minimise vehicle pitching due to road surface irregularities. Steering is responsive with nice feedback.

Combined fuel consumption is listed as 5.6 litres per 100km. We averaged 6.8 during our week of testing.

Summary

With nearly a quarter of a century behind it Kluger has established itself as one of the best seven-seat family SUVs on the Australian market.

It's spacious without being cumbersome with quality materials and fittings. Any lack of performance in the powertrain is made up for in smooth running and hybrid-based fuel efficiency.

Any lack of performance in the powertrain is made up for in smooth running and fuel economy.

Comfort and low road noise makes Kluger a perfect long-distance cruiser.



KLUGER STOCK NOW ARRIVING at MELTON TOYOTA



OH WHAT A FEELING



The Suns' Keshena Kinkaid celebrates a goal. 576218_41



Yarraville Seddon's Susan Prashanth. 576218_01



Wyndhamvale lines up. 576220_03



Parkside Spurs' Rita Ceravolo. 576220_26

Grand final joy and heartbreak

It was a big day of grand final action across Melbourne's north-west. Star Weekly's Ljubica Vrankovic was out shooting some of the action.



Laurimar. 576224_04



Wyndhamvale's Chloe Prior tries to tackle Parkside Spurs' Naomi Diong. 576220_15



Laurimar's Rylan Herrick. 576224_17



Westmeadows' Jordan Hollow. 576236_08



Westmeadows' team manager Deb Sparks. 576236_21



Westmeadows' Francis Keenan. 576236_29

Souter new Panthers coach

By Tara Murray

Blake Souter will coach Melton South in next year's Riddell District Football League season.

The Panthers announced that Travis Hodgson has stood down as coach after three years, with Souter stepping up into a player-coach role.

Souter joined the Panthers from Melton for this season and was one of the Panthers' best as they made a second straight finals series.

"Blake brings a wealth of playing experience and leadership to the Panthers, including two premierships and a best-on-ground performance in a grand final

victory," the Panthers said.

"Having already made his mark in the blue and white, Blake's knowledge of the game, high standards and winning experience will be invaluable as we continue to build on the foundations of our football program.

"Stepping into the senior playing coach role, Blake is looking forward to the challenge ahead and the opportunity to take everything he has learnt throughout his playing career into coaching.

"Blake has been fortunate to have some great mentors throughout his football journey, particularly over the past few years, and is excited to take the knowledge, guidance and lessons he has received from

those around him and pass them on to the next generation of Panthers."

Hodgson told Star Weekly after the side's elimination final loss that he was weighing up whether to continue, with increasing work commitments a factor.

On Melton South's Facebook page, Hodgson said it was the right time to move on.

"I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks and love for the Melton South Football Netball Club and its people, the people who together make it the great club that it is," he said.

"The way in which my family and myself have been welcomed and embraced, we could not help but feel part of the tight-

knit community that is the MSFNC.

"I've honestly loved every minute of my three seasons with you, from the tougher days without wins through to the 10- and 11-win seasons that culminated in finals appearances.

"To the committee, thank you for the unwavering support you have given me.

"To the playing group, it's been very rewarding working with such a coachable group of young men, hungry for success and open to strong feedback.

"Watching you develop and evolve into playing your best footy has no doubt been my favourite part of the journey and I will maintain contact with you and follow your footy journey closely."



Most Exciting. (Stuart McCormick)

Most Exciting emerges as Vicbred finalist

By John Dunne

The APG Vicbred (3YO Colts & Geldings) Final has changed complexion after Saturday night's semi-finals at Melton.

Punters were dealt an early blow after the favourite Soho Charmer galloped at the start before finishing eighth and failing to qualify for the final in the opening event.

Meanwhile, the Emma Stewart-trained Most Exciting defied a betting drift to take out the first semi-final after charging through along the sprint lane to defeat Major Blitz and Enjoy Life.

Champion reinswoman Kerryn Manning said the son of Always B Miki was always travelling like a winner behind the leader.

"He's a lovely horse and certainly lives up to expectations, he travelled pretty strong and was pretty keen in the run and on the bend took just a little bit to accelerate but on the line, he was pretty strong," Manning said.

The second semi-final too threw up an upset result after the Matt Craven-trained

Le Cardinal and Mount Barker Boy fought out the finish while the favourite Neptune nite capitulated to finish second last after over-racing in the lead.

Driver Amy Day admitted she was apprehensive prior to the race after being allocated an outside front-row draw.

"It's a lot of relief to have him in the Final, I was a little bit nervous about this race tonight because while I had so much faith in this horse, we had so many good horses in the race we could have easily missed the final from draw," Day said.

The first semi-final of the 3YO Fillies division went according to script after the Emma Stewart-trained fillies Bettor Beach (\$2.15) and the \$2 favourite Pre Eminent provided the quinella.

Bettor Beach eased out of the one-one trail around the home turn before producing a withering sprint to score running away by 10 metres and reeling off a 26.8 last 400 metres.

Driver Mark Pitt said he was able to secure a trail despite his extreme barrier (12).

"It was only a moderate tempo early so I thought that I would put her into the race and hopefully we got some cover and we did, she was very fast and I think she will be better again next week," Pitt said.

The Joe Pace-prepared filly Sweet Irish Loch prevailed in the second semi-final after getting the verdict in a thrilling three-way photo from Rachels Legacy and Keayang Passion with Adrian Pace in the sulky.

It was a career highlight for the 25-year-old Pace.

"It's right up there, I won a free-for-all last year and this is on par," Pace said.

"It didn't go to plan with what we had in mind but the one-one was good and it worked out perfect," he said.

The favourite Quatro Moth weakened noticeably in the home straight to finish last after leading and is on her last chance to race truly.

The Emma Stewart-trained colts Cardigan Sniper and Some High engaged in a two-horse war in the second semi-final of the 2YO Colts & Geldings division.



Western Rams are looking for a new coach. (Ljubica Vrankovic) 479000_18

Grech departs Rams

The Western Rams will have a new coach for next year's Western Football League division 2 season.

The Rams announced on social media that after two seasons in charge, Connor Grech would not be coaching next season.

"A chapter comes to a close," the Rams said on social media.

"A huge thank you to Connor for leading our senior team over the past two seasons.

"Your time, effort and dedication to the Western Rams hasn't gone unnoticed. From game day to training, you've poured plenty into the team and helped shape our senior program over the past two seasons.

"You're leadership, commitment and passion have made a lasting impact on our club and our players.

"We're proud to have had you lead the Rams and grateful for everything you've contributed along the way."

Grech joined the Rams at the end of 2024 having previously been an assistant coach at Kilmore and St Albans, having also been a development coach at the Calder Cannons.

The Rams finished this year in eighth spot with three wins for the year, the same amount of wins as last season.

The Rams put out an expression of interest for a coach and assistant coach for next season, with the club aiming to hold interviews this week.

The club said it was searching for a passionate, driven and committed leader who can help take the football program forward and build on the future of the club.

The Rams are also seeking interest for under-18s players for next year.

Devils go through again

By Tara Murray

Darley's hopes of back-to-back premier-ships are well and truly alive with the Devils the first side through to the Ballarat Netball League grand final.

The clear favourites this season, the Devils had little trouble as they got past Lake Wendouree in the main semi-final on Saturday.

A 17-5 first quarter set the tone for the Devils and by half-time the game was all but over with the Devils leading 37-18 at the main break.

The margin increased to 30 goals at the final break.

The Lakers won the final quarter 14-8 but

it mattered little with the Devils winning 61-37.

Olivia Cawthray shot 32 goals for the Devils.

Akira McCormack, who missed the qualifying final win, shot 18 goals and Ailish McCormack shot 11 goals.

The Devils will now get a week off before the grand final and the question is who can beat the defending champions.

It's the fourth straight grand final for the Devils.

Lake Wendouree will face North Ballarat in the preliminary final this Saturday.

North Ballarat had a dominant win against the Sunbury Lions in the other semi-final on Sunday, winning 64-46.

The Roosters led by eight goals at quarter-time and were never headed as they put out a strong all court performance.

The Devils C-grade side also won through to the grand final with a first semi-final win on Saturday.

It was a thriller with the Sunbury Lions, with not much separating the teams all day.

After leading by three goals at three-quarter time, the Devils were able to hold on to win 31-30.

The Lions will face Lake Wendouree in the preliminary final to see who will face the Devils in the grand final.

Meanwhile, the Devils' B-grade side kept its season alive with a semi-final win against East Point on Sunday.

After leading by two goals at half-time on Sunday, the Devils had a 31-18 second half to claim a 56-41 win.

The Devils will face Sebastopol in the preliminary final, with the Sunbury Lions awaiting the winner.

The Devils are looking to go back-to-back having broken through last year.

In the D-grade competition, Bacchus Marsh lost to the Sunbury Lions in the first semi-final.

The Cobras proved no match for the Lions, losing 30-16.

The Cobras will get a second chance and will play East Point in the preliminary final with the Lions awaiting the winner in the grand final.



Caroline Springs George Cross women's side. (Luke Hemer)

Simeki appointed Bloods coach

Melton has locked in its coach for next year's Ballarat Netball League season as the program aims to continue to rebuild.

Magz Simeki has been appointed the Bloods coach, with the club saying it was thrilled to have someone with her experience, passion and commitment to player development joining the club.

"Magz is a passionate leader with a strong focus on junior development, player pathways and community netball," the club said.

"Having grown up playing netball in New Zealand, Magz brings extensive experience across local, representative and pathway programs, with coaching experience including Casey Netball Association, Victoria Samoa Netball Association and currently Glen Orden Hawks in the WFNL (Western Football Netball League).

"Her experience extends beyond the court, having delivered clinics, school holiday programs and development initiatives focused on nurturing the next generation of players.

"A competitive athlete herself, Magz has played across the RDFN-L (Riddell District Football Netball League), BFNL, WFNL and MPFNL (Mornington Peninsula Football Netball League).

"She also holds leadership roles as secretary and treasurer of Victoria Samoa Netball Association and tour logistics and head strength and conditioning coach for The Nesian Project Academy."

Simeki will have the chance to make her mark after a few up and down seasons for the club.

After not having an A-grade side after Covid-19, the club managed to build with three wins in 2023, four in 2024 and five in 2025, despite some coaching changes along the way.

This year it was a tough year for the Bloods with four of their six sides failing to win a match.

The young A-grade side were able to push some sides in the back half of the season, showing its improvement.

The club's D-grade side won three matches, while its E-grade side made finals after finishing third.

The E-grade side was knocked out in the first week of finals.

Jubilation as Georgies claim championship

By Tara Murray

Caroline Springs George Cross has achieved the goal it set out to achieve the past two seasons, earning promotion and the championship in FV women's state league 1 north-west.

With only one team earning promotion each season, the battle to finish top has been fierce and hotly contested.

After missing out by four points last season, when two teams were eventually promoted with Calder United withdrawing, the Georgies came back stronger this season.

With a 4-0 in the second last round, the Georgies sealed top spot and with it the championship and the much wanted promotion.

Coach Davide Gualtieri said it was an amazing feeling.

"When I came to Georgies last year the long term plan was to bring them to the NPLW (National Premier League women's)," he said.

"So we are half way there and a step closer.

"It has been fantastic and I'm so proud

of the girls, all the coaching staff and everyone. It means a lot for the guys at George Cross and for the junior girls and the pathway."

Gualtieri had set big expectations when he came to the club.

He said while they wanted to achieve a lot, having fun was still a big key for them.

"We look at trying to be professional with the girls," he said.

"They knew what was at stake and we had to bring in some players with some experience.

"It's not easy with only one getting promoted."

Gualtieri said Mill Park and Altona City, which will finish second and third, had pushed them all season in the fight for promotion.

The championship and promotion goes with the Steph Catley Plate, which the Georgies won in the middle of the year.

It's the second straight year the Georgies have won the plate, which is for the highest state league teams like in the Nike FC Cup.

While the Georgies have achieved what they set out to do, Gualtieri isn't satisfied just yet.

The Georgies faced Craigieburn City in the final round of the season and they came away with a 5-0 win to finish the season.

They will now play in the state league 1 grand final.

"We want to get as much out of the season as possible," he said.

Gualtieri said one of the proudest things for him was receiving messages from people saying they enjoyed how they went about things.

"We were winning in style."

The Georgies will now play in the Victorian Premier League women's competition next season.

"Maybe we'll start thinking about that next week," Gualtieri said.

Meanwhile in the final round of state league men's action, a final round win wasn't enough for the Westside Strikers to avoid relegation in state league 4 north-west.

The Strikers, Point Cook and Melton Phoenix were all in the battle to avoid second bottom and with it relegation.

With all three teams getting wins on Saturday, it was the Strikers that finished second bottom and will go down.



Tyler Gysberts. (Ljubica Vrankovic) 574819_08

Lakers flex, win through

By Luke D'Anello

Caroline Springs had the answers each time Albion threatened a fightback on Sunday.

The Lakers held a comfortable, yet not insurmountable, 21-point advantage at three-quarter-time of the Western Football League division 1 sudden-death semi-final.

The Cats nailed the opening goal of the final term to reduce the deficit to 15 points, setting the stage for a potentially thrilling climax.

But Brian Lake's side then flexed its considerable muscle to turn a serious contest into a stroll, piling on the last seven majors to power to a 56-point triumph, 16.8 (104)-6.12 (48).

"You're always nervous throughout until you get to that point where the game's yours," three-time AFL premiership player Lake said.

"When sides are down at three-quarter-time, they're going to take risks, so it's about weathering that storm in the first five, 10 minutes ... and trying to absorb the pressure. But we also knew there were going to be opportunities going the other way.

"Last time we played them we gave up 10 goals from turnover, so we were just very conscious of not giving those goals away. If they can score from stoppage, well they're a really good stoppage side and it's hard to defend that.

"But are they going to have the ability to kick 10, 15 goals from there if we can limit and be careful with our ball use and control the ball. That was always going to make it hard for them to put a score on the board that was going to beat us."

Skipper Max Tessari, Ben Caluzzi, Alipate Bryant, Alexander Paech and Daniel Kitanovski led the way for the winning side. Jamie Ristoski bagged four goals and Zen Christofi three.

Caroline Springs will next face Yarraville-Seddon in a rematch of last year's preliminary final.

The pair have met three times this season, with the Lakers winning both home-and-away clashes before the Eagles prevailed in the qualifying final.

"We've reviewed that already and tried to correct a few things (on Sunday)," Lake said.

"We'll go in confident. We've got some injuries and so have they, so it will be a

really good challenge, similar to last year."

Caroline Springs lost last season's decider to Werribee Districts, who knocked off Yarraville-Seddon in the major semi-final.

Little has separated the three clubs in 2026, but the Tigers have the edge in experience on the big stage as they shoot for a third premiership in five years.

"Werribee had some injuries early, but they've got all their players back," Lake said.

"We beat Yarraville twice and lost the last game, and they've had some injuries as well.

"You can have your top 22, but it's very rare you get your best 22 out there in finals with injuries and whatnot.

"We've had some guys out as well, but we're fine. We've got a strong seniors, reserves and under 19s as well.

"It makes it a lot easier as a coach knowing you've got people to choose from."

Harley Tanti made his first senior appearance in the semi-final and earned Lake's praise.

Caroline Springs face headaches at the selection table, with Cooper Pepi and Beau O'Connell set to return for Saturday's preliminary final at Avalon Airport Oval.

Cobras kicked out

By Tara Murray

Bacchus Marsh's reserves side has been kicked out of the Ballarat Football League finals, according to the club.

The Cobras released a statement on Thursday regarding a sanction imposed on their reserves football team and that its season was over.

The Cobras had claimed the minor premiership before suffering a one-point loss in the qualifying final in the opening week of finals.

The sanction is in relation to names on teamsheets. The Cobras named Dennis Armfield, who oversees their whole men's football program, as their reserves coach on team sheets.

Marc Dransman, who is the dedicated reserves coach, had his name handwritten alongside Armfield's. Dransman registered as a volunteer at the start of the season, not as an AFL-accredited coach.

The club described this as an administrative oversight for which the club accepts full responsibility.

"Marc completed the accreditation promptly after the issue was brought to our attention, and the club has also reviewed its internal processes to prevent a recurrence," the Cobras said.

The Ballarat Football Netball League imposed a \$1000 fine and removed all premiership points earned in matches won while Marc was unaccredited.

"The loss of those points made our reserves team ineligible to participate in the 2026 finals series.

"The club subsequently asked AFL Victoria to refer the matter to a Regional Appeals Committee."

The club stated it was advised that the BFNLL decision involved a material error of law and that the resulting sanction was manifestly excessive in the circumstances.

The club said AFL Victoria has now advised that it will not refer the matter to a regional appeal.

"The club is extremely disappointed that the matter will not proceed to an appeal hearing, particularly given the significant consequences for our players, who participated in good faith, gained no advantage and had no involvement in the administrative failure," the club said in its statement.

"We are considering the decision and any remaining options available to the club. We will provide a further update if appropriate.

"We are devastated for our reserves players and thank them for their incredible efforts through the year, which netted 15 wins on their way to the minor premiership.

"We thank them for their dedication and care for one another through the year and this week."