

NORTHERN **Star Weekly**

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Celebrating all things Italian

The Calabria Club is celebrating the 80th anniversary of the Italian Republic with a fun community day in Bulla.

Club president Sam Sposato said it will be a day of celebrations with stalls, food vendors and fun activities, including a spaghetti and chilli eating competition.

"We've got mass in the morning, and then we've got entertainment for the rest of the afternoon," he said.

Other activities planned for the day include live entertainment on the main stage, the Fiat Club Car Show, an animal farm, jumping castles and kids entertainment.

Mr Sposato said the celebration will help mark an important day for the community and welcomed everyone to come along to this free event.

"You can have a dance, listen to music, it'll be a nice day," he said.

The community celebration will be held from 10am for mass with activities starting at 12.30pm at The Calabria Club, Bulla, on Sunday 31 May.

Details: facebook.com/calabriclubbulla

Calabria Club president Sam Sposato. (Damjan Janevski) 553107_01

By-election woes

By Laura Michell

A second Whittlesea council election has been tarnished by allegations of interference with votes.

The Local Government Inspectorate (LGI) has been asked to investigate allegations of interference in the Thomastown ward by-election.

On Thursday 21 May, the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) issued an alert to voters in the Thomastown ward, urging them to protect their vote.

The statement said the VEC had received information that residents had been

approached by an individual offering to complete and return postal ballots on their behalf.

The LGI confirmed it had been notified by the VEC of reports of voters being approached in their homes by an individual who filled out ballot papers and removed the postal ballot packs from the homes.

Electoral laws prohibit interference, coercion or improperly completing a ballot on another person's behalf, the VEC said.

The VEC said it had procedures in place to help determine if any irregular voting activity has occurred.

"We take all allegations of interference

with elections seriously," a spokesperson said. "This includes processes to detect multiple returns and identify irregular postal vote return rates."

The spokesperson said that at this state, there was no evidence the integrity of the by-election had been compromised.

"We understand that these incidents can make people concerned. What this demonstrates, however, is that any attempt to interfere with an election will be detected swiftly and acted on, in accordance with electoral laws," the spokesperson said.

"If any voter believes their vote has been interfered with, the voter should call us to

request a replacement postal ballot pack on 131 832 and let us know the reason. This information is important as it allows us to identify and investigate potential issues if multiple ballot papers are returned for the same voter."

In May 2025, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) voided the result of the October 2024 council election in Lalor Ward following "attempted and actual interference" with the election, with ballot papers stolen from letter boxes in an area of streets west of Edgars Road.

■ Continued: Page 3.

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Road hazards not repaired

By Courtney Black

Whittlesea council has condemned the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) claiming it has ignored reported road defects and hazards for years, putting the community at risk.

The council claims Whittlesea's arterial roads have deteriorated since the DTP became responsible for their maintenance in 2023. Prior to 2023, council maintained roads via a contract with DTP.

A report to last week's council meeting stated that as of February, DTP had only resolved 42 of 749 defects reported by council in October 2025.

The report detailed unresolved dumped rubbish, damaged guard rails and signage, surface defects, including potholes, and overgrown grass.

The report found that between those months DTP road defects had almost doubled to 1302 total.

According to the report, 11 road surface defects, largely potholes, reported on Gorge Road in October were unresolved by February.

Similarly, Whittlesea-Yea Road had 16 unresolved defects and 18 new road surface defects by February.

Cr Michael Labrador said the state needs to do more to ensure commuter safety on local roads.

"There are not only potholes... [but also] damaged guard rails which will impact the safety of our commuters in the case of an accident," Cr Labrador said.

More than 30 damaged guard rails reported over the past two years (including 23 reported in early 2024) were unrepaired in February.

Two damaged guard rails on Craigieburn Road reported in March and April 2024 were among those unrepaired.

According to the state, any hazards on the road network that impact community safety are rectified as a priority by DTP. The department did not explain why the defects reported by council were left unresolved.

Whittlesea mayor Lawrie Cox said road defects should be a priority in such a car-dependent municipality.

"The northern suburbs have been ignored for too long and we've said enough's enough," Cr Cox said.

A state spokesperson said Whittlesea's roads will be prioritized in the \$36.9 million Better Roadsides Blitz.

"We'll be delivering a substantial amount of work across the Whittlesea LGA - including cleaning up roadsides, repairing signage and vegetation clearing," the spokesperson said.

Council said it will continue to advocate to the DTP to improve maintenance in Whittlesea.



The Pacific Island Playgroup threw a big celebration in Atwood for its third birthday. (Courtney Black) 554098_01

Pasefika playgroup 'feels like home'

The Pacific Island Playgroup celebrated its third anniversary with an ever-growing community of Pasefika children and parents in Hume.

The celebrations were held at the playgroup's new home at the Atwood House Community Centre on 18 May with morning tea, nursery rhymes and games.

Playgroup volunteer and mum, Mava Tuitupou joined the playgroup in its first year with her kids Frankie, 4,

and SJ, 3.

"I hung around because it was, it was a space I didn't know at the time that I needed," Ms Tuitupou said.

"Now I am one of the three mums that volunteer and keep it running.

"It feels like home. This is just me giving back a little bit back to the community, I love it."

The playgroup has families with connections to Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Kiribati, Tokelau and Aotearoa.

Ms Tuitupou said she loves seeing her kids immersed in Pasefika culture.

"We're Tongan, but the playgroup is made up of different islands, so we learn how to count from one to 10, and how to say hello in different dialects."

She said she wants her kids to grow up and know that there are people that look like them.

"We might not be from the same island, but we're not alone, they are not the only ones that are brown skinned."

Feedback sought on Hume draft budget

Local recreation reserves are set for major investment under Hume council's 2026-27 draft budget.

The proposed budget, currently out for the final round of community feedback, is shaped by \$154 million in capital works.

Three recreation reserve upgrade projects are allocated over \$2 million each, the Antares Parade Recreation Reserve in Kalkallo, the John Coutts Reserve in Gladstone Park, and the Willowbrook Recreation Reserve in Westmeadows.

Councillor Naim Kurt said he was pleased to see investment in Westmeadows and Gladstone Park, but that Tullamarine had been left behind.

"I don't know whether we've just got the balance right," Cr Kurt said.

"Particularly in Tullamarine there's been no sort of capital funding committed at least for this financial year apart from the [\$55,000] master plan for the Melrose Drive reserve."

Cr Ally Watson welcomed the proposed investment towards Kalkallo.

"This is focusing on delivering essential community and sporting infrastructure that will support local participation, social connection, and shared community use as Kalkallo continues to grow," Cr Watson said.

She said the draft budget commits essential funding to council road upgrades.

"Some of the work that we're doing on our council roads includes \$3.6 million for the Mitchell and Malcolm Street bridge reconstruction."

Council is proposing an average 2.75 per cent rates increase - the maximum allowed under the state rate cap - while it proposes a \$306 waste charge and \$407 kerbside waste service charge.

The proposed capital works funding invests \$48 million in roads, footpaths and transport, \$33 million in parks, reserves and open space, and \$21.5 million in buildings and facilities.

Residents addressed the meeting to make their pitch for projects they would like to see included in the budget, which councillor Karen Sherry said all councillors should take into account before the final budget is adopted.

"It will be finalised in May and if it cannot be accommodated, it should be given very serious consideration for the next budget because we'll be taking ideas from 1 July," Cr Sherry said.

Details: participate.hume.vic.gov.au/proposed-annual-budget-202627

Damage bill from inclusive play space vandalism tops \$45,000

Whittlesea council has condemned "senseless vandalism" that left at least \$45,000 worth of damage at the All Abilities Play Space in Mill Park.

Council said it has been left to pick up the bill after vandals "trashed" public toilets at the play space, leaving families and people with disabilities without vital facilities.

Police are investigating the damage which investigators were told occurred

sometime between 2-11 May at the play space off of Morang Drive.

Council said it has had to close all public toilets at the park following the vandalism, including the changing places facility used by people with high-support needs.

Whittlesea mayor Lawrie Cox said vandalism has no place in the community.

"When our parks and playgrounds are deliberately damaged, it affects every resident or visitor who relies on these facilities

when out in the community," Cr Cox said.

"It's time we called out this senseless behaviour for what it is - selfish, unacceptable and a waste of public money.

"This kind of behaviour shows a blatant disrespect for much-needed public facilities, costing the council, and ultimately the community."

Police estimated the damage caused is worth approximately \$45,000, council said it totals more than \$50,000.

A home for a cure

The 2026 Home for a Cure is taking shape in Donnybrook, with proceeds from the project to provide vital support to children's cancer charity My Room.

The four-bedroom, single -storey Henley home is being built by volunteers on donated land in Satterly's Heartford estate.

My Room chief executive Margaret Zita said the Home for a Cure campaign is the charity's main fundraising activation.

"It's life or death for a charity like ours to have this home built," Ms Zita said.

Established 33 years ago, My Room supports families throughout every stage of their child's cancer journey.

"We provide financial and emotional support to families. We also fund critical clinical care positions in hospitals, right across Australia and we also fund research in clinical trials," Ms Zita said.

"This home creates more awareness right across the country so we can actually help more families support them through their journey, that's the difference."

Manfred Haupt and his family have been supported by My Room since his son Dieter was diagnosed at age 12.

"You've got someone who is in your corner who wants to help you, and it's not out of any obligations, it's out of genuine desire," Mr Haupt said. "We've not taken any financial assistance offered but Margaret had [Dieter] go to the Formula 1 and meet Oscar Piastrri. Those sorts of things helped him emotionally and mentally."

Piastrri is a My Room ambassador and his mum Nicole Piastrri said she was honoured to join the committee.

"Oscar's got a really good platform and so we need to use it. We really want to raise awareness of My Room, because they're



Manfred Haupt and his son Dieter, 14, celebrated the 2026 Home for a Cure with My Room chief executive Margaret Zita and Nicole Piastrri. (Damjan Janevski) 552195_04

incredible," Ms Piastrri said.

Henley national general manager Ben Griffiths said the commitment shown by volunteer tradies and suppliers every year is nothing short of extraordinary.

Satterly senior marketing manager Emma Bell said this is the ninth block of

land donated to My Room.

"We've got a fantastic block that's just going to be great for families, centrally located near future parks and a town centre," Ms Bell said.

My Room: <https://www.myroom.com.au/>

By-election woes

■ From page 1.

The interference was referred to VCAT, police and the LGI by the VEC in the days following the election after it detected a high number of multiple ballot papers appearing to be from the same voters.

Electoral commissioner Sven Bluemmel reminded voters that they could seek assistance to vote by a trusted relative or friend, when needed, but the ballot paper should be completed according to the voter's wishes.

"Any attempt to pressure voters or improperly handle another person's ballot is unacceptable," Mr Bluemmel said.

"Voters have the right to make their own choices freely and secretly, and we encourage anyone with concerns to contact the VEC as soon as possible."

The LGI said the penalty for anyone found guilty of interfering with election-related material could be up to 600 penalty units or five years imprisonment.

A by-election is being held in Thomastown ward to fill a vacancy left by the resignation of Nic Brooks from Whittlesea council in January.

Anyone with information that could support the investigation should report it to the LGI via lgi.vic.gov.au

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New bridge for Donnybrook

By Laura Michell

A second bridge will be built over the Hume Freeway on Donnybrook Road, the federal and state governments have announced.

Local MPs announced the new bridge in a series of posts to social media on Wednesday 13 May.

Federal Infrastructure Minister Catherine King, McEwen MP Rob Mitchell, Scullin MP Andrew Giles and Calwell MP Basem Abdo shared a video and post to Facebook stating that the federal government would provide \$37.4 million for the new bridge.

The MPs said the new bridge would help connect the three northern suburbs electorates.

State MPs Ros Spence and Lauren Kath-

age also took to Facebook to announce the second bridge, adding that the jointly funded project would include the duplication of Donnybrook Road to Dwyer Street.

The state government will contribute \$7.7 million to the project, which will build on stage one of the Donnybrook Road upgrade.

The state and federal governments announced \$125 million for stage one, which is currently in pre-construction, last year.

Stage one upgrades include transforming the roundabout at Donnybrook Road and Mitchell Street into a fully signalised intersection and building a new bridge over Kalkallo Creek.

Stage two will include the second bridge and the duplication of Donnybrook Road

between the Hume Freeway and Dwyer Street.

Intersection upgrades will also be carried out at the Hume Freeway outbound off-ramp.

New shared walking and cycling paths will be delivered along the northern side of Donnybrook Road between Polaris Road and Dwyer Street.

In her social media video, Ms Kathage, who is the Yan Yean MP, said the second stage of works were in response to community feedback.

"We're going to get that traffic moving which is causing so much frustration and delay when all you want to do is get to work or get to school," Ms Kathage said.

"You asked us to expand the scope of our

project to deliver more for the community and together with the federal government, that is what we are delivering."

Ms King said the federal government's investment was part of the federal budget handed down on 12 May.

She described the second stage as "an upgrade that the people living in Melbourne's outer north have called for and deserve".

Neither government has provided details about when the works will commence nor the expected completion date.

As reported by *Star Weekly*, Kalkallo and Donnybrook residents have been calling for the duplication of Donnybrook Road for a number of years, with congestion on the single-lane arterial road causing significant delays.



Elizabeth Paglia, Dr Sarvesh Soni and Tanya Gook were among the community members appointed to the committee. (Damjan Janevski) 552481_04

Preserving historical Epping Cemetery

A new committee aims to provide a community voice in how Whittlesea council manages the historical Epping Cemetery.

In April, Dr Sarvesh Soni, Barbara Miller, Bruno Tassone, Elizabeth Paglia and Tanya Gook were appointed to the Epping Cemetery Community Asset Committee (ECCAC) by council, following a public expression of interest process.

Mr Soni said the ECCAC will act as a bridge between council and the community by sharing feedback on the cemetery maintenance.

"We will also support the preservation of its heritage value, and help shape plans for future upgrades or work," Mr Soni said.

The Epping Cemetery opened in 1858 when cemetery trustees were first appointed. It operated until 1967 where burials were closed except to deed holders.

Whittlesea councillors Christine Stow, Deb Gunn and Jarrod Lappin are part of the Epping Cemetery Trust which the ECCAC will advise.

Mr Soni said cemeteries are more than just places of burial, but also of remem-

brance and heritage.

"As a committee, we are also looking to digitalise the history... [and] stories of the people those that are buried there.

"This cemetery is from the mid-1800s, so it provides a glimpse of cultural and natural history of the region."

He said the committee will prioritise maintenance, accessibility, and sustainability at the site.

You can keep up to date with the committee via its Facebook page or by contacting info@whittlesea.vic.gov.au.

Hume council adopts AI policy

Hume council has adopted its first artificial intelligence (AI) policy, aiming to keep up with the growing technology in an ethical way.

The policy allows council to use AI tools to assist with some administrative tasks like summarising documents, writing correspondence and drafting materials.

However, it restricts council from using AI to replace human interaction or to make final decisions that impact individuals, businesses or the community.

At the 19 May council meeting, councillor Jarrod Bell said the policy provides important guard rails for AI use.

"AI is one of those double-edged swords that there is a great deal of concern in the community and there is a great deal of excitement about its potential," Cr Bell said.

"It's a bit of the wild west right now, there is a lot of different ways, shapes and forms that people can use AI.

"[This policy is] a good governance step to ensure that our people are using this technology in an appropriate and an ethical way."

The policy also includes provisions for AI chatbots deployed by council, and responses to community enquiries.

The council can only deploy unsupervised public-facing AI chatbots or agents if they have human escalation pathways.

Under the policy, council can use AI to generate draft responses to common community enquiries to support timely and consistent communication.

Cr Ally Watson said the policy explicitly reinforces that AI will not replace human decision-making.

"This policy is not about replacing our staff, it is about supporting them," Cr Watson said.

"Our people are at the heart of everything council does. Their judgment, experience, and connection to community cannot be replicated by technology.

"AI is a tool that can help reduce administrative burden, improve efficiency, and free up our staff to focus on the work that matters most, serving our community."

She said without a formal policy, AI may be used inconsistently with potential privacy, security, bias, and accountability risks.

"Final decisions and accountability will always remain with council officers and inbuilt within the policy is the need for it to be reviewed within 12 months of adoption by council's IT group."

Terms set for Melbourne Airport's third runway health study

The terms of reference have been approved for Melbourne Airport's Community Health Study, progressing the third runway project.

The federal government's approval of the terms of reference establishes a clear framework for the independent study into the health impacts of aircraft noise associated with the operation of the new third runway on communities surrounding the airport.

Melbourne Airport said the approval represents an important milestone in the delivering one of the first long-term studies of its kind at a major Australian airport.

The Community Health Study was a key

condition of the government's approval for the third runway.

Melbourne Airport said the study will establish baseline data before runway operations begin and continue with annual monitoring for 20 years.

Developed in consultation with independent experts from Deakin and Liverpool universities, the Melbourne Airport Community Aviation Consultation Group, international public health experts and community stakeholders, the terms of reference provide guidelines on how health outcomes associated with aircraft noise will be exam-

ined, including sleep disturbance, annoyance, mental health, cardiovascular disease, learning impacts and quality of life.

The framework will ensure independence and governance, baseline monitoring, annual reporting that is publicly accessible, ongoing community engagement, and the use of noise exposure and health outcome data to monitor trends over time.

The next step will be the appointment of a qualified independent team to undertake the study.

Details: melbourneairportprojectshub.com.au/community-health-study

Elite Park plans withdrawn

By Courtney Black

Plans for Melbourne Airport's \$475 million Elite Park entertainment precinct have been withdrawn, after major tenant Topgolf pulled out of the project.

In 2024, Melbourne Airport announced that the US-based sports entertainment company would be one of Elite Park's first tenants. Construction on the precinct was set to commence in 2025 and continue over nine years, subject to federal approval.

A Melbourne Airport spokesperson confirmed that Topgolf has since exited the project and that the Elite Park major development plan was withdrawn fol-

lowing federal government consultation. "Melbourne Airport is governed by the Federal Airports Act and all major developments on the airport estate are subject to a major development plan," the spokesperson said.

Despite this withdrawal, the spokesperson said Elite Park will continue to be developed, but did not provide an updated timeline.

"We are working constructively with the [federal] department to progress our major capital program in accordance with the requirements of the Airports Act.

"The Elite Park vision remains unchanged.

"The only change is that planning

approvals will be progressed on a project-by-project basis."

At its 11 May meeting, Hume council noted its disappointment at Topgolf's exit. According to councillor Naim Kurt, council was informed in February that the Elite Park plans were withdrawn.

Cr Kurt said the precinct, with Topgolf as a tenant, was worth \$475 million and would have provided 2140 jobs in Hume.

"To not have the Topgolf development proceeding, which was going to take place in Tullamarine, was a real disappointment," Cr Kurt said.

"That was going to be a huge economic driver here for our community locally and would have provided particularly for

the Tullamarine community."

The Melbourne Airport spokesperson said it is engaging potential tenants for Elite Park.

"Elite Park is already a big visitor drawcard for Hume, thanks to the likes of UrbnSurf and AFL Max," the spokesperson said.

"Melbourne Airport remains in constructive discussions with numerous potential tenants and looks forward to making public announcements at the appropriate time."

The spokesperson said indoor skiing facility 'Snowtunnel', which was this month announced to open at a mystery location, is not part of current plans.

Pink round to raise awareness

The Hume City Broncos are gearing up for the annual Big V pink round basketball showdown raising money for Breast Cancer Network Australia.

The Broncos championship men's and women's teams will be kitted out in new pink round jerseys as they take on the McKinnon Cougars on Saturday 30 May.

The club is inviting locals to this thrilling round nine double-header in Broadmeadows to help raise awareness and funds for those impacted by breast cancer.

Broadmeadows Basketball Association general manager Morgan Hughes said the round is one of the most important nights on the club's calendar.

"While it is always a big occasion on court, the real purpose of the evening is much bigger than basketball," he said.

"As a community sporting association, we know the power sport has to bring people together, and pink round is a great example of that."

Across the the Big V competition, 30 teams took part in the pink round last year raising funds and awareness with raffles, giveaways and pink-themed initiatives.

The women's game kicks off at 6pm, followed by the men's game at 8pm at Broadmeadows Basketball Stadium.

To donate: <https://pinksportsday2026.bcna.org.au/o/broadmeadows-broncos-pink-round>



Hume City Broncos players Ricardo Time and Kelly Heimbürger are thrilled to wear pink jerseys for breast cancer awareness. (Damjan Janevski) 554401_01



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Above: Meg Talekar and Neil (centre), celebrated the book launch with playgroup facilitators Cheryl Paine (left) and Houda Musafa (right). (Pictures: Courtney Black) 553133_08
Below: Neil, 2, played a big part in the book's creation. 553133_06



Children sail into creativity

A new picture book called 'Sailing, Sailing' transformed a local playgroup's favourite toys into characters, their artwork into vibrant designs and their songs into a narrative. The book launched in Dallas on 1 May and Courtney Black joined in to hear the story behind Sailing, Sailing.

In Dallas, a partnership between a local playgroup and a non-profit arts organisation has helped a group of neurodivergent and disabled children create their own vibrant story.

Artists and writers from Kids Own Publishing (KOP) engaged with children from the Dallas Playconnect+ playgroup to create a book, 'Sailing, Sailing'.

Playgroup facilitator Cheryl Paine said creating the book was a personal, meaningful journey for children and families.

"The concept of Sailing, Sailing is actually based on a song that I sing each week with our children," Paine said.

"When the children are a bit unfocused I'll say, 'has everyone got their sailing hand ready?' then I'll start singing."

While moving her hand like a boat over waves she would sing, 'Sailing, sailing, over the ocean - Sailing, sailing, over the sea - Sailing, sailing, over the ocean - Sail back home to me.'

"I think it just captured the hearts of the KOP team."

The playgroup was able to create the book after being offered a \$20,000 Hume council grant from the Dallas Brooks Community Hub.

"The book has given us a purpose and an outcome," Paine said.

"Over five weeks the KOP team came in and engaged with the children in their play.

"They made special allowances for our children in how they directed and participated in the activity of art, because a lot of our children won't sit for very long.

"We had our big plastic stand-up tray with all different lots of paint in it and our children were doing a sensory play experience with the paint.

"Then at the end of it they took these great big sheets of paper, laid it on top and lifted it up and then created these fabulous big pieces of art."

On each page of Sailing, Sailing there are vibrant layers of paint which KOP lead artist Viet-My Bui said speaks for itself.

"All the artwork in the book is made by



This page of Sailing Sailing was inspired by Neil. (Supplied: Mylie Nauendorf)

“ All the artwork in the book is made by the children's hands, they are expressing themselves so beautifully and so vibrantly through artwork ”

- Viet-My Bui

the children's hands, they are expressing themselves so beautifully and so vibrantly through artwork," she said.

"The way KOP works is that all the books are children-led, so the narrative and the artwork is all by the kids, and we don't direct anything.

"It is a bit more challenging when they're non-verbal but we wanted to really champion the fact that Neil and Lincoln communicate beautifully in their own way.

"We wanted to try to put a book together that seemed true to them."

Bui and her team led finger-painting, water play, and collage activities, encouraging the children to make their own artwork.

"Lincoln loves water play so I thought to combine art-making with the thing that he already naturally gravitates towards,"

she said. "He was just obsessed, he almost wanted to climb in and swim in the paint. He was just making so much art, and I didn't really have to demand anything different of him."

Bui said she observed the children playing and communicating by pointing, jumping and making noises.

"We noticed that the kids gravitated towards certain toys, so we thought, we can make those toys the characters of the story.

"We wove together a narrative based on snippets of conversations we heard and that's how the book came to be."

Paine said while the words appear random in the book, there is a larger story around them.

"A lot of our children are non-verbal, so they might just say random words like, 'what, what, what', or 'splash, splash, splash', which really came in through the book," she said.

One of the pages was entirely inspired by how Neil, 2, played with Velcro fruit toys.

"Neil started cutting the fruit toys and saying 'that, that, that's an orange', and then he chopped a green Kiwi - so that's what's on his page."

Neil's mum Meg Talekar said creating the book was a new and unique experience.

"At home, he normally doesn't do the type of things that we did so it was quite eye-opening for me to see that. It gave me something to sort of take home and learn from," Talekar said.

"Neil was so interested in the fruit platter, so we started putting together some art around the fruits, we used paper to put the different colours together and make a game out of it.

"I'm hoping that it is a memory [for Neil] that no photo or video can capture.

"I hope the book that he has helped put together will become one of our favourites at home for bedtime stories."

Talekar said participating in the Dallas PlayConnect+ playgroup has been really valuable as a first-time mum with a non-verbal child.

"Since coming here it seems like his speech is starting to improve and get better," she said. "It's a nice setting to come in and have a bit of a break, spending time with people and sharing experiences and the roadblocks that they have experienced and how they overcame those."

This Dallas playgroup is facilitated by Playgroup Victoria and one of the many federally funded PlayConnect+ playgroups for children aged up to six with a disability and/or developmental concerns.

Playgroup Victoria programs and social impact manager Louise Buckle-Smith said PlayConnect+ playgroups are a safe, accessible space for families.

"It's challenging for somebody that's had a baby and things can be flowing normally and then all of a sudden there's a bit of a halt, where something's not quite right," Buckle-Smith said.

"The highest emotional journey from there on is where they've got to connect to services and get a diagnosis, a lot of them are going through that period.

"PlayConnect+ really is for families to have an understanding of what services are in their community that can also support them."

Buiv said it was a pleasure to create the book with PlayConnect+, and she hopes to work with children from all backgrounds.

"People might think that neurodivergent kids have limitations when making something like this, and I just want to totally dispel that.

"Your child might not speak in a conventional way, but they are so rich internally.

"All children are innately creative, and they just choose to express themselves in totally different ways."

The KOP community publishing program is open to communities and organisations working with up to 20 children aged 12 and under.

Kids Own Publishing: <https://kidsownpublishing.org.au/>

PlayConnect+: <https://www.playgroup.org.au/playconnect/>

Boosting women's health

By Christopher Carter, CEO, North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network

Even though Australia has one of the best and most accessible medical systems in the world, it's important to note that sometimes over the years it hasn't been without fault.

One substantial area in which it was for decades less than ideal was women's health. A combination of lack of focused funding, inadequate training and policy priority meant that conditions such as endometriosis, menopause and polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) didn't always receive the attention they deserved.

Across Melbourne's north and west there are these days, thankfully, plenty of GPs very well aware of the pain and discomfort caused by women's health conditions. There are also specialist women's health services available at Melton Health and Community Services and the Joan Kirner Women's and Children's centre at Sunshine Hospital.

Now, too, though, we have a whole new facility dedicated to the field. Funded by the Australian Government, there is an endometriosis and pelvic pain clinic in the west, one of 33 operating around the country.

Based at Werribee Medical and Dental Care, it provides expert, multidisciplinary services for endometriosis, PCOS, and other conditions. It also supports women experiencing symptoms of perimenopause and menopause.

And that's important, because it means women can discuss these matters without the anxiety that sometimes may arise when talking about them with their regular GPs. It also means that for thousands of women and girls in the outer western suburbs they



Support for endometriosis and pelvic pain is available at a new clinic in Werribee.

can find help and support much closer to home.

Endometriosis affects at least one in seven, often causing chronic pain and fertility issues. Many women can endure years waiting for a diagnosis, which may have a devastating impact on their daily lives.

Stories for other conditions are distressingly similar.

Now, though, things are looking up.

Patients don't need a formal diagnosis of endometriosis or a referral from another doctor to visit the Werribee Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Clinic (as it's formally known).

The focus is firmly on early access to intervention and support, to make sure treatment and management is as easy as possible.

And if Werribee is too far away to reach easily, telehealth appointments are available.

Werribee Medical and Dental Centre is a fully bulk-billing clinic. It is located at 1-5 Station Place, Werribee, 3030.

Call (03) 8734 0333 or visit werribeemedicalcentre.com.au for operating hours and to book an appointment.

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Pictured: Ingenia Lifestyle Natura.

MY PLACE

National volunteer week is celebrated from 18-24 May. Courtney Black spoke to Hansat Tariq about what it is like to volunteer with multicultural communities in Hume.

What is your connection to Hume?
I have volunteered at the Australian Multicultural Community Centre in Broadmeadows for two years. I love to be a volunteer because I think that's the best way to be in a connection with any organisation. I first joined in my social work placement being here and I really liked it. I really enjoy being the part of the carers group because there are multicultural people there. And every week we arrange different activities for them.

What do you like about volunteering with the Hume community?
It's been a really fun, like how you connect with different people and they are from different culture. I'm also an immigrant here. It gives you a better understanding of the participants. You can understand their problems, they are facing day by day, all those things. If someone need any assistance in anything, you can be doing the caseworks, it can help you find the different resources for them.

What, if anything, would you change about Hume?
Hume council have a range of multiple beautiful resources, and there's a lot more programs for refugees and asylum seekers. But I think the main thing that can be improved is some assistance in the process of immigration. I have worked with participants who have said the process of immigration is getting tougher for them, its taking too long. If there is some relief on that, then they can better be able to fit in the community.

Tell us something that maybe people would be surprised to hear about you...
Everyone is just a bit shocked that I was a zoologist, I have done my bachelor in



Hasnat Tariq. (Damjan Janevski) 554134_02

zoology. I was working for three years in research with honeybees in New South Wales. There was a mites disease there, and that crushed the honey bee industry. I switched it to social work and I'm really enjoying it. When you don't have the same background, you want to explore as much

as you can.
Do you have any advice for volunteers?
So for people who are working with the participants who are from different background, I really want them to be always be mindful because they don't have

the same language. So most of the time they feel really low because they won't be able to communicate as properly as they want to be. They want to express emotions and to connect with you, but they won't be able to. So we have some compassion and be really mindful.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Star Weekly looks back through the pages of our predecessors

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Retail mecca for north

By Lisa Mitchell

Craigieburn is set to become a 'one-stop shop' for all things retail, with plans under way for a large lifestyle centre opposite Craigieburn Central.

... [rest of article text] ...

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Voters fined for parking

By Lisa Mitchell

... [rest of article text] ...

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By Lisa Mitchell

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Pigeon poisoning

By Lisa Mitchell

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10 years ago
31 May, 2016

Craigieburn is set to become a 'one-stop shop' for all things retail, with plans under way for a large lifestyle centre opposite Craigieburn Central.

7 years ago
21 May, 2019

Several people casting their federal election vote at Craigieburn's early voting centre were fined by Hume council for parking on a nature strip.

5 years ago
18 May, 2021

Millions of dollars of emergency services facilities pledged for Craigieburn between 2016 and 2018 are yet to be built.

1 year ago
27 May, 2025

A culling operation to deal with an "infestation" of pigeons at Meadow Heights Shopping Centre has exploded into accusations of cruelty, cultural insensitivity and threats of violence.

Sustainable schools shine

By Courtney Black

Two sustainable schools from the northern suburbs are finalists in Sustainability Victoria's Resource Smart School of the Year Awards.

St Monica's College (SMC) in Epping is a finalist in two categories, Teacher of the Year and School of the Year, while Aitken College in Greenvale has been shortlisted as the Curriculum Leadership School of the Year (Secondary).

SMC's Ben Coleman said he was excited and very humbled to be a teacher and school of the year finalist.

"There are so many other schools out there doing so many amazing things, the competition is very tough," Mr Coleman said.

Mr Coleman has implemented many environmental initiatives at SMC since he joined in 2012.

"My background is in zoology and working in habitat constructions and revegetation... the knowledge and experience I've developed over the past 20 years allows me to create sustainability projects."

"Before school three days a week we look after an animal room where we have turtles, lizards, frogs, stick insects and a pet python.

"We have wetlands where we go at least once a week and do planting and weeding and also maintaining and observing the wildlife and the plants that are down there."

He said it is rewarding to see SMC teachers and students involved in sustainability within and beyond the school.

"From year 7 to year 12, there's over a



Dwayne Gauci leads sustainability at Aitken College. He's pictured with Aitken College students Charlie, Rian and Angus. (Pictures: Damjan Janevski) 550533_03

100 students each year that are actively participating in our sustainability co-curricular activities.

"I do see a positive change in their interests and passion towards the environment.

"Anytime a teacher comes up to me and says 'I have just started a veggie garden at home have you got some advice' that's what I live for."

Aitken College's Dwayne Gauci said the school takes sustainability very seriously.

"It's part of everything that we do, it's in the curriculum, it's in our forward planning," Mr Gauci said. "Being

shortlisted is a recognition of all the great work that we do and the teachers that put all that effort in to run these programs and include them in the curriculum."

"We've got Brodies Creek running through our property so we've contributed to its revegetation in partnership with Melbourne Water for several years now.

"Last year we planted over 3000 plants along the creek to try and get it back to how it was originally."

He said the school has collaborated with NASA in a unique project called growing beyond earth.

"They've given us this little chamber that



St Monica's College's Ben Coleman is a Resource Smart School Teacher of the Year finalist. He's with students Ethan, Yuri and Sophia. 551451_05



mimics what would be up in space and we're trying to grow food crops in there, it's pretty cool."

He said students have taken sustainability into their own hands

"Students talk about starting up a veggie patch at home, or focusing more on recycling as opposed to just chucking everything in the bin.

"It's about educating parents and getting everyone on board so it flows back into the community."

The 2026 Resource Smart School of the Year Award winners will be announced at a ceremony on 11 June.

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Sua Fa'alogo and Keagan Russell-Smith handed out Melbourne Storm gift packs to the kids. (Supplied)

Storm stars visit the Thunder

It was an electric evening when two Melbourne Storm stars dropped into Northern Thunder Rugby League Club last week.

On Wednesday 6 May, young rugby league players and their families had a night to remember in Broadmeadows mixing with the elite players at their local club.

Players Sua Fa'alogo and Keagan Russell-Smith visited Northern Thunder as part of the 'Storm in your Club' program which aims to give future stars a chance to mix with Melbourne Storm's professional players.

The event was a homecoming for Fa'alogo who grew up in Melbourne's north and played junior rugby league at the club.

Northern Thunder's Valerie Rivelli Seve said it was a fantastic event for local families and junior players.

"Sua Fa'alogo and Keagan Russell-Smith

spent time meeting the kids, signing autographs, taking photos, and chatting with players and parents," Ms Seve said.

"The kids also had the opportunity to ask questions and share some really special moments with two great role models from the Melbourne Storm," she said.

"To top off the night, each child was gifted a Melbourne Storm pack which included a training top, football, and some extra goodies."

She said the excitement on the kids' faces was priceless.

"It was an experience they will remember for a long time.

"We are incredibly grateful to Sua, Keagan, and the Melbourne Storm for giving back to our community and inspiring the next generation of players.

Briefs

Nominate a young person

Nominations for the 2026 Hume Young Leaders Awards are now open with a range of categories to enter. At the 11 May Hume council meeting, councillor Jarrod Bell urged the community to nominate and back a local young person. Nominees must live in Hume and be between the ages of 12 and 24 years. Submissions are open until Sunday 14 June. Details: <https://tinyurl.com/592papxs>

Sports precinct on the way

Ground has broken at the Kalkallo north active open space in Stockland's Cloverton community, promising over 93,000 square metres in sporting and recreational facilities. According to Stockland, the precinct will open in stages with playing fields expected to open from 2027. The precinct is set to have two cricket ovals, four soccer fields, multi-use courts, a large playground, dog parks, waterplay, parkour and picnic areas. Timing for additional features, including a council-delivered clubhouse and waterplay area, will be confirmed as planning progresses.

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Showcasing community services

Hume council held its community services expo at the Craigieburn Library on Tuesday 19 May, aiming to bring the community and local organisations together.

Hume mayor Carly Moore said the expo makes it easier for community members to find the support they need.

“Our libraries play such an important role in connecting people, and this expo is a great example of that in action,” Cr Moore said.

“It is a chance for residents to meet with a range of providers in one place, learn about the many incredible local services we have on offer, and create important one-on-one connections within our community.

“Knowing where to start can often be the biggest hurdle, so we’re bringing local organisations together in a welcoming space where residents can connect, ask questions and feel supported.”

Star Weekly photographer Damjan Janevski went along to capture representatives from community services in Hume and beyond.

The community services at the expo included SES, Breast Screen Victoria, Carer Solutions, Brotherhood of St. Laurence, Workskil Australia, Ethical Hire, VIGSEG, commUnity+, Good Shepherd, Melbourne City Mission, Holstep Health and Metro Trains.

Local organisations like the Australian Multicultural Community Centre Foundation, Craigieburn War Memorial, Bulla Hill Miniature Railway and Hume council teams were also represented.



Peter Maslac and Alan Penaluna are calling for volunteers to join their local SES. (Pictures: Damjan Janevski) 553613_04



Dina Sadvakassova from Ethical Hire which connects locals with dedicated disability or aged care support workers, nurses and allied health professionals. 553613_02



Julia Abou Asali from Melbourne Adult Migrant English Program which offers free English lessons and free childcare for eligible participants. 553613_03



Katey Voysey from Carer Solutions helps those with a disability to directly employ their trusted support workers. 553613_07



Sundos Hanna and Kaye Sands from Workskil help community members find a job that suits them best. 553613_01



Katey Ahmed from Australian Multicultural Community Centre which supports the multicultural community. 553613_05



Nadia Ghaly from Breast Screen Victoria helps locals find and book a local screening service. 553613_06

What's on



Coffee with Council



Coffee with Council at Mill Park

Join us for a free coffee and an informal chat with City of Whittlesea Councillors and senior staff.

This is your chance to share thoughts, ask questions, and discuss the issues that matter most to you and our community.

When: Tuesday 2 June, 1:30pm - 3pm

Where: Walkers Donuts, Westfield Plenty Valley, 415 McDonalds Road, Mill Park

No registration required, just drop by.

For more information, visit: whittlesea.vic.gov.au/events



Positive Ageing Expo and World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

Join us for a free community event celebrating positive ageing and promoting respect and dignity for older people.

Discover local services, programs, and resources that support healthy, active, and connected living. The event also highlights the importance of preventing elder abuse and fostering safe, inclusive communities.

When: Tuesday 23 June, 10am - 3pm

Where: Plenty Ranges Arts and Convention Centre (PRACC), 35 Ferres Blvd, South Morang

For more information, visit: whittlesea.vic.gov.au/positiveageingexpo



whittlesea.vic.gov.au

The power of sleep: How to rest better in retirement

Time gifted by retirement should allow for more relaxation. However, older adults find that sleep becomes harder to obtain precisely when they need it most.

The lack of quality rest disrupts your daily energy levels, mood and health through frequent night-time wakeups and difficulty both falling asleep and staying asleep.

Better rest is possible for everyone who follows simple changes to their daily routines.

How Much Sleep for Seniors: How Many Hours of Sleep Do Senior Citizens Need?

We receive this question frequently about senior sleep duration. Most older adults need seven to eight hours of sleep each night. It's not only how much time you spend asleep that counts. Your sleep quality stands as the key factor instead of the number of hours you spend in bed since you may wake up feeling tired despite sleeping for eight hours. The goal is to achieve deep, restful sleep, enabling you to feel energised and alert upon waking the next morning.

Practical Sleep Tips for Seniors

The following list includes several effective methods that have proven successful for enhancing sleep quality:

1. Stick to a Routine: You should maintain consistent bedtime and wake-up times throughout each day and throughout weekends. The body's internal clock regulates itself better when you maintain a regular sleep-wake cycle, which helps you fall asleep more easily on time.

2. Create a Calming Bedroom: Keep your bedroom quiet, dark, and cool. Use



A supportive environment helps you develop better habits and enjoy more restful evenings. (Supplied)

blackout curtains, remove noisy clocks, and limit distractions. Your bedroom needs to be a rest zone rather than an entertainment space, as it must remain free of distractions like TVs and phone screens.

3. Wind Down Gently: Begin your night with activities that help you relax. A warm bath, together with light reading materials or calming music, can help you relax before sleeping. Breathing exercises before bed can also help settle a racing mind - explore some gentle breathing techniques for seniors here.

4. Be Mindful of What You Eat and Drink: Consuming caffeine in the evening and alcohol before bed disrupts sleep quality. Avoid going to bed with a full stomach, and ensure you are not hungry.

The staff at Centennial Living recognises that quality sleep is essential to senior wellness.

We establish spaces that enable relaxation while maintaining quiet, as our mission centres on supporting residents who want to live well.

A supportive environment helps you develop better habits and enjoy more restful evenings.

Sleep functions as an essential foundation that supports both a healthy lifestyle and happiness.

You can achieve restful mornings by adopting mindful changes that suit your body, helping you feel refreshed for daily activities.

Test one or two of these suggestions as you go to bed tonight to discover the transformed feelings you will experience when you wake up tomorrow.



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Nylon Phoenix is on the rise

A chance meeting and a shared dream was the spark that Sunbury locals Jet Bastos and Floyd Bassett needed to come together. Georgia Tacey caught up with duo Nylon Phoenix to hear more about the band and its origins in the lead up to their debut single *Magenta* releasing this August.

Every great band has that iconic story of how they came to be.

U2 formed through an ad on a bulletin board. For Green Day, Billie Joe Armstrong met Mike Dirnt at a bus stop on their way to school.

But for Nylon Phoenix, it all started in a restaurant and the constant tap tap tapping of Floyd Bassett's imaginary drum.

His future bandmate Jet Bastos, though he didn't know it yet, was working at that very restaurant he came upon looking for his feed.

"Whenever I have to wait for anything in my life, whether I'm at the supermarket or the gym or anything, I just start tapping, going through drum beats," Bassett said.

"I could see Jet watching me as I'm tapping along, waiting for my food, and he walks up to me as he's like 'are you all right man? You've just ordered, it's gonna take a couple of minutes'.

“The name is a bit of a contradiction in of itself ... It however also describes our music perfectly”

- Floyd Bassett

"I'm like 'oh sorry, I'm just practising some beats that I'm working on', and he said 'Wait a minute, you're a drummer? I'm looking for a drummer in this band I'm starting'."

It was perfect timing.

Bassett, a skilled drummer, was looking for a fresh project after his previous band disbanded.

Bastos, already a solo artist, was looking for someone to join him and create a band and accompany his vocals and ukulele.

"We jammed and realised we had a good mix of influences and Nylon Phoenix was born," Bassett said.

Fusing ukulele punk and alternative, the duo has been playing a number of gigs and open mics around Melbourne as they navigate their way through the Melbourne music scene.

Their name - taken from Bastos's middle name Phoenix and the material used to make strings on the ukulele that defines their sound - was the perfect descriptor and title that was all thanks to Bastos.

"The name is a bit of a contradiction in of itself, being a combination of the artificial,



Jet Bastos and Floyd Bassett from Nylon Phoenix. (George Johnson)

contrasted by the natural; it's a critique of the insincerity of the modern popular music scene," Bassett said.

"It however also describes our music perfectly, as we combine live performances of acoustic and electric instruments with synthesized tracks, attempting to blend and balance the two different worlds together."

Over the past two years since their fateful meeting, Bassett and Bastos have been busy honing their sound and recording music, with their debut single set to release this August.

Magenta, their first single, will dive deep into Bastos' trials and tribulations navigating the modern dating world.

"It's pretty much a critique on myself in the modern dating scene, which I find quite funny," Bastos said.

The duo has spent the better part of the past year - alongside other gigs and projects - chipping away at the song, with Bastos taking the lead on production.

"Jet comes up with the initial song idea and shows me and we start to workshop some ideas to flesh it out," Bassett said.

"Jet usually has pretty solid ideas of the feel and mood of the songs as well as the chord progressions, lyrics and structure. I add some drum ideas and then Jet gets into recording mode."

Bastos then layers the tracks, adding drums, bass ukulele and synth before laying down the vocals, which are all produced by him in his own home studio.

Even the music video which they've been shooting for the song has all been produced by them with little outside help.

"The music video is based on different

caricatures and different people you'd see on online dating apps and I'm playing them in different costumes," Bastos said.

"[The music video had] two shoots, one in a studio with professional videographer and photographer George Johnson, and another on site in Bendigo with our friend Sara Hancock, using various locations and a wider wardrobe to capture the lyrical motifs in the verses of the song," Bassett said.

Now in the final stages, Nylon Phoenix are constantly working, creating music and gearing up for a busy few months as their single goes out to the world.

"We're working on music all the time," Bassett said.

"Every week is different as we sometimes have gigs on consecutive days or just a couple of days apart, but we are pretty strict about rehearsing at least once per fortnight."

Most recently, the duo took to a local stage, helping to put on a showcase of Sunbury's finest performers in the scene at The Industrial.

"Most of our shows are around the Fitzroy, Brunswick area ... which was one of the reasons we wanted to put on the Sunbury show because it's a fair distance for people to travel for those who are local to Sunbury," Bassett said.

"We wanted to give them a chance to hear us play with some of the other local bands around Sunbury."

For Bastos, this was his favourite performance.

"It was such an amazingly unexpected turnout," he said.

"It was a fantastic show, a good crowd, great energy, a great performance ... I want to play more shows like that."

Bassett agreed, as well as the first show they ever performed together.

Performing live and making music was what they were meant to do, and Bassett said he was proud to work with Bastos on their music.

"The development of the music that Jet's putting together, it's a really unique style," he said.

"Not only having the ukulele as the front instrument ... but also the way he's crafting songs, taking elements since recorded music began and over the last 60 years of popular music, it's just something that's totally unique."

"If you come to our shows, you'll see something that you've never seen before."

Details: facebook.com/nylonphoenix

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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 weditorial@starweekly.com.au by 9am Wednesday the week prior to publication



Through the lens

This week's photographer's choice picture is Mount Macedon as seen from Tony Clarke Oval on a wintry Saturday afternoon. (Ljubica Vrankovic) 554589_01



Whittlesea Probus

Members of The Combined Probus Club of Whittlesea will meet on Monday 1 June at Whittlesea Bowls Club at 9.30am. The presentation will be about Jirrahlinga Dingoo Conservation. On 6 July a member of the club will talk about personal experiences. Visitors are welcome. Probus is open to all retired and semi-retired members of the community.

■ whittleseaprobust@hotmail.com, or 0427 021 592

Mill Park Community House Groups

The Neuro Group is a social group catering for people with multiple sclerosis (MS) and neurological disabilities. The group runs Mondays and Fridays and includes bingo, card games, group outings and much more. There is a \$10 yearly fee and a gold coin donation for tea, coffee and snacks.

The carers friendship group supports families and friends who care for someone experiencing mental illness and meets on the fourth Wednesday of every month. The Coffee & Chat runs every Thursday, 1-3pm, and is a relaxed and friendly space where everyone is welcomed in for a gold coin donation. The seniors Recycled Teenagers Group runs every Tuesday between noon and 3pm. \$10 yearly fee, includes tea, coffee and afternoon tea every week.

■ Natasha, 0408 561 597

Community singing group

Join the Broadmeadows Community Singers on Tuesdays at 7.30pm. No previous experience needed, just a love of singing.

■ Sonja, 0429 587 285

Craigieburn Residents' Association

Do you live in Craigieburn and wonder what's happening about roads and facilities, or have a concern you'd like to raise so it can be addressed? The Craigieburn Residents' Association is the perfect platform to share your concerns. The association liaises with Hume council,

as well as state and federal government organisations to get the job done. It also gives donations to local charities each year. The group meets on the last Wednesday of the month at Selwyn House, Selwyn Avenue, Craigieburn, at 7.30pm.

■ craigieburnresidents@gmail.com, or 0430 354 463

Craigieburn Country Women's Association

The Craigieburn Branch of CWA welcomes women of all ages to its meetings and craft sessions which are held on the third Wednesday of every month. Meetings begin at 10.30am followed by lunch and a craft or socialising session. Meeting venue is St Thomas's Uniting Church corner of Rayfield and Dianne Avenues in Craigieburn.

■ craigieburncwa@gmail.com or Karen, 0499 821 754

Gladstone Park Probus Club

Have fun with like minded people if you live in Gladstone Park and surrounding suburbs. Monthly speakers, lunches, outings and bus tours. The probus club meets on the first Wednesday of the month at 9.45am at the Good Shepherd Parish Hall, 88 South Circular Road, Gladstone Park. Visitors and new members welcome.

■ Chris, 0422 017 907

Bundoora Probus

Bundoora Probus meets on the second Wednesday of each month at St Peters Anglican Church Hall, Alma Road, Bundoora at 10am. Make new friends at excursions, lunches, coffee mornings, walks and craft sessions. Hear guest speakers at monthly meetings.

■ Leanne, 0419 004 997

Young parents group

DPV Health's Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies program in partnership with Whittlesea council, Brave Foundation and Westfield Plenty Valley is a group

for young parents every Thursday, from 10.30am-noon during school term. The group is a supportive space that allows young parents to form friendships and develop their parenting skills. It also allows for their young children to play and socialise with other children. At The Y at Westfield Plenty Valley, 415 McDonalds Road, Mill Park.

■ Asha Robinson, 0491 934 819

Kalkallo English Classes

Learn to speak English with confidence. Open to all adults, come to learn English in a fun and supportive environment. Improve your English speaking, reading and writing in a supportive group. Practice speaking, listening, and understanding English for daily life. Gain confidence in conversations at work, in shops, and in the community. Meet new people and make friends while learning together. Enjoy a relaxed and friendly classroom where everyone is welcome. Mondays 11am-1pm at Kalkallo Community Centre, 33 Toyon Road, Kalkallo.

■ Sussex Neighbourhood House, 9354 2210

Broadmeadows Senior Citizens Club

The club meets on Mondays, Wednesdays, Saturdays and first Sunday of the month. It also has indoor carpet bowls, bingo, and snooker. Enjoy a dance between 7-11pm on the third Saturday of every month. All are welcome.

■ Liz Munro, 0409 712 613, or lizmunro7@gmail.com

Mernda Repair cafe

Located at Mernda Neighbourhood House, the Mernda Repair Café will be open monthly for residents to come and have their faulty or broken items fixed. Staffed by skilled volunteers from the community. A range of repairers will be available at each session with skills in repairing items including bikes, small electrical items, clothing and jewellery.

■ Mernda Repair Cafe Facebook page for bookings each month.

TAC L2P Program

The Transport Accident Commission (TAC) L2P Program is a community-based program developed to assist eligible young Victorian learner drivers between the ages of 16 and 21 who do not have access to a supervising driver, or an appropriate vehicle to gain driving experience required for a probationary licence. Volunteer mentors needed.

■ Cynthia Petridis, 0435 653 371

Regular Storytime for Kids

Yarra Plenty Regional Library offers a range of children's services and programs across their network of libraries. They are run every day with sessions for young babies, toddlers, preschoolers, and families. Come along to help your child develop those crucial language skills and social connections. Italian, Greek and Spanish Storytime also available.

■ yprrl.vic.gov.au

Inclusive tennis

A free weekly tennis program for people with disabilities and/or special needs, or if you're just struggling to access mainstream sport programs. Held at Epping Tennis Club, 861 High Street, Epping, on Thursdays from 5-6pm.

■ play.tennis.com.au/eppingtennisclub.com.au

Craigieburn Probus Club

Craigieburn Probus Club offers retired people an opportunity to socialise, go on monthly bus trips, enjoy dine outs and morning melodies among other activities like general business, morning tea and an interesting speaker. Every second Monday of the month at the Craigieburn Bowling Club, 233 Craigieburn Road, Craigieburn.

■ Bill, 0411 517 217 or Marion, 0407 052 774

Fleetwood's magic captured

If you never did believe in miracles, you'll be beginning to wonder why after seeing Starshine in Werribee next month.

The Fleetwood Mac and Stevie Nicks Tribute band will be rocking Studio 185 on Friday 12 June, promising to bring nostalgia, mystique and power to their performance.

The gig will be driven by a standout lineup of musicians who embrace their Fleetwood Mac counterparts, featuring former Las Vegas performer Nikki Canale as Stevie Nicks.

Krissy Keys channels the soulful feel of

Christine McVie, Mitchell Jon goes his own way like Lindsay Buckingham, Regotron brings the groove of John McVie, while Brennan Smith glues it all together as Mick Fleetwood did behind the drum set.

"Starshine is about capturing the magic people felt when they first heard these songs," Canale said.

"It's not just a nostalgia trip — it's a shared experience between the band and the audience, where every lyric, harmony and moment matters."

With sold-out performances, standing

ovations and enthusiastic word-of-mouth following the show wherever it travels, Starshine's growing reputation is certainly not a rumour.

The show appeals to lifelong Fleetwood Mac fans, music lovers, and new audiences discovering the timeless power of these songs for the first time.

Tickets can be purchased at the door, but all are encouraged to secure them online.

Tickets: <https://megatix.com.au/events/starshine-a-tribute-to-stevie-nicks-fleetwood-mac-werribee>



Nikki Canale. (Marjorie Skea).



Multi-award winning cabaret artist, Miss Friby, is preparing to unleash her inner-beast in her new show in Footscray next month. (Damjan Janevski) 551682_04

Miss Friby's new show is a different beast

Multi-award winning cabaret artist, Miss Friby, will take over Footscray early next month with her bold new immersive performance, *Beasts of Burden and Other Party Guests*.

Developed through a Maribyrnong Arts and Culture creative residency, the show blends cabaret, dance, satire, and physical theatre into an experience that is part-party, part-ritual, part-beautifully controlled chaos.

Beasts of Burden and Other Party Guests explores the invisible weight we carry in contemporary life.

Set inside a party that slowly slips into its own logic, Miss Friby said the show invites audiences not to escape that weight, but to recognise it together.

"Everyone arrives carrying something," she said. "This show doesn't ask you to define it. It just asks you to bring it with you."

Miss Friby will perform the show for a three-week season at Footscray's Bluestone Church Artspace, the same place where she staged her previous production, *Galah*, in 2023.

It should bring back good memories for the inner west performer, as *Galah* won her

the 'Most Outstanding Cabaret Artist' and 'Best Production Design' at the following year's Green Room Awards, Melbourne's peer-presented, performing arts industry honours.

With the historic venue to be turned into a bespoke pop-up theatre for *Beast of Burden* - complete with extravagant lighting design, live soundscapes and rhinestones - Miss Friby is every chance to win even more awards this time around.

To judge for yourself, get tickets and details at: <https://www.missfriby.com.au/beastsofburden>

Join in Farmy Farm fun at Plenty Ranges arts centre

Join Kenny and Jenny at The Farmy Farm, a circus with tractor-loads of fun and farming tomfoolery.

This hilarious duo are rolling into Plenty Ranges Arts and Convention Centre on 7 July to share what a day in their life is like at Legend Farms.

The Farmy Farm show is jam packed with jaw-dropping acrobatics on tall towers of hay, giant juggling carrots, fair dinkum high flying farmers and loads of laughs for everyone.

Kenny and Jenny have been farming for years but you never know if they might need you to lend a hand up on the circus stage.

Book your seat online and enjoy the 70 minute show from 11am on 7 July. This show is suitable for ages 5 and up and includes loud sounds, flashing lights and interactive elements.



Kenny and Jenny are bringing The Farmy Farm circus to South Morang. (Supplied)

The Farmy Farm was created by the Circus Trick Tease team that brought you 'Children Are Stinky' in collaboration with Stunned Mullet Circus. The show

is supported by Showcase Victoria and Creative Australia. Bookings: <https://www.pracc.com.au/Whats-On/PRACC-Program/The-Farmy-Farm>

Dreamlike photos anchor artist's first solo show

Sunbury artist Paul Melnyczuk is hosting his first solo exhibition in Kyneton.

The photographer is exhibiting his collection of works, taken across his travels, featuring landscape photography.

Titled *Impressions*, Melnyczuk said his works have a dreamlike quality to them.

"The way I like to think of it is if you have a memory sort of being on a beach, perhaps a number of years ago, a lovely day, beautiful hot sun, closing your eyes and just trying to remember that image you get."

Melnyczuk said he aims to capture the emotion and image that he saw in that moment through the lens of his camera, sometimes a more impressionist approach, utilising software and intentional camera movement to capture a radically different but equally valid memory of the moment an image was captured.

Melnyczuk has been photographing his world since he first picked up a proper camera while spending three years in Africa from 1981.

After retiring from writing and photography for magazines, Melnyczuk said he began experimenting with different technology and techniques as a way of manipulating images to create his signature impressionist style he has on display now.

He said this collection of works started in Scotland during the covid lockdowns when he began taking landscape photographs.

When he moved from Scotland to Australia in 2024, he continued to capture his new surroundings as he explored Australia from Byron Bay, Mission Beach and Ocean Grove to Mount Macedon and more.

Covering the last six years of his photographic journey, this exhibition is one not to miss.

Impressions is on display until 1 June at The Old Auction House Creative Hub and Gallery, Kyneton.



Photo from the exhibition. (Paul Melnyczuk)



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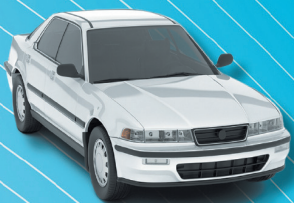
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Suzuki's EV debut imminent

By Alistair Kennedy, Marque Motoring

It's been a long time coming, but Suzuki has finally produced its first fully-electric vehicle.

Called e Vitara, it's a compact crossover SUV that won't be in dealerships until late-June or early-July but with preorders being taken.

The e Vitara shares the same platform and many features but styling differences with the Toyota Urban Cruiser. Both are built in India at Suzuki's Gujarat factory on its Heartect-e lightweight dedicated electric chassis.

At this stage it's unlikely that Toyota will be importing the Urban Cruiser.

Suzuki is unique in Australia in that a separate independent company distributes its vehicles in Queensland and part of Northern NSW with the factory-backed Suzuki Australia looking after all other areas. Generally, there are only minor differences including model grades, specifications or styling trims.

In both markets e Vitara will be available in either two- or four-wheel drive with two specification levels: 2WD Motion and AWD Ultra. In Queensland a 2WD Ultra is also offered.

The long-running Suzuki Vitara remains on sale in either petrol or hybrid powertrains but differs significantly from its EV sibling which is marginally longer but with a significantly longer wheelbase that provides additional interior space as well as a bolder, more premium styling and new tech features.

Styling

The design of the e Vitara is a major departure from the fairly bland looks of previous Vitara models. It's much bolder and more adventurous with a smooth but sculpted exterior sitting above, and surrounded by prominent black plastic cladding to infer some off-road credentials.

At the front the tall erect bonnet sits over LED headlights and large LED daytime running lights. The usual narrow 'grille' that identifies most EVs, with a large Suzuki badge in the centre.

The rear doors have the annoying 'hidden' handles mounted high on the C pillars and designed to suggest a coupe appearance.

The rear mirrors have a similar design to those at the front with a full-width light bar linking them.

Both variants come with 18-inch alloy wheels.

Ultra gets a panoramic nonopening glass roof with a retractable sunshade.

There are four colour options. Arctic White is standard. Bluish Black Pearl and Land Breeze Green are an \$890 option with two-tone also available with a Black Pearl roof on the Ultra for \$1340.

Interior

The biggest design feature comes inside the e Vitara. The brown seats and trim will not be to everyone's taste but at least it's different and we loved it.

The floating centre console is piano black that's hard to view in bright sunlight and too easy to smudge. A big plus, at least in our eyes, are physical climate control switches in the centre of the dash.

There are twin large cupholders in the centre console although grippers would have helped for smaller containers. The door bins are large and wide. There's also a large space below the centre console for keeping items away from prying eyes.

Ultra gets a smartphone wireless charger at the base of the dashboard.



| RATINGS | |
|---------------|------|
| Looks: | 8/10 |
| Performance: | 7/10 |
| Safety: | 7/10 |
| Thirst: | 7/10 |
| Practicality: | 7/10 |
| Comfort: | 7/10 |
| Tech: | 7/10 |
| Value: | 6/10 |



Suzuki's e Vitara sits at the top end of the compact SUV EV category and will struggle to compete against Chinese rivals. (Pictures: Supplied)

Some clever design allows rear seat and boot space to be adjusted with the seats able to slide back and forwards. When the seats are all the way back for maximum legroom luggage space is just 238 litres. At the other extreme, legroom is quite cramped but luggage space is increased to 310 litres. With the rear seatbacks folded there's 562 litres.

There is a useful storage compartment beneath the boot floor but no spare wheel.

Powertrain

The e Vitara powertrain combines a lithium iron-phosphate (LFP) battery system, electric drive axles and an integrated heat pump battery management system.

The 2WD Motion variant comes with a 49kWh battery that drives a 106kW/193Nm motor mounted on the front axle. Ultra increases the battery to 61kWh and adds a rear-mounted motor for total output of 135kW and 307Nm.

The charging port is on the front passenger side of the vehicle. Charging time for both variants are an impressive 11kW with AC and 70kW with DC.

WLTP driving range is listed at 344km and 395km respectively. The Queensland-only 2WD Ultra has a claimed 426km range.

Vehicle to Load (VTL) is available in both variants.

Safety

Standard safety in all e Vitara models includes seven airbags, adaptive cruise control, autonomous emergency braking, rear cross-traffic alert, lane keeping assist and departure prevention, forward collision warning, dual sensor brake support, multicollision braking, high beam assist,

front and rear parking sensors and blind spot monitoring.

Ultra AWD adds front LED foglamps, adaptive high beam, hill descent control and a trail mode switch.

The absence of a front centre airbag and a driver monitoring system contribute to the e Vitara only gaining a four-star ANCAP rating. While the extra airbag is disappointing, not being incessantly nagged by a camera pointing at the driver's face may well be a positive selling point for many drivers - including us.

Infotainment

Standard in both variants are 10.1-inch central touchscreen and 10.25-inch digital instrument cluster in front of the driver. There's a 360-degree view camera as well as front and rear USB-A and USB-C ports.

The infotainment screen falls well short of the sharp high-res screens that we're used to from Chinese vehicles.

Motion has four-speaker audio with Ultra stepping up to a premium 10-speaker Harman Infinity system.

Driving

The compact size of the e Vitara and the EV agility makes it an excellent urban vehicle.

The Ultra AWD that we tested came with a 10-way adjustable driver's seat which allowed it to settle into a comfortable driving position.

Visibility is good with a large windscreen, side and rear windows together with relatively thin A-pillars.

The gear selector is a rotary and push-down set-up with a park button above it. There are also physical buttons to adjust

brake regeneration, hill descent, parking brake and auto hold.

Zero to 100km/h acceleration is listed at 7.4 seconds from the AWD Ultra and 9.6 seconds in the FWD Motion.

The ride is relatively soft, aimed at comfort rather than sportiness.

Despite the cladding, a decent 180mm ground clearance and the eAxe. e Vitara is only suited for modest off-road conditions. Those looking for serious bush bashing will be aware that a Jimny EV is under development and will be hoping that it comes here.

Summing up

The compact EV SUV range is growing rapidly with most models coming from China and with very competitive pricing. This is Suzuki's biggest challenge because the e Vitara driveaway prices run from \$48,990 for the 2WD Motion through to \$58,990 for the AWD Ultra.

These prices drop by \$2000 with limited time cashback offers.

Even with these discounts e Vitara sits at the top end of the compact SUV EV category and it will struggle to compete against Chinese rivals such as the BYD Atto, Jaecoo J5 and GWM Ora which are more than \$10,000 cheaper.

The fact that Suzuki is a respected and trusted Japanese brand will no doubt attract buyers, provided they aren't deterred by it being manufactured in India.

It's a capable and comfortable vehicle mostly aimed at urban conditions and with a fair balance between physical and touchscreen controls that will satisfy both tech-savvy and conventional drivers.

McAuley joins Lalor Stars

By Tara Murray

New Lalor Stars coach Mitch McAuley is keen for the new challenge at the Diamond Valley Cricket Association club.

McAuley will be a playing coach having crossed from Bundoora United and brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the role.

"It's really fantastic to take on such a good role and I'm absolutely ecstatic to get into it," McAuley said.

"I coached previously, eight or nine years ago, and I was really young at the time. This is my next phase in my cricket journey and I want to put the club into a good spot."

McAuley said he had some friends who were already at the Stars which was part of the reason why he wanted to come across.

He said having watched the side from

afar, he knew there were plenty of good signs.

"You don't know what you are going to get with them, which is very scary," he said.

"It's a good mix of old and young players and some talented players.

"Cricket wise, I was keen to take on the job."

The Stars have had a focus of bringing through younger players the past few years after a tough run.

McAuley said there were a lot of kids with talent coming through.

"I'm looking forward to seeing so many young kids," he said.

"I'm excited by the talent and think that we can match it with the best."

The Stars will play in the Mash Shield next season after finishing second bottom in the Money Shield last season.

With a restructure, the bottom four



Mitch McAuley. (Supplied).

teams dropped down a division.

"It was an unlucky thing to happen," he said. "A few clubs had to drop down and it

was basically if you didn't make finals, you are unlucky.

"I'm looking forward to the competition. It will be a tough competition and we'll see what is in front of us and get on with it."

The core group from last season has re-signed along with many of their up and comers who have been performing in the lower grades.

Jackson Hayse is returning to the club after playing in the Victorian Sub-District Cricket Association last season.

McAuley said they were hoping to get a few more players back to the club.

"We've got some other signings who we hope will lift us up," he said.

"Jackson is someone that can bring a lot to the club and is still at a young age.

"He's very talented and hopefully a couple of players will come with him which would be nice."



Jesse King. (Ljubica Vrankovic) 476968_03

Bulls bounce back onto winners list

By Tara Murray

Bundoora wasn't at its best but was able to return to the winners list in the Northern Football League division 1 competition on Saturday.

Having lost to the two grand finalists from last season in the previous rounds, the Bulls were in action against bottom side West Preston Lakeside.

It was hard going on the scoreboard early on before the Bulls took control to run away with a 13.15 (93)-3.7 (25) win.

Bulls' coach Heath Scotland said it was a scrappy performance.

"It was good to bank another win after two tough games against last year's grand finalists," he said.

"It was nice to get back on the board and be in the middle of the pack and fighting for finals.

"It was a good day for the club with another three wins through the footy club.

"We had a long couple of years rebuilding the footy club."

Scotland said they did what they needed to as they looked to get the win after two losses.

He said with wins few and far the last couple of years, getting a win of that margin was a real positive for the group.

Jesse King kicked eight goals in a best on ground performance for the Bulls.

Liam Mallia and Peter McEvoy were other standouts.

The win moves the Bulls to fifth on the ladder with a 4-3 record.

Scotland said they had enjoyed the challenge of facing some of the top teams in the competition.

He said it showed them where they were at.

"We're confident that we're playing a good brand of footy," he said.

"Against Hurstbridge we let ourselves down and let that one slip. Against Diamond Creek it was a disappointing day.

"Last week against Heidelberg it was one quarter of football. They kicked nine goals and demolished us.

"Our best is not far off, it's about consistency and not having lapses."

Having bought in a number of players last season and again this season, the Bulls knew that it would take some time to connect.

Scotland said that was starting to show through.

"We're starting to gel and have the connectivity between lines and individuals," he said. "It's starting to show up and we're really pleased.

"The culture is fantastic and the boys are getting along really well and it's translating into performances.

"We're not there yet but the growth has been pleasing."

The challenges continue for the Bulls who face Montmorency this Saturday.

Montmorency sits third on the ladder.

"We've played some good sides over the last seven weeks," Scotland said.

"We don't fear any side and last week we were confident that we could match them.

"We're excited about it and this is a good chance to see where we sit."

Meanwhile in division 2, South Morang beat the Old Paradians and Whittlesea was too good for Thomastown.

In division 3, Epping beat Kinglake, Lalor lost to Ivanhoe, Laurimar beat Kilmore and Mernda was too good for Heidelberg West.

Sports shorts

NPL

Hume City continued its good form as it accounted for the Altona Magic in the National Premier League on Saturday. Hume opened the scoring in the fourth minute before the Magic levelled the scores in the 18th minute. Moonib Adus soon gave Hume back the lead and Adisu Bayew scored a late goal to seal the 3-1 win. Hume sits on top of the ladder with nine wins. Meanwhile in the Victorian Premier League 2 competition, Whittlesea United lost to the Goulburn Valley Suns, 1-0.

EDFL

Tullamarine got its second of the Essendon District Football League women's division 1 competition on Saturday. After an emotional couple of weeks following the death of a former player, the Demons returned to the field with a 7.8 (50)-4.4 (28) win against the Sunbury Lions. Anais Lipski, Summa Blackburn and Charlotte Jackson were named the Demons best in the win. In other matches, Westmeadows remains unbeaten after beating Gisborne, Craigieburn beat East Sunbury, while Roxburgh Park lost to Coburg Districts.

FV

Whittlesea Ranges got a big win against the Uni Hill Eagles in the FV state league 2 north-west competition on Friday night. Both sides scored in the first half before the Ranges took the lead for the first time in the 65th minute through Oliver Napolitano. The Eagles levelled the scores at 2-2 in the 88th minute with the Ranges responding almost immediately to get the 3-2 win. The Ranges sit third on the ladder and the Eagles in seventh. Elsewhere, Mill Park had a 0-0 draw with Albion Rovers.

Big V

The Hume City Broncos are still undefeated in the Big V men's championship division. The Broncos were in action on Sunday and managed to just hold off the Bellarine Storm, winning 95-91. Robbie Heath continued his good form, top scoring with 38 points for the Broncos. The Broncos unveiled new signing Markise Davis in the win.

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Glen Milner and Peter Jackson. (Supplied)

Duo are Broncos legends

By Tara Murray

It's an end of an era with Peter Jackson and Glen Milner stepping away from the Broadmeadows Basketball Association board.

The pair step away as two of the most influential people in the history of the association and its representative program, the Hume City Broncos.

Both returned to the board in 2008 and had been involved ever since, with Jackson serving as president from 2008 until he stood down this year.

For both their influence dates back a lot longer.

"I started originally back in 1980," Jackson recalls. "It's been 45 or 46 years and 18 as president."

"I did multiple other years on the committee of management."

"It feels good and the organisation is in a good position at the moment. It's really strong and respected and there's some good personnel."

"It's a good time to step back and see what the younger cohort can do."

Jackson said the board had looked at a succession plan for a number of years and the timing was perfect to pass on the reins.

He started as a player domestically and represented the association.

He was a committee member, team manager, coach, referee, referee supervisor as well as his many years as president.

Jackson said a lot had changed over the years.

"We were a fledgling northern suburbs club with a northern suburbs reputation," he said. "We've come a long way. We had some good vision and some good people."

"We worked pretty hard and forged our way to establish who we are."

"We gradually forged a formidable reputation as a northern suburbs club of medium size that punches above its weight."

“ We were a fledgling northern suburbs club ... We gradually forged a formidable reputation as a northern suburbs club of medium size that punches above its weight ”

- Peter Jackson

Jackson said he and Milner both came from governance backgrounds, which gave them a solid footing.

He said while the championships were the highlights everyone remembers, there's a lot of the behind the scenes things he's proud of.

"We've solidified programs and that takes a fair bit of time and strategic planning," he said.

"The board has been a model to peer groups around the state and that is the feedback we've heard from Basketball Victoria."

"If you don't get that right you're really living on the ledge of falling over."

"All the people that I worked with over the years, I've made many friends."

Jackson said the association had grown to be a community service organisation.

There was a focus on gender equity, diversity and being a safe place for community members which was something they were proud of.

While Jackson has been there nearly since the beginning, Milner is one founding members of the association which started in 1978.

He is only one of two of those founding members alive.

The other Elsie Crotty is the mother of new association president Mark Crotty.

Milner has been on the board from 2008 to recently and was vice-president from 2008 to 2024, but his role has been a lot larger.

He has been a coach at junior and senior level, president, secretary, player referee and more recently interim general manager.

Team manager is about the only role that he hasn't held over the years.

"I came back on the committee in 2008," he said. "BBA was struggling across the board and we wanted to try and use our experience and knowledge of the organisation and strategies to get us back in a good financial position."

"This was part of the succession plan and it's been a seamless transition of the leadership positions."

Milner, who is still the women's director of coaching in a mentoring role, said there had been a range of highlights over the journey and one of the biggest was becoming very much a community service organisation.

He said the establishment of Dallas Phoenix and Somerton All-Stars in recent years had been exciting to see.

"It's been about working in the best interests of the associations and the clubs and whatever has been needed to continue to do the best that we can," he said.

"The main highlight has been seeing the association grow into a well respected community based organisation."

Both Jackson and Milner highlighted Randy Anderson as the best men's player they had seen in their time.

"Most impactful player for us," Milner said. "He was definitely someone who brought crowds in and was a tremendous player."

Both said they loved seeing the local players come through and have an impact not only for the club and at higher levels.

Among them is Glen's daughter, Sharin Milner, a former WNBL player.

"She is a bit of a legend," Glen said. "She was pretty special as a player, she was involved in five Big V championships."

"Not only on the floor but she is still involved with us for grant opportunities and she's a driving force for the clubs in the socio-disadvantaged areas."

"She's roped me into coaching an under-14 girls side at the Phoenix club and get back to grassroots coaching."

Broncos general manager Morgan Hughes said both men have made an enormous contribution to Broadmeadows Basketball Association over many years, and their service deserves to be properly recognised.

"While they are stepping away from the board, they certainly won't be lost to BBA," he said.

"Both Peter and Glen care deeply about the association, and we know they will continue to be familiar faces around the stadium — whether that is at Big V trainings, VJBL on Friday nights, or our weekend domestic competitions."

"Their ongoing support means a great deal, and we are incredibly grateful for the lasting impact they have had on Broadmeadows basketball."

Jackson said that Milner was a great mate and that the two of them were in step the whole way along dating back to when they were on the committee of management.

It was Jackson who suggested Milner become president many, many years ago.

"I have the utmost respect for Glen," he said. "I greatly admire him."

Milner shared a familiar sentiment about Jackson.

"We work well together," he said. "We had a good balance."

"I value his contribution over that period."

Both said they won't be strangers to the association and will help out where needed.

"I love the club," Jackson said.

Upfield makes flying start

By Tara Murray

Upfield has had its best start to an FV state league 1 north-west season and is hoping it will continue.

After nine rounds, Upfield sits third on the ladder with a game in hand.

Club president Wally Hanna said they couldn't have asked for much more to start the season.

"It's the best start that we've had in state league 1," he said.

"We have a settled side and a settled coaching group that has been there three years now."

Hanna said having looked at what other clubs have done on the way to having success, they've had the same coaching group for two to three years.

He said they have good belief in the

coaching staff that they have to take them to the next level.

Hanna said they had kept 10 players from last season, meaning their core group was still together.

The side finished fourth last season, seven points off promotion.

Hanna said they had looked to add some attacking options.

"The culture in the dressing room is so good and we've added some new players," he said.

"They've invested in the group and they love the culture and group.

"They've bonded as a team and the results have come."

Hanna said the focus of the club remains trying to push in the Victorian Premier League.

The club has finished in the top six

in each of its three seasons in the state league 1 competition.

"The target is to push for promotion into the elite level, the NPL [National Premier League], VPL.

"That is the ambition."

Hanna said they had been playing some good soccer to start the season, and had been missing a few players in their loss to Lalor United.

Upfield faced Sydenham Park on Friday night.

Speaking before the match, Hanna said it would be a big clash for them and they were getting plenty of crowd support at their home matches.

"They are always up there," he said. "They haven't had the start that they wanted and will want to prove a point.

"It will be tough. The team is pretty con-

fidant and love getting results at home."

It turned out to be a disappointing night for Upfield as it lost 3-1.

Upfield hit the lead in the 23rd minute through Nicholas Kacev.

It went a man down in the 43rd minute when Kacev was given a red card.

The Reds capitalised and scored twice in the second half before another two Upfield players were given red cards, leaving it three men down.

With the advantage, the Reds were able to score a third.

Hanna said things were going well across the club.

He said with the growth they've had they were hoping to see the masterplan for their facilities be implemented soon after waiting a number of years for it to happen.



Salvatore Melilli. (Ljubica Vrankovic)

Demons full of confidence after strong start

By Tara Murray

The buy-in from the Tullamarine playing group has been the key to its early season success in the Essendon District Football League division 1 competition.

The Demons moved to 5-2 and third on the ladder with a big win against St Albans on Saturday afternoon.

Demons' president Peter Labbad said there had been so much positivity around the group and it was reflected in the results.

"From what I'm seeing Zack [Carey] and the group are very humble and they are playing for Zack," he said.

"I've haven't seen a group play for a coach like this for a long time.

"They've just played a lot of good footy. Training is amazing and the boys are amazing on and off the field."

Labbad said the group had been slightly disappointed to only win by five goals against East Keilor in the previous round.

He said their performance against the Saints on Saturday was a bit of a statement.

The Demons kicked 10 goals in the open-

ing quarter to set the tone for the match.

They would eventually win, 26.19 (169)-6.5 (41).

Austin Warden kicked four goals for the Demons as Joshua Cowell, Tom Jackson and Salvatore Melilli kicked three goals each.

Nicholas Owens, Warden and Sam Lazarevski were named the Demons best.

Labbad was full of praise for captain Fletcher Smith and what he had done with the group on and off the field.

The president said the group had shown that they could match it with the top teams and could have easily had another win on the board against West Coburg, had they kicked straight.

Labbad said if they continue to play the way they have they could be in the mix deep into the season.

"It's a credit to Zack," he said.

"He's given confidence to a lot of players that didn't have the confidence last season.

"With not having Josh [Covelli] I think a lot of people thought we would struggle.

"We're playing some pretty good footy."

The tests continue this week for the Demons who face Moonee Valley on Saturday. The Fog also has a 5-2 record.

In other results, Craigieburn continued on with a massive win against East Keilor. The Eagles won 28.22 (190)-10.5 (65).

Hayden Polley kicked 12 goals in a best on ground performance.

His brother Blake Polley was another one of the standouts.

The Eagles sit second on the ladder.

In division 2, Westmeadows made it two in a row while Roxburgh Park lost a low scoring affair with Glenroy.

The Tigers beat East Sunbury, 17.9 (111)-11.9 (75).

Nick Mathewes and Shaun O'Grady kicked four goals each for the Tigers.

Skipper Ryan Capron was named their best.

Meanwhile, Roxburgh Park lost to Glenroy, 6.13 (49)-5.10 (40).

In premier division, Greenvale sits outright bottom after losing to Airport West.

The Eagles won, 17.7 (109)-11.6 (72).

Logan Mcleod was named the Jets best.



Raphael Borges Rodrigues. (AAP Image/Mark Evans)

Borges Rodrigues, Behich in Socceroos training squad

Former Parade College student Raphael Borges Rodrigues has received his maiden senior national team call up, called up for the Socceroos training camp.

On Monday, 10 players were added to the Socceroos train-on squad for the World Cup 2026 pre-camp in Sarasota, Florida.

A-League duo Aziz Behich and Patrick Beach (Melbourne City) join seven UK-based players and Netherlands-based Ajdin Hrustic (Heracles Almelo) in being added to the squad.

Behich started his career at Meadow Heights.

Borges Rodrigues, who is currently playing with Wigan Athletic on loan from Coventry City, is among the seven UK-based players to be called up.

Borges Rodrigues joins Cameron Burgess (Swansea City), Mohamed Toure (Norwich City), Nestory Irankunda (Watford), Daniel Bennie (QPR), Alex Robertson (Cardiff City) and Joe Gauci (Port Vale, on loan from Aston Villa) in making the trip from the UK to Florida. They join the eight players who arrived in Sarasota last week: Harry Souttar (Leicester City), Hayden Matthews (Portsmouth), Anthony Caceres (Macarthur FC), Mitch Duke (Macarthur FC), Brandon Borrello (Western Sydney), Nick D'Agostino (Brisbane Roar), Nishan Velupillay (Melbourne Victory) and Mathew Leckie (Melbourne City). Leckie, who grew up in Melton and played much of his junior soccer in Brimbank, was one of the heroes at the 2022 World Cup.

The Socceroos play a friendly against Mexico in Los Angeles on 31 May - the last game before the final squad is selected on 1 June - before relocating to their Bay Area base.



Broncos legends



Demons big win



Matthew Fennell.
(Ljubica Vrankovic)
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Pacers' defensive focus

By Tara Murray

Whittlesea Pacers' defensive game has been the key as the side gets its Big V division 1 season back on the track.

The Pacers dropped a couple of games to drop back to the pack, but have responded by winning their last two games, including beating the Shepparton Gators on Saturday night.

Pacers coach Des Radoslovic said there were no panic stations when they dropped those couple of games.

"We assessed where we were at after those couple of losses," he said.

"We had a heavy injury toll and made some adjustments on the defensive end and it made a massive difference.

"We're getting guys back as well."

Radoslovic said that they'd had two or three players out and not being able to fully train which had hurt their consistency.

He said they had managed to get continuity back the last couple of weeks and a full side to play with and it had reflected on the scoreboard.

"We had always planned to introduce

things along the way and the plan was to add some defensive elements," he said.

"It's stuff that has worked for us in the past and we want to build on that and it's come to fruition."

On Saturday night, the Pacers accounted for the Gators, 94-63.

The Pacers won every quarter on the way to the big win.

Brendan Young top scored with 21 points as four players scored double figures.

Radoslovic said they won this game in a different way than they had to others this season.

"Most people expected us to win, which was good," he said.

"Our offence was OK but defensively we were able to keep them to 63 points.

"Our defence won the game. Most of our games have been won by our offence."

Radoslovic said as one of the two highest scoring teams in the competition and averaging more than 100 points a game, it would be defence that takes them to the next level.

The Pacers sit sixth on the ladder with five wins from their nine games.

Radoslovic said now they have the consistency they were after, they were keen for the second part of the season.

"We've now played everyone one and we're now starting to play all the teams a second time, starting with Chelsea," he said.

"We'll see how the defensive ideas go and see if they can hold up against the teams at the top of the table.

"We'll look to make big strides defensively in the next month. It'll let us know if we are on the right track."

Meanwhile, the Craigieburn Eagles dropped a rare game against the Blackburn Vikings on Saturday night.

The Vikings set to the 89-79 win in the third quarter which they won 28-12.

Maxwell Barkeley and Shawndale Jones Jnr shot 19 points each for the Eagles.

In the women's division 1 competition, the Pacers beat the Mildura Heat, 78-63, while the Eagles lost to Gippsland United, 89-54.

Bears' future is bright

Thomastown is setting the platform for years to come in the Northern Football League women's division 3 competition.

The Bears are fielding a women's side for the third time this season.

While they have one win on the board, it's about looking at the bigger picture and providing females an opportunity to play sport.

Bears team manager Rachel Hayse said there was a really good vibe around the group.

"We have a lot of new players and we are quite young," she said. "There's a lot who are new to football. It was challenging the first couple of years.

"We had 50 registered last year but on game day it was hard to get a whole team. "There's a few that stuck fat and continued with the group.

"We have about 30 registered and have managed to have a full bench this season."

Hayse said while results were important and the group was keen to get some more wins on the board, it wasn't the most important thing. She said this season was more about development.

Hayse said they were pretty excited when they got their win against Wallan and have shown some positive signs since.

"It's about enjoyment and learning the game," she said. "It's about making sure they all improve one thing for the season.

"They come off saying did you see that and laughing."

The Bears are also trying to group the connection with the men's football sides and the netballers.

She said more players were sticking around at team dinners on Thursday nights. With eight or nine netballers now playing football, there's that connection as well.

"We're looking to build a culture of inclusivity," she said.

"We want to get girls involved in the game. We've got an under-14 girls side for the first time ever and they played before the senior women on Sunday and the senior women got there early to watch the girls."

On Saturday, the Bears women started a big day of action as they played before the reserves and senior men's sides. It's the first time the club has hosted a triple-header involving the women's side.

Hayse said before the game that the men's sides had been planning to come early and they were expecting a big crowd.

The Bears lost to Macleod on Saturday. Macleod was able to build on its lead throughout the match, winning 5.14 (44)-0.0 (0).

In other results, Epping and Whittlesea both got wins.