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INSIDE

- **MBPH CARDIAC CLINIC:** Foundation helps fund hospital's new ground breaking cardiology service.
- **IN JOFFA'S FOOTSTEPS:** The Martin clan are a sporting dynasty whose success is a great story.
- **JAMIE'S HIGH FLYING AMBITION:** From flying gliders in Mildura to piloting high speed stunt aircraft.

EDITION

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Heartbeat magazine is published
by the Mildura Base Public
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THE PROJECT CLOSE TO BERNHARD'S
HEART IS NOW A REALITY.
STORY: PAGE 6.



THE SKY'S THE LIMIT FOR STUNT
PILOT JAMIE BRADY.
STORY: PAGE 22.



BRENDAN CULLEN'S STORY IS
THE TALE OF A LEGEND.
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THE MARTIN SPORTING DYNASTY
SUCCESSSES CONTINUE.
STORY: PAGE 68.

From our Foundation Chairman >>

Over the past 12 months, the Foundation has been working hard to bring together several major projects that we believe will deliver significant and lasting benefits to communities across our three states served by Mildura Base Public Hospital (MBPH), the major healthcare provider in our region.

As the Foundation supporting MBPH, our role is to invest in initiatives that directly improve health outcomes for people living across our diverse and often remote communities. This year, we are proud to see the tangible impact of that commitment.

One of the most significant achievements has been the establishment of our new public cardiac unit. Thanks to a \$230,000 contribution from the Foundation to assist with the purchase of essential equipment, this service is now operational and already changing lives through early

intervention and improved access to cardiac care.

Our screening truck project is also progressing well and remains on track for completion by the end of March. From the Foundation's perspective, this is the most substantial project we have undertaken, both in financial commitment and in scale.

What began as a vision for a mobile skin screening service, has evolved into something far greater. The truck will now deliver cardiac, skin and breast screening services, with a long-term vision to expand even further. The addition of cardiac and breast screening is particularly exciting, as it will provide people in remote and rural areas with convenient access to essential these health services.

The Rural Imaging Australia truck has been three years in the making, and seeing it come to life is very rewarding. The Foundation has contributed approximately \$3 million to this project, a milestone made possible by the generosity of our community. Donations, fundraising events and the support of our corporate partners, have all played a crucial role in turning this vision into reality.

Once operational, the truck will service not only regional Victoria, but also parts of New South Wales and South Australia, a true cross-border initiative delivering healthcare closer to home.

A major community launch at the end of April will be held, giving the people of Mildura and surrounding districts the opportunity to see this remarkable new asset up close.

The year ahead will see another calendar-full of exciting Foundation events. I encourage everyone to get involved and support these initiatives, which directly improve the health outcomes for our community.

Thank you once again for your continued and generous support.



Ross Lake
Chairman

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MBPH DIRECTOR OF MEDICAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICES; CLINICAL DIRECTOR OF GENERAL MEDICINE; AND SPECIALIST PHYSICIAN GENERAL MEDICINE AND CARDIOLOGY DR BERNHARD KUEPPER.



DR BERNHARD HAS HIS HEART SET ON CARDIAC SUCCESS

« The man who will head up Mildura Base Public Hospital's (MBPH) new outpatient cardiology unit is Dr Bernhard Kuepper »

Dr Kuepper already wears three 'hats' for the hospital being its Director of Medical Services - Medical and Community Services; Clinical Director of General Medicine; and Specialist Physician General Medicine and Cardiology. A busy man, but he is revelling wearing an additional fourth hat for now...

When speaking to Dr Bernhard Kuepper it is hard not to get caught up in the enthusiasm he has for MBPH's new outpatient cardiac service.

Formerly from Germany, a busy Dr Kuepper holds down many positions at MBPH and is also an Adjunct Senior Lecturer at Monash University Rural Health.

Regular readers might recall Heartbeat spoke to Dr Kuepper for our third edition. We discovered then that he was spearheading the campaign to have a specialist cardiac unit opened at MBPH.

Now, together with a team specialist clinicians and nurses, Dr Kuepper has spearheaded the opening of what is an outstanding addition to health services offered by the hospital.

Located in the MBPH Specialist Clinic adjacent to the main hospital building, the cardiac unit features a raft of cutting-edge cardio screening equipment.

"Generating a brand new service that has never existed before, and in the public arena, requires getting it right," Dr Kuepper explained.

"You have to involve a lot of different groups in the establishment of a service like this and that goes all the way up to the Ministry for health.

"So, from that point of view we're actually doing pretty well," he said as an opening day draws ever closer.

"We got the service signed off at the beginning of last year and have been working towards a slow opening because when you do not have the required 'instruments of the trade' you need to find the resources to purchase them.

"We have done some fund raising - some very successful fund raising - and a big thanks must go out to the community for putting their collective hands in their pockets for that.

"Thanks of course must also go the MBPH Foundation

WORDS
GRANT MAYNARD



and some private donors [should we insert the names?] who helped boost the funds available to purchase the latest cardio screening equipment.

“Also, we must thank the Foundation and MBPH’s Executive Director Engagement & Support Services Heath Kendall for overseeing complementary fundraising efforts and equipment purchases.

“We have recently gone through a tender process to purchase the equipment we need to open as an outpatient service.”

Dr Kuepper said the service should be up and running by the time people read this, but it will be a slow start as the service finds its feet and beds down its operations.

He explained that initially it is intended the clinic will follow-up with former hospital cardiac patients, those who have either presented to the emergency department or have been admitted to the hospital.

“That’s comparable with

how we’ve done it for the past two years with people who had heart failure and presented to the hospital,” he said.

“That’s a small service... revolving around one cardiologist - who’s me - and one cardiac sonographer and two, part-time cardiac nurses.

“We may be able to offer that service a couple of mornings or afternoons per week, but it’s not a full-time service.

“And we will not be opening the new unit immediately for GP referrals. That will take time, a second cardiologist and a solid demonstration that the necessary funding is stable before we can increase service levels.

“There is certainly a need for the existing service to be enhanced, and from the modelling we have done we also anticipate that there will be the funding to do so.

“But it is one step at a time. We have to prove that the funding will be there before we are able to hire more staff.”

Dr Kuepper said that in terms of the funding model, staff numbers and operations, the cardiac unit would not be very different in many ways from the respiratory and oncology services already provided by the hospital.

Looking ahead, Dr Kuepper expects that once the clinic is up and running, and with the extra staff in place that will be needed to open for longer hours and take referrals from GPs, he will relinquish some of his hands-on time.

“The hospital is reshuffling my duties now so that I have time to start the clinic, but the intention is that once I have a new colleague in place I will be supervising and he or she will be the majority hands-on person.

“I will be adding value to the clinic because of my heart failure background but retreat a little bit into my more administrative scope of work.

“But right now, I am very focused on getting the new unit up and running.”



Amy's heart is in cardiac care >>

MILDURA Base Public Hospital Cardiac Sonographer, Amy Stanbrook, describes her motivation for working within the hospital's busy cardiac service as both personal and professional.

"My late grandfather passed away from a cardiac arrest when I was a teenager, and with a strong family history of heart disease, cardiology became an area of deep interest to me," she told Heartbeat.

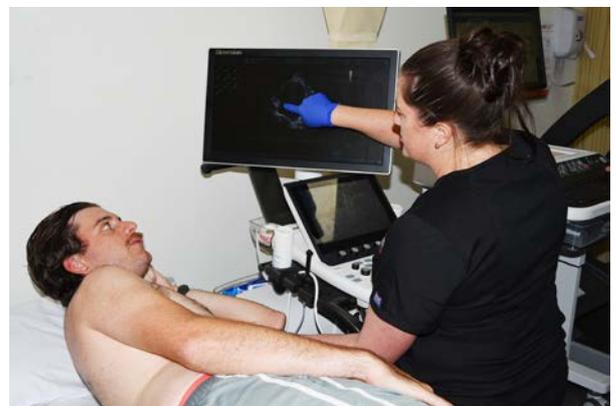
"During my time in nursing I was drawn to cardiac care however, due to the lack of local opportunities to specialise I believed it was a path I would not be able to pursue.

"When the opportunity arose to train as a cardiac sonographer, I embraced it wholeheartedly.

"Being able to contribute to such a vital and highly skilled service locally is something I consider truly special.

"Looking ahead, I see a powerful and meaningful future for our cardiac service, particularly through the continued growth of a public cardiology clinic at Mildura Base Public Hospital," Amy said.

She explained that in just the seven months



Mbph Cardiac Sonographer, Amy Stanbrook reviews the patient's heart monitoring image.

since the unit opened "we have touched so many lives".

"Not only through timely diagnosis and treatment, but by offering reassurance, clarity, and compassion during moments of fear and uncertainty.

"The emotional impact of the unit's work is profound, and it is something I am immensely honoured to be part of.

"I am incredibly proud to be part of a service that is growing, improving access to cardiac care locally, and genuinely changing lives within our community."

Emma's heart-warming tale of professional success >>

MBPH Cardiac Liaison Clinical Nurse Consultant and Nurse Practitioner candidate Emma Bath shares her heart-warming tale of the journey to become who, and where, she is today.

EMMA Bath is a straight-talking, no-nonsense kind of person.

She talks rapidly mainly, I suspect, because she has limited time between obligations.

"I grew up on a fruit block at Coomealla," she began when Heartbeat asked how she became an integral member of the hospital's cardiac team.

"I attended Flinders University, South Australia, to complete a double degree in Bachelor of Nursing and Bachelor of Health Science.

"I had our first son (with husband Travis) halfway through my degrees, and he helped me type at 2am when I was cramming for my studies and meeting assignment deadlines.

"I completed my university studies in 2002," she said, her voice betraying the fact that there was more to come.

"I then completed my Graduate Nurse Program at Flinders Private Hospital Critical Care Unit in 2003."

Emma returned to Mildura when her second child, a daughter, was just five months old to begin working in the Mildura Base Intensive Care unit. That was 2004.

"We had our second son in 2006, and soon after took off in a van to travel around Australia."

Back from that adventure, Emma became a sessional Clinical Nurse Educator, tutor and facilitator with La Trobe University from 2007-2012, worked in the Royal Darwin Hospital ICU for a month in 2011 and completed her postgraduate Certificate in Critical Care from Deakin University in 2013.

Then, after many years of shift work in varied nursing roles, Emma decided a sea change was in order and took the opportunity to cross over into community services in 2020.

"I started the Cardiac Pulmonary Rehabilitation Program as a maternity leave replacement for 12 months, as well as a second role in the Hospital Admission Risk Program as Care Coordinator - a part of a chronic disease management program.

"An opportunity arose in 2021 to apply to Safer Care Victoria for Mildura Base Public Hospital to take part in the Cardiovascular Ambassador Project.

"This project was part of a conglomerate of projects under the '100,000 Lives Project' - aiming for cardiac care under these projects to reach the lives of 100,000 Victorians.

"I was employed as the Cardiac Liaison Nurse (CLN) and Project Lead of The Cardiovascular Ambassador Project, with Dr Bernhard Kuepper as Medical Lead," Emma said.

"This project allowed our team to map the journey of patients entering our hospital with Ischaemic heart disease, atrial fibrillation and heart failure.

"We looked at who was admitted to hospital, how long they stayed, where they were discharged to, who was re-hospitalised and in what time frame, and what discharge services were in place.

"The key interventions that were planned, trialled, and conducted are now an embedded service in the organisation because of this project.

"Patient and family feedback has always been overwhelmingly positive," Emma revealed.

"I have learnt so much from you. This was very thorough and now I feel like I am well equipped to handle this," she says are common responses from patients and their family.

Emma revealed the CLN team has since expanded to full time "with addition of our incredible CLN CNC, Lauren Slatter".

"Lauren has an extensive background as a senior

Emergency Department clinician, as well as Cardiac Pulmonary Rehabilitation Coordinator, and in Community Services, Indigenous Health Management and Wound Care Consulting.

"Our CLN team also developed a Heart Failure Outreach service for patients who are isolated, either by socioeconomic circumstance or often their condition means they are too unwell to leave their house to travel to appointments.

"We take the same standard of clinic care to these patients in their homes," she says proudly.

"Following the success of the Cardiovascular Ambassador Project - completed in 2024 - and seeing the potential for expansion of cardiac services, I applied to Monash University and was successful in obtaining a university place for a Masters of Advanced Nursing Nurse Practitioner degree.

"I completed this in December 2025 and am now awaiting endorsement by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency."

For those unsure of what a Nurse Practitioner (NP) is, or does, Emma explained: "We are nurses with advanced clinical assessment skills, knowledge, training and experience within a meta or sub speciality.

For example, Emma said: "I undertook my NP degree with a Chronic Disease focus and a cardiology subspecialty.

"Once I am an endorsed Nurse Practitioner, it will enable the Heart Failure clinic to expand, reach more patients, improve efficiency in the service, and improve access to timely care."

About the hospital's dedicated cardiac unit, Emma told Heartbeat that following the hospital's participation in the Cardiovascular Ambassador Project, and armed with a greater understanding of the local community's cardiac needs, Dr Kuepper "developed and presented several iterations

of business cases to seek backing from the Department of Health to increase cardiology services offered at Mildura Base Public Hospital”.

“The first step has been to establish an in-house echocardiogram service which was previously privately contracted. This saw us welcome senior Cardiac Sonographer to our team Amy Stanbrook (see separate story) at the beginning of last year.

“Amy’s knowledge, skills, work ethic and enthusiasm is refreshing and contagious!

“In the meantime, we have continued planning and work in the background to establish the first Public Outpatient Cardiology Service.

“Pre-tests are under way, and further preparations see us nearing the grand opening of this much needed service.

“We are a small, but highly motivated and passionate group of clinicians whose focus is always on serving the needs of our local community,” Emma concluded.



MBPH Cardiac Liaison Clinical Nurse Consultant and Nurse Practitioner Candidate, Emma Bath attaches the ECG monitoring patches to MBPH Foundation team member Jack Madafferri.

Lauren loves her very full life >>

LAUREN Slatter is another of Mildura Base Public Hospital (MBPH) nursing staffers with a very full life.

As well as her role at MBPH in the cardiac unit, she is a wife and mum to five children.

Lauren readily acknowledges she has a very busy life and says at the same time she finds it agreeably fulfilling.

“I am a local, born and bred,” she told Heartbeat proudly.

“I returned home to Mildura soon after completing my Bachelor of Nursing at La Trobe University in Bendigo.

“I then completed my Graduate Nurse Program at Mildura Base Hospital in 2004, found a love for emergency care and stayed working in the Emergency Department until 2014.

“Through those years I completed a Graduate Certificate in Emergency Care Nursing through Deakin Uni; fulfilled roles of Clinical Nurse Specialist and then Associate Nurse Unit Manager and felt privileged to care for people in their most vulnerable times.



MBPH Cardiac Pulmonary Rehabilitation Coordinator and Cardiac Liaison Nurse Consultant, Lauren Slatter participates in a heart monitoring procedure with MBPH Head of Cardiology Dr Bernhard Kuepper.

“I have also worked in rural primary care at an Aboriginal, community controlled health organisation and enjoyed teaching nursing at the Sunraysia College of TAFE (SuniTAFE) and MBPH.

“Since 2016 I have worked in wound management, wound clinic nursing and am now enjoying my nursing role as Cardiac Pulmonary Rehabilitation Co Ordinator and Cardiac Liaison Nurse Consultant at MBPH.”



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WORTHY AWARD WINNERS

A CELEBRATION OF OUR WONDERFUL MEDICAL CLINICIANS, NON-MEDICAL STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS AT THE MILDURA BASE PUBLIC HOSPITAL (MBPH) DURING 2025.

JUST ahead of Christmas last year the hospital held its annual Week of Joy celebrations. A highlight of the event was the Mildura Rural Talent Awards 2025 presentation ceremony and the MBPH Employee Heart Heroes Certificate of Excellence Awards.

The annual event is a proud collaboration between Monash Rural Health, through the North West Victoria Regional Training Hub, and Mildura Base Public Hospital, recognising outstanding early career doctors and their mentors who have demonstrated exceptional skill, dedication, and impact in our rural community.

Nominations for the awards are submitted by peers and colleagues, with the final award recipient selections made by a panel of judges.

The awards are recognition and uplifting of the talented doctors who make Mildura and the MBPH community proud.

The awards also saw many other MBPH employees recognised for the achievements in their respective roles at the hospital.

Here is a gallery of photos taken at the awards presentation.

MILDURA RURAL TALENT AWARDS



MBPH Acting CEO Matt Jukes, Esraa Basha Highly commended Heart Star Commitment to patient care & Board chair Frank Piscioneri.



MBPH board member Kieran Cain Hall, Osama Ali Most Commended Senior Medical Staff Award & Acting CEO Matt Jukes.



MBPH board chair Frank Piscioneri, Diolous Trangia Highly Commended Coolamon Patient Care Award & Acting CEO Matt Jukes.



MBPH board chair Frank Piscioneri, Steff Schoen Champion for workplace Safety & will Being Acting CEO Matt Jukes.



MBPH Executive Director of Medical Services Chief Medical Officer Dr Nabrees Sinnalebbe.



MBPH Executive Director People, Culture & Strategy Janelle McGregor speaks at the Talent Awards



MBPH board memembr Quentin Norton, Mark Daniel Winner Heart Values Aspire Award MBPH Acting CEO Matt Jukes.



MBPH board member Mary Rydberg, Sara Clark Adult Recovery and Wellbeing Service, CLAD Director Tim DeBoo received their awards from Acting CEO Matt Jukes.



MBPH board member Mary Rydberg, Chris Compt, Diversity & Inclusion Award & Acting CEO Matt Jukes.



MBPH board member Mary Rydberg, Ashley Bath Highly commended Graduate Nurse Program, Acting CEO Matt Jukes.



MBPH board member Kieran Cain Hall, Sarah Harris Heart Values Aspire Award MBPH Acting CEO Matt Jukes.



MBPH board member Kieran Cain Hall, Catherine Healy Winner of the Coolamon Patient Care Award MBPH Acting CEO Matt Jukes.



MBPH board chair Frank Piscioneri, Isabella Gove Highly Commended Improvement and Innovation Award & Acting CEO Matt Jukes.



MBPH Executive Director Clinical Operations Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer Katrina Allen speaks at the 2025 Talent Awards.



MBPH board member Mary Rydberg, Motaz Bahageel Highly Commended Senior Medical Staff Award & Acting CEO Matt Jukes.



MBPH board member Ian Campbell, Greta Reid Highly commended champion Workplace Wellbeing & Safety & Acting CEO Matt Jukes.



MBPH board member Kieran Cain Hall, Melinda Cain Volunteer Award 2025 MBPH Acting CEO Matt Jukes.

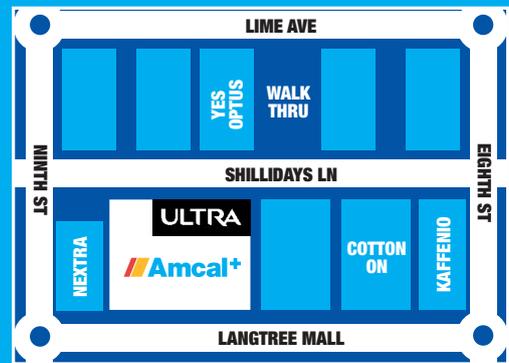


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AT 85 MARTY IS STILL PLAYING COMPETITIVE BOWLS THIS IS HIM IN MILDURA IN HIS MID 50S.

IT'S NOT THE LUCK OF THE IRISH, HE'S JUST A REALLY GOOD SPORT



THIS ARTICLE IS ANOTHER IN THE SERIES BY AWARD-WINNING FORMER MILDURA JOURNALIST AND NEWSPAPER EDITOR ALAN ERSKINE. MID-WAY THROUGH HIS CAREER, ALAN WAS THE RECIPIENT OF THE PRESTIGIOUS HARRY BRITTAIN MEMORIAL FELLOWSHIP, ONE OF ONLY EIGHT IN THE WORLD THAT YEAR, AND IN 2012 WAS AWARDED THE VICTOR CHANG AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN CARDIOVASCULAR JOURNALISM FOR REGIONAL AUSTRALIA. HE IS RE-VISITING SOME OF HIS MORE COLOURFUL CAREER STORIES FOR HEARTBEAT.

THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE WHO ARE VERY GOOD AT THEIR CHOSEN SPORT...AND THEN THERE'S THE REALLY GIFTED, LIKE MILDURA'S MARTY CONNORS - HE HAS EXCELLED IN MULTIPLE SPORTS, EVEN AFTER CELEBRATING HIS 80TH BIRTHDAY IN 2021 AND HE IS ABOUT TO CLOCK UP HIS 86TH YEAR ON THIS EARTH!

MARTY Connors is one of the most affable, quiet, modest high-achieving sportsman I have ever had the pleasure of interviewing.

We played lawn bowls together in Mildura in the early 2000's, but I soon found out there was more to this bloke than meets the eye.

Irish-born Marty, born on St Patrick's Day (he made it by five minutes!), has had a sporting career that most of us simply dream about.

He played soccer at Wembley in England, A Grade tennis in Melbourne, is still off a single figure handicap in golf, has played top-level squash, is a lawn bowls champion, and in his 'younger days' helped the legendary Ron Barassi and other former footy champions make Aussie 'Super Rules' victories a mere formality.

Marty was born in Limerick, Ireland, the second eldest of eight children.

He's the only one who survived the 70th birthday milestone.

Growing up in the 1940's, and things haven't changed much, Irish sport, especially football (soccer) wasn't merely a game. It was a passion, a lifestyle.

One Irish wit had even remarked - "our football isn't a matter of life or death... it's much more serious than that!"

And a young Marty took to soccer like a duck to water.

He kicked a ball going to school, during school and again after school, firstly in Ireland, and even more so after the family moved to London, honing skills that caught the attention of the English schoolboy representative team.

It didn't take much encouragement for him to join the group, and Marty shared schoolboy success both nationally, and internationally.

WORDS

ALAN ERSKINE

It was during a London home game that talent scouts liked what they saw, and signed the then 14-year-old Marty to the world-famous Manchester United Soccer Club.

He says a highlight of those early years was meeting the legendary Georgie Best, still Marty's greatest sporting hero.

A lowlight was the death by plane crash in Germany in 1958 of eight of the Manchester United playing squad.

They were among 20 passengers who died instantly, with another three dying later in hospital.

Among the injured survivors was the legendary Bobby Charlton.

The plane crashed at its third take-off attempt in bleak weather conditions at Munich Airport, after Manchester had won their way into the quarter finals of the European Cup.

"The whole country - and the soccer-playing world - was devastated," Marty said. "Many elite-level sporting teams are broken up now so that they travel on different planes."

Marty says he was in awe of Irish-born Manchester United star Georgie Best, who passed away in 2005, aged 59, after half a lifetime chasing booze, women, and drugs.

"Best was a prodigious talent," Marty said. "He left the game aged just 26, with his best years still ahead of him, but as probably the greatest player ever to pull on a boot."

Marty was at the game where Best scored six goals! It was 1970, and Best's comeback game after a four-week suspension. The goals came in a round of the FA Cup, and after the game, someone remarked to Best that the goals came after he beat six opposition players.

"That's not right," Best replied. "I beat the same three players three times!" Modesty was never his strongpoint.

For the last of his six goals, just to add salt into the wounds, he 'danced' around the opposition goalie to casually dribble the ball into the back of the net. "It was amazing stuff," Marty says.



Marty has been an untiring volunteer driver for Mildura's Sunassist community service.

Marty played against some of the world's best soccer stars at all major grounds in England during his career, firstly with Manchester United, and then Queen's Park Rangers, before the Connors family decided to make the big move to Australia. Marty was just 22.

Living in Melbourne, Marty took up squash, tennis and golf, and loved them all, with golf always (and still) his favourite sport. A highlight was a win in the prestigious Johnny Walker Classic.

Marty has to be prompted to reveal his lowest handicap (he got down to three), and these days, after his 80th birthday, plays off six! He regularly has rounds of 75 or 76 off the stick, well below his age!

He has had three holes in one, but his proudest moment was coming in one under par (71) during a competition round. That would have beaten most of the field at the recent Australian Open.

Of course, you can't migrate to Australia and not play Aussie Rules, so when Marty came of age for 'Super Rules' (over 35's), he pulled on the boots, and delighted in rubbing shoulders with VFL greats like Ron Barassi, Kevin Murray, Keith McKenzie and Billy Barrott.

In his 40's, Marty made the decision to re-locate to Mildura, a move he says he will never regret, making many new friends through the years.

Within months of his arrival, Marty became one of Sunraysia's



Marty lobs the ball onto the green on the 10th hole at the Mildura Golf Resort.



Marty enjoys a round of golf at the Mildura Golf Resort.



Bobby Charlton and the legendary George Best.

leading lawn bowlers, Pennant and social. He played Division One for Mildura for many years, while still managing to get in plenty of golf as well.

And he was still playing soccer in the local comp in his late 40's, winning the club, AND the league, best and fairest at the age of 49.

Marty has walked away from bowls a few times because he can't handle the hot Mildura summers, but friends always talked him into making a comeback.

These days, at 84, Marty is pretty much just a spectator, but said during our recent talk that he's on the comeback trail after a serious illness, centred on lung and heart infections that almost proved fatal.

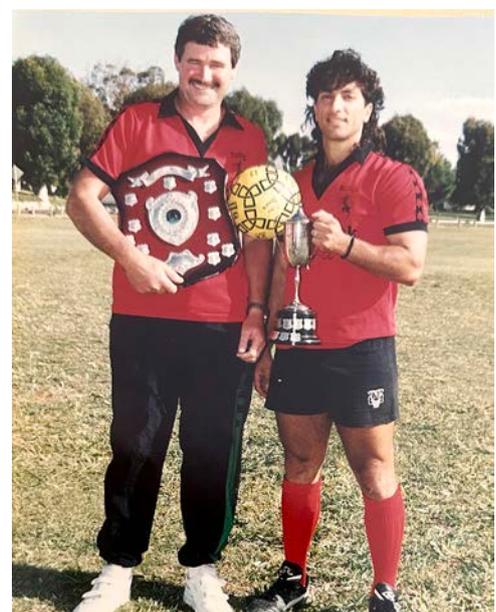
He lost 13 kilograms, is on a high protein diet and still pretty weak, so he is restricting himself to a few ends of bowls a week, and/or some practice golf swings at the local driving range.

"But I'll be back," he says with his trademark grin.

Apart from great success in the sporting arena, Marty lists a life highlight as returning to Ireland in early 2001 to see the house in which he was born, and catch up with relatives he hadn't seen for 50 years.

And the almost 86-year-old has another trip planned.

"Before I get too old," he says with an Irish twinkle in his eye.



Marty was a playing coach with Mildura City Soccer Club in Mildura into his 50s that's Cosi Simonetta with him.



LIVING HER HIGH-FLYING DREAM

« The young are often encouraged by their parents to ‘spread their wings’ and go after what they want in life. Jamie Brady took that advice to heart. »

WHEN her parents gifted 12-year-old Jamie Brady a voucher to go gliding, they couldn't have known the impact that experience was to have on their impressionable youngster.

“They got me a voucher for the glider field just down the road,” the Mildura ex-pat told Heartbeat as she stood on the threshold of a Mildura Airport runway.

“I never had any idea it (the gliding field) was there up until that point,” she revealed.

“But it all started from there.”

The ‘it’ she is referring to is a career in aviation that has not only seen her flying all over but also instructing others.

Now 27, Jamie acknowledges that first glider flight opened the “doorway into flying”, a passion she says has existed for as long as “I could see the aeroplanes coming and going from Mildura Airport” over the fence that surrounded her family's Mildura property.

But a family move to Melbourne delayed her aerial aspirations.

“I moved to Melbourne with the family so

rather than being just two kilometres from a gliding club, I ended up 100 kilometres from one.

“Yeah, that made it harder.. and you know what Melbourne weather is like -- you can only really fly during the summer months.

Undeterred she persisted and after lessons went solo when she was about 17.

“A little bit later than I planned,” she says ruefully.

Jamie made the move to powered flight, a transition made easier by the knowledge and skills she had acquired gliding.

“It was actually easy for me to transition to powered flight. All I needed to learn really was that I now had an engine... and I needed to make more radio calls,” she laughs.

“I don't believe any of my gliding training was recognised, and I can't remember if that was because it was through a university that I was doing it, or it might just be for a CASA recognised licence.

“The gliding didn't really amount to much, but it did give me experience. That was definitely one thing.”

Jamie went through to, and completed, high school at Pakenham Secondary College and was looking at the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) as an option to get into aviation.

“Unfortunately, at that time I was too short and too light!”

“So, I ended up going to university. I applied for a course there and had the ATAR that I needed because I had done a bit of physics and maths - both requirements of the course so that I could do something in aviation.

“Now, not every pilot needs to do physics and maths at school. You can just go to any flight school and get a licence, and that’s completely fine... it’s just not the way I did it.

“But it does help to have a little bit of that knowledge. It certainly makes flight training easier, especially the theory exams. But the way that I did it was that I had done those subjects in high school, and that set me up pretty well to go on with a Bachelor of Aviation at Swinburne University, which does its flight training out of CAE flight school at Moorabbin.

Jamie spent the next few years at Swinburne earning her private licence, commercial licence and her multi-engine rating.

She also has an ‘instrument rating’ that allows her to “basically fly into cloud”, and an instructor’s rating too.

“My first job was as a flight instructor for two years with Inbound Aviation at Mangalore,” Jamie recalled.

“They oversaw the Sharp Airline cadetship program and ‘Flight Pelican,’ training future airline pilots.”

At this stage, when she was flight instructing, Jamie was about 24 she recalls.

Jamie professes she has had an enthusiasm for aerial aerobatics for some time, sparked, by a former instructor at the gliding club.

“I seemed to have known that I wanted to do something in aerobatics for a long time... even as a hobby. It would just be good fun.”

Were you a thrill seeker as you grew up?

“Definitely, yeah. My mum and dad took me to Queensland and all the fun parks including Dreamworld and I’d be on every ride.”

With her next goal firmly in mind, Jamie set about completing her aerobatic endorsement.

“I had to pay for that myself, outside of working at the flight school,” she says.

“Then, through the flight school, I got my aerobatic instructing approval.”

Soon after she met two people who were to have a profound impact on her aviation career.

The first is Matt Hall, the principal of Matt Hall Racing (MHR). Founded in 2009, MHR is a high performance aviation racing team that also offers a range of aviation services including aerobatic flights, scenic flights, private charter, corporate speaking, air shows and corporate displays.

The second was Emma McDonald. At the time one of Matt’s team of pilots.

“I did a joy flight with Emma,” Jamie told Heartbeat when describing her first meeting.

“Both of them are big idols for me.

“I’d seen them at airshows and thought, ‘Wow, if only I could do something like that!’.

“I met them in Yarrawonga, as they were sort of passing through, and I thought that they might have had some flight bookings open.

“I thought just do it. You’re about to go on aerobatic instructing, it’ll help learn what it’s all about to do the really fun stuff, and it would help with my confidence as well.

“I wasn’t expecting anything out of it, but Emma liked the way that I flew the aeroplane; got me doing a few loops and rolls of my own. I met Matt afterwards, and he joked about giving me a job.

“I said ‘OK, I’ll take it’ and followed up with my resume. A position opened up about six months later.”

MHR is based at Lake Macquarie Airport at Marks Point, 15 kilometres south of Newcastle, New South Wales.

When Heartbeat caught up with



Jamie, she was back in Mildura as part of the MHR team, revealing it was unusual for the team to be offering joy flights.

“It’s not something we normally do. You’ll find that Matt travels everywhere for air shows, displays and corporate speaking engagements, and sometimes he’ll do some joy flights while we’re there.

“As far as I know, we’ve never done a trip dedicated to doing remote joy flights, not of this scale anyway, so I’m hoping this will be a bit of a start for that.

“We’ve had a relatively easy run here and we’ve had a lot of interest and that’s the main thing.

“I am really hoping we can do something like this again.

“You’ve got it pretty safe here. Virtually no traffic, only the occasional commercial flight comes in and a few light planes, so it’s a great area to do it.”

The 20-minute Mildura flights included “a bit of a cruise down the river for a few minutes” and then a turn right or left out over the irrigation area or outback landscapes.

The single-engined aircraft used for the flights was a German-built Extra 300L with a big, 300 horsepower engine up front.

“The aeroplane itself is very light,” Jamie explained, less than 600 kilos, so even with people on board “we have a lot of power for what we want to do”.

The weight savings come in the form of aluminium and composite carbon fibre.

“That means it is very light but very strong,” Jamie explained.

So strong it is rated for work that would see the pilot pulling up to 10Gs, or 10 times their body weight.

“Matt takes it up to over 10 G all the time, not so much in the Extras, but in some of the other planes that he has it not unusual.”

In terms of speed, Jamie said on the three-hour return flight to Lake Macquarie the Extra will be cruising about 300 kilometres an hour or 160 knots.

“I’ll be hoping for some tailwinds,” she said.

That might well depend on the height the plane will be cruising at.

The plane is not pressurised and has a ceiling of about 10,000 feet.

“Generally, you wouldn’t take an aeroplane like this too much higher than that. It gets really cold and it doesn’t have a heater,” Jamie explained.

So, what’s next on the horizon for high-flying Jamie?

“I’m quite happy doing what I’m doing for now,” she says.

“We’ve got another plane - a Cessna 303 - which is pretty rare in Australia. There wasn’t too many of them built, and it’s a twin engine aeroplane. I want to build up more of our hours on that.”

Jamie also revealed that the company is a proud supporter of the Wings for Kids charity.

“We fly sick kids from places like Dubbo, Cobar... anywhere in regional New South Wales really... for specialist treatment in Bankstown or Sydney.

“These kids - and they can be as an infant or as old 15 or 16 - but they’ve all been unlucky with their circumstances.

“Sometimes they might need to take a weekly trip to Bankstown, which is hard if you have to drive and you live in Cobar.

“It’s completely free of charge for the families.”

Scan the QR code or visit: www.matthallracing.com to see more about Matt Hall Racing and the team Jamie works with.



MATT HALL RACING AND RED BULL AEROBATIC EXPERIENCES

Designed and performed by company principal and Red Bull Air Race World Champion Matt Hall and his highly disciplined team of RAAF and elite aerobatic pilots, his is a way to experience mind-blowing stunts from barrel rolls to tumbling end-over-end at speeds of 370kph-plus.

“You’re in the front seat, so choose how much you cruise and how much time you spend upside down!” the company’s promotional material advises.

The Matt Hall Racing Red Bull Aerobatic Experiences came to Mildura in January this year.

Stunt pilot and ex-pat Jamie Brady was at the controls of the EXTRA 300 high performance aerobatic aircraft taking thrill-seeking, local aviation enthusiasts – some may say ‘adrenaline junkies’, for the flight of a lifetime!

As you will learn in this article Jamie has a local connection to Mildura.

MATT HALL RACING AVIATION AND OPERATIONS ASSISTANT HENRY HOWARD IS BASED AT MHR HEADQUARTERS AT LAKE MACQUARIE.

The 23-year-old was quick to list the MHR aeroplane inventory.

“We have two EXTRA 300s, that’s one of them there we’re doing the joy flights in,” he says pointing to the plane sitting on the Mildura Airport runway apron.

“We also have an MXS (a single-seat aerobatic aircraft made of carbon fibre and built by MX Aircraft Company, a manufacturer located at Jandakot Airport in Perth.) which Matt flies displays in, and a Cessna 303, which Jamie flies for our Wings for Kids Operations.

“Jamie is also our full-time aerobatic experience pilot.

“That’s a big part of our business. Offering that experience to anyone. Anyone can book a flight with us, young, old, short, tall.

“That’s exactly why we’re here in Mildura, to offer that experience to the people of Mildura.”

For the record, Henry is himself a pilot having started flying at 15.

HEARTBEAT SPEAKS TO JOY RIDER TREVOR BAUER

Trevor Bauer is a thrill seeker at heart and took two rides with Jamie while she was operating out of Mildura.

“I came out last week and did it and while they’re here I jumped at the opportunity to do it again,” the Algerian resident told Heartbeat.

On pulling 8Gs while performing aerobatic manoeuvres, Trevor said it made him feel “a lot heavier”.

Asked if he was one of those people who goes on “all the terrifying rides at an annual show, Trevor said: “No. No way. I don’t feel safe in those.”

“But Jamie’s a really amazing pilot and makes you feel so safe.”

Trevor is not a pilot himself, although it was something he wanted to do growing up but the planets never aligned.

Working in the environmental industry, he agreed that he had had a pretty good view of the environment while in the skies above Mildura and Sunraysia.

INTERNATIONAL ALLIED HEALTH PROFESSIONS DAY: MUSIC THERAPY IN MILDURA



<< International Allied Health Professions Day was held on October 14, 2025 and in Mildura we celebrated a music therapist who marched to the beat of his own drum from Adelaide to Mildura. >>

IT'S not easy to find a role as a music therapist; at least, that's what Ben Edwards thought when he graduated with a Music Therapy Masters in December 2023. Music therapy is the intentional and therapeutic use of music to support people to improve their health and wellbeing.

But it wasn't long before he spotted a Graduate Music Therapist role at Mildura Base Public Hospital, Victoria.

"We used to go on holiday to Mildura when I was a kid," said Ben, originally from Adelaide, "so when I spoke to mum about the role, she encouraged me to give it a try."

"I have always wanted to do something where I was helping people through playing music. This position came at the right time when I was figuring out what kind of music therapist I wanted to be,"

The position is part of the Department of Health's Mental Health Allied Health Expanded Disciplines Graduate Program.

As part of this Program, the department funds Area Mental Health and Wellbeing Services to deliver a one-year graduate program, providing a structured and supportive pathway to enter the public mental health and wellbeing system safely and competently.

Experienced allied health clinical educators are also funded to deliver discipline-specific education, supervision, and support—creating positive learning environments that foster job satisfaction, skill development, and workforce wellbeing.

The Program is open to graduates in clinical pharmacy, physiotherapy, speech pathology, dietetics, exercise physiology, art therapy, and music therapy.

This initiative is a key strategy to diversify and grow the mental health workforce, aligning with recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

For Ben, this was the perfect opportunity to get a peek into the world of mental health.

"As a music therapist I'm not just trained in mental health. Music therapy can be done in a lot of different capacities.

"I realised the graduate position at Mildura would allow me to build up my skills, and it made the idea of moving there a lot easier."

Ben uses music as part of a multidisciplinary approach to support consumers with their mental health recovery. He said he wants people to notice what they feel when they engage with music.

"The goal of music therapy isn't necessarily about teaching someone a song on the guitar. You might do that - but you're really focusing on what's happening for someone during that process."

"I try to encourage people to think about their relationship with music, just by listening to it."

The 12-month graduate position turned into a two-year role, as Ben's colleagues at Mildura Base Public Hospital saw the positive effect his expertise had on their consumers.

"I've really enjoyed the graduate program and my skills have improved substantially, even over the last 12 months," he said.

Read more about pathways into mental health careers at: www.health.vic.gov.au/workforce-and-training/discover-pathways-to-your-new-mental-health-job

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JOE JONES IS NOT
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A MAN WITH TIME ON HIS HANDS

« Segal's Law states: "A man with one watch knows what time it is; a man with two watches is never quite sure." So, how does that translate for a man with upwards of 100 clocks? Heartbeat decided to ask Merbein's Joe Jones just that... »

JOE Jones drove trucks for a living all his working life, but the now 'mostly retired' truckie got sick of the Melbourne 'rat race' and recently relocated to Merbein.

"I just had to get away from Melbourne. I've driven trucks there most of my life, but I'd had enough. It's a rat race on the roads here now... it's murder.

"Some of the drivers down there leave a lot to be desired," he told me as he explained his Merbein move.

Gregarious with a ready wit and smile, Joe has quickly made friends in his new hometown and acclimatised to the much slower pace of life.

"I should have moved up here a few years ago," he says, "I am loving it."

A little surprisingly, one of the interesting things I found out about Joe since meeting him is that he has a large collection of clocks, so many that they occupy three rooms in his Merbein home!

But more on that later. For now, let's get back to the man himself.

Joe grew up in the vibrant, inner-city Melbourne suburb of Prahran, attending the State and High Schools there.

"My father was a florist. He had his

own shop but died at the age of 49.

"He wasn't a smoker or drinker but had a heart attack all the same.

"I was 20, just going on 21."

He was already driving trucks by this time, telling me that early in his career he had done some interstate work but gave that up in favour of more local work, including carting asphalt, some tipper work and a bit of closer-to-home haulage.

Then, probably about 10 to 12 years ago, he moved to Queensland, first living in Mackay and then Bundaberg.

He went 'way out west' working between Roma and Miles in the gas mines - three weeks on, one week off.

"I did that for about a year and a half," he says.

Joe drove a dump truck hauling dirt out of the large dams being built as part of the process of extracting the target gas from the water that it comes up out of the ground with.

"They were huge," Joe says, referring to the dams, "probably 10 acres each."

Joe explained that the gas and the water come up together with the water ending up in settling ponds, which is what he was helping build.

WORDS

JOHN DOOLEY
& GRANT MAYNARD



German regulator Clock.



Joe's tilt tray towing truck.



Ornate timber mantel clock.



English made timber mantel clock circa 1930s.



19th Century Marble Carriage Clock.

JOE JONES

After that stint it was back to the 'big smoke' but not enjoying it one bit.

That time in the wide-open spaces of Queensland's west had left an indelible mark it seems, a yearning for a quieter, less hurried life.

That was the catalyst for the move to Merbein, Joe admits.

But Joe still has the truck driver in him, and since his move to the birthplace and home of The Great Australian Vanilla Slice Triumph, he has continued to drive, even if on a much lower key.

He now operates a tilt tray truck, and while not actively seeking work, Joe usually manages to fill in a couple of days a week.

"I'm not out to cut into any other towing service operator out there," he tells me.

"I just have a bit of a hobby. It gets me out of the house, and if I can help someone in the community, I'm happy."

Joe, and his delicate little Chihuahua named 'Rocket', are now well known around Merbein.

Rocket is legendary for waking up the neighbours with his ferocious and incessant early morning barking!

He is quite the 'alarm clock' Joe acknowledges, which brings us around neatly around to his impressive collection of clocks.

"It all started 45 years ago, I reckon, roughly," he says, explaining the origins of the collection.

"Somebody gifted me a clock, and then one of my friends gave me a clock. It just grew from there."

So how many do you think you have?

"I think probably more than 100, or close to it."

Looking at the collection, many are particularly ornate and probably expensive?

"Yeah, they made them when people were willing to pay for the work involved. They don't make them like that anymore."

Joe explained that collecting clocks has become a journey in itself.

"I have gotten them from everywhere," he says. "I've met a lot of people through the journey of selling and buying clocks."

Joe said one memorable fellow collector was 'Melvin' from Carrum Downs in Melbourne.

"He had a ton of clocks. I ended up buying a heap off him because he wanted to get out of collecting as he was dying," he said.

Pride of place in his collection is a perennial favourite – a grandfather clock that has been known to wake him out of a deep sleep with its booming chimes.

"I used to have eight of them. They're a beautiful clock, but they're hard to transport. They're not made to move, and so the others couldn't make the move to Merbein with me," he explains a little wistfully.

"But I do have some other beautiful ones, like the carriage clock on the mantle over there," he says pointing it out.

"People used to use that one on the trains from England to France."



18th Century European ornate garniture set.



Cuckoo clocks were crafted in Germany during the 1930s and 1940s.



Other beautiful pieces include Spelter statues.



An ornately carved wall cabinet is home to a large collection of clocks.



Joe's turbo-charged Chihuahua 'Rocket' is legendary for waking up the neighbours with his ferociously incessant early morning barking!

Turning to a sideboard, Joe enthusiastically points out a range of timepieces from the late 1800s, but singling one out in particular.

"That's a beautiful clock. They're German and called 'the regulator,' and so is this one here," he says indicating another.

"See, that's got the eagle," he says, explaining that the Germans loved the eagle device on their clocks.

Joe's collection features some other, just as magnificent 18th Century European clocks, including an ornate garniture set.

Other beautiful pieces include a set of Spelter statues.

"They're not very heavy," Joe explains.

"Spelter is made from a zinc alloy (often mixed with lead or tin), commonly used in the 19th and early 20th centuries as an affordable, lightweight alternative to bronze."

"The material is typically found in 19th Century artefacts."

Moving on, Joe's magnificently

adorned dining room features a collection cuckoo clocks and a variety of Dutch clocks.

"Many of the cuckoo clocks were crafted in timber in Germany during the 1930s and 1940s, when the Germans were at war," Joe explained.

"The black cuckoos are particularly special – they are known as Black Forest cuckoos. "Germany was making them, but nobody was buying them, because Germans were held in great disdain back then because of the war.

"So, they sent them to England to be re-stamped "Made in England, so they could be sold with prejudice."

There were so many highlights amongst Joe's collection but another magnificent standout for me was an English-made timber mantel clock circa 1930s.

Heartbeat asked Joe if all of the clocks chimed?

"If they were all ticking as the half hour and hour arrived it would produce a cacophony of sound that would shake the

neighbourhood and quite frankly, it would make Big Ben sound like a travel alarm clock," he said with a cheeky twinkle in his eye.

"And what's more, we don't need that. Rocket already wakes half of the street up every morning!

Joe could very easily open his collection up to the public it is that impressive, and he would make quite the tour guide.

I reminded him that former Prime Minister Paul Keating was once famously seen shopping for clocks during a cold winter in Canberra, not long after he had been deposed as PM at the March 1993 federal election by Liberal leader John Howard.

Keating was an avid collector of antique clocks, and grinning I told Joe that he "wasn't in bad company" there.

"Well, that would depend on your politics!" he shot back.

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WORDS

REBECCA CROSSLING

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY

AT Mildura Base Public Hospital (MBPH), Bianca Wilkens and Rhianna Duncan-Batchelor exemplify the power of growing and training our own. Both studied with La Trobe University while living and working in Mildura, balancing study, work and family as they build meaningful careers in their home town. When they cross the stage at the Mildura Arts Centre on graduation day in late March, their stories will stand as powerful reminders of why local education pathways are vital to sustaining a skilled, committed regional health workforce.

For Bianca Wilkens, studying locally wasn't just a preference - it was what made university possible.

"I had my family here, my support network here. Moving away just wasn't an option," Bianca said. "Having La Trobe in Mildura made university achievable for me."

Now 32, Bianca has lived in Mildura since she was seven. A mum of three, she balanced family life, work in aged care, and study - a juggling act familiar to many regional students. After leaving school at the end of Year 11, Bianca took a non-traditional pathway into nursing, starting with a Certificate III in Individual Support and later completing La Trobe's Tertiary Preparation Program before enrolling in her Bachelor of Nursing.

"Studying at La Trobe has

honestly been one of the best decisions I've ever made," she said. "As a mature-aged student, I felt supported the whole way through. The flexibility and understanding from staff made such a difference."

All of Bianca's placements were completed locally at MBPH - something she sees as invaluable preparation for the workforce.

"Completing placements locally helps you build relationships and connections before you even graduate," she says. "On every placement, someone would ask if I planned to stay in the area - that really shows how much the hospital values students who train here."

This year Bianca has begun her graduate year in mental health nursing at MBPH - exactly where she hoped to be.

"It feels amazing knowing I get to stay at my grassroots and now give back to the community that supported me through my study and life."

For Rhianna Duncan-Batchelor, midwifery wasn't a childhood dream - but it quickly became a passion.

"When I finished school, I had no idea what I wanted to do," she said. "I fell into this career and I'm incredibly lucky that I did."

A graduate of Coomealla High School and a qualified nurse and midwife, Rhianna has just completed a Master of Midwifery Practice, with an Advanced Clinical specialisation.

"I pursued the Master of Midwifery Practice as I genuinely find it so satisfying to set myself a challenge of learning. I enjoy organisation, studying and the reward of finishing something I once saw as impossible. The course was the ideal combination to challenge my clinical skills, support my love for teaching others and all with the focus of a career I love. Now I am considering options such as completing a PhD, lecturing, doing further study in a Master of Midwifery Management."

Rhianna was able to study the course online with La Trobe University while living and working in Mildura. She works as the Midwifery Educator at MBPH, supporting staff, students and the next generation of midwives.

"Mildura is a really unique place to practice midwifery," Rhianna explains. "We see around 800 births a year - busy enough to maintain a broad range clinical skills, but small enough that we can support women across their entire maternity journey."

"As midwives here, we might work in childbirth education, antenatal care, birthing, postnatal, special care nursery and community midwifery - sometimes all in the same week."

Rhianna is passionate about challenging misconceptions about midwifery.

"People think we cuddle babies all day and while that's a



MBPH Midwifery Educator Rhianna Duncan-Batchelor.

nice part of the job, midwifery involves complex clinical skills, emergency response, education and emotional support,” she explained. “It can be challenging, but it’s incredibly rewarding.”

Both Bianca and Rhianna credit having the opportunity to study whilst living in their home town as a key factor in their success.

Even while studying online, Rhianna found the physical campus beneficial.

“Having the campus nearby made such a difference when I needed support,” Rhianna said. “Being able to talk to someone face-to-face helped resolve things quickly.”

For Bianca, the sense of belonging mattered just as much.

“It really felt like being part of a community,” Bianca said.

“I made lifelong friendships, especially with other mature-aged students juggling similar commitments.

“All of my placements were at MBPH, and now I’m working here. That continuity builds confidence and loyalty.”

As health services across Australia grapple with workforce shortages, stories like Bianca’s and Rhianna’s reinforce the importance of accessible regional education pathways.

“Growing up on a farm and in a regional town, it sometimes felt as though my path was already set — that I would be a battler and struggle to make it through tertiary study. There was an



MBPH Registered Graduate Psychiatric Nurse Bianca Wilkens.

expectation that those who leave never return, and those who stay see their careers stall. But that narrative isn’t true. You can build a strong, meaningful career right here,” Rhianna said.

Bianca agrees.

“There’s always a way to get where you want to be,” she said. “Studying locally opened doors I never thought possible.”

Now, both women are not only contributing to patient care at MBPH - they’re shaping the future workforce, whether through mentorship, education or simply showing what’s possible.

“I hope one day other graduates look at my journey and feel

encouraged,” Bianca added. “Mental health nursing needs passionate people and regional communities deserve them.”

Dr Sandy Connor, Head of Campus at La Trobe Mildura said local study options play a critical role in strengthening both individual outcomes and community resilience.

“Bianca and Rhianna’s stories show exactly why La Trobe is committed to place-based education. When people can study where they live, with the right support around them, they don’t just succeed at university - they strengthen the communities they call home.”

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An Aboriginal Canoe Tree stands tall in the centre.



Native wildlife Tea towels pegged to a Hills Hoist.



The well attended Christmas Night was a great success.



Capogreco Wines' Jane Capogreco was conducting tastings of the winery's extensive range of fine product at the shopping night.



Soft toys, board games, books and much more featured amongst the lovely gift ideas.



The produce from the region was a popular pick for many shoppers.



Mildura.com tourist attractions information stand.

MILDURA VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE OFFERS MORE THAN ITS NAME SUGGESTS

« On
Wednesday,
December
3, 2025,
Heartbeat had
the pleasure of
attending the
Mildura Visitor
Information
Centre's annual
'Christmas
Shopping
Night'. »

WORDS
JOHN DOOLEY

THE well-attended event was an opportunity for those attending to taste and purchase local wines, beautiful preserves, gift wrapped hampers and to browse the array of gift ideas, clothing, arts and crafts, soft toys, board games, books and much more stocked by the centre.

All the while there was live background music as a talented pianist created a serene yet joyful atmosphere.

I discovered the story of Mildura, and the wonderful contribution made to settlement by the Chaffey Brothers, detailed on a beautifully illustrated display at the rear of the centre dubbed 'Discover the Chaffey Trail'.

One of the stand-out features is a replica scale model of one of the Chaffey's irrigation pumps, housed in a Perspex display case.

Meanwhile, stories of First Nations people and other historical memorabilia is also a feature along with an Aboriginal 'canoe tree' standing tall in another section of the centre.

I found other informative installations that included 'Our River – the Amazing Murray';

'Food & Produce in our region'; 'Arts & Culture'; 'Surrounding Towns' and 'Aboriginal Culture'.

The Mildura Visitor Information Centre team's primary role sees them helping visitors to the region find the perfect tour, attraction, accommodation or event to ensure that they have a truly memorable experience.

The centre's gift shop is home to more than 40 local suppliers and also includes various unique Australian made products from further afield including produce, art, homewares, body products, an expansive 'wellness range', and branded souvenirs.

Heartbeat spoke to the Visitor Centre's Service Team acting Leader, Ruth Allen, who was delighted with the turnout for the shopping event.

"It's fantastic," she enthused. "It's always a good time. It's the festive season and it's very festive here! We like to bring some Christmas cheer to the centre at this event," she said. "It's great to see a lot of locals here. We're selling our local products, and we have some wineries here as well, conducting wine tasting and sales - it has been a lovely evening."



Visitor Services Officer Kelsey Cameron displays one of the prizes up for grabs at the shopping night.



The Chaffey Trail exhibition at the visitor information centre.



One of the many locally focussed installations in the visitor centre.



The Mighty Murray River is featured in an informative installation.



A young couple sample some wines at another local winery's stall in the Surrounding Towns display.

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SCARLETT'S A RISING ATHLETIC SUPERSTAR!

« That's
Scarlett
Carn on the
front cover
of Heartbeat
and here's
her story. »

MILDURA is home to the vibrant and active Sunraysia Athletics Club, which boasts a membership of 166 school children and senior participants as well. The organisation is bearing fruit, with some outstanding champions making a name for themselves across the state and nationally.

One such champion, is 12-year-old Scarlett Carn, who for a number of years has already been competing at a high level at State and National Titles, bringing home a stash of medals!

Scarlett's proud father and Sunraysia Athletics Club committee member, is Mildura Base Hospital's Maintenance Manager, Matthew Carn.

"Scarlett comes from a sporting family, where her mother and I have participated in a lot of sport," Matthew said.

"Our general home life revolves around sporting activities, playing in the backyard and a lot of those sort of things.

"We originally took Scarlett down to athletics because she showed natural talent and interest in running

particularly and being competitive and to give her an opportunity to develop her talent further."

Scarlett's first visit to Sunraysia Athletics, located at the Mildura Aero Ovals, was somewhat of an overwhelming experience for her, as Matthew explains.

"When you rock up, there's a hundred or so kids there. Upon seeing that, Scarlett didn't want to get out of the car, so the first year was a bit of a tricky experience," he said.

"Then, in under 9s, she started to get into the swing of things."

Scarlett's brother, the soon to be 10-year-old Lennox, is also a 'budding star' who is enjoying some great success at an early age on the athletic field, following in his sister's footsteps, by joining in the fun at the athletics club.

Scarlett has 'A-qualified' for seven events in the upcoming State Individual Championships, Lennox three, Matt informed me. "Most kids are lucky to A-qualify for one or two events, we are very proud and look forward to cheering them on."

WORDS

JOHN DOOLEY

Little Athletics is a national organisation that has been running for more than 50 years.

A bit of the history...

Little Athletics evolved through the mind and conscience of one man -Trevor Billingham. Following the pattern set by many pioneers in the field of community service, he recognised a need and introduced an idea designed to fill that void.

On an October day in 1963, three boys turned up at athletics meeting in Geelong, Victoria. They were ready to compete. On approaching an official they were told that they were too young to take part. That official was Trevor Billingham.

The disappointment, evident in the boys, left a marked impression on his mind.

The thought was forgotten; it came alive again several months later. At a coaching clinic designed for secondary school students, it was noted that the majority of children were of primary school age.

Reminded of his earlier experience, Trevor Billingham had an idea. The answer to the need expressed in the children would be a simple Saturday morning competition.

On the first Saturday of October 1964, he met with a small group of children on a Geelong oval. They took part in a short program of running events.

From that simple beginning, athletics for under 12 boys and girls developed at a phenomenal rate. Little Athletics created tremendous interest and by 1967, the Victorian Little Athletics Association was formed.

On March 31, 1972, the Australian Little Athletics Union was formed in Perth.

Victoria, New South Wales, Northern Territory & Western Australia were the founding members. South Australia, Queensland & Australian Capital Territory joined in the 1973-74 season and Tasmania soon followed joining in the 1974-75 season. Ref: Little Athletics Australia.

Volunteering parents are a big



Scarlett Carn with some of her many trophies.



Scarlett has had great success at the State Championships in South Australia.

part of the Little Athletics scene, without whose contribution, the clubs couldn't function.

"We are fortunate to have very good equipment, which is thanks to lot of community support," Matt told Heartbeat.

"If we need anything, it's been easy for us to obtain new equipment, funding or sponsorship.

"It's been fantastic for Scarlett to be able to win State Champion in South Australia over a few years and also some different awards in Melbourne and she has also won at state school events, most recently the Victorian long jump champion for state schools."

Not to be outdone, young Lennox is also in the hunt for gold!

"He's actually won State Champion in different ages for high jump and the 400 metres, so he's got a bit more of a 'tank', whereas, Scarlett sort of maxes out at 400, but they've both got plenty of power!" the proud Dad told me.

Scarlett is a student at Trinity Lutheran College, where she is in Grade-6 and is the Primary School Captain. She's has been there since Prep and is fortunate to have been awarded sporting and academic scholarships.

There's no doubt, that Scarlett is destined for bigger and better things on the athletics front, and who knows, an Olympic future may await her and Lennox may be hot on her heels too!



10-year-old Lennox Carn is a confident and competitive Sunraysia Athletics rising star.

Now that kids are spending less time on their devices due to the Social Media restrictions, Heartbeat would encourage to parents with young children to visit one of Sunraysia Athletics Club Thursday afternoon training days, to see what goes on. And then, if the kids are athletically inclined, or might be enticed to be so involved, get in touch with the local organisation on the ground their or visit: www.mildura-and-district.littleleaths.com.au/join-our-club.



Scarlett Carn with her dad Matthew Carn and brother Lennox.

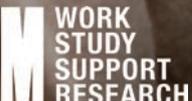
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CREATIVE SUNRAYSIA: A NEW FORCE FOR THE ARTS AND CULTURE IN OUR REGION



Melinda Hinkson is the inaugural chair of Creative Sunraysia.

2026 SEES THE LAUNCH OF AN EXCITING NEW INITIATIVE, CREATIVE SUNRAYSIA, BASED IN MILDURA AND REACHING OUT ACROSS THE REGION. CREATIVE SUNRAYSIA HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED BY PEOPLE WITH DEEP AND DIVERSE EXPERIENCE ACROSS THE ARTS, BUSINESS, ACADEMIA AND COMMUNITY ADVOCACY WITH A SHARED PASSION FOR THE FUTURE OF THIS REGION.

WORDS

ROHAN MORRIS

MUCH recent research tells us that people in rural communities are feeling disconnected and crave new ways of coming together.

With that firmly at the forefront its thinking, Creative Sunraysia's mission is to generate arts and cultural activities that spark "regional renewal".

Building collaborations from the ground up, Creative Sunraysia is, in its own words, "hungry to activate energy and imagination; reconnect people to nature and each other; build new alliances; and foster cross-community participation in shaping our future".

Across history and cultures, vibrant cultural life has been vital to thriving societies. This is something Mildura's diverse ethnic communities know all too well. Gathering in public to share stories, music,



Creative Sunraysia soiree with Sharon and Slava Grigoryan at NAP Contemporary. PHOTO KELSEY LEGGE.

food is the basis for building trust, for knowing where we come from, and for imagining a future of hope and possibility.

The Russian writer Dostoevsky famously wrote that beauty would save the world. His saying that has often been rephrased as “art will save the world”. Behind this deceptively simple statement is a profound idea - when we give careful attention to the world around us; and when we value beauty, love, and kindness, people and their environments will flourish.

At Creative Sunraysia we like to think of art as akin to primary production. Our farmers are as inventive in their work of growing food and in their endless problem solving as are classical pianists. It is no coincidence that the production of food in this place over the last century has run in tandem with the production of some acclaimed artists and musicians, as well as a

broader creative community.

But as we look to the future, we face significant challenges in our region. Sunraysia is in many ways a barometer for the future of rural Australia and the nation. The impacts of climate change are being keenly felt as are repercussions of a river system under unprecedented threat. The federal government has recently declared the Murray River “critically endangered”. How we respond to these challenges now will determine what kind of future is possible.

Creative Sunraysia will address the plight of the river system upon which we all depend at a special event at the Mildura Writers Festival on Friday, July 17. Ecologists, First Nations custodians, farmers, researchers and community leaders will explore what we can do collectively to turn this situation around.

Creative Sunraysia will be a dynamic arts and culture workshop responding to pressing issues of our place and time. We will curate events across music, theatre, poetry, environmental art, and public dialogue. Our program will build new conversations and relationships across diverse sectors of our community and between the country and the city. We will spark fresh enthusiasm for all of us to get out and about. We hope you will join us on this exciting journey.

Be part of the Creative Sunraysia story by following Creative Sunraysia on Facebook and @creativesunraysia on Instagram. For further information email: hello@creativesunraysia.org.au.

Melinda Hinkson is the inaugural chair of Creative Sunraysia, a social anthropologist and a farmer who lives and works in the Millewa.



Fisher Developments Director Alan Fisher has a strong heartfelt connection to the Sunraysia region.

THE HISTORY OF A GROCERY STORE SUCCESS STORY

« This is the story of a ‘pioneer store’ established in 1911 and located on the Murray River at the foot of Pump Hill in Merbein. Selling everything from drapery, footwear, clothing, ‘fancy goods’ and stationery to all manner of groceries and even more, it was the first step in a journey that was to produce the region’s iconic Fisher’s grocery store chain. »



Bill Fisher was often seen in his grey coat sweeping the footpath outside his SSW grocery store.

RITCHIE'S IGA

WORDS

JOHN DOOLEY
WITH AMY ZURRER

If you have lived in Sunraysia for any length of time, you'd remember 'Fisher's Sell it for Less.'

It was the well-known slogan that adorned Fisher's grocery store façades across our region for decades.

And, not surprisingly perhaps, those words still resonate. Despite the stores having changed hands and been rebranded 'Ritchie's IGA', people still say: "I'm off to Fisher's."

In the mid-1960s, Fisher's became part of the SSW grocery food chain and became known as Fisher's SSW.

In later years, those same stores and a few more added along the way became a part of the IGA independent grocery group to become Fisher's IGA, now Ritchie's IGA.

The opening paragraph of acknowledgements for the history of Fisher's written by Amy Zurrer and entitled 'Always going forward – Celebrating 100 years of Fisher's Stores' it says: "This book, as many things are at Fisher's, is the result of a team effort and it is the team's efforts over many years that has seen Fisher's continue to prosper."

That would seem to sum up things perfectly.

Fisher's stores were an integral part of the greater Sunraysia community for more than 100 years.

Interestingly, the Fisher name was a creation of one James Fassio, who immigrated to Australia from the United States of America. While on the ship coming over, he changed the family name from Fassio to Fisher.

James had a son - Eugene. Eugene married Elizabeth and together they had eight children including Alan. Alan was educated at Scotch College in Melbourne and became quite an athlete. He was a champion lawn bowler and a staunch player and later supporter of the Merbein Football Club.

Alan married Hannah, known as 'Lalla' and the couple had two children, George William (Bill) and Merrie.

Bill Fisher, whose face was to become synonymous with the supermarket chain, would go on to significantly grow 'Fishers' into a grocery store empire.

The story of the evolution and growth of Fishers supermarkets across Sunraysia and then beyond our immediate region, is one of hard work and determination.

Something the former managing director and son of the well-known and respected Bill Fisher - famous for his direct participation on the shop floor - remembers all too well.

Alan Fisher takes up the story:

“Dad lived by the mantra: ‘Do as I do’, or ‘I don’t expect anyone to do anything that I wouldn’t do myself’ – that was his ‘trademark’ in many ways,” Alan recalls with pride.

“I remember at one point in time, he was unhappy because he was the only one cleaning the toilet.

His solution?

“We then had to have a toilet roster, so that everyone got their fair share of cleaning the toilet.

“Naturally, some of the office staff weren’t overly supportive of this and they wanted someone to come in and do it.”

It didn’t happen in Bill’s time.

I remember Bill Fisher well when I was growing up in Mildura. You’d often see him in his grey coat, out the front of the Fishers SSW store, (which by then had relocated to the 10th Street end of Langtree Avenue) and he’d be sweeping the footpath.

“He was an incredibly hard-working man. And he was also a very clever man - but very basic. Not basic in intelligence, but everything was laid out in its simplest form. He was a very practical fellow,” Alan explained.

“He would always make decisions at the closest point. For example, he would say: “If you want to ask someone about pushing trolleys around, don’t ask the store manager, ask the person who pushes the trolleys around” which sense.”

Heartbeat asked Alan when his first involvement with his father’s business began?

“I was very fortunate to be born into a prosperous family. I’ve been prepared to work, but you know, I had a fabulous start in life that made such a difference,” Alan acknowledged.

“Having a mentor like my

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father - someone who was so uncompromising when it came to honest, hard work and doing the right thing, made me a better person.

“Being able to look people in the eye and say: ‘Well look, I may not have done the thing that’s most profitable, but I did the thing that I thought was the right thing to do.

“And, look, I’m far from perfect, but dad taught me that you need to be able to shake people’s hands and stick to the deal and if there’s one thing that stayed with me, it’s that,” Alan said.

Bill Fisher’s support of the Mildura Base Hospital in the 1980s and 90s

Something that may not have been known by many people at the time, was the generosity that Bill Fisher delivered to the local Sunraysia community. One stand-out example of his philanthropy, was seen in 1982, when a fund for the Mildura Base Hospital’s nursing home wing, who named it the G.W. Fisher Nursing Home. This money was invested and ensured the success of the home for the aged. By the mid- 1990s more than \$500,000 had been given to the nursing society, the largest of its kind in the district of Mildura at the time.

Alan’s foray into the supermarket business

Alan went to school in Merbein and later spent time at Irymple Technical School before finishing

his secondary education as a boarder at Geelong College.

With his formal schooling behind him, he returned to Merbein and his business education at the hands of his father began.

All three Fisher siblings worked full time in the family stores at some point in their lives.

When Alan started his full-time stint, he was being groomed to one day take over his father’s role.

“I worked in the stores every school holiday, but I didn’t start fulltime until I was 18 and a half. And then I had to work in every part of the business,” he said.

But one job in particular is more memorable than others... and for the wrong reasons.

“When I was 15 or 16, I was working in the warehouse with fruit and vegetables,” he said. “We would prepare everything to be sent to the stores. I was working with two blokes at the time who were 20 and 22. They had a lot of fun at my expense.

“One day we were cutting cabbage, and you had to cut the back off of the cabbage with this huge machete-like blade that acted like a guillotine.

“They showed me how to hold the top of the cabbage with one hand and use the other to pull the blade down.

“Well, my hands were small and I couldn’t hold the cabbage properly and so I moved my



The aftermath of the fire that destroyed the Fishers Merbein store.



Alan Fisher Snr photo gallery.



Well known Merbein plumber John Matotek worked with the team of tradies who installed the Fishers sign on the Merbein store many decades ago.



The early day Fishers was a drapery, grocery, boots and shoe store, plus much more.

hand to the top. I guess my index finger was too close and it was sliced off!

“I went over to where the guys were and told them what I had done and they laughed, thinking I was joking around.

“They soon realised that I wasn’t!”

Alan was carted off to the hospital and remembers the surgeon being drunk while fixing his finger.

Once he had completed the task, Bill walked in, looked at his son and said: “Well, you’ll wear that one for life!”

To gain experience outside of Fishers, Alan took on a job outside the family business in Adelaide... oddly enough working for their competitors.

“I went to work with Coles and Woolworths for six months. It was good to work for a company that dad didn’t own,” Alan recounted.

Coles tried to keep Alan and move him into management, but getting paid a minimum wage and working 50-hour weeks, didn’t appeal to the young Fisher heir. Instead, he returned to the family business, only to find he would end up working longer hours!

The transition from Bill to Alan wasn’t as difficult as when Lalla and Bill took over because, Alan says, there hadn’t been a sudden death in the family forcing the family’s hand.

Instead, the management shift from father to son was a gradual.

But, when Bill passed away suddenly in November 2012, the responsibility of leading the family business into the future immediately fell to Alan.

“My focus was to continue to build on the well-known Fishers brand of being community minded and service focussed,” Alan said.

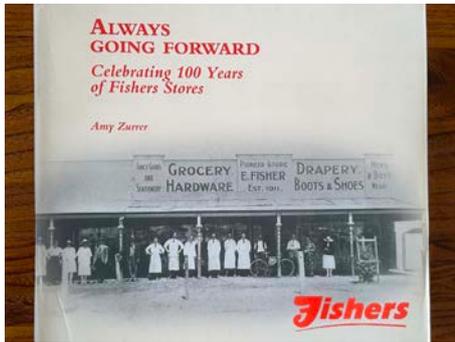
“Together with my management

team, we made a strategic decision to change the business model, deciding to expand geographically, rather than getting involved in other businesses.”

The first non-Sunraysia store Fishers acquired was at Warracknabeal and buying the business turned out to be the easy part because making it work within Fishers’ structure and corporate culture was more challenging than anticipated.

Alan explained: “The cultural differences in running a single store with a store manager working autonomously was very different to running a store within a group, with a head office and hierarchy of management involved in achieving the store goals.”

However, Fishers management team worked through these issues and the store became a well-respected and popular brand within the Warracknabeal community.



The Fishers Centenary book by Amy Zurrer.



The opening of the first Fishers store in Langtree Avenue Mildura in 1961.



Alan Fisher in the entrance to Fisher Developments office which features an array of historical photos.

The acquisition of a mix of existing IGA and other stores followed in Stawell, Hamilton, Kerang and Tatura.

The Fishers footprint in the grocery business in regional Victoria and NSW was now an impressive conglomerate.

Challenges would ensue, but nothing that couldn't be managed by Alan and his team.

The decision to sell the Fishers stores

Alan told Heartbeat that running a supermarket business these days isn't an easy task.

"It's so competitive and so amalgamating with a bigger group like IGA became inevitable. It was probably the only way we could survive," he said.

"When I started, we could be price competitive with Coles and Woolworths, but as time went on, we were unable to remain competitive and rely on a return.

"They're just so big and their efficiency, particularly at the warehouse level, gives them such an advantage.

"And, in our model, the retail supermarkets are 'owned' by the warehouse. They've got to make a profit. The supermarket's got to make a profit and there's always

this in-fighting between the two.

"Most people sell to Coles and Woolworths because they get paid more money, and here is although a perception that they are 'higher' (up the food chain) than an IGA.

"In the end', I sold to Ritchies IGA... mainly because I was much more motivated by selling to people I'd fought the good battle with. And, I also felt it would have 'a sellout' selling to Coles and Woolworths.

"Once the sale and transition to the new owners took place, I moved to Melbourne to pursue other business interests.

"I started dabbling in property and in the stock market, trading shares and the latter proved to be an unmitigated disaster.

"As a share trader, I make a very good property developer!" Alan said in a moment of candor.

"After that I had a bar in South Melbourne and soon realised that I wasn't ideally suited to be in hospitality either.

"I am now back in Mildura and loving living here again and have established Fisher Developments which is an exciting business to be in, and I feel very comfortable in this space.

"We develop more than land; we develop opportunities," the Fisher Developments website announces.

Alan explained his company was established in 2017, specialising in 'end-to-end construction' of new commercial buildings and also land development.

The company's large portfolio of complete builds includes gyms, industrial sheds, a carwash, supermarket and liquor stores, funeral parlours, fast-food outlets as well as house and land packages.

Fisher Developments has its own fleet of development machinery comprising large excavators, graders, water trucks and rollers suitable for most development projects.

Current major projects include the Limpidi and Sandilong housing estates.

Fisher Developments also built the retail shopping precinct in Irymple.

So, it appears the Fisher name will continue to be prominent in our region for some time to come.

From little things, big things grow seems an appropriate tag line to this story and if it's not a good story, I don't know what is.

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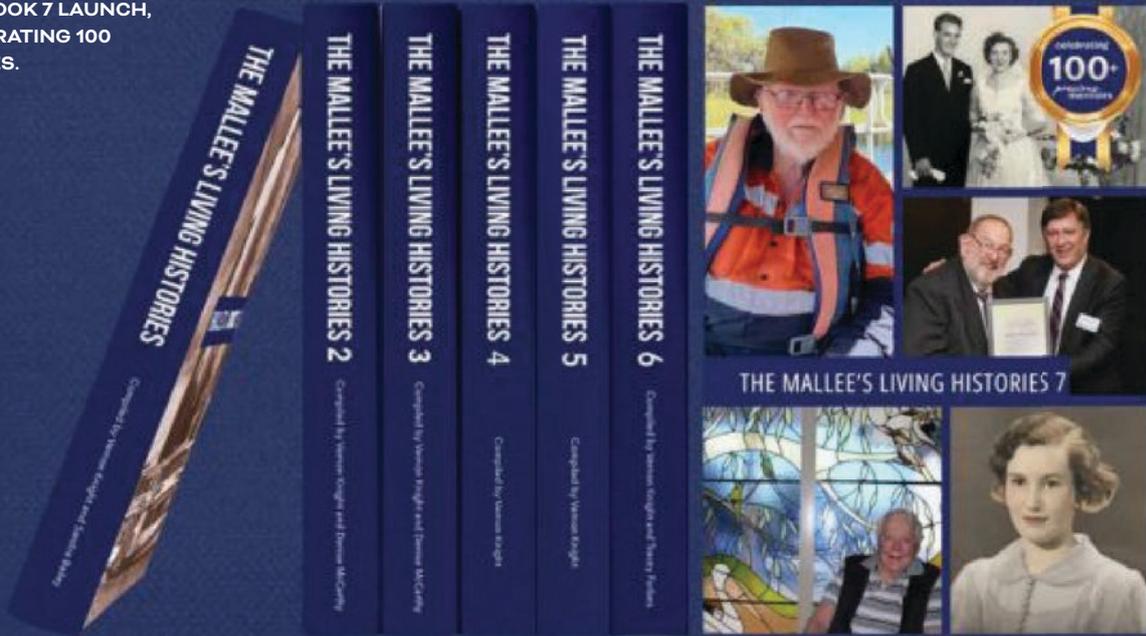
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 June 6th (Kings Birthday) and 20th
 July 4th and 18th



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WE LOVE A LAUNCH!

« Mallee’s Living Histories (MLH) launched Book7 in the series on Wednesday, December 3, last year, perfectly timed for Christmas. »

THE gala event, held at Princes Court Village, was attended by writers, contributors, family and friends, Mildura Rural City Council representatives including CEO, Martin Hawson and Mayor, Ali Cupper.

The occasion which I had the pleasure of hosting, featured special guest speaker Dr Sean MacDermott and also marked MLH’s co-founder Vernon Knight’s retirement from the project.

By the time launch day arrives, our volunteers and story tellers are pretty much “done”!

There’s quite a bit of work involved in getting these stories to print.

For the story tellers it can be quite tiring – recounting events from years ago, remembering and retelling the good times, the difficult times and everything in-between.

For the writers it’s all about piecing the conversations together in such a way that an accurate and engaging story emerges – checking, rechecking, editing and finally getting the all-important stamp of approval from their story teller.

But then launch day arrives and everyone looking back at you from their seats in the audience are so happy and excited to have been a part of the experience. The story tellers have family or friends, or both, around them – everyone is as proud as punch.

It’s not a simple feat for some of the story tellers to get to the launch – mobility issues mean that there are

walkers and wheelchairs required. But they get there.

And many of the writers bring family and friends too, in recognition of just how important the project is to them.

The launch at Princes Court Village on 3rd December was not only a celebration of Book 7 but also recognition of publishing more than 100 stories since the commencement of Mallee’s Living Histories.

A few “special” highlights were added to the day to celebrate in style.

On arrival, guests were treated to a display of vintage vehicles courtesy of Mildura Vintage Vehicles Club.

Story tellers certainly enjoyed recognising some beautifully maintained cars from days gone by.

Once settled, guests were treated to a video presentation showing story tellers in a “now and then” format.

Photos of the story tellers in their younger years had been brought to life with the magic of AI – the presentation was a hit with the audience, and replayed a second time at the end of the day.

John Dooley of Mildura Base Public Hospital, editor of Heartbeat magazine and producer of the Heartbeat of the Mallee podcast entertained the audience by interviewing several of the writers.

The audience heard why writers were involved with the project and what they valued most from the experience.

WORDS

TRACEY FORBES



MLH Book 7 launch presentation to guest speaker Dr Sean McDermott by Tracey Forbes & Vernon Knight.



Dr Sean McDermott captivated the audience with a superbly researched and constructed speech.



Dr Sean McDermott cuts the celebration cake.



MLH Book 7 launch at Princes Court Village.

Mandy Whelan, writing for Mallee's Living Histories for the first time, summed up her time with story teller Alan; "It is such a beautiful gift to have someone invite you into their world and share their life story with you, the milestones, the triumphs and the hard times.

It's emotional, it's life-affirming and it's inspiring.

Dr Sean MacDermott, Director, John Richards Centre for Rural Ageing Research officially launched Book 7 with his presentation *Cad É An Scéal* (What's The Story)?

The audience was captivated by his presentation, his storytelling. The takeaway from Sean's address was his observation that 'Storytelling is absolutely central to aging well'.

It is such a beautiful gift to have someone invite you into their world and share their life story

with you, the milestones, the triumphs and the hard times.

It's emotional, it's life-affirming and it's inspiring." Dr MacDermott completed formalities by happily cutting the cake which had been provided by Princes Court, proudly baked in recognition of the 100th story.

This launch, a first for Mallee's Living Histories, was live streamed through the generous support of Latrobe, meaning that those unable to attend in person could view the launch either via live stream or later, at their leisure.

Chaffey Aged Care Merbein held a "live stream" party, with residents invited into their community room to watch the live stream together.

The live stream recording is still available on the Mallee's Living Histories website.

Tracey Forbes, coordinating the

project with Vernon Knight, says she is "extremely grateful for the enthusiasm and commitment of the volunteers and that without the generous and ongoing community support the important work of MLH simply could not continue".

Work on Book 8 has already started and is well on track for publication in December this year.

This book promises to be bigger than previous publications, with 22 possible story tellers involved.

A number of new volunteers have joined the project and will be writing for Mallee's Living Histories for the first time this year.

Anyone wishing to either volunteer or contribute to Mallee's Living Histories can contact Tracey Forbes or Vernon Knight through the website www.malleelivinghistories.com.au.



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BRENDAN CULLEN HAS FACED
HIS DEMONS HEAD ON TO COME
OUT THE OTHER SIDE ON TOP TO
LIVE AN AMAZING LIFE.



A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

« Brendan Cullen is an impressive person to say the least. His journey through life so far has had its challenges trials and tribulations and its triumphs. »

WORDS
JOHN DOOLEY

LATE last year, I met Brendan Cullen by chance one Saturday morning, while having breakfast with a friend at a Mildura café who knew him, and Brendan came over to say hello.

Brendan had just arrived from Patchewollock, where the previous night, he had held an evening of discussion about mental health issues. More than 100 men from the region, many of them farmers, had gathered at the local pub to listen to Brendan tell his story and offer some mentoring advice to the assembled group and answer their questions.

I was fascinated by what he had to say and we immediately formed a connection, which would later become a friendship.

Recently, I met with Brendan, who manages Kars Station, a 10,000-head sheep property, 65 kilometres outside of Broken Hill, where I was staying.

A reading of Brendan's biography details that he has lived around Broken Hill all his life and has shared his love of the land with his wife Jacinta and three children.

Through Brendan's battle with depression and his self-acknowledgment to take

the first steps to seek help, Brendan began sharing his story with others. This led him to become a Lifeline Regional SA & Far West NSW Ambassador in 2017. His role with Lifeline then eventuated in him becoming a peer-support mental health champion for rural people through the 'We've Got Ya Back initiative'.

His biography further reveals that another of Brendan's many passions in life is fitness and health, as he likes to live by 'fit body, fit mind'. This mindset led to Brendan swimming from England to France - the English Channel - in 2022, covering a total distance of 64km in 17 hours. Brendan backed this up the following year swimming the channel again, this time with a team of likeminded individuals. In 2024 Brendan completed his first 100km Ultra Marathon, which was held on Kars station.

In 2024, Brendan had the honour bestowed upon him to represent Rebel Sport for their 'Sport is Calling' campaign. Through Brendan's life experiences, he feels fortunate and grateful for the opportunities that have been bestowed upon him as he continues to support the community through his roles in peer mental health and wellbeing initiatives.

Brendan travels to a wide range of destinations speaking to groups and individuals who have their own issues with mental health and are seeking information and wise counsel on how to deal with the things affecting their day-to-day lives.

When I sat down with Brendan in Broken Hill, one of the first things he mentioned to me was the support and love he has from his family.

“I’m 53 and I have a lovely wife and three kids, all adult children. And that’s probably my success in my life, you know, first and foremost,” Brendan said.

“I was brought up on a sheep and cattle station north of Broken Hill, and basically, I left to go to boarding school from the age of six or seven in Broken Hill. I went to two boarding facilities, the Bush Church Aid Hostel and Allison House. And then once I left Broken Hill, I went to high school in Adelaide. And spent all my high school years there until Year 12.

“I pretty much boarded for 10 years of my life, and so, I had this great desire to go back to the property that I was brought up on and I suppose that was always the intent.”

Brendan would then go onto to spend more than 12 months back on the station and gained further work experience, earning what was considered good money in the early 1990s.

“I remember working four weeks straight and having \$440 in my pocket after a month,” Brendan said.

“I’d come to town and blow it in two days. And after that, I pretty much had to go and find something else to do. I went and did my wool classing at Marlestone College of Textiles in Adelaide. Spent a couple of years down there and in between all that period, I met my wife. I had actually met her a lot earlier, when I was 15. She was a Melbourne girl.

Things evolved from there and I ended up working for Elders and Michelle’s wool buying company in Adelaide.

Then in 1993, my wife Jacinta



Brendan Cullen with his dog Poly taken at Kars Station near Broken Hill.

and I spent about eight months working on a farm in England on an agricultural exchange program. During that time, I actually ended up playing for Frocester Cricket Club - a village club - which was in a competition fixture with 500 other teams and we made the finals of the Country Cup!

“The frustrating thing was that because I was an Aussie, I couldn’t play because they had changed the rules two years before I got there. But we were there at the match and sadly watched our team go down.” Fast forward several years and Brendan found himself working on Avenel Station, a property adjacent to where he had grown up.

“Avenel is right on the wild dog fence - the border fence of South Australia and New South Wales. That’s literally next door to the property that I was brought up on,” Brendan explained.

“I had decided to leave the family’s property because I couldn’t see a future there for Jacinta and me, and so I was looking for work,

and there was a job available at Avenel, I applied for it and I got it. I literally went from here to there, you know, basically next door.

“And I can recall thinking when I got there that it wasn’t much of a place. We had gone from a really nice place to a place that’s quite run down.

But I had this vision and I got Jacinta across there and I said, look, you know, we’ll make something of it here.

I remember the amount of my first pay paid and thinking this is the first time I’ve had a decent amount of money in my pocket after a week!”

Brendan confided that during this period of his life the things that had been “going on” were adding to his ‘depression cake’.

“In 2008, 2009, we had a shocking drought. It was horrible. And it got to a point for me where I was self-medicating on alcohol, working ridiculous hours, at the same time becoming a recluse,” he said.



The Desert Swimmer is a compulsory read.

An endurance test like no other is the English Channel swim.



Brendan Cullen on his English Channel swim.

BRENDAN CULLEN

“It got to the stage where I couldn’t get out of bed and I went to the doctor and ended up having to have testosterone injections because I had nothing left – no energy or enthusiasm for anything. I actually didn’t listen to myself and just started getting these injections and kept doing what I was doing and as I would discover, I was in a downhill spiral.”

Brendan somehow kept going but things were getting worse for him on the mental health front.

“It wasn’t until probably 2015, when I went to a workshop run by the Royal Flying Doctor Service and a life-skills coach, named Jill Rigney,” Brendan recalled.

“It was a two-day program and out of that workshop, I realised that all the boxes I was ticking, I shouldn’t have been ticking. I was fatigued, worn out, drinking to excess - a whole range of negative things - all rolled up into one. And I was

talking to myself a lot. I was having those conversations by myself in the car, driving around. And I was verbalising a lot of conversations both in what I thought would be happening, what I would be foreseeing in the future, or having conversations about what’s going on in the past - it was just a complete mess.”

I asked Brendan how his state of mind at the time was affecting his home life – his wife and family?

“I had a pretty good façade. I could front up to anyone and have a smile on my face and whatnot. My façade was good, because no one knew what I was going through my mind. Only I knew,” Brendan replied.

I interrupted Brendan by saying “The Farmer”, a reference to a film produced by the wife of a famer who committed suicide, leaving her and their children wondering why. Brendan discussed the film at one of his speaking events.

Brendan then continued recounting his struggle with his mental health.

“I remember going into the kitchen and putting my hand up on the architrave of the door and I said to my wife, Jacinda, “I think I’m having a heart attack”, my heart was just smashing out of my chest,” Brendan explained.

“Jacinta was rearing twins and our older daughter was just five years old and so she was all-over-the-shop there for a while.

“I eventually got her attention and she said “are you going all right?” I said “think I’m dying.

“That was just one example. I would go into my bedroom and cry my bloody eyes out.”

Eventually, Brendan decided to seek professional help and presented to the Broken Hill Base Hospital.

“I drove to town and I remember walking up the steps into the Broken Hill Base Hospital, and I asked someone where I could get some help,” Brendan said.

“They took me into this room and I had two people see at me pretty much straight away, which was extraordinary. They asked me what was wrong? I said, ‘I’m not feeling that flash’. I was almost diagnosed there on the spot and given antidepressants to take. And so, from that period, that gave me the ‘permission’ to change my life. I had to make a difference. I had to change something about what I did.”

Brendan told me how he came to realise that he was placing himself under incredible pressure, creating unrealistic expectations.

“I had these incredible expectations of myself, work-wise. Always being someone else as opposed to myself,” he recounted.

“I constantly gave myself over and probably ‘lost my voice’ completely. Maybe I never had a voice. And never looked after my own backyard, meaning me. Not anyone else, but my own backyard.

But I felt that I had to do extra. I couldn’t just rely wholly and solely on a tablet.

I needed to change what I was doing.”

Brendan had decided something had to give.

“I came home and I had made the decision to back my work load right off - cut it back by 50%,” he said.

“And so, I cut back a lot and I started putting a lot more time into my children and going to things, which I never used to. And putting the onus on other people to come and help.”

Brendan said he then set about making some other big changes in his life.

“I created a toolbox for myself. I needed to control my drinking and so I basically stopped, because I was drinking a lot,” Brendan admits.

“Not during the day, but at night I’d have a ‘full glassful’. And it never really encroached into my day. I was always a runner and I started substituting my drinking for my running. The trouble was, I think that burnt me out even more.



The ‘We’ve Got Your Back’ program is proving to be a valuable support service.

And you can’t keep living like that. And so that was part of my toolbox - to reduce my drinking. If not, stop it altogether.”

Eventually Brendan said to people; “I’m off the grog, I’ve been diagnosed with depression”.

“I needed to look after myself. That gave me the excuse - the artillery I needed to have that conversation. That conversation got easier and easier and easier. Lifeline had a program called ‘How’s Your Mate?’ It was in its infancy. And they asked me if I would tell my story.

“While I don’t run the How’s Your Mate? Program, it really was the launching pad for the program I run today - the launching pad for me to be able to tell my story. And in doing so, I couldn’t believe the amount of pain that was out there. Because you’re exposing yourself and your story to the general public and that takes a lot of courage to do that.”

For Brendan, it was about getting that stuff off his chest.

“And after that conversation, I would have people coming up to me, not necessarily to pat me on the back, but to say, “hey, I’ve been through this. I’ve been going through a similar thing”. And then that started happening in the bush. I’d get the odd phone call saying well done.”

I suggested to Brendan, that in a sense, his mentoring was actually a part of his own therapy.

“There is no doubt about that,” he confirmed.

“It’s been a transition into what

we do now - the ‘We’ve Got Your Back’ program and lifeline. It’s been a fluid transition.

“Most of my Keynote addresses have been by word of mouth. My association with Lifeline Regional SA & Far West NSW and the We’ve Got Your Back program has certainly given me a platform to tell my story.

“It was never intended to be like this. It just started happening. I just get a great kick out of being able to help anything with a heartbeat. It doesn’t matter whether it’s a human being or an animal, I love looking after it.”

I think that sums up this extraordinary man who I met by chance. We found that we had some things in common on the mental health front and his mentoring and words of reassurance to me have meant a lot.

Brendan is launching his new book, *The Desert Swimmer*, which is the inspirational true story of an Aussie bloke from the outback, crippled with depression, who challenges himself to swim the English Channel as a way of managing his mental health struggles. That is just a snippet of what this great man has achieved and continues to contribute.

The *Desert Swimmer* shows the good that comes from facing challenges head-on, but you will need to read the book to learn the full story.

A visit to Brendan’s website is well worth a look too. www.brendancullen.com.au

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HISTORY OF ACHIEVEMENT ON THE SPORTING FIELD

« Geoff 'Joffa' Martin is a former Sunraysia Football League star player. It's a title not bandied about lightly in local footy circles, but one that nonetheless is richly deserved in this case. »

WORDS
JOHN DOOLEY

Mildura's 'Joffa' Martin had a football career that a youngster could do worse than aspire to.

"I started in Under 14s at Mildura Football Club because that's as early as you could play when I was a young fella," he says, and was that his voice betraying that he rues potentially wasted years?

"I played three years of Under 14s before I went away to school and didn't really get back to Mildura for years.

"I went to school in Hamilton and then went on to Ballarat for three years. I was playing footy all during that time and played my first senior games in Ballarat.

"In 1980, I came back to Mildura from the Beaufort club. It was then in the Ballarat League, but is now part of the Central Highlands League.

"It was Bill Lanyon who recruited me and I came back to play for Mildura.

"I went to Richmond in 1981, but was back in Mildura in 1982, where we won that year's flag. That was fantastic."

Joffa acknowledges he only played a handful of games with the Tigers.

The Richmond Football Club won the VFL premiership in 1980 and Joffa rates them as "a really good side".

"I played half a dozen senior games and the rest in the reserves," Joffa says of his time at the club.

"But it was a fantastic experience obviously," he recalled, with a highlight being running out with the Richmond seniors to play before 65,000 fans at 'The G'.

"Did that twice," he says.

"When I came back to Mildura in 82 I joined up with all those other great footballers that the club had in that year.

"We won the flag, but then there was a big drought before Josh got there in 2007," he said referring to son Josh and Mildura Football Club's Grand Final win of that year.

Josh's Grand Final win started with Auskick, a program his father had become involved with after his playing days ended.

"I played Auskick all the way through up until the Under 18s, and then into the seniors at Mildura so I pretty much played my whole football career at Mildura.



The Martin Sporting Dynasty L-R Geoff Joffa Martin, Josh Martin, Tyler Martin and Annabelle Martin.

“I think I was about 16 when I played my first senior game.

“I loved footy. It was my passion and I spent my life for a long time there, at the club, and played all the way up through the ranks until I was about 19 and moved away.

“I moved to Adelaide for six or seven years to study construction management at the University of South Australia and played with a number of country teams while I was there.”

Geoff now project manages at Mildura Rural City Council, but what he won't tell you himself is that he won the Sunraysia Football League's highest accolade - The McLeod Medal in 2017 as the league's Best & Fairest player.

Highlights of his time at Mildura Football Netball Club?

“Definitely the premierships in 2007. That was the highlight, I think, of my career,” Geoff said.

“It's a great club. It's got a great tradition, but I guess all clubs have. I guess it's the camaraderie and the people you meet and all that. It's something that's incredibly special.

“I probably have all my lifelong friends through football, so yes, it's good to get around the club.”

Will the family sporting

exploits continue into the next generation through Josh?

“I have two girls and we'll have to see if they feel like playing netball for the club at some stage,” he smiles.

Josh isn't the only Joffa Martin son to taste success with Mildura. Josh's younger brother, Tyler, was a member of the club's 2025 grand final winning team.

His story, he acknowledges is remarkably similar to his older brother's.

“I grew up playing Auskick with the old man and then playing for Mildura as a junior all the way through to seniors,” Josh explained.

“I made my senior debut, I think, in 2008, so a year after we won the flag in 2007. It was a long search for a flag after that, but we finally prevailed.

“I think I was my 18th senior year and for a long time, with all the heartache that we had as a team - like making and losing the grand final in 2016 and losing multiple prelim finals - I think that probably made last year's (the 2025 Grand Final) win even sweeter.

“It was nice that we were able to finally get one.

“We had a particularly good year - finishing on top of the ladder

- but we had a lot of injuries towards the end of the season, and I think that probably the last six or seven games of the year we didn't really play to our full potential.

“That showed in the second semi, and then halfway through the prelim final against Robinvale we were down by a couple of goals, and it wasn't looking likely.”

“That win really capped it off for me,” Joffa said referring to last year's premierships triumph that meant that he and his two sons had all tasted the sweetest of victories.

For the record Mildura beat Irymple for the 2025 flag 12.8 (80) to 10.8 (68).

“A real family success story,” I offer.

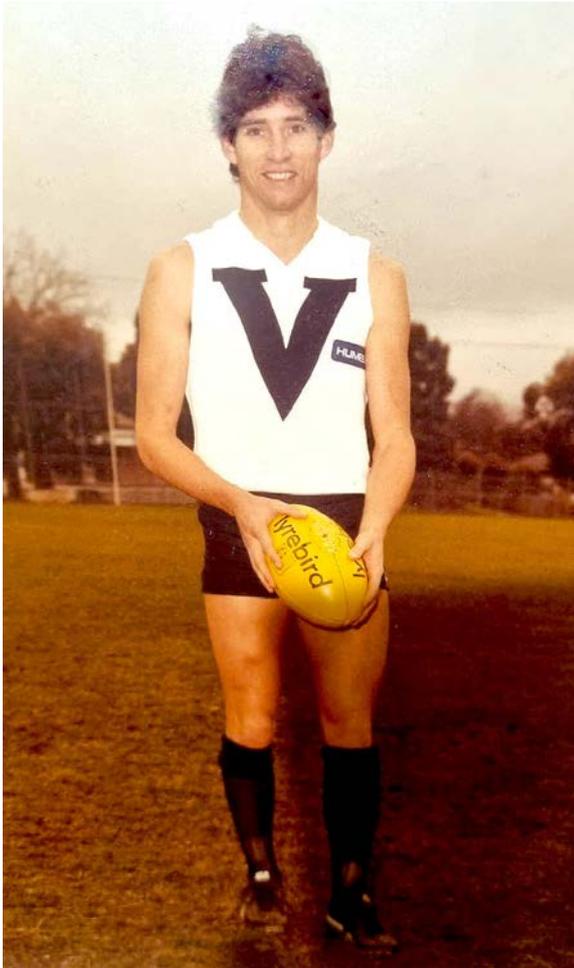
“It's not enough premierships, but at least we've got some,” Joffa says ruefully.

“And of course, we've now got Annabelle playing that 'other' football code.”

More on daughter Annabelle a little later.

When did Joffa realise he might have fathered several sporting stars?

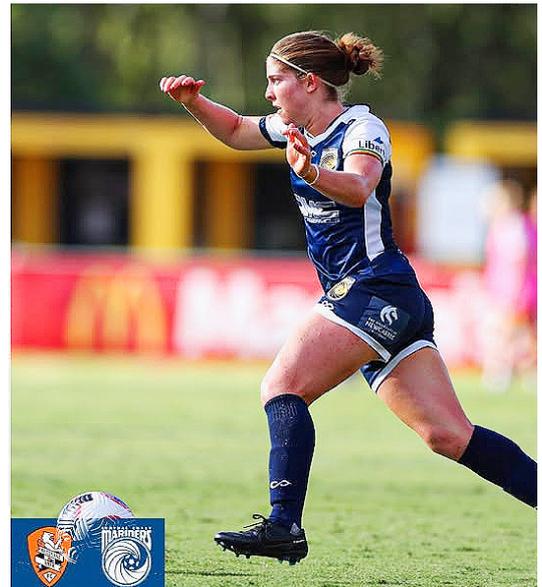
“Oh look, they've always been into sport... ever since they were little kids,” he said.



A youthful Geoff Joffa Martin at the Victorian Country Round c.1982.



It was a rare opportunity on Christmas Eve 2025 for the Martin siblings with them all together to relax and have some fun.



A feisty Annabelle Martin on the Football field for Central Coast Mariners in NSW.

“I did Auskick when I retired from football and all the boys came through that system as did Annabel who was a champion Under 10 footballer at Mildura.

“I knew the boys were good. Everyone that pulls a jumper on does the best they can, and my boys did that. I guess we were also lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time.”

And Annabelle? The rising Australian Football League superstar.

“Like Dad said, I grew up playing footy and loved it. I played Auskick at school - two years of Under 10s and I think going into Under 12s,” the now Central Coast Mariners’ super star said.

“I really wanted to play again with all my friends, but Dad came home one day and said: ‘I think we should change to soccer’.

“I think I cried and refused to do it. I didn’t want to do it at all. But I think he saw that I had some

sporting ability and wanted me to go into a sport where he thought I could have a future.

“There was obviously no AFLW back then or anything like that, and I would have had to have quit playing with the boys when I turned 14.

“Then, I think he dragged me to my first (soccer) game, and I just fell in love with it.

“I have been playing it ever since.”

Annabelle may have started out in Mildura, but she has moved much further afield since.

“In my first year of soccer I made the Under 12s Victorian schoolgirls team, which I think was a bit of a shock to mum and dad at the time and, to be honest, to myself as well.

“But mum and I would drive for hours every Wednesday so I could train at the State level. We’d both take the day off school to do it.

“It helped she was a teacher!”

“Then, I think once you get your name in the system like that, you’re kind of in it.

“So, from there I went to Under 13s Victorian Country which meant I could still play from Mildura.

“But then the Under 14s is purely a metro side, so I ended up moving to Melbourne when I was 13 with mum to pursue my soccer career.

“I went on through the ranks Under 14s was followed by Under 15s and then the Young Matildas and eventually Melbourne Victory.”

And in a repeat of family history, Annabelle won the club’s Best and Fairest medal in just her second year at the club...and aged just 16!

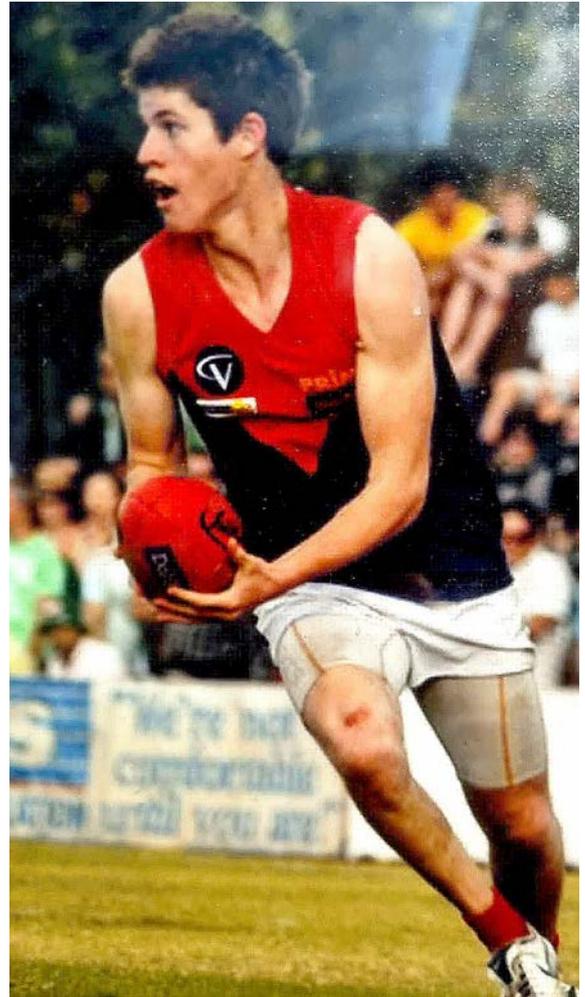
“I’m now at the Central Coast Mariners and loving it,” Annabelle says.

The Central Coast Mariners are

Tyler Martin kicks the winning goal playing for the Hills League in Adelaide.



Josh Martin's 15 goals in one match was the biggest SFNL haul in more than a decade c.2017.



Josh Martin in action in during the 2007 SFNL Season.

based in Gosford, New South Wales, Australia with their home ground at 'Industree Group Stadium' (previously Central Coast Stadium) and training facilities in Tuggerah.

They play in the Isuzu UTE A-League - the top tier of Australian professional soccer.

Having seen the successfully hosted the A-League Festival of Sport in Mildura, Annabelle said she would be keen to play here in front of a home crowd.

"I am so jealous. I would love to play here."

So, what does the future hold for the highest profile Martin?

"We're right in the middle of our season now... and sitting fourth, I think. We won the championship last year, so that's the goal again.

Much to Annabelle's delight, that 2025 win was watched from the stands by a bevy of family and friends from Mildura all barracking for the Mariners.

"It's a very different season," she says of 2026.

"We have some new players, new challenges and stuff, and we've got a really hectic schedule coming up."

So, another premiership for the Martin sporting clan is not out of the question it seems.

"It's the middle of the season, and it's looking good," Annabelle says.

The notion of one day pulling on a Matildas guernsey for Australia is a dream at present, but not out of the question either.

"It has always been the dream I think. The Matildas are flying at the moment, and they've got such a good team," she said.

"It's good to see some of the Matildas playing in the A-league and stuff like that, so I guess, yeah, when you come up against them you try and cut it with the best. But we'll see."

Even when she's not on the field playing soccer, Annabelle is never

far from the game.

The 27-year-old is a journalist by profession, fitting in some freelance work 'up the coast' between soccer commitments.

Annabelle explained that in the past she has done "a lot of work" with Football Australia.

"I interned there during the World Cup and then they have kind of kept me on," she told Heartbeat.

Every now and then Annabelle is still writing for Football Australia.

"I like the human-interest pieces," she says.

#We obviously have a lot going on in our game, not just at the top level so I like turning the spotlight on more local players, rather than just the Matildas and the A-league players.

"That is really cool."

And cool the Martin sporting dynasty is. It was Heartbeat's pleasure and privilege to meet them.

RED CLIFFS' CORALEE
LEVER REFUSES TO
THINK ABOUT MARTIN
BRYANT WHO MURDERED
HER HUSBAND THEIR
FRIEND RON JARY
AND SO MANY OTHER
INNOCENT PEOPLE.



GHOSTS OF PORT ARTHUR HAUNT US STILL

ON DECEMBER 14, 2025, AN ANTISEMITIC ISLAMIC STATE (IS)-INSPIRED TERRORIST ATTACK OCCURRED AT BONDI BEACH IN SYDNEY, DURING A CELEBRATION OF THE JEWISH HOLIDAY OF HANUKKAH. BEGINNING AT 6:42PM, TWO GUNMEN KILLED 15 PEOPLE - 11 MEN, THREE WOMEN AND A 10-YEAR-OLD GIRL.

« Bondi shooting brings back bad memories of the past »»

When news of the December 14 mass shooting at Bondi broke, it was hard not to be uncomfortably reminded of the Port Arthur massacre 30 years ago.

Yes, it really has been three decades since deranged murderer Martin Bryant went on a rampage, predominantly at the historic Tasmanian convict site, killing 35 people and wounding 23 others.

The now infamous shooting spree happened on April 28, 1996.

It was, and remains, the deadliest massacre in terms of the number of people killed in modern Australian history, leading to fundamental changes in Australia's gun laws under the leadership of then Prime Minister John Howard.

The National Firearms Agreement between state and federal governments was announced within two weeks of the massacre, establishing heavy restrictions on the use of automatic and semi-automatic weapons and creating a gun buyback program, a national gun registry and a waiting period for firearm sales.

Two of Bryant's victims were known to him personally and were killed at 'Seascope', a bed

and breakfast property, but the majority of his victims were killed in a shooting spree at the Port Arthur historic site, a popular tourist destination.

Using two semi-automatic rifles, he began his attack at a small café before moving into a nearby gift shop, killing 20 people indiscriminately in a short amount of time.

Many others were killed in the site's car park, including children.

After killing its four occupants, Bryant stole a vehicle at the Port Arthur tollbooth and drove to a nearby service station, where he killed a woman and abducted her partner.

He continued to fire at passing vehicles before finally returning to Seascope with his hostage, who was then killed.

He set fire to that property and was hunted by heavily armed police before being captured the following morning.

Bryant pleaded guilty to the killings and received 35 life sentences without parole; his motives remain the subject of debate, something that is not opaque when it comes to the Bondi killings -- it was unequivocally a hate crime based on religion.

WORDS

GRANT MAYNARD

Port Arthur left an indelible stain on Australia's soul; a trail of grieving families, and many of us asking: 'How could this happen in Australia?'

Bondi has had a similar impact and left us asking the same, fundamental question.

One major difference between the two events is that following Port Arthur we were forced to confront how closely these atrocities can strike to home.

Red Cliffs' Lever and Jary families were just six days into a planned three-week tour of Tasmania when they decided to visit the historic former convict settlement of Port Arthur.

Speaking to Mildura Weekly editor Alan Erskine in May 2008, Coralee Lever told the veteran journalist she would never forget the events of that day, and that she'd never forget her courageous husband Dennis, or the aftermath of the tragedy.

But she flatly refused to even think about the social misfit who murdered her husband, their friend Ron Jary, and so many other innocent people.

Instead, Alan told readers, Coralee had devoted her life to her business, her family and friends, and to a new group that started up eight years ago (2000) to support recipients of bravery awards, family and friends – the Australian Bravery Association.

"You can't let insignificant people like Bryant get the better of you," she said.

"You're better off not even thinking of them. They're not worth it. I want to concentrate on my family, a family that Dennis was so proud of and helping others get support through the bravery association."

Alan's story continued: Coralee is small in stature, but huge in spirit and compassion. She has a friendly attitude, an outgoing disposition and a warm smile that belies the hurtful memories of the past. But that April day 12 years ago will live with her forever...

"They didn't notice anything unusual about Bryant, or any other of the visitors in the Broad Arrow Café that day.



Port Arthur Penitentiary c.1870.

"We had actually just left the café part, and were in the souvenirs section," she said. "All of a sudden there was a horrific bang. It was very loud, deafening."

Bryant, armed with a high-powered Armalite rifle, had fired his first shot.

Coralee looked around.

Bryant was standing about 10 metres away, calmly holding the firearm in the ready position. She thought it was a re-enactment and she was concerned, because both Dennis and Ron had recently gone through open heart surgery.

She said to Bryant; "You're obviously not thinking of people with heart problems."

It was Dennis who reacted first, realising the danger. As they turned to walk away, Coralee felt his hand in her back, pushing her to the floor. Ron Jary had done the same to his wife Vera. Then there was a further volley of gunfire.

Coralee and Vera crawled behind a partition, assisted by another woman. When she peeked around it, she saw that Ron had suffered obviously fatal wounds. She couldn't see Dennis anywhere.

The firing continued, causing deafening noises in the confined café.

Coralee told Alan her ears didn't return to normal for three days.

She heard later that some survivors had punctured eardrums.

The gunfire lasted for what seemed an eternity. Then there was silence.

The two women couldn't move the partition to get out because of the bodies piled against it. They crawled out the side to the most horrific scene imaginable – made even worse because their husbands were among the victims.

Coralee, Vera and the other survivors had to step over dead bodies to escape the café. It was about two hours before police and emergency response teams from Hobart arrived at the remote site.

In the meantime, off duty police, doctors and nurses who had been visiting Port Arthur took charge, helping local staff checking the bodies, and doing their best to help those who had been wounded.

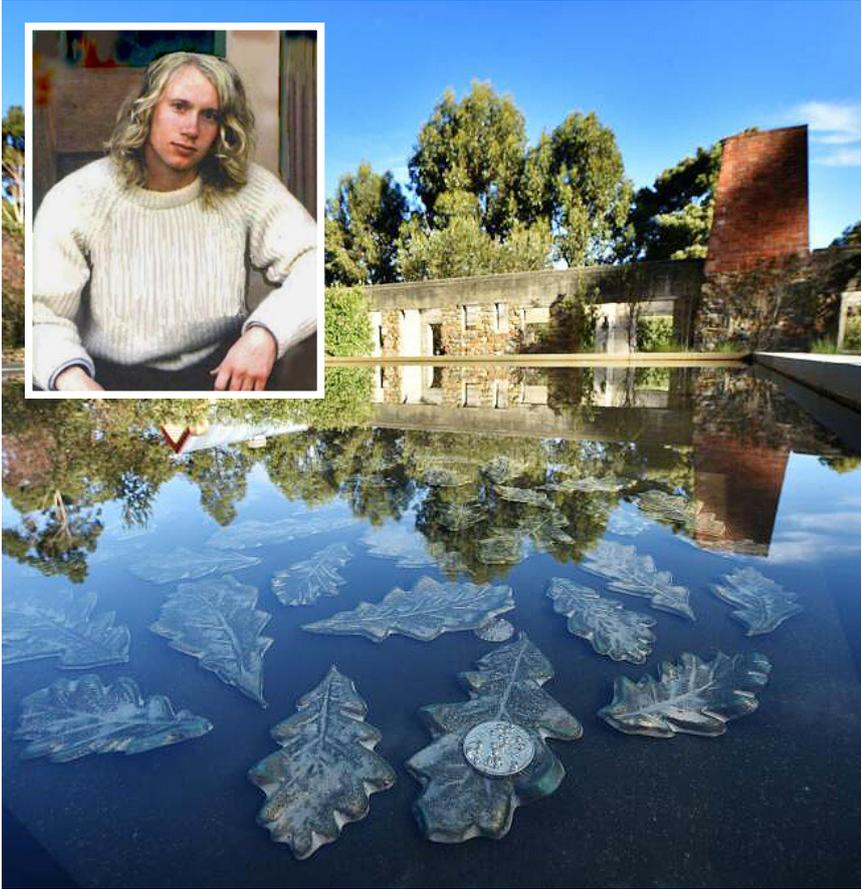
The women weren't allowed anywhere near their husbands. In deep shock, they were comforted by Port Arthur staff for several hours while police scoured the area for the cowardly shooter.

It was about 9pm before the pair could contact their families at Red Cliffs with the tragic news.

Technology has advanced appreciably since then, but while the messages may have come through much faster following the Bondi massacre than in 1996, they would have inflicted the same gut-wrenching pain on those receiving them.

I am reminded that people much wiser than me have advised: "If we do not learn from history we are doomed to repeat it."

Let's us hope and pray we do not need another lesson.



A memorial to the victims of the massacre was built on the site of the former Broad Arrow Cafe at Port Arthur. **INSET:** Port Arthur murderer Martin Bryant is serving a life sentence in Hobart's Risdon prison.



Coralee Lever proudly displays her Dennis Lever Memorial Award presented to her in 2008 in recognition of her outstanding work.



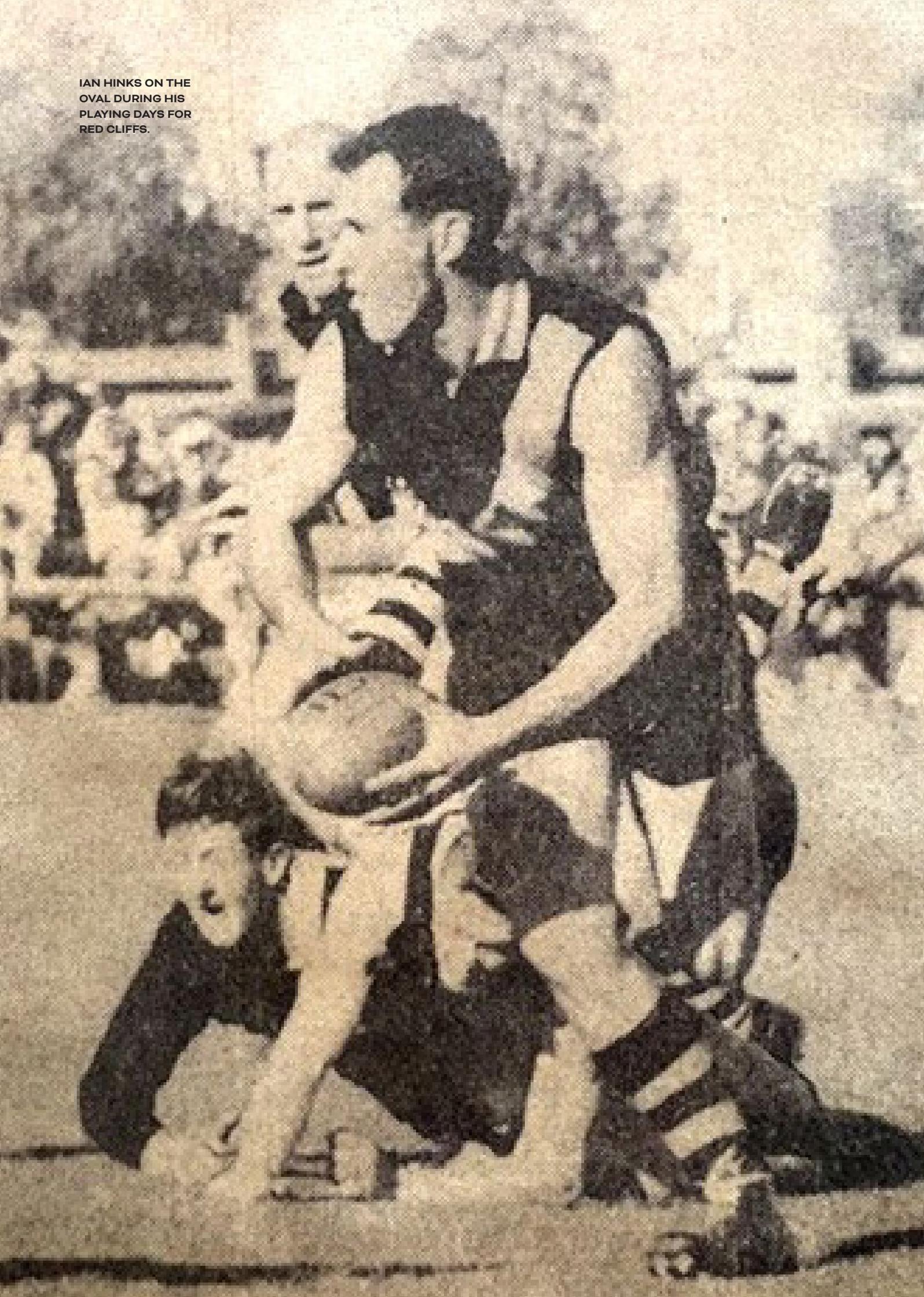
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IAN HINKS ON THE
OVAL DURING HIS
PLAYING DAYS FOR
RED CLIFFS.



ONCE A HERO, ALWAYS A HERO

« Spending time and chatting with a childhood hero is always something special. For Phil Kettle that heroic figure is former Red Cliffs Football Club captain/coach and champion player Ian Hinks. »

LOOKING back, my backyard was home to my earliest football playing memories.

The games were amazing, and never once did I lose.

Not only was I a champion player like my hero, but I could also umpire and commentate at the same time.

I drop kicked like he did, or more accurately I tried to drop kick like he did.

My hero, Ian Hinks, wore the number 19 and it was on my tenth birthday that I received two things that I will never forget.

The first was a Labrador pup we named 'Skipper' and the second was a Tigers football jumper, which I insisted my mother stitch the number 19 on the back.

Ian was born in the Melbourne suburb of Caulfield in 1937, the eldest son of Sid and Carrie Hinks.

The Hinks family, which now included a younger brother for Ian arrived at Merbein in the mid-1940s, via a spell in Bendigo.

His father worked for the State Rivers organisation and was transferred to the Murray River town in his job.

Ian was eight at the time.

"Merbein was a great place to live and grow up," he recalls fondly.

"On arriving in Merbein, I was enrolled at Merbein State School and life was busy with sport seeming to occupy most of my time.

"In winter it was football, and summer cricket.

"I also remember going to the Roxy Theatre matinees, cheering on the goodies and booing the badies as the Lone Ranger and Tonto did battle. "The cost for any afternoon's entertainment back then was just one shilling - sixpence for the matinee entrance, four-pence for a Pollywaffle and two pence for a purple ice-block which left your mouth and lips discoloured.

"But it was all part of the fun of growing up."

At the age of the of 11 things changed for Ian as he started Merbein Higher Elementary School. Sport was now playing an even bigger part in his life, and he began to be recognised as a footballer with talent and potential.

He went onto Mildura High School to finish his secondary education while, at the same time, his footballing reputation continued to grow.

WORDS

PHIL KETTLE

He won a Sunraysia junior Best and Fairest and then, at age of 17, he made his senior team debut for Merbein.

“It was a huge challenge to succeed at senior level against old and experienced players,” he recalls ruefully.

But succeed he did, and by the time he matriculated and been accepted to attend Melbourne Teachers College, Ian had offers from several VFL Clubs. He chose Hawthorn.

Study and training kept him busy and, on the day before his 18th birthday he was rewarded for his effort, playing his first senior game for the Hawks against Fitzroy. It is a game he can never forget. Not only because it was his first senior game, but also because Fitzroy player Jack McGregor wacked the very young Ian.

McGregor received a four-week suspension for that effort.

As the season progressed, and the grounds got heavier, Ian found himself playing in the Reserves and making a move into the back line.

It was where he was to play the majority of his football going forward.

In 1956, Ian graduated from Teachers College, before being required to complete his mandatory National Service stint at Puckapunyal.

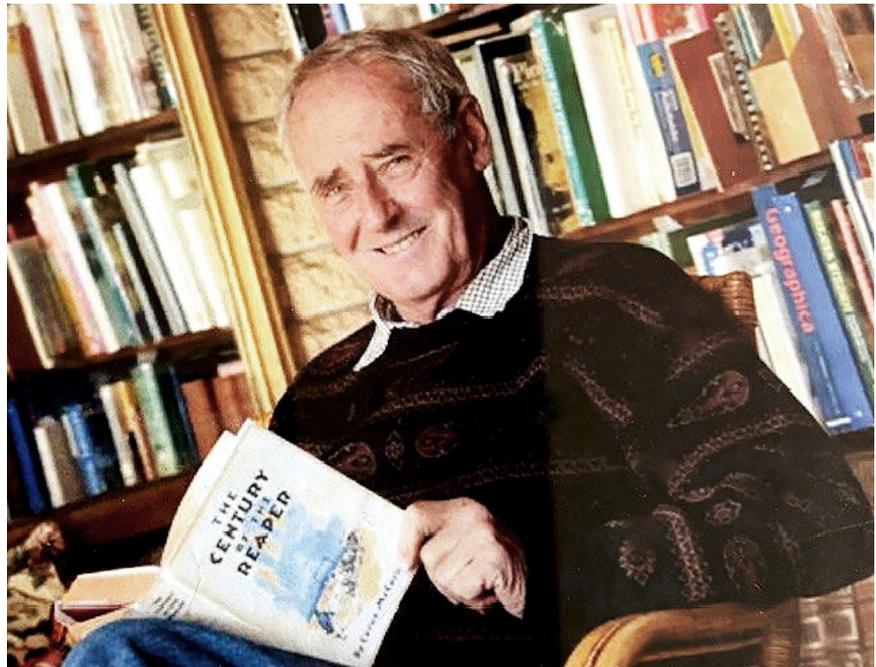
“Teachers were required to do a country route, but because I was playing VFL football it was arranged that I was able to stay in Melbourne,” Ian explains

“I became a supply teacher - spending short periods of time in various schools in the Melbourne region.”

One of the highlights for Ian during his time at Hawthorn was being selected in the VFL seconds side to play against SA. He was subsequently named one of the best players that day.

Still doing supply teaching rounds in early 1960, Ian became the Educational Officer at Coburg's notorious Pentridge Jail.

At the same time, having finished at Hawthorn FC, he played a year with Coburg.



Today, at 87, Ian is still busy and very much interested in life and everything that is happening around him.

“At the end of 1960, having played at Hawthorn and now Coburg, I thought that I had something to offer as a coach.

“That, along with the urge to return to country life and secure a permanent teaching position, saw me applying for various positions and finally securing a teaching job at Irymple Primary School.

“Not long after that I got a call from the Red Cliffs FC to say that I was appointed coach.”

Not only did the arrival of Ian in 1961 lead to a premiership in his first year, his coaching and playing ability brought an excitement to the community.

And it was not only to be a great year for Red Cliffs, Ian recalls. It was also the year he met his soon-to-be wife, Lucy Jean Moser.

Saturday afternoons at Red Cliffs footy oval were something that a very young me will never forget.

Standing on a packed, one-eyed, hill screaming and yelling at our team. Willing them on to win. The players were our heroes.

For me, the only player that I seemed to watch was the fabulous Ian Hinks, a full back like no other. When he kicked out from fullback his drop kicks would always land in the centre

of the oval or beyond and I wore my Number 9 Tiger jumper with immense pride.

I was hooked on football!

The following year did not result in back-to-back premierships for the Tigers, but it certainly another great year for Ian! He married Jean.

The Tigers won the premiership again in 1964, but the following year Ian was moved to Lascelles by the Education Department. He was promptly appointed Lascelles' captain/coach and led the team to premiership runners-up in the Southern Mallee League.

The following year, opportunity saw him return to Mildura where he captained/coached Red Cliffs until 1968.

“I thought at the end of 1968 my time as coach and player were over. I accepted a role as an STV8 commentator and a writer for Sunraysia Daily. Of course, this while I was still teaching, and with now with two young children, life continued to be extremely busy.”

Wanting to further his opportunities in education, Ian and his family moved back to Melbourne in 1970 where he studied and gained an Associate Diploma in Librarianship.



Red Cliffs Football Club Premiership year in 1961.

And, during this time played football with a couple of clubs, more to keep fit than for any other reason.

With a Mildura job offer, Ian and family packed up once more and moved back to Irymple and their home.

Ian eventually resigned from his job as a librarian at Irymple Technical School in June 1987.

“My time was up. It was time for a change of direction.”

With his children now adults and having lives of their own, Ian and Jean started to pursue other interests including furniture restoration, taking trips to various parts of Australia, some on motorcycles, collecting books and restoring tractors.

Today, Ian, 87, is still busy. He is still interested in life and everything that is happening around him.

“I might be a little slower, but while I’m still breathing I will be interested in what is happening around me and in the wider world,” he said.

For me, Ian (the number 19) is still as big a hero as he was when I was a small child - the man that could kick drop kick to the centre of the oval and beyond.

The truth is that when we are

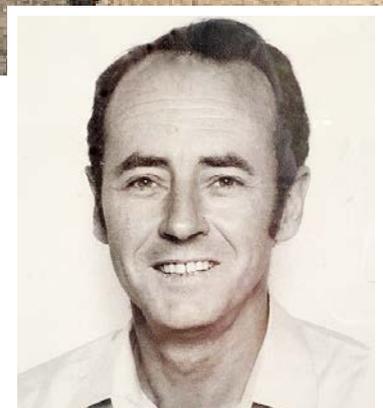


Ian at home in the classroom.

young we often have a hero, someone we admire. That person, whomever it might be, will often remain a hero for life. Ian Hinks certainly has for me.

I asked Ian what was his best moment in life. Without hesitation he said: “Jean. She is, and has always been, the greatest part of my life.”

And Ian, the world is better place for you being part of it.....



Ian resigned from his job as a librarian at Irymple Technical School in June 1987.



MBPH FOUNDATION EVENT SCHEDULE

2026

DATE	EVENT NAME	LOCATION
20 March	Foundation Golf Day	Coomealla GC
1 May	KC Society Lunch	400 Gradi
17 July	Paddock Club Marquee	Mildura Cup Races
2-3 October	A-League	Mildura Sporting Precinct
31 October	MBPH Foundation Halloween Ball	TBC



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

