

Women Who Mean Business ... Selling Gippsland's Finest



Project Newsletter :: Summer Edition 2005



Community projects off the ground

The groundwork for exciting community projects in Gippsland were outlined at a meeting of Women Who Mean Business project officers in Maffra prior to Christmas.

The projects are like pieces in a big jigsaw that when complete will create a beautiful picture of Gippsland.

Dreams and plans are transforming into reality as women across the region set the wheels turning on their projects.

Frustration, disappointment and mind-boggling obstacles are more than balanced by self-discovery, heightened community awareness and new friendships.

As each of the project officers described their progress it became clear that rewards in this huge challenge are already happening, in small and wonderful ways.

Lana Whitehead, from Warragul, reported that all is going well with plans for a recreational walking/running track, with links to tourism, art and culture and an interactive play area for children.

Tina Hambleton, of Yarram, spoke of plans to conduct a four day arts festival on the Melbourne Cup Day weekend.

"Our aim is to promote local artistic talent in what is a predominantly dairying area," Tina said.

A glossy brochure is being planned, to let artists and art lovers know about the big event and invite their participation.

The festival will start in Yarram on the Saturday, move to Port Albert on the Sunday, to Tara Valley on the Monday and back to Yarram for a Cup Day luncheon on the Tuesday.

"It's a bit daunting," Lyn Willmott said.

"I'm a sculptor and I admit to feeling in a bit of a panic.

"Here we are, inviting artists to come and display their work, but we have nowhere for this to happen.

"Hopefully we'll find a permanent location ... the old Court House would be a dream come true."

In case it doesn't, suggestions around the room ranged from disused woolsheds, petrol stations, old milk factories and dairy sheds. The consensus was re-assuring for Lyn: there will be a solution and, with perseverance, it will be found.

Evelyn Schmidt, from Buchan, described how her hometown had been looking quite desolate with the closure of several shops.

"People are coming to visit the Caves and are driving straight back out of our town," Evelyn said.

"Unlike some other groups, women at Buchan have known from the start exactly what we want to do.

"We have 25 to 30 women, all of whom are keen to establish a community-based art and craft workshop, possibly in our former post office.

"We've already started our business plans and have started to seek expressions of interest from people who will help stock our workshop.

"We're raring and ready to go, and are looking at seeking grants in addition to our \$10,000 project funding."

Evelyn explained that Buchan's tourism market is seasonal, with the biggest influx from Christmas to Easter each year.

Plans were afoot to extend the workshop with a tourist route beyond Buchan to Nowa Nowa and Lakes Entrance.

Plans are also taking root at Orbost, with designs for a magical garden and community walkway which would link two current tourist attractions.

Project co-ordinator Kate Earle said the garden and walkway, which would adjoin the Snowy Wilderness Discovery Centre, would be a follow-on from the mosaic path created in the 1990s under the Uniting Our Rural Communities project.

Women plan to incorporate cultural mythology themes, adventure and mystery, restfulness and child friendly aspects as well as their own sculptor pieces in a beautiful native garden which will enhance the town of Orbost.

"We'll move to Marlo and Newmerella later," Kate said.

An excellent relationship with East Gippsland Shire, government departments and schools augured well for this project.

"We'll have a totem pole to explain what can be found in the magic garden," Kate said.

"There will be visual as well as tactile areas."

Michelle Tisdale, from the Latrobe Valley, said women in her area wanted "something positive" and had decided on a community book which besides telling stories of people in the area, would also include children's artwork and a collection of recipes.

"We plan to launch our book in September," Michelle said, "and we are hopeful that it will lead to bigger things."

A data base of more than 250 community groups had already been established — no mean feat.

"We are attracting a large group of professional women and are finding that besides creating partnerships in various ways, we are experiencing personal growth," Michelle said.

"Amazing connections and new peer groups are being formed.

"Women are starting to use community assets, such as the library, and many good things are happening."

The Stratford-Maffra group is well on the way with plans for a community garden overlooking the Avon River at Stratford.

There will be a strong relationship with local Landcare groups in creating the park. It will be a tourist attraction, including sculptures, paving and indigenous plants.

Omeo group is focusing on an alpine celebration around their region's entry in the annual International Back to Back Wool Challenge (see story Page 6). Spokesperson Deirdre Jack said the event would include the communities of Benambra, Omeo, Swifts Creek and Ensay, and a talent quest was on the board. New and exciting connections were being made already, including the discovery of belly-dancers in Swifts Creek.

Besides promoting the Back to Back competition, which would be held on the long weekend in June, there were plans to document the process with photographs and paintings to provide a formal record.

In South Gippsland, plans are afoot to develop a suite of 12 resident information kits that promote individual districts, and can be readily updated. In conjunction, the goal is to establish a network of community volunteers skilled in local area promotion and community liaison, and to design a resident information kit template that can be used in other rural communities

South Gippsland has 28 communities ranging from very small through to major towns (Leongatha and Korumburra each have populations of more than 4000).

About 25 community volunteers from across the shire will work collaboratively on design and production of the resident information kits. The volunteers will be drawn from at least 15 communities, with a preference for no more than two members from any one locality.



Anna Lottkowitz, co-ordinator, Rural Women's Network, and Deb Bye, station manager for Life FM, Gippsland, catch up at Maffra. Anna later commented: "I think the meeting was great to see how many different ideas are generated in the communities involved, and that each can be supported at their respective stages of development through a project which is so clearly driven by grass roots women in communities. Well done!"

A Message ... about Mary

I think Mary Salce must have several middle names, and they all start with the letter "P": Persistence, Perseverance and Passion.

As most of you will know, Mary is on the phone and e-mail every day. If she needs to, she will be on the phone and e-mail several times every day to the one person. There is no doubt about it. Mary means business.

Mary heads the huge Women Who Mean Business undertaking, which started in Gippsland in January this year. Her enthusiasm for improving the lives of rural women has a habit of rubbing off on everyone she meets.

The eight community projects which have evolved under the umbrella of WwMB are on schedule for completion by the end of next September. The one exception is Yarram, which will hold its special event on Melbourne Cup weekend in November.

Mary is already thinking about a get together of all groups to celebrate the end of the project.

"We'll have fun, but we'll also emphasise the importance of continuing to improve marketing and business skills," Mary said.

"We expect that at least some of the projects, which are tied to tourism, will become ongoing tourist events and attractions.

"It would be great, even at Omeo, to get participants in some of the big city-driven events held in the country, to connect and meet with local people."

Gippsland women want city people to pause in their journey. They want city people to pull into little towns like Ensay, or Swifts Creek. They want them to chat with the locals in the pubs over a cool drink, or in enticing little cafes, over a hot and frothy cappuccino.

They want city people to take time to smell the country flowers, experience country culture and, when they head for home, leave some money in rural communities.

Persuading people to do this is part of the challenge facing Gippsland women who mean business.

For women taking part, rewards are already occurring on a personal level. Mary is delighted with feedback.

"Women who have never done so before are talking to councils and business leaders for assistance — for their group, not for themselves," Mary said.

One woman said "until I joined the project group, I didn't know how to approach the shire. I've been helped out of my comfort zone ..."

"Further down the track such experiences will give women more confidence in looking after their own needs and those of their families," Mary said.

"Confidence in yourself is reflected in your family and flows into the community."

About 400 women attended workshops held across Gippsland in recent months.

Some women attended for personal development only, but around 200 women, or 25 in each of the eight groups, are continuing to be involved with the various community projects.

"Anybody can come on board at any time," Mary said.

Mary Salce heads WwMB Project Management Committee

"Our project is open to everybody — families, men and children as well as women — all the way through.

"It's just that the women are facilitating it.

"It is through women on the ground that we can achieve change for the better.

"Our project is encouraging people to be involved in their local community in a welcome and friendly environment."

June Alexander, newsletter editor



Mary Salce

Hi,

The project management committee has asked me to introduce myself to you, so here goes!

Firstly, I am delighted to be invited to edit your newsletter, starting with this summer edition.

This new role comes at a time when I am feeling very much like a bird out of a cage – in December I returned to Gippsland to live after 20 years of living and working in Melbourne.

When I moved to Melbourne I worked initially on The Melbourne Herald, and then for the next 19 years, I worked as a journalist on The Weekly Times newspaper. This period included seven years as Country Living editor and 11 years as the columnist, Miranda.

I grew up on a beautiful property at Iguana Creek, beside the Mitchell River, in the upper reaches of the Lindenow Valley. I was a dairy farmer's daughter and my childhood was largely divided between helping with the cows and calves, wandering in the bushland and along the river adjacent to the family property, and burying my head in any literature I could lay my hands on.

I began a journalism cadetship with The Bairnsdale Advertiser in 1969, at age 18, and have been a journalist ever since.

While living in Melbourne (necessary, to work on The Weekly Times), I always said my heart was in Gippsland.

I resigned from my full-time work on The Weekly Times in March 2004 and set up a home office, working a few days a week for The Pakenham Gazette. Just prior to Christmas, I took another big step and sold my Melbourne property so that I could return to Gippsland to not only work, but to live.

I explained to my four children (Shane 32, Rohan 30, Ben 29 and Amanda 28) that such a move at this stage in my life was important for my heart and soul ... parts of me that I tended to neglect while pursuing a full-time career in the city.



June Alexander

My children understand my desire to return to the country and their love and encouragement has meant a lot to me.

Being involved with Gippsland women is helping me to re-connect and adjust to the country way of life. I am delighted to be working with and living among like-minded, passionate women. I find your stories so inspirational. Every day, I am reminded more of how much I love this region. My heart sings – I am where I belong.

I apologise for being in a rush with editing this newsletter – a combination of moving house, the festive season, and changeover in the role of editor from Catherine Noy to myself.

I extend appreciation on behalf of all of you to Catherine, who has so capably edited previous issues of this newsletter. For 10 years, Catherine has worked untiringly and diligently in supporting Gippsland women. Her passion has helped the WwMB project grow from strength to strength.

Now, Catherine is taking a well-earned break to devote more time to her young family. A trip around Australia is on her family's agenda for next year.

As a journalist, I have enormous respect for Catherine. She always responded to calls, and delivered comprehensive answers to any queries. People like Catherine are few and far between. She is a real treasure.

As a friend of Catherine, I admire her for putting the needs of her family and herself first at this time in her life. It's a time that won't come again.

I'm sure you will join me in saluting Catherine and wish her well.

Regarding this current newsletter, I thank the wonderful contributors – all the stories are inspiring; all have been written with a smile, at short notice at a busy time of the year.

Please contact me with ideas and thoughts for your autumn newsletter ... I'd like you to share my goal of making it a voice for you all.

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NEW PROJECT OFFICERS ...

Lara Whitehead

Warragul project officer



The soft American accent floated around the room, just perceptively different from the voices around her. It clearly wasn't Australian, but then, it wasn't quite American either. "My family laugh at me when I talk

on the phone," says Lara Whitehead, a 37 year old mother and writer of children's books. "They tell me I've become completely Australian, but then my husband's Australian family laugh at me when I say that. They tell me I'm definitely not! Sometimes I'm not sure who I am. I'm just ... part of both places now, I guess."

The last sentence is said with a smile. Having lived in Australia for nine years, Lara has come to terms with the difficulties of living in a new culture and being far from family. "Maybe being on my own much more led me to start writing" says Lara. "I didn't really start until after my children were born and I found myself home alone a lot. Our first son, Flynn, had died when he was just four days old, and I had become very closed up with grief, even after our daughter Sarah and then son Matthew were born. Living in an old farm house, out of town and far from all of our family, I didn't see too many people. Writing was a good way for me to heal and it meant I could still be at home with Sarah and Matthew."

"I love writing for children," says Lara, who has a degree in English Literature and a Masters Degree in Linguistics. "I've always loved language, but I never had enough confidence in myself to try writing for publication. I taught English as a Second Language, specialising in teaching writing. Then I became a book editor, working on other people's books. One day it just sort of hit me, 'Hey, I'm good at this! I could probably write my own books.' After about a year of stewing on it, I gathered my courage and called a friend in the publishing industry. I basically just spat it out and asked her if she was looking for any new writers. I think I nearly dropped the phone when she said yes!"

Since then, Lara has had six books published, with another on the way. Her books are mainly science-based, such as *The Science of Cooking and Colour Around Us*, and are used in primary schools in five countries. "My style is a bit different," says Lara with a wry smile. "One of my publishers described it as 'quirky'. I wasn't sure if she was firing me or not at that point! But, I hated science as a child in school, even though I thought some of the ideas were amazing. I just didn't learn from dry, fact-driven material. I still don't!" she laughed. "So, when my first book assignment turned out to be a science book, I wasn't sure what to do. I decided to write as I like to learn, mixing up the material so that some of the facts were

part of a fiction story; others were presented in wacky ways. In one section I needed to explain the how yeast works. This isn't really exciting stuff, so I decided to write a short skit called "The Mystery of the Bread Roll Murders" and turn it into a detective story for the students to figure out. I want children to see that science can be fun. For me, it's a way to combine my creative side with my love of teaching and writing."

"Writing is one of the reasons I wanted to get involved with WwMB," Lara continued. "I am alone so much in my work — I wanted something that would bring me back out into the community. I started off as a participant, and suddenly found myself being offered the chance to become the Project Officer here in Warragul. It's been a wonderful thing for me. I love the incredible feeling of place that people have here — that Warragul and the surrounding towns are so special to them. Our group is looking to share that by celebrating the regional history through our Seats of Distinction idea. It's only the first stage in a 3 year project that we're planning, but I think it's going to be terrific. We are asking the secondary schools in the area to participate in creating a bench with a historical theme from our region. The benches themselves will be pieces of art, but also be functional seats on the Linear Park walking trail in Warragul. There will be a storyboard at each seat, providing the historical background of the theme and giving credit to the school and students. We're also going to create our own mosaic artwork piece with local artist Mary Gabriel, who has agreed to work with us. This will be our 'fun' part! Our hope is to finish Stage 1 by October, and then have a big launch with all of the schools involved. By then, we'll also be well into Stage 2, although I'm not sure we've got a clear vision of that yet. It will come, I'm sure!"

Michelle Tisdale

Latrobe Valley project officer



I guess that I discovered when I was eight that I loved community work. At that time I walked along the road sides collecting cans, so that I could send the money to Assisi Farm in southern India

so that children over there could experience some of the things that I had always taken for granted.

Simple things like a good sound education, nourishing food and a place to live within a supportive family and circle of friends are important to me. I developed inquisitiveness into human nature and spent eight years studying social sciences and psychology at Monash University while raising my children. I have taken on various small roles in the local community, to use the skills I'd developed along the way. These days I satisfy the

scientific part of myself with collecting water watch data, the environmental part of myself with Clean up Australia Day, and my need to be around children by assisting the leader in Cub Scouts.

For the artistic part of myself, I paint flowers, sculpt and play drums with a great group of supportive women. This project offered me a way to develop my business skills and work with inspiring women who are working hard on leaving their mark on the community, nurturing new growth and sharing it with all, so that we all feel a part of something strong and vital.

I have learnt there are many wonderful ways to learn things in our area, and there are many wonderful and gorgeous women. After travelling around Asia, I came home asking how to use my skills and talents to make a positive difference in Gippsland.

That's why I have become involved in this project and I guess I will just have to put off looking for full time work until next year. I have learnt that there is a richness and diversity in this area with its mix of cultures and skills. There are new shops, projects and ideas popping up every where.

The Latrobe Valley is changing as the major focus turns away from coal mining and the production of electricity. Tourism, education and horticulture is on the rise. Where else in this country can you drive for under an hour and have beach swimming in summer, cross country skiing in winter, wonderful local produce and wines? We also have festivals, markets and cultural performances.

Our project hopes to share some of these wonders with the rest of the country. We have undertaken to create a social history book of people of the region so that others can get to know us. This book will also contain some wonderful recipes from an area that takes its food very seriously. It will include some artwork from our up and coming talent.

We are planning to donate 5 per cent of the book's profit to local schools that provide education to our youngsters with learning difficulties so that they can have music as a tool for self expression and as a tool for combating depression, anger management, and improving their thinking and learning abilities.

We have run several workshops to upgrade women's business skills, and leadership skills; we have developed the project timelines, and are informing the community and seeking partnerships with businesses and Local Government.

We would like to have our book completed to launch in September in time for the Christmas market.

I feel hopeful that many Latrobe Valley residents will be willing to share their personal journey as a way to connect to and inspire others.

We're sending out 250 invitations to members of the community to participate in the project and will invite schools to be part of the art competitions we are running in connection with the book.

There is plenty of room for artist, cooks, writers, photographers, and any skills that the community is willing to donate towards the project. This way we feel that we can make it as inclusive as possible. Our aim is to help to unify and strengthen the community. I am finding this a very enjoyable way to explore my area and make some wonderful new friendships for the future.

Personal Journeys ...

Imogen Prior's Story



I have enjoyed living in Orbost for four years and have developed wonderful friendships and a deep sense of amazement for the beauty of the landscape. East Gippsland surely is a paradise of forest, mountains,

rivers, beaches and people.

I previously lived, worked, studied and had a lot of fun in Canberra for 14 years while raising my son as a sole parent. He is now 25 and is living in Tweed Heads.

In Canberra I had many opportunities to explore feminist theories and therapies whilst working with ACT Family Planning as a sexual health educator and youth clinic coordinator. I was also involved off and on with the ACT Incest Centre as a member of the Collective. Half way through a BA at ANU a relationship break up and burn out knocked me for six and after years of strong personal development I found myself suddenly plummeting and struggling with my self-esteem. My darling son was in his 13th year and was travelling through his own turbulent adolescent passages and rites.

Something had to give and it did, I was presented with the opportunity to have a year out living in a mud brick house on a property called 'Singing Stones' at Cabanandra — nestled in the foothills of the Monaro Tablelands leading to the Jingalalla River, East Gippsland. It was just what I needed and while the year did present new challenges and stresses, as I had never lived in an isolated bush setting before, on the whole it was spiritually healing and physically strengthening.

My son and I had many new experiences, including: horse riding, milking Ruby the cow, collecting eggs, wood chopping, meeting the local "hippies", swimming nude in the tranquil rivers, listening to the sounds of the bush, seeing starry nights, growing vegetable gardens — in short, all that an 'alternative' lifestyle encompasses, including Distance Education for my son!

I was fortunate to meet my current partner and on moving back to Canberra being offered an exciting position as coordinator of a young women's refuge. We now have a little tornado called Jessica, age six, who keeps us on our toes and adds bundles of love and happiness to our lives.

My partner Jurg runs Kanooka Nursery from our property and I will be starting my integration aide language and literacy traineeship at Orbost North Primary School in 2005.

I also belong to the Orbost Belly Dance Troupe "Strait From The Hip" and we have performed at several Snowy River Art Network performances. We were one of the local acts engaged to entertain cyclists participating in the Great Wilderness Bike Ride held in April 2004.

I believe passionately in making the most of what the local community has and showcasing

it to the rest of the State. This is also why I am a Friend of the Rainforest Centre.

I love being involved in Women Who Mean Business. It has come at a good time for me as I have been at home with Jessica for five years, settling in a new town, and just starting to venture out into the work force to meet people and build up my confidence and my skills.

I think every woman who has been at home as a primary parent and out of the work force should be given an opportunity to re-enter the life outside gently with the support of other women.

•Pictured: Imogen Prior, of Orbost group, has found peace and harmony, and new purpose in life, following a move from city to country.

Evelyn Schmidt ...

a member of Buchan Women's Network Project.



I moved to Buchan about seven years ago and stepped with enthusiasm into volunteering in the community. After two years I found myself involved in so many committees and projects that I was spending all my time on

this task. I was doing too much and began to burn out. This began to have an effect on my own personal projects including renovating my home. I quit all the committees and stayed at home and also spent more time with my now eight-year-old boy, Liam.

A number of events started to affect me including the looming bush fires of 2003, the isolation of being at home alone most of the day and with nothing motivating me but myself, and after six years really feeling to far away from good friends and family. The fact that it was winter wasn't helping. I would basically do the chores and watch TV. Driving into the township I would feel an invisible wall rise in front of me and a heavy weight drop down on me. I was starting to feel depressed.

There had been talk in the town about the empty Post Office building since the people who ran the post had bought the General Store and amalgamated the two businesses. Most of the talk was around using the building as an art and craft shop. Another business in the town, the Willow Café had also been closed for about a year and the main street of town was looking unused.

Buchan has the Caves, and visitors to the caves total around 120,000 per year. Unfortunately most of those people don't stop in the town.

Initially I looked into opening the Post Office as an Art and Craft Gallery and operate it as a small business. I had contacted the councils Economic Development Department and gained some information. I had contemplated this idea further and decided that the task was too great and daunting on my own.

Some information about the WwMB project came

to me in the post and the centre coordinator who knew that I was experiencing some difficulties talked about how this project could be used to open the Post Office and began to encourage my involvement. I was actually really glad to see that this project was to be with women only, even though I don't usually gravitate towards women based projects. I thought this would be a warm way to re enter Buchan.

Another positive aspect about this project is that it seems to have also brought together Buchan women from different backgrounds and outlooks: farmers, elders, locals, those seen as "hippies or alternative", conservatives, greens and troublemakers. These descriptions are generalisations, of course. But Buchan is a town of diverse personalities and opinions.

So as things always go in swings and roundabouts, we now have new landlords at the Buchan Caves Hotel and they have made some great changes including outside seating, great menu and a nearly finished veranda.

The Roadhouse and General Store have made some changes and renovations and we are now waiting for the Café to re open. The owner of the Black Marble Hut is revamping after some personal losses in his family and Buchan is already looking livelier.

The next thing needed is the Buchan Gallery at the old Post Office building.

We have now completed our workshops and have the skills, business plan, and a grant application in progress. We still need to really plan out our Budgets and are starting to network into the other surrounding towns to look at a tourist route from Bairnsdale to Bruthen, Buchan, Nowa Nowa and Lakes Entrance.

Everyone is really keen to open the Buchan Gallery and get some of the 120,000 visitors to the Caves Reserve to stop in the town and generate employment and income to a rural town with few employment opportunities.

Needless to say I have once again stepped in with enthusiasm and there is no time to watch the TV.

•Pictured: Evelyn Schmidt, of Buchan group, wants her hometown to be known for its art and craft as much as its wonderful Caves.

Victorian Women on Water wrap-up

The facts, fallacies and future of water were the focus of a dinner and forum held in Sale in October.

The aim of Victorian Women on Water was to enhance women's understanding of and participation in the water debate, to ensure the voices of rural and regional women are heard. By understanding the issues, women will be better equipped to assert themselves in speaking to governments and authorities managing the industry.

The forum encouraged networking between community members, with the ambition of acting as a catalyst for action.

The Gippsland Women's Network and Wellington Shire Council hosted the forum, which provided information on the water debate from local to global levels, to mark World Rural Women's Day.

About 150 people participated in the forum's presentations and workshops. Staff from Government departments, national and state authorities, interacted with Gippsland business people and farmers.

Chair of the Regional Women's Advisory Council, Anne Dunn, said she would provide a report on the forum directly to the Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson.

One of the main issues concerned the impact of the International Free Trade Agreement on water management.

For the first time a workshop was dedicated to identifying the social impacts of water reform. The forum steering committee will investigate the possibility of ongoing research in this area.

Another outcome of the forum was establishment of the web site wow.org.au to enable ongoing discussion.

PROFILES Women Who Mean Business

Val Murphy ...

a member of the Latrobe Valley group.



I grew up on a dairy farm at Yinnar, and married a potato farmer from Thorpdale.

My family (Coleman) were pioneers in the Yinnar district—my grandfather Alfred Coleman served on Morwell Shire Council for 13 years and served as shire president

in 1941. Coleman Parade, in Churchill, was named after him.

Throughout the years, I have learnt to have a real "love of the land" and appreciate the beauty of nature and "God's own country".

I have been invited to promote potatoes throughout Australia through cooking demonstrations and talks, which help raise money for many different charities, fairs, food festivals and the Royal Melbourne Show. (With a surname of Murphy, it's rather appropriate.)

As my children finished their education I found my involvement in school councils, parents' club, school canteen, scouting, guides, brownies and all the sporting activities weren't happening any longer and gradually I started my own business in tourism.

Val Murphy has found wonderful ways to use the humble spud, and shares two recipes for you to try:

Potato Coconut Roughs

1 cup mashed potato
30gm butter
1 2/3 cups icing sugar
1 3/4 cups coconut
1 tspn vanilla essence
1 1/4 tblspn cocoa

•Blend butter into potato, gradually beat in sifted icing sugar and cocoa. Add coconut and vanilla, mix well. Spoon teaspoonfuls on to greaseproof paper, refrigerate until firm. Makes about 30. Note: if potato is dry, add extra butter.

Potato Salad

1 kg potatoes
2 sticks celery (slice)
Salt and pepper
1 finely chopped onion
2/3 cup salad dressing
1 tblspn lemon juice
1 cup sweet corn (whole kernel)
2 tblspns chopped parsley and chives
2 hard boiled eggs (optional)
1/3 cup sour cream (or salad dressing)

•Scrub potatoes and boil in their jackets until tender. When cold, peel and slice about one cm thick. Mix gently with celery, corn, onion, eggs, chives and parsley. Combine all other ingredients and stir into potato. Chill well.

"Potatoes, Paddock to Plate Coach Tour" is a one-day tour for groups and clubs who enjoy a day's outing in the country. The tour includes a potato lunch and potato cooking demonstration of sweets such as potato ice-cream and potato after dinner mints.

It's a fun day out with potatoes as a theme. As we travel the country roads around the potato growing district of Thorpdale I share jokes, poems and stories of life on the land.

A visit to my large country garden is included, and tour participants enjoy meeting the friendly farm animals.

Now I have moved into extended stays of up to one week in other areas of Gippsland.

We live in such a diverse area and we have so much to offer in tourism ... Walhalla, Tarra Bulga National Park, Port Albert, Wilson's Promontory, Powerworks and more.

The tours help our small country towns with tourism dollars while bringing our "city consumers" closer to their "country cousins".

I also enjoy being a volunteer for the Country Fire Authority. My husband Phil has been captain of Thorpdale CFA unit for 25 years while I'm involved in Critical Incident Stress

Lyn Willmott



In the late eighties I left Melbourne fired with enthusiasm, certain my dream of operating a successful pottery would come to fruition.

I built a workshop next to my house on the South

Gippsland Highway, built my own large kiln, and set about creating a range of pottery and sculpture that reflected my love for our planet. What foolishness! Why had I not researched the area — both financial and physical — before diving into such a fantasy? Why do women like me fly by the seat of their pants and expect their dreams to simply take shape because that's what they want? I quickly learned that sound business practice was just as important as a heart filled with creative passion.

So after years of single-handedly struggling to run a pottery, a bed and breakfast, and an after-school clay workshop for kids I walked away from the entire project, totally broke and sick at heart. I was over 60, almost crippled with a potter's 'back', with no money — life seemed grim indeed.

Then 'miraculously' I was diagnosed with Type Two diabetes. Horrified, I changed my diet and immediately began to lose weight. This encouraged me to start walking and soon my back problems eased. The more I exercised the fitter I became. Thus my interest in metabolism and strength training blossomed. At 63, I decided to go back to TAFE and get a Fitness Trainer's qualification.

(CIS) aspect of brigade work. I've a lasting impression of the stress that fires can cause as I spent two weeks in the Omeo and Gelantipy districts when fires hit there in summer 2003.

Palliative care is something else I enjoy — that is, helping people who are less fortunate than me. It's a special privilege, sharing people's lives with support and assistance.

I'm also a member of our local Thorpdale Uniting Church. Our church was built 13 years ago, largely by volunteer labour. Then we grew paddocks of potatoes, reared calves, catered for functions and generally raised funds to pay for our beautiful building.

Baw Baw Shire acknowledged my community work with an achievement award for outstanding community service in 2004.

This followed an award from Narracan Shire as citizen of the year in 1995, and an award in 1977 from the Thorpdale Potato Festival for my work in promoting the potato industry.

The Thorpdale Potato Festival has run for 25 years, always successfully. I have been publicity officer for about 10 years.

I feel honoured to be able to live and serve as an active community member in this beautiful part of Gippsland.

•Pictured: Val Murphy, the "spud lady" of Thorpdale, is passionate about promoting the potato industry and Gippsland.

My passion for creative expression has not disappeared, but these days I'm aware that we must take responsibility for our bodies. If we eat well, and exercise each day our energy levels automatically lift, our self-esteem feeds into a strong sense of self. Also it's possible to put a halt to serious physical deterioration if one changes one's lifestyle. To prove what I am saying — now aged 66 I am as fit as I was in my twenties. My passion now is to pass on this message of renewal. Anyone can do what I am doing!

I run strength training classes in Yarram (seven classes, twice a week) for both men and women — mainly over 40, although there are a few younger people involved.

I am trying to get a book — Fitness over 40 — published ... but you know what the publishing business is like, I shall be dead before they realise what I am on about. I would like to travel around country areas, helping form groups of women who then exercise twice a week using my book (I might have to publish it myself) as their guide.

I will help get the women started and advise them on what equipment to buy. They will need dumbbells and leg weights and I estimate they will spend about \$70 each to begin with, (plus maybe \$40 — the group would pay me for an hour's tuition) but after that they are home free. Anyone who pays money at a gym knows that this is an excellent deal. It has been proven that working with weights in this way is better than using high tech. gym equipment and of course I will be around for help and guidance.

I will start a web page so people can ask questions online. So this is my idea.

I think it is important that older people keep fit, but this seems very hard in the bush. I know once people get together and 'workout' that they enjoy themselves, and they will find it much easier to commit. This is the hardest part of keeping fit, making the commitment. PS: I have written a couple of books, but that's another story (smile).

Lyn's e-mail: lynwillmott@dodo.com.au

•Pictured: Lyn Willmott, of Yarram group, aims to inspire women to focus on fitness.

THE BIG GALLERY



The small town of Briagolong is making its mark in the contemporary art world with the re-opening of its Big Gallery.

The gallery, which held an exhibition called "Down the Track" in December, had closed for about six months to enable it to be moved to a new venue.

Established in 2002, the Big Gallery is operated and run as a co-operative venture by about 25 members of the Briagolong Fine Art Group. The artists are all members of the Briagolong School of Fine Art run by local artist and teacher Pat Waters.

Some of the gallery members come from as far away as Rosedale, Sale and one man travels all the way from Ensay.

The current exhibition has works by: Coral Minster, Deborah Milligan, Helen Booth, Judy Dorber, Lorraine Scott, Margaret Fennessy, Gabrielle Smith, Helen Francis, Diana Balhorn, Michelle Sandison, Esther Jago, Margaret Hallett, Robert Logie, Ali Sutton, Juliet Miskin, Fiona Reynolds, Libby Wittchell, Judy Maxwell and John Lack.

In this exhibition marking the re-opening and relocation of our Gallery, the work is diverse and wide ranging. However one thing that unites it is the strength and boldness of the work displayed and this is frequently the first thing remarked on by visitors as they enter the gallery.

Many of the artists are concerned with environmental issues and this is reflected in their choice of subject matter. The exhibition has works in acrylic, oil, watercolour, mixed media and photography. The group meets regularly, either weekly to paint together as part of the Briagolong School of Fine Art, or at a monthly gathering at tutor Pat Water's house.

Painting regularly together is a great source of inspiration and support for members. Apart from being represented in The Big Gallery, the Briagolong School of Fine Art also has an annual group show in a major regional gallery, and many of the artists have solo exhibitions. The Gallery is open on Friday afternoons, Sundays and public holidays or by appointment.

The venue, which has been rented from a local businessman, is shared with two local furniture makers, John Woollard and George Clarke, who will exhibit their work from time to time.

The whole venture is well supported within the

community and the artists are proud that such a small town has its very own gallery.

•The Big Gallery, Cnr Forbes and Avon Sts, Briagolong. Phone 5145-5454, 5145-5240 or 5145-5439.

•Pictured: Helen Booth works on one of her paintings while minding The Big Gallery, Briagolong. The works in the background are, from left to right, by Lorraine Scott and Judy Dorber (behind easel).

Somebody doing something worthwhile for someone

Omeo is considered by many to be remote and isolated, but Jean Jenkins, is placing it on the world stage ... in the International Back to Back Wool Challenge.

Jean tells her story:

I was born and raised in the Omeo area and have only recently returned to live and work here. I was away about 40 years and came back about three years ago. I just love the place ... it's just so clean and pristine. It has drawbacks of remoteness and social life, but the environment, the beauty of the place and friendliness of country people far outweigh any negatives.

I work at the Omeo hospital almost full time as a nurse, and run the High Country Wash Tub, a little Laundromat at Omeo. I organise bush walks once a month and am involved the community in other ways ... particularly with the Back to Back competition.

The Back to Back teams comprise eight people — one is a blade shearer, the rest are spinners and knitters.

We aim to shear the sheep, spin the wool and knit a man-sized jumper in less than eight hours.

The record, of just over five hours, is held by the Mirrawa team in NSW.

About eight countries participate, including England, Scotland and Canada, on Queen's Birthday weekend in June. Each country aims to hold its race on or as close to this date as possible.

The Back to Back competition was held in Australia for the first time in 1994, and we've held it about eight years in Omeo.

The competition began in Scotland many years ago by people making a bet that you couldn't shear a sheep and knit a jumper in a day. In those days, the sheep was not only shorn, but killed and eaten as well in a celebration, but we don't do that any more.

The competition eventually ceased but in the middle of last century, a man in Britain wanted to raise funds for cancer and thought of the Back to Back, and got it going again. We still aid a cancer related organisation — in 2003 we supported Camp Quality for children and last year we supported the oncology unit at Bairnsdale hospital.

The Back to Back is a free entry day so we raise money for cancer research by raffling jumpers of previous year.

When I came back to Omeo in 2003 I learnt the Back to Back competition had not run the year before, so I got it up and going by myself. It was quite an eventful day. We had art and craft and wool, and in 2004 we did it again, extending it a little further, with a wool craft market. We had all wool things in our hall, and craft in the library. It was a lovely day with blade shearing demonstrations, spinning demonstrations and catering.

In 2004 we had two teams — one from East Gippsland and one from Melbourne — and are hoping this year for a third team, from the North East. With the WwMB involved, we'll



•Pictured: Jean Jenkins is putting Omeo on the world map with her enthusiastic support for the International Back to Back Wool Challenge.

also have more entertainment. Bairnsdale is likely to enter a team, based at Bairnsdale, and others will compete around Australia.

I'm a wool spinner from way back. I spin and weave, and had been involved with the Back to Back in earlier years. The Back to Back is an opportunity to showcase wool as a primary industry and I also want to showcase its history, which is interesting, being so remote.

Promoting sheep has many angles.

I'm always thinking up new ways to involve the children, with the sheep, wool or knitting.

As part of the Back to Back we hold lamb tastings in a culinary event which we call "A Taste of the High Country". Local wineries, a bakery and restaurant all take part. We also have a chap at the front door roasting chest nuts.

We did this again in a bigger way at the 2004 Omeo Show, held on the second Saturday in November, and it was a huge success.

In fact, the 2004 show was our best in recent times, and we're hoping to build it up more as a great day out.

The Back to Back competition is held in the Omeo hall in Day Ave. We start at 8am with a blessing of the fleece, then a local dignitary opens the event and at 9am the sheep starts to be shorn. This goes on to 5.30pm. We have assessors to make sure rules of competition are obeyed.

Last year I organised a celebratory dinner at the Golden Age Hotel, and we had roast lamb on the menu.

We grow lamb here so why not?!

The Queen's Birthday weekend is also the opening of the ski season. People off to the snowfields stop awhile and look at what we are doing — last year they were enthralled by a felting exhibition. We have Bairnsdale machine knitters knitting with wool, a demonstration local mohair farm.

We don't use our local wool in the Back to Back — we have Merino at Omeo, and it's harder to spin, and so use Border Leicester, a more open fleece from Sarsfield.

•For details about the Back to Back competition contact Jean Jenkins on 5159-1557. Jean would be particularly pleased to hear from any spinners and knitters who would like to be a member of team.

Calendar of Events

•**Planning meeting.** WHERE: Morwell, 24 Hourigan Rd, Morwell. WHEN: January 19, 10am. CONTACT: Michelle Tisdale, ph. 5134-3223 or e-mail maltis@tpg.com.au

•**Planning and update lunch/coffee.** WHERE: The Courthouse, Warragul. WHEN: January 20, 12-1:30pm. CONTACT: Lara Whitehead, ph: 5626-1271, email: sandl@dcsi.net.au

•**Interviewing and creative writing workshop.** WHERE: Traralgon Neighbourhood House 61 Breed St, Traralgon. WHEN: January 28, 9am -3pm. Bookings essential. CONTACT: Michelle Tisdale, ph: 5134-3223 or e-mail maltis@tpg.com.au

•**Events management/marketing and promotion workshop with Maggie Maguire.** Cost: \$10 (will include a light lunch). Bookings essential. WHERE: Golden Age Hotel, Omeo. WHEN: Monday, February 21, 10am-2.30pm. CONTACT: Deb Milligan, ph: 5145-5240; e-mail: littlemilligan@ozemail.com.au

•**Events management/marketing and promotion workshop with Maggie Maguire.** Cost: \$10 (will include a light lunch). Bookings essential. WHERE: Office of Dept of Primary Industry, 1 Stratford Rd, Maffra. WHEN: Tuesday, February 22, 10am-2.30pm. CONTACT: Deb Milligan, ph: 5145-5240 or e-mail: littlemilligan@ozemail.com.au

•**Orbost Workshop: Event management, marketing and promotion.** Cost: \$10 for catering purposes. Bookings essential. WHERE: Snowy Wilderness Discovery Centre (Orbost Rainforest Centre), Browning St, Orbost. WHEN: February 28, 9.30am to 3.30pm. CONTACT: Kate Earle, PO Box 141, Marlo, Vic. 3888. Mobile phone: 0408-178-179. Email: katedoc2@hotmail.com

•**Photography all day workshop with Daniel Jenkins.** Cost: \$10 (will include catering). Main focus will be on digital photography, working towards exhibition in September, 2005. Also discussion on SLR (single lens reflex: that is, cameras that use film rather than computers) photography. Bookings essential. WHERE: Omeo district (venue to be confirmed). WHEN: Monday, February 7, 10am-4pm. CONTACT: Anne Richardson, ph: 0408-523-498 for details and bookings; also for general inquiries, Deb Milligan, ph: 5145-5240; e-mail: littlemilligan@ozemail.com.au

•**Garden design workshop.** Cost: \$10 (will include catering). Bookings essential. WHERE: Stratford, Community Garden site, Stratford and another venue in Stratford (details to be confirmed). WHEN: February. CONTACT: Deb Milligan, ph: 5145-5240; e-mail: littlemilligan@ozemail.com.au

•**Events management, marketing and promotion workshop with Maggie Maguire.** Cost: \$10 (will include light lunch). Bookings essential. WHERE: Yarram, DSE Building, 301 Commercial Rd, Yarram. WHEN: Tuesday, March 1, 10am-2pm. CONTACT: Tina Hambleton, ph: 5183-9123; e-mail: alberton@dcsi.net.au

•**Events management, marketing and promotion workshop with Maggie Maguire.** Cost: \$10 (will include light lunch). Bookings essential. WHERE: I-Gain, 58-60 Commercial Rd, Morwell. WHEN: Wednesday, March 2, 10am-2pm. CONTACT: Michelle Tisdale, ph: 5134-3223 or e-mail maltis@tpg.com.au

•**Events management, marketing and promotion workshop with Maggie Maguire.** Cost: \$10 (will include light lunch). Bookings essential. WHERE: Warragul. WHEN: Thursday, March 3, 10am-2pm. CONTACT: Lara Whitehead, ph: 5626-1271 or e-mail sandl@dcsi.net.au

•**Media workshop with Deb Bye.** Cost: \$5 (will include a light dinner). Bookings essential. WHERE: Maffra, Office of Dept of Primary Industry, 1 Stratford Rd, Maffra. WHEN: Tuesday, March 29, 5.45pm for a 6pm start, until 9.30pm. CONTACT: Deb Milligan, ph: 5145-5240; e-mail: littlemilligan@ozemail.com.au

Out and About

•**Drouin Farmers' Market.** WHERE: Civic Place, Drouin. WHEN: January 15.

•**Drouin Ficifolia Festival.** WHERE: Drouin. WHEN: February 11-20. Inquiries: ph. 5625-4892.

•**Hot Sauce and Fiery Food Chilli Festival.** WHERE: Jacksons Track, Jindivick. WHEN: February 19-20.

March dates for your diary:

March 11 — Noojee Trestle Bridge Long Lunch.

March 11 — Yarragon Art Show.

March 13 — Harvest of Gippsland Festival.

Women Who Mean Business groups from around Gippsland met at Maffra in December to share reports of progress. Project officers, group representatives and committee members inspired each other with their experiences and descriptions of their dreams and goals.

Maffra



Kate Leggett, of Swift's Creek/Omeo was busy recording the meeting so she could share proceedings with women in her group.

Jane Gurling, Anna Larkin and project officer Deb Milligan of the Maffra-Stratford group.



Lara Whitehead, project officer, and Patricia Clynes, of Warragul group.



Above: Michelle Tisdale (right), project officer of the Latrobe Valley group, shares a joke with group member Jenny Richmond.

Left: Deirdre Jack, of Swift's Creek project group; Di Deppeler, project management committee member; and Eileen Thurgood, Art Network East Gippsland executive officer.



Kate Earle, project officer for Orbost and Buchan, and Evelyn Schmidt, of the Buchan group.



Tina Hambleton, Yarram project officer, and Patricia Clynes, Warragul-Baw Baw group.

Women Who Mean Business ... Selling Gippsland's Finest



Project Newsletter :: Spring Edition 2004



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- Personal Journeys
- PROFILES Women Who Mean Business
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- Calendar of Events
- Maffra Pictorial

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