

SEASONS

KEEPING YOU CONNECTED

ISSUE **51**

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A taste for change in aged care

School's back in at St Paul's



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SEASONS

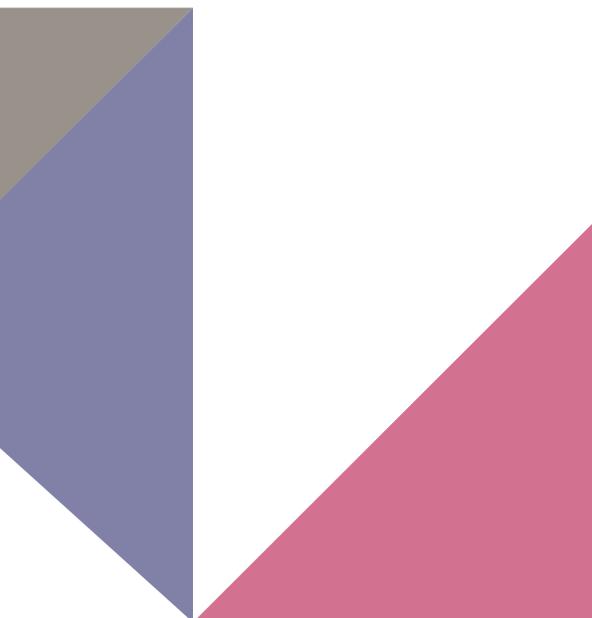
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CEO'S MESSAGE

Welcome to the first edition of the new look Seasons. We have tried to give it a fresher, more modern feel - I do hope you enjoy it.

To coincide with the move to 486 Albert Street, East Melbourne, the VMCH website has also been updated to make it more accessible and easier to navigate. Feel free to log into it at: www.vmch.com.au and try for yourself. I would also be interested in your feedback.

Following the successful relocation of staff recently from Hawthorn to East Melbourne, the move from Kew to East Melbourne took place over the weekend of February the 13th and 14th.

Thanks to the good work of the relocation working party, all went seamlessly. Staff were able to arrive at their new desk on the Monday morning and continue where they left off the previous Friday afternoon.

There are a number of important events scheduled for April.

THE FIRST OF THESE IS THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE VMCH MULTICULTURAL WELLNESS CENTRE (MWC) AT WANTIRNA ON THE 5TH APRIL BY THE PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS, HONG LIM MP.

The MWC is located on the 3rd floor of the Wantirna aged care residence and will cater for the health and social needs of the large number of ageing Chinese and Filipino citizens living in the surrounding community.

The next is a function at Athelstan in Camberwell and will celebrate the collaboration between VMCH and Cabrini Health in relation to restorative care.

This mutually beneficial arrangement will see VMCH residents eligible for private care able to be treated at one of Cabrini's facilities, and for Cabrini patients requiring "step-down" or low-level rehabilitation or transitional care to receive this support from VMCH.



The third event is the sponsored visit to VMCH by Baroness Sheila Hollins on the evening of 14th April. Baroness Hollins is a prominent British Catholic who has recently been appointed by Pope Francis to the newly-created Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors.

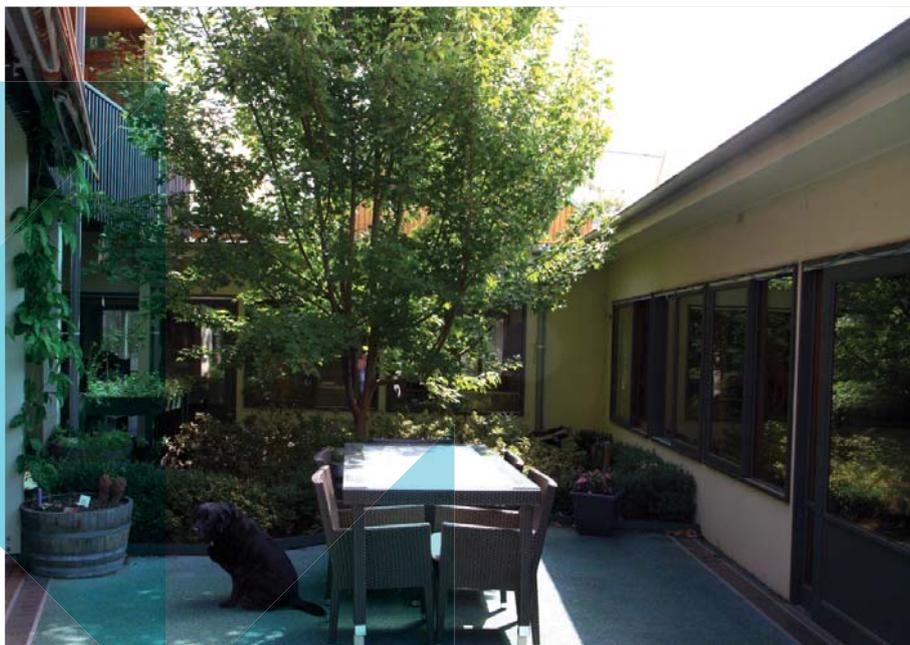
As well as being a member of the House of Lords, Baroness Hollins is a former President of both the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the British Medical Association.

She has been prominent in successfully arguing the Catholic position in relation to end-of-life issues in Great Britain as well as advocating in relation to the care of people with mental health issues.

This event, which will see Baroness Hollins sharing some insights from her life work, will be held at the Catholic Leadership Centre on the corner of Albert Street and Punt Road.

Kind regards

Greg Pullen
CEO



GARDEN DREAM BLOSSOMS

Since opening its doors six years ago, Austin Street has had wonderful success in helping its residents, who are young people living with an acquired brain injury (ABI), achieve their dreams.

However, one big goal that has eluded them has been a garden that would be a healing and restorative space for its 10 residents.

The only garden they have is a courtyard with a beautiful maple tree in the centre. But the layout of the space means the residents, several who are in wheelchairs, cannot enjoy it.

That is until now – thanks to the generosity of Villa Maria Catholic Homes supporters, more than \$30,000 has been raised to build a sensory garden at Austin Street.

With no government funding available, VMCH asked for donations to help fund the redesign and landscape of the existing garden into a beautiful sensory garden featuring walkways for wheelchairs, raised planter boxes, a water feature, colourful flowers, vegetables, mood lighting and much more.

We all love a beautiful garden - but for people with physical, cognitive, sensory and memory impairments a garden can be life changing.

The new garden will give Austin Street residents a safe, tactile and relaxing environment to enjoy nature.

Austin Street manager Jo Herbert said the new garden will make a huge difference to the majority of the residents who are unable to leave the house alone.

“A LOT OF OUR RESIDENTS HAVE LOST AT LEAST 90 PER CENT OF THEIR INDEPENDENCE,” JO SAID.

“IF YOU PICK FIVE THINGS YOU REALLY LIKE TO DO – TAKE FOUR OF THEM AWAY AND YOU’RE LEFT WITH ONE – THAT’S WHAT THE RESIDENTS FEEL LIKE.”

Austin Street resident Kay (pictured) said she hoped the garden would have a water feature, herbs and flowers.

There are also plans to start a new therapy – plant therapy – where plants and garden activities will be used to improve body, mind and spirit.

It is hoped that the sensory garden would provide stimulation for all the senses and improve residents’ motor skills by working in the garden and touching the plants.

Austin Street is Victoria’s first purpose-built residence for young people with an ABI who may otherwise be forced to live in a nursing home.

Regardless of the severity of their ABI, the short and long-term goal for Austin Street is to return each resident to the community as soon as possible and to improve their independence.

TUNING INTO DEMENTIA

It is hoped a new, ground-breaking study into television watching habits within aged care will improve the lives of residents living with dementia.

Around 20 seniors from four Villa Maria Catholic Homes (VMCH) aged care residences in Balwyn, Clayton, Sunshine North and Wantirna will be observed for six months by two students undertaking their Masters of Psychology (Educational and Developmental) at Australian Catholic University (ACU).

The project is part of a unique, ongoing partnership between not-for-profit organisation VMCH and ACU which includes an in-house research unit, based at VMCH, researching innovative ways to provide the highest quality of care to the people it supports.

VMCH & ACU Professor of Aged Care Colleen Doyle said the students would investigate the impact of television exposure – including its content and the length of time watched – on the observed behaviour of people living with dementia and their sleep quality.

“IN DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCHERS HAVE STUDIED EXPOSURE TO VIOLENT TELEVISION SHOWS AND VIDEO GAMES AND THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN’S BEHAVIOUR. WE WANT TO SEE WHETHER THIS APPLIES TO PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA WHO MAY NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT’S ON THE TELEVISION AND MAY LEAD TO THEM FEELING MORE AGITATED.”

The project is being conducted in collaboration with St Catherine’s Aged Care Lifestyle Coordinator Sue Sammartino, whose observations of residents becoming upset or falling asleep while watching free-to-air TV led to the creation of the project.

“We notice agitation in people with dementia when news breaks are broadcast depicting natural disasters, wars, child abuse and animal suffering,” Sue said. “American style talk shows are confronting because of their tendency to raise their voices and talk over each other. This can seem like people arguing, and when a person has limited vision and hearing they can sometimes interpret this as an altercation in their environment from which they want to flee.”

Sue said she hoped the research would produce evidence about the impact of relaxing audio visual experiences for residents.

“Over the years I have worked with residents at VMCH to build up a library of DVDs relevant to their interests such as music concerts and musical movies. I have noticed that when given a choice, residents will choose their favourites and focus their attention on what is being played.”

ACU student Yael Marhaim said she and fellow student Melissa White (pictured) had come across no other research of this kind and were excited to get underway.

“It’s an important topic and we hope the research will result in some positive changes to lifestyle programs and how aged care residences are run to maximise the quality of life for these residents.”

Yael and Melissa will undertake observations between January and June 2016 with results expected in October/November 2016.





SENIORS FIGHTING FIT

Did you know that just 38 per cent of senior Australians meet the recommended level of physical activity?

Lorna Deverill, 87, is in the minority and says that without weekly visits to the Villa Maria Catholic Homes (VMCH) Wellbeing Centre in Wantirna, she would most likely be in a wheelchair.

Lorna suffered serious health setbacks after being attacked by a feral cat 12 months ago. Infections affected her balance and mobility, leaving Lorna housebound following her hospital stay.

“At first I couldn’t walk at all,” Lorna (pictured) said. “I’d lost my confidence and didn’t want to leave the house. I’ve always been a sporting girl and when you’ve played golf and tennis all your life and aren’t able to get around without help from a walking stick, it hits you hard.”

With her “life disappearing very rapidly”, Lorna sought help from the Wellbeing Centre.

“I’ve had a special association with VMCH for many years. My husband Harry – who was blind and later developed Alzheimer’s – was supported by their respite services and aged care residence before he passed away eight years ago.”

Lorna says attending weekly Community Gym classes – run by a qualified physiotherapist – for the past six months had been her “salvation”.

(Statistic from National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre – July 2015).

“THEY HAVE HELPED ME SO MUCH. BALANCE IS MY GREATEST FOCUS AND I’M IMPROVING ON THAT. I’M ALSO LEARNING TO WALK STEPS AGAIN. IF I HADN’T BEEN DOING THESE CLASSES I WOULD BE IN A WHEELCHAIR BY NOW.”

VMCH Allied Health Operations Manager Jo-Ann Petersen said Lorna was among around 150 people aged over 65 who attended the centre’s Rehabilitation Program each week.

“If you want to remain living at home and be as independent as possible, then your physical fitness plays a big part in that,” Jo-Ann said.

“Most of our clients have back, neck or shoulder problems, or they may have experienced a stroke, have arthritis or Parkinson’s disease. You’re never too old to start caring about your fitness – everyone can improve, no matter what age.”

Jo-Ann said the centre also offered Allied Health services including podiatry, speech pathology, massage and dietetics.

Lorna said she planned to continue her weekly gym classes.

“I really couldn’t speak highly enough of the program and I’ll keep going for as long as I can.”

If you would like some more information about the VMCH Wellbeing Centre, please call 1300 919 850 or visit www.vmch.com.au

SCHOOL'S BACK IN FOR ST PAUL'S BRIDGING PROGRAM

With its colourful superhero pictures on the classroom walls, teeny tiny chairs and tables and adorable children dressed in shiny new school uniforms – this looks like your average prep class starting off the school year.

But the St Paul's College Bridging Program is different – it gives children who have a disability or developmental delay one year of additional preparation for entry into a mainstream school.

And according to Bridging Program teacher Melanie Weinberg – the key ingredient behind helping students with special needs is the smaller class sizes.

This year the program, which has been running for more than seven years, has 14 students in two classrooms.

“It gives us a chance to really be creative in a small setting,” Ms Weinberg said.

“Even behaviours... Behaviours can be really challenging. In a small setting it allows us to iron that out.”

THE BRIDGING PROGRAM WORKS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND THE MAINSTREAM SCHOOL OF THE PARENTS' CHOICE TO HELP THE STUDENT TRANSITION INTO THAT SCHOOL.

Parents Miriam and Tom (pictured with William and their daughter Grace) admit they were daunted about the prospect of sending their son William, who has Down syndrome, to the local school of 600 students, where their older daughter attends.

They used the Early Childhood Intervention Services at Villa Maria Catholic Homes and when they heard about the Bridging Program thought it would be ideal for William.

“I would be really worried about him if he was just jumping straight into school,” Miriam said.

“With the transition to that more formal learning, it's going to be quite a big leap for him to sit and concentrate and focus on the task and follow instructions, which has not been required of him in kinder.”

“I think the teachers here have loads of skills in helping him do that, which he probably wouldn't have otherwise.”

And so far, so good. William, who loves dancing and music, is enjoying the program which includes a music program.

“We talk about school at home and he's excited and he likes it. He's really looking for the social interaction and the learning,” Miriam said.

In term one the students learn about the structures and rules of a classroom and the smaller class size allows the teachers to provide students the additional support they may need to master these classroom routines.

In term two the students spend two days of each week at the mainstream school with their Bridging Program teacher on hand to help the student and also the prep teacher.

The ultimate goal is for the student to become independent enough to become a part of the mainstream school and for their new school to have the best tools to support them.

“This program sets parents up, it sets teachers up and it sets schools up,” Ms Weinberg said.

“It's also about supporting families, giving them some hope that they can keep going and they can still have choices.”



INSPIRATIONAL COUPLE SAY GIVING HAS ITS OWN REWARDS

Alistair and Shirley Lloyd have spent almost 59 years of their married life giving – whether it is through fostering 70 babies or adopting two children with disabilities and this is on top of raising their own three children.

They say that through giving they have received a lot more back.

Villa Maria Catholic Homes is proud to say the couple have been part of the VMCH family since their adopted daughter Alana joined our Early Childhood Intervention Program about 16 years ago.

Soon the couple will move to the new VMCH retirement village St Joseph's Mews.

The family are also valued and long-time VMCH donors and share the story about their enduring and special connection with VMCH.

You have a long association with VMCH. When and how did it start?

"Alana, who has cerebral palsy and cortical vision impairment, is now 17 and a senior at St Paul's College in Kew," Shirley said.

"It's quite a special school. The teacher who had her in her first year is still there, we're all still together. The people there know her they know everything about her, everything about us."

You are soon embarking on a new chapter of your life. How are you feeling about your move to the retirement village, St Joseph's Mews?



"We're downsizing. After almost 59 years (of marriage) it's a bit daunting," Shirley said.

"Villa Maria Catholic Homes have been very supportive in this move because we have a son at home with a disability and they have made it possible for us to take him with us to the unit," Alistair said.

"Moving into St Joseph's Mews, we're not buying into a unit, we're buying into a community and with people that care about each other."

You are also valued VMCH donors. What motivates you to give back to the organisation?

"The thing that they (VMCH) have stressed all along and the thing we have found ... has been that they care about the family. It is not about the child, it's not about us, it's about the family," Shirley said.

"And they stress to us that VMCH is a community and it really truly is like nothing else we've experienced - which is why we have wanted to support them as much as we can in return," Shirley said.

"IT IS A WAY THAT WE CAN DEMONSTRATE THAT WE VALUE, BEYOND BELIEF, WHAT THEY DO," ALISTAIR SAID.

"We want to see it be able to continue to do this not only for us, but for other people."

A big part of your life has been your work as foster parents. Can you tell us about that?

"In 1970 we started with the Women's Hospital. They were advertising for foster mothers (for babies). I saw that and I thought that's me. It's been my passion," Shirley said.

"I loved every one of them and the two that weren't adopted were the two that we adopted ourselves."

"I always felt that I got more than I ever could give. Those babies, while I had them, from the minute I picked them up. I was that baby's mother."

"It was great. Shirley was so happy, I was happy. We were able to have a great life together," Alistair said.

After 58 years of marriage you are obviously still very happy. What's the secret to a long and happy marriage?

"Doing what I'm told," Alistair quickly replies.

"I've trained him well," Shirley adds with a chuckle.

"On May 3 it will be 59 years of marriage. We've had a happy life. We laugh a lot."

"We support each other. We still enjoy each other's company," Alistair adds.



A TASTE FOR CHANGE IN AGED CARE

A former high-flying executive chef is using his extensive experience within the food industry to help enrich the lives of residents in aged care.

Sri Lankan-born Sanath Wanniarachchi held coveted positions in some of the world's most luxurious hotels and casinos including various Hilton's and the 7-star Burj-Al-Arab Hotel in Dubai before migrating to Australia in 2008.

Seeking a greater work/life balance and more time with his wife and two children, Sanath swapped the high-pressure environment of restaurant kitchens to take on the role of Chef Manager at Villa Maria Catholic Homes' (VMCH) Shanagolden aged care residence in Pakenham two years ago.

Since that time, Sanath has been committed to ensuring the quality of food reflects his fine-dining experiences and enjoyed introducing residents to new and exciting flavours and cuisines.

"It is a very rewarding job," Sanath said. "Food is a very important part of aged care and residents should of course have access to the best quality food available. Along with a focus on meeting their dietary requirements, I've also worked on improving the texture, flavour and appearance of the meals to appeal to their appetites and make it more interesting."

Sanath's new, seasonal menus have been well-received by residents. Although many still enjoy traditional dishes such as shepherd's pie and roast meals, they have embraced

new, fusion-style dishes including Moroccan lamb moussaka with Greek salad, lamb biryani with pappadam and raita, and smoked cod with lemon-thyme butter sauce.

VMCH Catering Services Manager Ellis Wilkinson said attracting experienced chefs like Sanath was vital to improving the culture of food in aged care.

"The aged care food industry has long been seen as one in which chefs and cooks go to retire, or where the chefs overcook and puree all the food. Having a chef with a solid cookery background is just one part of the role – having passion for cookery is just as important. Sanath has both, which is a win for the residents and the organisation."

Ellis said VMCH will introduce new menus across the organisation's aged care service, focusing on produce-driven meals to promote health, wellbeing and cultural diversity.

"BEFORE THEY CAME TO AGED CARE, RESIDENTS HAD A CHOICE AND ATE WHAT THEY WANTED. THEY HAVE LIVED THEIR LIVES, PAID THEIR TAXES, AND IN SOME CASES WENT TO WAR FOR THIS COUNTRY. THEY DESERVE TO HAVE GOOD, WHOLESOME FOOD WITH VARIETY THAT ENCOMPASSES CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND BELIEFS," ELLIS SAID.

"Moving forward we hope to not only maximise the residents' dining experience here at VMCH; but advocate for change across the industry as a whole."

STYLISH NEW VENUE FOR DINNER & ART WITH HEART

The date has been set for this year's major Villa Maria Catholic Homes fundraiser- an event that is absolutely vital to raise money for quality and innovative disability, education and senior services that empower and enrich individuals and communities.

The fourth Dinner & Art with Heart fundraising event will be held on Friday June 3 and promises to deliver some exciting new features, favourites from previous years and of course raise funds for a great cause.

The event will be held at a stylish new venue, Crown's River Room which boasts stunning views of the Yarra River and is in the heart of Melbourne's entertainment precinct.

The venue truly comes alive at night with a private balcony overlooking the city skyline and Crown's signature flame towers.

Comedian Jean Kittson returns as the night's MC. The popular entertainer had last year's audience in stitches with her humorous take on political travel expenses.

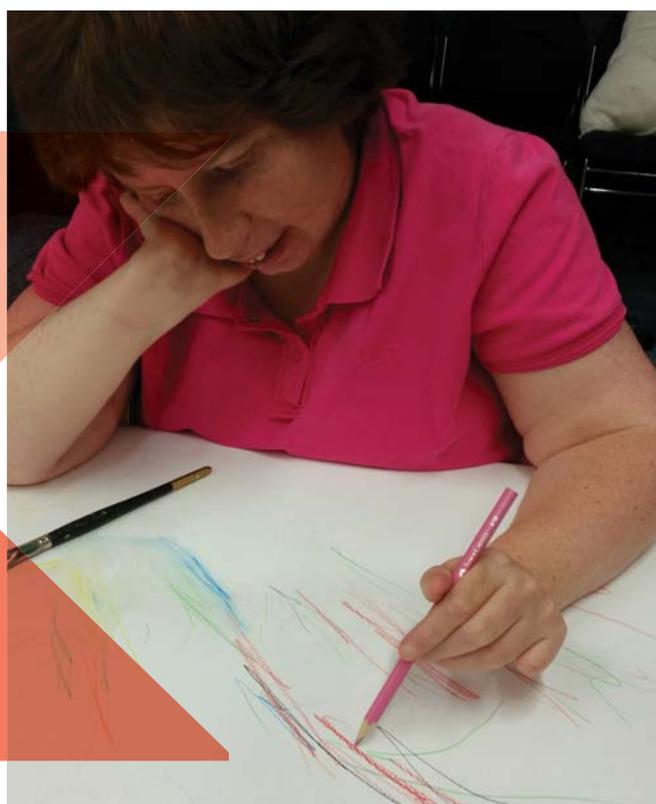
Last year's 170 guests dug deep for the auction of amazing artwork and silent auction items donated to the fundraising event.

Their efforts raised more than \$40,000 for the St Paul's College Build a Bus program.

Money raised at this year's event will help VMCH continue working in partnership with people of all ages and abilities to help them achieve their goals and dreams, remain connected to their communities and enjoy their independence.

Stay tuned for more details about entertainment for the night, contributing artists and other features that are sure to make the night memorable.

For more information about this event that raises much needed money for a very worthy cause contact VMCH Fundraising and Major Events Coordinator Narrelle Paige on 9926 2412 or 0414 738 007.



THE ART OF CARING AND SHARING

The art of caring and sharing was the theme for the 9th World Community Arts Day project.

Gateway Services in Kew invited aspiring artists at Villa Maria Catholic Homes to help create a piece of art to mark the day.

Artist and Gateway Services instructor Melissa Peacock has organised the project and said it was well on its way.

"We have some beautiful paper and we are going to send it out to different organisations, St Paul's College, Gateway, you can contribute and we will slowly put it all together," she said.

It will eventually be a 2.5 meter high wall hanging. So far they have about 20 drawings and they would like about 50 more.

"I think it's going to look really nice and organic, really tactile," Melissa said.

"Until all the spots of the wall hanging are all filled up, about two and a half meters, we will just continue."

THE GIFT OF TIME

Simon LeMaistre is a perfect example of how volunteering not only benefits the community, but also promotes personal growth.

The 66-year-old retiree has been volunteering at Villa Maria Catholic Homes' (VMCH) Wantirna aged care residence since 2012. Three days per week, rain, hail or shine, Simon travels from his home in Armadale to spend time with residents who have high levels of dementia in the Memory Support Unit.

His role includes playing ball games, gardening, walking and undertaking word puzzles and bingo with residents.

"I started the role thinking 'I'll give it a go' and next thing you know I'm here for three years!" Simon (pictured right with resident, Barry) said.

A former Storeman in his working life, Simon feels he may have missed a career calling.

"I DIDN'T LIKE BEING A STOREMAN AS MUCH AS I LIKE DOING THIS," SIMON SAID. "WE'RE ALL GOING TO GROW OLD AND MANY OF US MAY DEVELOP DEMENTIA LATER IN LIFE. I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO GIVE YOUR TIME NOW WHILE YOU CAN BECAUSE YOU MAY BE THE PERSON IN NEED OF ASSISTANCE LATER ON."

Simon described his role as "personally rewarding". It has also been the catalyst for undertaking a Bachelor of Dementia Care – Australia's first degree in dementia care – by correspondence with the University of Tasmania. He hopes the degree will help develop his knowledge in the field to make even more of a difference to the lives of people living with dementia.

Wantirna Lifestyle Assistant Sandra Davey described Simon as an "unassuming fellow with a lovely nature".

"He's a very patient man with a warm smile and a helping hand for everyone. His work is extremely valued to our staff and the residents just love Simon – they look forward to his days and his company."

Simon is one of more than 500 volunteers who give their time to help VMCH run its services in aged care and for children and adults with a disability.



Activities include helping to run opportunity shops, going for walks with aged care residents, visiting cafes with young people with acquired brain injuries, transportation assistance, and calling isolated people at home to have a chat.

Simon said anyone could give volunteering a go.

"You can make a difference just by being there."

If you are interested in volunteering with VMCH, call 1800 036 377 or visit: www.vmch.com.au

GEOFF CELEBRATES A CENTURY

Surprises are a little harder to come by when you're 100 years old. But Geoff Noonan's family managed to astonish their father on his milestone birthday – reuniting him with three nieces.

Geoffrey 'John' Noonan was born in Ballarat on February 7, 1916. His father Patrick worked for the Tramways in Ballarat and then the family later moved to Kew when his father took a new job at the Hawthorn Depot.

Sadly, when Geoff was just four years old, his father passed away. Then ten years later his younger sister, Kathleen, also passed, aged just 11. His mum, Eileen, remarried and Geoff later gained a half-brother, half-sister and step-sister.

Geoff served in WWII in the 53rd anti-aircraft company based in Melbourne – but was lucky enough not to see any conflict. He met his beautiful wife Mary and settled in Broadmeadows, where they lived for 50 years, raising their six children.

Geoff worked at the University of Melbourne for 27 years in the mechanical engineering department until his retirement.

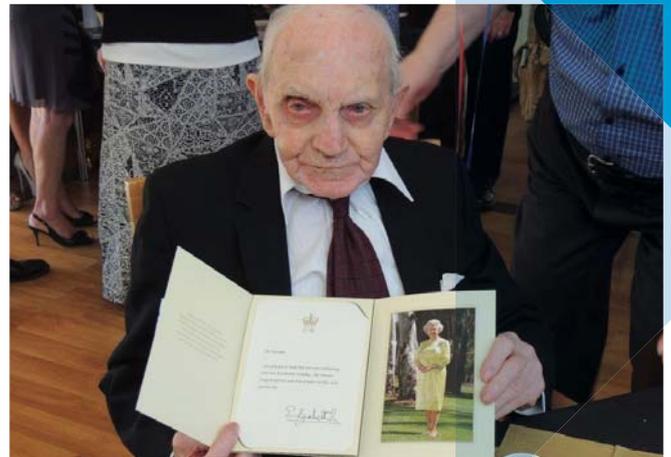
“Dad is very proud that since leaving school at age 14, he has never been unemployed,” said his son, Luke.

“SINCE OUR MUM PASSED IN 1998, DAD HAS DETERMINEDLY PUSHED ON AND ALL HE HAS TALKED ABOUT FOR THE LAST TEN YEARS IS HE WANTS HIS LETTER FROM THE QUEEN.”

On February 7 Geoff received his wish at a special celebration at Villa Maria Catholic Homes aged care residence in Bundoora, where he has lived for three years.

Surrounded by his 17 grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren and around 40 other family members and friends, Luke said his Dad was “wrapt” to be reunited with three daughters of his half-sister.

Join the conversation



“It took a while to track them down and they haven't seen our family since about 1971. It's actually a surprise for all my family,” Luke said.

Luke described his dad as a “quiet and gentle person” who loved his family. Geoff described turning 100 as a “real achievement”, although his proudest lifetime achievement was marrying Mary.

And as for the ever important “tip” for making it to 100? Geoff's answer is simple and practical: “don't drink or smoke!”

Happy birthday Geoff.

