

LEADWEST'S NEWS SUMMARY FOR MELBOURNE'S WEST

27th January 2012



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BRIMBANK

NOTHING DEAR ABOUT DEER PARK AFTER PRICE PLUMMETT

Brimbank Leader–25th January 2012

<http://brimbank-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/nothing-dear-about-deer-park-after-price-plummet/>

Houses in Deer Park are among the most affordable in Melbourne, latest figures show.

And while prices fell across Brimbank, house prices rose in Taylors Lakes and Sydenham.

Real Estate Institute of Victoria data shows Deer Park's median price is \$330,000, making it the city's fifth-most affordable suburb.

The December quarter figures show prices in Deer Park fell 14.8 per cent during the quarter.

Melton was the most affordable suburb in Melbourne, with a median house price of \$280,000.

The median house price in Sydenham rose 7.9 per cent during 2011 to \$410,000. In Taylors Lakes prices lifted 6.8 per cent to \$502,000.

There was no change in Sunshine, with the median price at \$430,000.

First National Taylors Lakes sales manager Alex Dacakis said there had been more buyer activity in Sydenham and Taylors Lakes.

"There are first-home buyers, families and investors," Mr Dacakis said.

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REIV chief executive Enzo Raimondo said demand and affordability was up marginally from the previous quarter.

"As we head into 2012, there is no doubt that housing affordability has improved through lower house prices and two interest rate reductions," Mr Raimondo said.

PARKING PAYMENTS

Brimbank Star—24th January 2012

<http://starnewsgroup.com.au/star/keilor-taylors-lakes-sydenham/332/story/147436.html>

Road users have contributed more than \$600,000 to Brimbank Council in parking fines since July last year.

A total of 13,197 parking fines were issued in 2011, with the council raking in \$618,000 for the 2011-2012 financial year so far.

If previous years are anything to go by, that figure could rise to a total of \$1.2 million by June 30.

General Manager of City Development Stephen Sully said most of the fines in 2011 accumulated in St Albans and Sunshine, with the worst streets being Alfrieda St and Hampshire Rd.

In most cases drivers were overstaying time limits or parking in no-standing zones, while 809 fines were issued to drivers who took disabled parking spaces without a permit.

But it's not just money drivers are contributing to Brimbank Council – they also received 1122 complaints about parking last year.

Mr Sully said council is identifying the need for improved parking provisions in many of Brimbank's town centres, including Sunshine and St Albans, as part of their strategic planning.

He said council was also looking at strategies for cycling and public transport.

Mr Sully said the exemption public schools have from planning permit requirements meant that council was unable to manage on-site car parking and drop-off arrangements, which could cause parking headaches for drivers.

Stations are another hotspot for parking problems and Mr Sully said council has called on improved parking at stations.

"Improved bus network access, bike storage and 'kiss and ride' facilities (allowing drivers to stop and help others out of the car while remaining within a short distance of the vehicle) would improve the situation and reduce car parking demand," Mr Sully said.

THEY'RE BACK SACKED BRIMBANK COUNCILLORS WILL RUN FOR RE-ELECTION

Brimbank Star—24th January 2012

<http://starnewsgroup.com.au/star/keilor-taylors-lakes-sydenham/332/story/147432.html>

Four of the councillors sensationally sacked in 2009 are eyeing off a seat when Brimbank Council elections return in October this year.

Troy Atanasovski and Sam David, who were both named in the Ombudsman George Brouwer's reports, told Star last week they would be running again.

Former councillors Marion Martin and Margaret Giudice are also considering running, along with Virginia Tachos, the wife of former councillor Stuart Miller.

Former deputy mayor Tran Siu is ineligible to run after being found guilty last year of distributing unregistered how-to-vote cards during the 2008 election campaign.

Robert Bozinovski and Heidi Seitz did not respond to messages left by Star, Robert Shamon could not be contacted, Geraldine Brooks is not running and Maria Kiselis refused to comment.

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Former Keilor MP George Seitz, who Mr Brouwer claimed showed a strong interest in the former council, is also in the race.

Mr Atanasovski and Mr David both said they felt they still something to offer, while Ms Giudice said councillors felt their jobs were “half done” after the sacking.

But Sunshine resident and community campaigner John Hedditch said he would hate to see the same people back on council.

The Administrators have been a breath of fresh air,” Mr Hedditch said.

“We haven’t had democracy in Brimbank with the way it’s operated in the past it’s been a factionally driven council.

“The community should be looking for good independent candidates.”

Mr Hedditch denied rumours he would be entering the race himself.

Ms Tachos echoed the call for community leaders to “step up”.

“We need fresh people, people that are involved in community issues now,” she said.

She said having a “good team of people” run for council would influence her decision to stand.

Meanwhile, Mr Seitz is wasting no time preparing for the 27 October election day.

Mr Seitz, who told Star he was running for council election at the suggestion of Maribyrnong MP Bill Shorten to keep the council “cool, calm and collected”, said he would be establishing the Brimbank Residents and Ratepayers Association in the coming weeks.

IDEAS SOUGHT ON BRIMBANK BUDGET

Brimbank Weekly–24th January 2012

<http://starnewsgroup.com.au/star/keilor-taylors-lakes-sydenham/332/story/147432.html>

Brimbank Council wants to hear from residents as it develops its 2012-13 budget and council plan.

Residents and community or sporting group representatives can meet with council administrators on February 6 or 20 to share ideas about local area needs.

Details: Anu Prasad on 92494310.

BRIMBANK STORM DAMAGE BILL HITS \$550M

Brimbank Weekly–24th January 2012

<http://www.brimbankweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/brimbank-storm-damage-bill-hits-550m/2429694.aspx>

Insurers have received more than \$550 million in claims for damage to vehicles, homes and businesses following the Christmas Day storms that hammered Brimbank.

Insurance Council of Australia member companies had received 77,174 claims by January 13.

Chief executive Rob Whelan said the figures were likely to go up as assessors completed estimations of repairs.

The storms brought the total number of natural disasters in 2011 to eight, with losses of \$4.9 billion - more than double that of 2010.

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GODDESS GRACES TEMPLE SITE

Brimbank Weekly—24th January 2012

<http://www.brimbankweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/goddess-graces-temple-site/2429066.aspx>

Traditional ceremonies marked a milestone in the 10-year transformation of a vacant block on the banks of the Maribyrnong River into Australia's largest Heavenly Queen temple.

The Heavenly Queen Temple Society bought the site, once a dumping ground for nearby tanneries, and began work on plans to build a temple and gardens dedicated to the Chinese seafarers' deity known as Mazu.

Mazu lived from 960-987 during the Sung Dynasty.

She became a legend after saving and helping many people.

The 16-metre-high stainless steel, gold-painted statue of the sea goddess, visible from passing trains, was designed and made in Nanjing, China, and cost about \$450,000.

It was funded by donations from devotees in Melbourne and around the world.

With the temple, it completes the \$3 million first stage of what will eventually be a six-building complex with a garden, drum tower, lake pavilion and exhibitions centre, and a jetty on the previously industrial land under the Sydenham line rail bridge.

WINNING POST LOOMS

Brimbank Weekly—24th January 2012

<http://www.brimbankweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/winning-post-looms/2429064.aspx>

Research into medical disorders is galloping ahead at Sunshine Hospital thanks to the outstanding success of Flemington's Western Health race day.

Last month's Victoria Racing Club event raised more than \$100,000 for the new Australian Institute for Musculoskeletal Science (AIMSS) at the Western Centre for Health Research and Education.

AIMSS director Professor Peter Ebeling said the national reference centre for research into bone, muscle and joint disorders was particularly significant to western suburbs residents.

"Conditions such as osteoporosis and arthritis are widespread in the local community, and chronic disease presents major challenges."

The institute will use the money to support programs that fight these conditions through exercise and proper diet. Western Health chief executive Kathryn Cook said the service played a pivotal role in disease prevention as the west's population grew.

VRC chief executive Dale said the club was proud of its six-year partnership with Western Health.

"AIMSS places Western Health at the forefront of medical research, enhancing the already exemplary services they provide to Melburnians in the west."

The fund-raising easily surpassed last year's record total of \$68,000.

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BRIMBANK HOUSE PRICES UP AND DOWN

Brimbank Weekly—24th January 2012

<http://www.brimbankweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/brimbank-house-prices-up-and-down/2429063.aspx>

Brimbank's property roller-coaster ride refuses to let up as prices jump in some areas and tumble in others.

December quarter figures from the Real Estate Institute of Victoria show Braybrook house and unit prices crashed by 17.7 per cent.

Prices also fell in Deer Park (14.8 per cent), Delahey (12.9 per cent), Taylors Hill (9.1 per cent), Keilor (6.4 per cent) and Sunshine North (5.5 per cent).

Cairnlea, Taylors Lakes, Sunshine and Caroline Springs all recorded modest growth and Derrimut was the best performer, up 11.1 per cent.

Deer Park remains one of Melbourne's most affordable suburbs with a median house price of \$330,000.

Only Melton (\$280,000), Werribee (\$302,500) and Wyndham Vale (\$310,000) are cheaper.

The new figures follow a report revealing the number of unsold property has skyrocketed across Melbourne.

Prosper Australia data shows 'stale stock' - unsold property on the market for more than 60 days - being just shy of 100,000 after a 6.2 per cent spike in November.

This follows a 20.4 per cent rise in September and an 18 per cent rise in August.

Campaign manager David Collyer said buyers who would normally enter the market were holding back.

"Real estate vendors are price takers, not price makers. Choosing to hold out for a better offer will prove to be a bad call."

Hot spots include St Albans (1163), Caroline Springs (1399), Sydenham (1151) and Melton (2696).

But Brimbank real estate agent Tom Kyriakou believes there are signs the market will pick up this year.

The Bells Real Estate agent said buyers had been spooked by talk of interest rate rises and the global financial crisis.

"There was an impression that there was going to be a couple of rate rises and that kept people holding back."

Mr Kyriakou said properties were taking an average of 51 days to sell, up from 40 days when the market was running hot.

But the two recent interest rate cuts would bring back buyers who would take advantage of the softer market, he said.

ENROL TO VOTE, NEW CITIZENS URGED

Brimbank Weekly—24th January 2012

<http://www.brimbankweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/enrol-to-vote-new-citizens-urged/2429062.aspx>

Brimbank's newest citizens are being encouraged to enrol to vote.

Australian Electoral Commission staff will be on hand at Australia Day citizenship ceremonies to assist new citizens to enrol to vote and join more than 14 million Australians already on the electoral roll.

Voting is compulsory for all Australian citizens 18 and over.

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Enrolment forms are also available at any AEC office, Australia Post outlet, Medicare or Centrelink office or at www.aec.gov.au/enrol

HOMEWORK LAPPED UP IN THE NEW LAND

Brimbank Weekly—24th January 2012

<http://www.brimbankweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/homework-lapped-up-in-the-new-land/2429061.aspx>

A homework program for young refugees has been giving students an edge on more than just their schoolwork.

Edmund Rice Community and Refugee Services have been providing free tuition and homework support to refugee students in Brimbank for more than 10 years.

Program co-ordinator Dane Stammers (pictured) says that for people in the Primary Homework and Learning Club, based in St Albans, English is their second or even third language.

"We've got about 100 kids coming down. When they arrive in Australia they're given some English lessons; after that they're slotted into the education system. They might have arrived with no English at all and they often lack the fundamentals of the language."

Nearly all the students have a Sudanese background and most join up after being encouraged by friends already in the program.

"Participants gain an enormous amount of confidence from being involved. There are all sorts of education and social benefits: improvement in literacy and increased confidence and social interaction."

New group leaders and assistant group leaders are needed for when the program resumes on February 13. More details: 0439970002.

CHILDCARE PROGRAM MAY BE AXED

Brimbank Weekly—24th January 2012

<http://www.brimbankweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/childcare-program-may-be-axed/2429060.aspx>

The final nail appears to have been hammered into the coffin for the Take-a-Break childcare program.

The program has been caught up in months of bickering between the state and federal governments over who should provide funding, which ran out on December 31.

The state government released an independent report on Friday, recommending the program be dissolved and its funding diverted.

The KPMG report found that the program's "social benefit exceeds social cost".

But it also cited problems with the program including trouble meeting its aim of short-term care at late notice.

The report suggested funding be shifted to the under-used Adult Community and Further Education subsidy. That program assists parents with childcare while they undertake education and training.

But Duke Street Neighbourhood House manager Bronwen Merrigan said a number of parents using the program weren't necessarily in further education.

"A lot of our low-income families aren't taking classes but aren't in a position to pay for full childcare," she said.

The Sunshine service will continue until June thanks to a \$25,000 eleventh-hour grant from Brimbank Council.

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The future looks gloomy beyond then, with Children and Early Childhood Development Minister Wendy Lovell saying the program was being "inappropriately used" to address gaps in general childcare services.

Jamila Rizvi, a spokeswoman for federal Early Childhood and Childcare Minister Kate Ellis, said the state government should follow the lead of other states which have committed funding for this type of childcare.

State opposition children and young adults spokeswoman Jenny Mikakos said the report offered a flimsy excuse to refuse funding the program.

NEIGHBOURHOOD ROLE FOR THE WORLD GAME

Brimbank Weekly—24th January 2012

<http://www.brimbankweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/neighbourhood-role-for-the-world-game/2429050.aspx>

Derrimut's Deng Duang fears more young people in his community could resort to drugs and crime if they don't get the education and support they need.

But he's not going to sit back and wait for it to happen.

Mr Duang co-founded the Aweil Youth Association of Victoria about a year ago.

It's aimed at encouraging more young people from southern Sudanese migrant families to play sport.

Mr Duang believes sport can play a vital role in keeping young people off the streets and away from bad influences.

The group runs two-hour soccer sessions for more than 30 youths each Saturday at the West Sunshine Community Centre.

"We are running soccer training at the moment, but we hope to include basketball and Australian Rules football soon," Mr Duang said.

"A lot of the kids' parents can't afford to take them to sports training and after-school activities so I wanted to start a free service."

Mr Duang said that to keep the program running, community support was vital.

The association was given a \$2500 grant last week from the Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre's Seeds for Growth fund.

The fund was established two years ago by Spectrum to help new migrants and refugees.

Last week, community groups across the north-west shared in more than \$36,895 for more than 29 projects.

Mr Duang said the money would help provide sports equipment.

"We are very grateful for this money, but we will need more support and more volunteers from the Brimbank community.

"A lot of young Sudanese people struggle in school and drop out and end up on the streets, so we want this program to grow so we can run homework support and education sessions."

AMBASSADORS CLEAR A PATH FOR MIGRANTS

Brimbank Weekly—24th January 2012

<http://www.brimbankweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/ambassadors-clear-a-path-for-migrants/2429048.aspx>

A group of western suburbs community leaders has been praised for helping migrants settle into their new Australian life.

Lalor MP and Prime Minister Julia Gillard last week named 40 'People of Australia' ambassadors around the nation, congratulating them for promoting inclusion in their communities.

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Ten Victorians were named, including Sunshine Heights-Western Tigers Soccer Club player-coach, David Nyuol Vincent.

Other ambassadors working or living in the west include Victoria University community engagement adviser and co-ordinator Elleni Bereded-Samuel; Australian Somali Football Association founder Ahmed Dini; Wyndham Community and Education Centre chief executive Jennifer Barrera; and Point Cook resident and Australian women's soccer team captain Melissa Barbieri.

The leaders will use their roles to promote their work in local communities and advise the federal government and the Australian Multicultural Council. The ambassador program is part of the government's new multicultural policy announced last year.

Mr Vincent said it was a great honour.

He was born in Sudan, but his family was forced to flee the country when he was three following the breakout of civil war in 1983. He lived in refugee camps for about 18 years before moving to Australia in 2004.

Now employed as a community liaison officer with the Brotherhood of St Laurence in Melbourne, he has worked as a human rights ambassador for the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.

Mr Vincent has worked tirelessly to help Sudanese migrants settle in the country and is player-coach of the Sunshine Heights-Western Tigers club, which is made up of Sudanese youths.

He believes the ambassadorial role will open doors for his community.

"I will give the Sudanese community here a voice by advising the government on the many issues our people have in trying to settle," he said.

"Many young people in the community drop out of school and end up using drugs or being involved in crime because they don't have anything to do."

His role will include speaking at public events, including on Harmony Day, March 21.

"I will be trying to make people who are new to the country feel welcome and I'll do my best to promote multiculturalism," Mr Vincent said.

SITE A SORE SPOT

Brimbank Leader—24th January 2012

<http://brimbank-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/site-a-sore-spot/>

Neighbours are calling for the demolition of an unfinished house in Sunshine West, claiming it has become a rubbish dump and haven for drug users.

Residents say the property, on the corner of Corella Rd and Briar Way, is littered with syringes, debris and rubbish.

Trenco Kutlesovski has lived next door to the house for six years.

"It's ridiculous, every night there are people going to the house and making noise," Mr Kutlesovski said. "There are people jumping from scaffolding and needles everywhere.

"When it is going to be finished?"

Another resident said children use the house "as a kind of adventure playground".

Brimbank Council records show private group VA Building Surveyors were issued a building permit in 2004, which expired two years from the date of issue - in December 2006.

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State Government legislation stipulates a two-year permit be issued for domestic developments.

Council's acting city development general manager Carey Patterson said there had been no correspondence received to indicate the permit had been extended.

"Provided the building is structurally sound and not a danger to the public, there are no restrictions on the time a building can be vacant or uncompleted," Mr Patterson said.

Despite concerns from nearby residents, council inspectors have visited the site and said the structure "though uncompleted does not constitute a risk to the public".

"If the structure does become unsound or creates a risk the council can intervene and issue the building notices or order to the owner of the site to rectify the problem," Mr Patterson said.

The state Building Commission is responsible for enforcing actions against owners and builders where permits have been issued by private surveyors. Non-compliance with a building order can incur fines of up to \$12,000 if the matter proceeds to the courts.

VA Building Surveyors could not be contacted by the Leader before deadline.

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

Brimbank Leader—24th January 2012

<http://brimbank-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/neighbourhood-watch-5/>

Traders in St Albans have renewed calls for closed-circuit television cameras to monitor their shopping strips following a recent armed robbery.

The January 13 robbery at Ziggy's Place on Princess St left Melton South woman Suzi Frith, 40, with life-threatening injuries.

Armed Robbery Taskforce detectives arrested 33-year-old Goran Jetic the following day.

The St Albans man was charged with four counts of armed robbery, two counts of false imprisonment, two counts of criminal damage, intending to cause serious injury and resisting police.

Brimbank Acting Insp Andrea McAlpine said police were aware residents and traders were concerned for their safety.

"We would like to reassure residents that we are maintaining a visible presence in the community," she said.

"Public safety is our No 1 priority and police have a number of measures in place to address any community concerns."

St Albans Traders Association secretary Asip Demiri said cameras could help prevent crimes similar to last Friday's attack.

He said traders had lobbied for years for cameras.

"We've been banging our heads against the wall. CCTV cameras are an absolute must, no questions asked," Mr Demiri said.

"Cameras don't mean every angle will be covered, but should something occur, we would get a pretty good lead.

"As a community, we all have children who walk the streets. This attack could happen to anyone."

Brimbank Council's Kelly Grigsby said improving safety was a priority for the council.

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OLD PHONES FOR CHARITY

Brimbank Leader—22nd January 2012

<http://brimbank-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/old-phones-for-charity/>

Residents are urged to donate old mobile phones to St Vincent de Paul Society St Albans and Sunshine to support local welfare work.

The society receives \$3 from Australian Mobile Recycling for every phone donated.

St Albans Vinnies manager Barbara Shepherd said the money raised went towards clothing, food and furniture for those in need.

Garry McBride, general manager of Vinnies centres in Victoria, said the initiative was a simple way to support the local community. "I think just about everyone has at least one old phone tucked away in a drawer somewhere that they could donate," Mr McBride said.

Sunshine and St Albans Vinnies are accepting donations until the end of February.

To donate your mobile phone, drop into: 71 Main Road West, St Albans, or 56 Station Place, Sunshine.

HOBSONS BAY

TREE REMOVAL OUTRAGE IN SEAHOLME

Hobsons Bay Leader—24th January 2012

<http://hobsons-bay-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/have-your-say-tree-removal-outrage-in-seaholme/>

Seaholme residents have called on Hobsons Bay Council to consult the community before cutting down street trees.

Garden Grove residents are angry three trees on their corner with Beach St have been cut down in the past year, two of them this month, despite residents attempting to stop workers.

Resident Judith Kirkman said locals should have the right to have a say in whether the trees were cut down and rejected council statements the trees were in poor health.

"These trees are community property. If council were going to take them down, why weren't we notified?" Ms Kirkman said.

"If Garden Grove had been told the trees (were) to be cut down we, as a street, may have had time to have an independent assessment of the trees' health."

Council works and assets director Phillip McDonald said three trees were inspected in March 2010 after a branch fell on a roof, and that later inspections showed the trees were fragile and splitting, prompting one to be cut down last February and another two this month.

"(This month), an inspection by the council's arborist found both of the remaining trees were becoming unsafe and removal was required," Mr McDonald said.

Mr McDonald said council had been monitoring 40 to 50-year-old agonis and willow myrtle trees on Beach St and others may need to be removed in the next year.

"The council is very considerate of tree removal and replacement and therefore the locations where these trees have been removed will be placed on the street-planting program for the upcoming season," Mr McDonald said.

The council did not respond to Leader's queries about consulting residents about street tree removal.

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SAFE AS HOUSES IN WILLIAMSTOWN

Hobsons Bay Leader—24th January 2012

<http://hobsons-bay-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/safe-as-houses-in-williamstown/>

Value for money and a stable base seem to have insulated Williamstown's property market against the decline experienced across much of Melbourne in 2011, agents say.

The Real Estate Institute of Victoria reported house prices in the seaside suburb rose 5.7 per cent last year, making it the seventh best performer in the city, while Melbourne's median price fell 5.2 per cent.

An increase of 2.5 per cent in the last quarter of the year pushed Williamstown's median price up to \$856,000.

Greg Hocking Elly Partners Williamstown director Wayne Elly said while nearby suburbs such as Newport and Yarraville had experienced huge growth in the past three years, Williamstown had stayed stable.

"That's why we're seeing the increase now, because it hasn't increased as much in the past," Mr Elly said.

Altona, which recorded a 16.8 per cent fall in its median house price in 2011, finished the year on a high, posting a 4.4 per cent increase in the last quarter, although it recorded fewer than 30 sales during that period.

Newport took a hit with a 10.3 per cent drop in its median house price in the December quarter, pulling prices down 6.7 per cent for the year.

Altona North, Altona Meadows, Laverton and Seabrook, which all had fewer than 30 sales for the quarter, recorded falls in their median house prices in that period, with only Altona Meadows posting an increase for the year.

AUSTRALIA DAY: LEIGH HARDINGE HONOURED

Hobsons Bay Weekly—26th January 2012

<http://www.hobsonsbayweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/australia-day-leigh-hardinge-honoured/2433150.aspx>

Leigh Hardinge is the pride of Hobsons Bay. The 62-year Altona resident has been awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in this year's Australia Day honours for his services to local government and a host of community organisations.

A foundation member of the State Emergency Service's Altona unit, Mr Hardinge served as its controller between 1990 and 2006.

In 2002, he was elected to Hobsons Bay Council, which included two terms as deputy mayor in 2004 and 2005-06 and mayor in 2006-07.

His community involvement includes roles with scouting groups and district associations, Neighbourhood Watch, Friends of Lower Kororoit Creek, Altona Probus Club, Hobsons Bay Arts Society and the Fit to Drive Foundation, which delivers road safety programs to school students.

Mr Hardinge said he was humbled to receive such a prestigious accolade.

"I'm quite honoured by the recognition, but I really must be sharing it with the people that have been supporting me in the things I've done," he said.

"My Dad used to always say, 'As you go along in life, son, always try to leave a place a little bit better than you found it'.

"I've had a wonderful life, wonderful upbringing, a fabulous marriage and family.

"I couldn't wish for anything better than that."

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MARIBRYNONG

EAST MEETS WEST

Maribyrnong Leader—27th January 2012

<http://maribyrnong-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/east-meets-west/>

Footscray will come to life on Sunday with up to 70,000 people expected to attend the East Meets West Lunar New Year Festival.

Celebrating the Year of the Dragon, the street party in central Footscray will run all day with a parade, music, rides, stalls and firecrackers.

Streets within Irving, Moore, Donald and French streets will be closed for the event.

Join the festivities from 10am-10pm on Hopkins St.

Details: lunarfestival.com.au

FOOTSCRAY A WINNER FOR AFFORDABLE REAL ESTATE

Maribyrnong Leader—26th January 2012

<http://maribyrnong-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/footscray-a-winner-for-affordable-real-estate/>

Units and apartments in Footscray are among the most affordable in Melbourne, latest figures show.

Real Estate Institute of Victoria figures for the December 2011 quarter show the median price for units and apartments in Footscray is \$316,000, the third most affordable suburb behind Frankston and Noble Park.

Prices in the suburb were down 4.2 per cent on the same time last year, while in neighbouring West Footscray prices climbed 28.7 per cent to a median price of \$429,500.

Barry Plant Yarraville sales manager Niels Geraerts said Footscray was very affordable given its proximity to the city.

He said the suburb had lost its negative stigma and about half the properties he had sold in the area recently had gone to first-home buyers.

“Footscray has been rejuvenated over the last three to four years,” Mr Geraerts said.

“Buyers are now looking at it because it’s affordable and because they want to live there.”

The REIV figures showed house prices fell across Maribyrnong with the exception of Seddon, where the median price rose 2.3 per cent to \$653,500.

REIV chief executive Enzo Raimondo said demand and affordability had improved marginally from the previous quarter.

RISING SUN TO GO BUT COMMUNITY WON'T LOSE ITS FOOTING

Maribyrnong Leader—25th January 2012

<http://maribyrnong-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/rising-sun-to-go-but-community-wont-lose-its-footing/>

The demolition of the Rising Sun footbridge will not cut the community in half, Regional Rail Link’s Footscray Deer Park Alliance says.

As reported by the Leader, residents, councillors and local politicians fear removing the bridge on Buckley St, which runs over Cross St but does not connect to West Footscray Station, will reduce moveability around the city.

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The footbridge connects people from Seddon, Yarraville and Kingsville to West Footscray and Whitten Oval.

RRL project Footscray Deer Park spokeswoman Megan Cusack said the design being considered would “consolidate” the footbridge into the new West Footscray Station.

She said it could not be retained in its current location due to the additional tracks, but cyclist and pedestrian connectivity across the rail corridor would be maintained with no increase in travel distance for the majority of users.

Ms Cusack said station upgrades would provide enhanced accessibility with the inclusion of lifts, new ramps, stairs, a station forecourt, and a dedicated pedestrian/cyclist crossing on Sunshine Rd.

She said the alliance would hold discussions about the footbridge with the community early this year.

SALVOS MAKE BIG MOVE

Maribyrnong Leader—24th January 2012

<http://maribyrnong-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/salvos-make-big-move/>

A 12-seater bus and about 10 non-emergency ambulance trips will move disadvantaged people into their new home today.

Forty-one men from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds will finally move from their Ryan St, Footscray, facility into the Salvation Army’s 120-bed aged care centre in Buckley St after the availability of the new building was delayed by bad weather and safety enhancements.

Salvation Army diversional therapist Kate Rose said regular meetings were held with the men to keep them informed about what was happening.

After tours of the new building Ms Rose said residents felt more comfortable with the move.

But special projects officer Kellie Wynne said there would still be some anxiety with the change of scenery.

“We’ve geared up the staff (and) done a lot of educational sessions with them to make sure that (residents are) supported in the move and (staff know) how to holistically look after the clients so they can alleviate any fears,” she said.

Ms Wynne said half the staff would help the men move from the old facility while the other half would be at the new home helping them settle in.

Salvation Army aged-care group manager Richard Flanagan said a number of contingency plans had been made because many of the men were mentally impaired and could get confused easily.

He said there were a lot of corridors at the new centre and people who were “compromised cognitively” might lose their way and need additional guidance for some time.

To make a referral to the centre, call 9283 4000.

NEW TOILET ALONG RIVER

Maribyrnong Star—24th January 2012

<http://starnewsgroup.com.au/star/footscray-yarraville/332/story/147517.html>

Maribyrnong City Council has installed a new public toilet in Coulson Gardens along the Maribyrnong River.

The new, two-cubicle Exeloo toilet has been sited next to a playground on Chifley Drive for the convenience of walkers, cyclists, and families using the play equipment.

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The new public toilet replaces an old brick public toilet in Coulson Gardens which was close to the northern end of Navigator St.

“Public toilets are rated as important by the community, and this new block is part of Maribyrnong City Council’s commitment to providing better community facilities,” Mayor John Cumming said.

The existing public toilet is expected to be demolished soon.

CHOIR SEEKS A HOME

Maribyrnong Leader—24th January 2012

<http://maribyrnong-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/choir-seeks-a-home/>

Footscray Sings community choir is scouting a new home with Maribyrnong Council planning to use its rehearsal venue as an art facility.

The choir had been rehearsing in a former church at the town hall for the past year and found out they’d lost their home three weeks before rehearsals were set to begin.

Choir member Mike Harut said the group had been trying to get in contact with the council since December to confirm whether they were still able to use the venue.

“It would have been fine if they told us in November, it would have given us more time,” he said.

After performing at three citizenship ceremonies for Maribyrnong Council last year, Mr Harut said: “We thought we’d cemented our relationship with council”.

But he said the choir had since been in contact with Maribyrnong Council executive officer Vince Haining, who had agreed to let the choir remain in the church for its February rehearsals.

The council has also agreed to help them find a new base.

Choir conductor Bridget a’Beckett said it would be difficult to find a space as good as the church.

“It was the perfect space for us because it’s located right in Footscray, the acoustics are fantastic, (and) it’s a big, open and inviting space,” she said.

Ms a’Beckett said the choir had about 20 members but she hoped to increase it to 40.

She said the choir welcomed all new members, even those who could not sing, because the choir was about “having fun and belting out sometimes”.

Maribyrnong Council general manager of community wellbeing Arden Joseph said council officers were looking to use the former church hall as a dedicated art facility for a 12-month pilot.

Details: creativityaustralia.org.au

RED TAPE UPS PRICES

Maribyrnong Leader—24th January 2012

<http://maribyrnong-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/red-tape-ups-prices/>

The developer of Yarraville’s former Bradmill Textiles site has warned a lengthy approval process will see property prices skyrocket.

Five years after DeGroup submitted an application with Maribyrnong Council to rezone the site, it is still waiting on final approval.

A request to rezone the 26ha Francis St site from industrial to residential was first lodged with the council in January 2007.

In May 2010, DeGroup property development manager Paul DeLutis told the Leader red tape was halting development.

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He said then that demolition of the site would begin that year and major works on the 1000-home development would start in 2011.

But the rezoning was not approved by the planning minister until early 2011.

Now Mr DeLutis has warned the longer the process takes, the more expensive houses will be.

“There seems to be new issues coming up all the time. (The project is) in the hands of council planning officers, we can’t start until they give us the go-ahead,” Mr DeLutis said.

He said tendering works had started and demolition would take place in the first half of this year.

Deputy Mayor Michael Clarke said there was “absolutely no question” the project was going ahead.

“We are committed to seeing this site available for development as soon as humanly possible,” Mr Clarke said.

Maribyrnong Council general manager of sustainable development Nigel Higgins said a demolition permit for specific parts of the site was issued mid-2011.

He said the planning approval process was under way and a development report was under assessment. “With a redevelopment of an industrial site of this size, there are other reports that also need to be considered including traffic and transport, road design, amenity, heritage, sustainable development, urban design guidelines, affordable housing, services report, landscaping and site remediation,” Mr Higgins said.

It is anticipated a briefing will go before council in May.

‘WORSE TO COME’ AFTER TOYOTA, O-I JOB CUTS

Maribyrnong Weekly—25th January 2012

<http://www.maribyrnongweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/worse-to-come-after-toyota-oi-job-cuts/2433192.aspx>

Melbourne’s west should brace for more job cuts, a Liberal MP warned as Toyota announced 350 workers will be axed at Altona.

Western Metropolitan upper house MP Bernie Finn blamed the July 1 carbon tax and warned the west would be the worst hit.

O-I glass manufacturer has also announced 70 workers will go when one of its three furnaces at Spotswood closes on March 31.

State Williamstown MP Wade Noonan said it was “part of a worrying trend in Melbourne’s west, particularly in the manufacturing sector”. He said Victoria was bucking the national trend. “Victoria lost 2000 full-time jobs last month while 26,400 new full-time jobs were created across the rest of Australia.”

All Toyota’s cuts will be forced redundancies, covering blue and white collar workers at Hobsons Bay’s biggest employer. More than 3300 workers assembled at the plant on Monday in a company-wide briefing to hear Toyota Australia president Max Yasuda announce the cuts.

It is the latest blow to the car industry, which is increasingly reliant on government handouts for survival and caught with outmoded classes of cars as consumers increasingly opt for small cars and SUVs ahead of locally built, big sedans.

Hours before the 4pm announcement, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union was still in the dark over job-loss plans.

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Toyota had reneged on its commitment in the enterprise bargaining agreement signed last month to consult with the union ahead of any job cuts, said Ian Jones, federal secretary of the union's vehicle building division.

Despite the cuts, Toyota spokesman Glenn Campbell said the company was in for a busy year, with the introduction of the latest-generation petrol-electric Hybrid Camry in late February or March, a refreshed Aurion six-cylinder in April and a new engine plant to produce four cylinder engines due to be completed by year's end.

O-I Asia Pacific general manager Brian Slingsby said the glass furnace closure was due to deteriorating market conditions and weak consumer sentiment. "This has led to declining food and beverage sales across the country, particularly in the beer and wine segments."

Mr Finn said: "I was predicting this last year, unfortunately: that the carbon tax would have this impact, particularly in the western suburbs."

BOATBUILDERS HOPE THEY'LL GET A LIFELINE

Maribyrnong Weekly—25th January 2012

<http://www.maribyrnongweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/boatbuilders-hope-theyll-get-a-lifeline/2433191.aspx>

Victoria University's axed boatbuilding course at Newport could be revived at The Gordon TAFE in Geelong.

As reported by the Weekly, VU last year announced that it would not relocate the course to Williamstown despite receiving a \$3.4million Skills Victoria grant to do so. It blamed declining enrolments.

State Williamstown MP Wade Noonan cautiously welcomed news that Gordon was considering taking over the previously doomed program.

"I'm growing increasingly optimistic that Victoria's only boatbuilding program will stay afloat," Mr Noonan said.

"Gordon TAFE in Geelong seems very keen ... but has yet to make a final decision.

"This is very positive news for the boating industry who rely heavily on skilled workers. It's also positive for those young people who wish to pursue an apprenticeship in the boatbuilding industry.

"I find it quite ironic that the Victorian government is prepared to throw thousands of dollars at the Festival of Sales event in Williamstown, whilst at the same time allowing the tide to go out on a niche trade such as boatbuilding."

MARIBYRNONG COUNCIL DROPS OFF THE PELOTON IN SPENDING

Maribyrnong Weekly—25th January 2012

<http://www.maribyrnongweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/maribyrnong-council-drops-off-the-peloton-in-spending/2432338.aspx>

Maribyrnong Council has installed 22 bike parking hoops across Footscray but still has some way to go to catch up with other metropolitan councils' bicycle infrastructure spending. The hoops are at community centres, libraries and shops.

The council has also laid green road-surfacing on bike lanes at selected intersections along Hyde Street to make drivers aware they share the road with cyclists.

The council says it is spending \$100,000 on bike-related projects in this year's budget yet an analysis of its bike-related spending by Bicycle Network Victoria found Maribyrnong spent more than double than that in 2010-11: \$207,000, or \$2.85 per resident. It was one of only two "inner zone" councils to fall below the \$5-per-resident threshold.

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The Bicycle Expenditure Index (BiXE) ranks each council based on the total bike-related spending allocated in its annual budget divided by the number of residents in the municipality.

A benchmark of \$5 per resident is considered an amount that will adequately improve bike facilities and increase cycling rates.

The most recent Super Tuesday bike counts taken last year show that cycling numbers remain at historically high levels, despite a small drop last year. Cycle routes along main roads are the responsibility of VicRoads.

VicRoads Metro North West regional director Nial Finegan said it was consulting with councils in a review of the Principal Bicycle Network.

Mr Finegan said VicRoads was spending \$475,00 to improve the shared path at Footscray Road, under CityLink. Money will be used for widening and reconstructing parts of the existing path, line-marking, installing fencing and new pedestrian and cyclist operated signals, as well as improved street lighting.

Footscray Traders Association president Grant Miles said FTA supported efforts to improve access for cyclists but not at the expense of space for cars. He said there were examples where multi-level car parks could incorporate facilities for cyclists such as lock-up cages and showers

REPORT SCUTTLES TAKE-A-BREAK CASH

Maribyrnong Weekly—25th January 2012

<http://www.maribyrnongweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/report-scuttles-takeabreak-cash/2432334.aspx>

The final nail appears to have been hammered into the coffin of the Take-a-Break childcare program.

The program has been caught up in months of bickering between the state and federal governments over who should provide funding.

The state government released an independent report on Friday recommending the program be dissolved and its funding diverted.

The KPMG report found that the program's "social benefit exceeds social cost".

But it also cited problems with the program including trouble meeting its aim of short-term care at late notice.

The report suggests funding instead be shifted to the underused Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) subsidy, assisting parents with child care while undertaking education and training.

Children and Early Childhood Development Minister Wendy Lovell said the program was being inappropriately used to address gaps in general childcare services.

Jamila Rizvi, a spokeswoman for federal Early Childhood and Childcare Minister Kate Ellis, said the Baillieu government should stop misleading families and follow the lead of other states in committing funding for this type of child care.

"The federal government also funds an unlimited number of childcare places in Victoria in long day care, family day care and outside school-hours care so existing childcare services can expand and new services can be created," Ms Rizvi said.

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Opposition Children and Young Adults spokeswoman Jenny Mikakos said the report offered a flimsy excuse to refuse funding.

Ms Mikakos said the KPMG report also outlined strengths, including a safe and welcoming environment, health benefits and reduced social isolation. "For Ms Lovell to now rubbish this program when she has spent the past nine months calling on the Commonwealth to fund it smacks of hypocrisy."

REPORT SCUTTLES TAKE-A-BREAK CASH

Maribyrnong Weekly–25th January 2012

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WESTS AND RALEIGH ROADS TOWER BATTLE BACK ON HORIZON

Maribyrnong Weekly– 25th January 2012

<http://www.maribyrnongweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/wests-and-raleigh-roads-tower-battle-back-on-horizon/2432333.aspx>

A battle is looming over a plan to build more than 300 units on a busy corner in Maribyrnong less than two years after a similar plan was rejected.

The Weekly understands an application has been lodged with Maribyrnong Council to build 360 units on the corner of Wests and Raleigh roads in multi-storey buildings.

It's the second time the site has been the subject of a controversial development application.

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The council in early 2009 rejected an application by the Australian Affordable Housing Association (AAHA) for 271 apartments in three towers of up to eight storeys.

The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal upheld the decision in March 2010 following an appeal by AAHA.

Both times the application was rejected because it had only a third of the minimum car parks required.

The site is across the road from the old Maribyrnong Defence site, which will be turned into a 3000-home development from 2014.

Highpoint shopping centre is also undergoing a \$300million development that will expand it by 30,000 square metres to 156,000 square metres. Work started last year and is expected to be completed by mid-2013.

The area is already congested. A recent transport study showed 88percent of trips are made by car compared to 59percent for the rest of the municipality.

River ward's Cr Dina Lynch said roads were already close to maximum capacity and could not cope with further high-density development.

"The reason why high-density does not work across the road [in the Waterford Green estate] is because there's no transport to back it up.

"You've got a predominantly low-density area and you're going to put 18-storey buildings on a site that is pretty much closed off by two main roads. I don't see it as very sustainable." Cr Lynch said while there was a tram route nearby, trams were inadequate for most people's needs.

TOYOTA CUTS TO HIT WEST HARD

Maribyrnong Weekly– 24th January 2012

<http://www.maribyrnongweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/toyota-cuts-to-hit-west-hard/2430622.aspx>

Toyota workers' worst fears were realised yesterday when the company announced it would axe 350 jobs at its Altona North factory.

Toyota Australia president Max Yasuda said falling international demand for Australian-built Toyotas resulting from the high Australian dollar had triggered the decision.

The move sparked fears the job losses could snowball through to the parts supply industry, whose viability, and 40,000 jobs, depends on the number of cars made locally.

Toyota Australia typically exported up to 80,000 cars a year to the Middle East and other overseas markets, but Mr Yasuda said he was looking at little more than half that amount this year.

"We have strong sales forecasts for the domestic market, but the reduction in the export market is so huge we can't cover it with incremental sales in the domestic market," he said.

The company plans to make 95,000 cars this year, almost 40 per cent fewer than its production peak of 149,000 cars in 2007.

Federation of Automotive Products Manufacturers chief executive Richard Reilly said the number of cars produced in Australia was vital to employment levels in the components industry, comprising 180 to 200 companies.

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Yesterday, the more than 3300 workers assembled at the plant for a company-wide briefing heard that more than one in 10 jobs will be axed by mid-April. The job cuts will be in vehicle assembly and painting, as well as in management.

Mr Yasuda said the plan would make the company more competitive but would only see it through to the end of current model cycles, or about the next five years. All the jobs axed will be forced redundancies.

The federal secretary of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union's vehicle building division, Ian Jones, said Toyota had reneged on its commitment in the enterprise bargaining agreement signed last month to consult with the union ahead of any job cuts.

"It's extraordinary that there are procedures in the agreement laid out for how you handle these things, and Toyota is simply not following any of them," Mr Jones said.

Mr Yasuda said there would be a 10-week consultation period with the union.

The decision inflamed an already heated debate in Canberra over the level of government support for the struggling industry.

Manufacturing Minister Kim Carr said Toyota had looked at "every option" to avoid axing jobs. "But the harsh reality of the continuing strong Australian dollar means that Toyota's export markets are under severe pressure and they are struggling to sell enough cars to keep the Altona line at full capacity," he said.

In Sydney, Opposition Leader Tony Abbott said the news did not alter the Coalition's plan to cut \$500 million from the federal car grants scheme, despite reports the idea is unpopular with elements of the Liberal Party.

"Under our proposals, there will be \$1 billion in the automotive transformation scheme ... but we're not prepared to invest beyond the \$1 billion that we say should be in that fund," he said.

"I think that is a lot of money to help the car industry to flourish in this country."

Victorian Premier Ted Baillieu said the state government would "do what we can" to help manufacturers survive in Victoria, saying there was no doubt the dollar was putting stress on the industry.

Local state Labor MP Jill Hennessy said the Toyota decision could have a "devastating" effect on long-term employment prospects in the western suburbs.

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MELTON

MELTON SHIRE WILDLIFE TO BENEFIT FROM CLEAN-UP OF LITTER AND WASTE

Melton Leader–25th January 2012

<http://melton-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/melton-shire-wildlife-to-benefit-from-clean-up-of-litter-and-waste/>

Litter heroes are needed to help co-ordinate Melton Shire's Clean-Up Australia Day sites.

Residents, community groups and schools are being encouraged to identify clean-up sites such as parks or waterways.

Clean-Up Australia Day will be held on March 4, 9am-noon.

Melton Mayor Justin Mammarella said: "Clean-Up Australia Day is a wonderful opportunity to get together with family and neighbours and spend a few hours making our municipality cleaner and, not to mention safer, for local birds and wildlife.

"Melton Shire is home to some endangered wildlife, including the white-bellied sea eagle, platypus and frogs, which are impacted by litter and waste."

For information on becoming a site co-ordinator, phone council's environmental educator on 9747 7200 or register at cleanupaustaliaday.org.au/register.

MOORABOOL CHILDREN HOOKED ON READING

Melton Weekly–24th January 2012

<http://www.meltonweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/moorabool-children-hooked-on-reading/2430220.aspx>

Moorabool Council's literature and reading promotion program 'Let's Read' is being hailed a success.

About 1100 children across four age groups took part last year, with positive feedback received from parents.

Mayor Pat Griffin said parents had reported that their children's reading time had increased, "not only with the younger children for whom this program was designed, but also the increased involvement of other family members in the reading process".

He thanked Bacchus Marsh Rotary Club for its dedication to the project.

Its aim is to encourage parents to have fun reading to their children, to read with their child daily and encourage a love of books.

More details: Nichole Russell, 53667100.

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LOCALS VOW TO PRESERVE COTTAGE

Melton Weekly—24th January 2012

<http://www.meltonweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/locals-vow-to-preserve-cottage/2430219.aspx>

Restorers of a dilapidated cottage at Rowsley's Lady Northcote Camp have breathed a sigh of relief after Heritage Victoria awarded a \$95,000 grant to bring the former migrants' home back to its former glory.

As reported in the Weekly, 'Cottage 12' was granted heritage protection last July.

Now a popular YMCA recreation camp, the property was established in 1937 as a 'farm school' to provide orphaned or underprivileged British child migrants with an education in the ways of the land.

Only four of the original 12 cottages remain. Many were sold and then demolished over the years.

The group behind the heritage campaign, the Old Northcotonians Association, now plans to re-roof, replace gutters and external weatherboard and fix up ruined joinery.

The group is made up of locals who were raised at the farm and have maintained their connection to the site.

"[The grant] is mainly to make the house weatherproof so we can have it as a museum," president Mal Rogers said.

"It'll be up to scratch and watertight and weatherproof. We've already started getting some artefacts and bit by bit we'll get it done."

The group has plans to use the building as an education centre, with interactive displays and videos of its history.

"It's important to keep this piece of heritage alive as the shire grows," Mr Rogers said.

He said planning to preserve the historic building had taken a lot of hard work.

"It started with the Lady Northcote reunion five years ago and it's taken this long to get this stage ... we're a patient lot."

Western Victoria MP David O'Brien said the funding and volunteer assistance from Bacchus Marsh Lions Club and local tradesmen would help preserve the building for future generations.

For more details on the Old Northcotonians, phone 0427058714.

CALL TO GIVE HOMELESS YOUTHS A PLACE TO SHELTER

Melton Weekly—24th January 2012

<http://www.meltonweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/call-to-give-homeless-youths-a-place-to-shelter/2430218.aspx>

Jessica, not her real name, has only just turned 17 and is at a loss.

For months now she has floated from one friend's house to the next, "couch-hopping".

But it's wearing thin and her network is becoming smaller.

She's becoming anxious that soon she'll be out on the streets.

The Bacchus Marsh teenager had faced some pretty traumatic experiences at home with her parents.

She doesn't want to talk about it and when asked, her eyes glaze over and she bites down on her nails.

It's apparent that it would be unsafe for Jessica to return home.

LEADWEST'S NEWS SUMMARY FOR MELBOURNE'S WEST

27th January 2012



As Child and Family Services Moorabool manager Paul Huggett says: "We'd be concerned for her well-being".

Couch-hopping and youth homelessness is becoming a big problem in Moorabool, according to Bacchus Marsh youth resource officer, Senior Constable James Ross.

"The problem is that it's hidden. They're not under a bridge where everyone can see them," he said.

"They are disconnected and feel isolated. There is no sense of security for them, they feel very vulnerable.

"Often school is their only solid foundation so when they're on holidays they can fall into trouble, drug and alcohol abuse, and it can spiral."

Mr Huggett said Moorabool's lack of accommodation for young homeless people was becoming problematic.

CAFS has room for two young people in its youth safe house, but has been contacted by more than 15 'couch-hoppers' in the past three months.

"Some people have a bit of a confused definition of what homelessness is. These kids don't appear in the data," Mr Huggett said.

Without a rental history or a job, Jessica has found it impossible to find rental accommodation in Moorabool.

Mr Huggett said while CAFS had a program, Reconnect, to help children who have left home, many missed the safety nets.

CAFS desperately needed greater community involvement and it's calling for volunteers to house transient youths temporarily.

"We're not asking these people to be social workers, it's about getting a temporary roof over their heads.

"Young people, if they do settle, and are engaged in an educational program, with longer-term plans, have a greater chance of being able to secure their own accommodation options."

Mr Huggett said CAFS would be in "constant contact" to support hosts and the youths they housed.

MOTHERS NETWORK IS TOP COMMUNITY GROUP

Melton Weekly—24th January 2012

<http://www.meltonweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/mothers-network-is-top-community-group/2430210.aspx>

A Melton mothers' group that has supported countless local women has been recognised for its contribution to the community.

Mothers Network was selected as the shire's community organisation of the year.

Diggers Rest mother and network President Deborah Watson said members were excited with the win.

She said the group, which was formed in 2003, had about 300 members from across the municipality.

Mrs Watson said support groups were crucial for all mothers, who face many challenges after giving birth and returning home.

A council spokesman said the meetings were particularly important for isolated or overwhelmed mothers who did not have other support networks to help them through the various stages of motherhood.

LEADWEST'S NEWS SUMMARY FOR MELBOURNE'S WEST

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Activities run by the group include a kinder gym, playgroups and parenting information sessions.

MELTON'S TOP CITIZEN A DEVOTED HELPER

Melton Weekly—24th January 2012

<http://www.meltonweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/meltons-top-citizen-a-devoted-helper/2430209.aspx>

One of the first volunteers at Melton's visitor information centre, Edith Feth has been selected as the shire's citizen of the year.

Mrs Feth, who settled in Melton after migrating from Europe 29 years ago, has become one of the shire's most recognised and admired citizens.

After 10 years of working with Mrs Feth, visitor information centre co-ordinator Kay Haugh was full of praise for the 80-year old resident.

"Edith is devoted to her community ... her attitude is that you are never too old to learn," Ms Haugh said.

Mrs Feth volunteers up to 20 hours a week, splitting time between the information centre and a planned activity group for aged and disabled residents.

Ms Haugh said she once overheard Mrs Feth saying she loved working with the "oldies".

"On one occasion I pointed out to her that she was older than many of the participants ... she simply shrugged her shoulders," Ms Haugh said.

Mrs Feth's commitment to volunteering began in 1996 after her husband died of cancer. She was keen to give back to the community that she said had helped the couple so greatly during his illness.

The youth citizen of the year award will be presented to Marayne Muller.

Marayne, who volunteers her time across several local youth initiatives, is on Melton's Youth Advisory Committee.

She contributes to youth magazine No Restrictions and recently become involved as a leader at the new GAP youth facility.

This year's community achievement awards will be presented at the shire's Australia Day celebrations at the Willows Historical Park from 10.40am.

Mayor Justin Mammarella said the awards recognised the invaluable contribution made by individuals and groups over the past 12 months.

"We gratefully acknowledge the efforts of those who put their community and fellow residents first and, in doing so, make a real contribution to our quality of life."

MELTON TOPS IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Melton Leader—24th January 2012

<http://www.meltonweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/melton-tops-in-affordable-housing/2430207.aspx>

Melton remains in the enviable position of being Melbourne's most affordable suburb, according to new data released by the Real Estate Institute of Victoria.

That comes as no surprise to Melton Residents' Association president Peter Rowan.

"Young families can easily move out west. And people are starting to realise geographically what a good location Melton is," he said.

"It's 32 minutes travel to the city, a 35-minute train commute. We're well within striking distance of country, city and beach, depending on what you prefer."

LEADWEST'S NEWS SUMMARY FOR MELBOURNE'S WEST

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December quarter figures released last week showed Melton had a median house price of \$280,000, followed by Werribee (\$302,500) and Wyndham Vale (\$310,000).

House and unit prices decreased by 9.1 per cent in Taylors Hill, while Melton was up by 9.4 per cent.

But Ryder Real Estate's Jayson Ryder warned monthly or quarterly sales figures could be deceptive.

"All it takes is a few extra sales outside of the average price range for that area to swing the percentage in that direction, when in reality the average-priced homes in that area may have moved in the opposite direction.

"This is most definitely the case for the Melton area where home sales can range in price from \$200,000 up to \$750,000."

The new figures follow a report revealing that the number of unsold properties had skyrocketed across Melbourne.

Prosper Australia data shows 'stale stock' - unsold property on the market for more than 60 days - being just shy of 100,000 after a 6.2 per cent spike in November.

This follows a 20.4 per cent rise in September and an 18 per cent rise in August.

Prosper Australia campaign manager David Collyer said buyers who would normally enter the market were holding back.

"Real estate vendors are price takers, not price makers. Choosing to hold out for a better offer will prove to be a bad call."

'Stale stock hot spots' in December included Melton (2696 properties) and Caroline Springs (1399).

Mr Ryder said stale stock was caused by an increasing number of properties coming on to the market and slowing sales.

"This led, in 2011, to prices declining by 10 per cent in most price ranges."

GEORGE USES PULL TO HELP KIDS

Melton Weekly-24th January 2012

<http://www.meltonweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/george-uses-pull-to-help-kids/2430204.aspx>

Melton's George Bell and Ararat West Primary School pupils have collected more than 900 kilograms of ring pulls to raise money for paediatric cardiac research at the Royal Children's Hospital.

The recycling haul was the latest effort in a four-year partnership between Mr Bell, 85, the school and Melton residents.

Brooklyn's Sims Metal will melt the titanium ring pulls, after which a cheque to the value of the melted product will be presented to the hospital.

In previous years, Mr Bell's collection of ring pulls has been melted and made into prosthetic limbs for children in Third World countries.

U-TURN FOR HORROR HIGHWAY

Melton Weekly-24th January 2012

<http://www.meltonweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/uturn-for-horror-highway/2430203.aspx>

The Western Highway to Melton has been named one of Victoria's most dangerous roads, but police and road users don't necessarily agree.

The Australian Road Assessment Program report, released last week, found several sections of the Western Highway were among the states riskiest based on traffic, death and serious injury data.

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RACV general manager of public policy Brian Negus said the three worst sections of Victoria's highways accounted for just 3 per cent of the road network but 9 per cent of road deaths.

Joining the Western Highway in the top three were the Princes Highway (Strzelecki Highway to Traralgon) and Princes Highway East (Rosedale to Sale).

The Western Highway was upgraded with the construction of the Deer Park bypass in April 2009 and the RACV said it expected this would result in improved performance in the next analysis.

Melton's Leading Senior Constable Allan Edwards said he didn't think the road was "all that bad. It has been improved with wire rope barriers ... historically, it may have accounted for many fatalities, but not anymore".

Senior Constable Edwards said most collisions occurred around Caroline Springs Boulevard and the Western Highway's problems were worse before the bypass was built.

Melton Council's acting general manager, Les Stokes, said it had been actively advocating for safety improvements on the highway through VicRoads and the Western Highway Action Committee.

"Over time this work has achieved significant improvements such as the Deer Park bypass, Anthonys Cutting realignment, Leakes Road interchange and numerous crash barrier installations between Melton and Caroline Springs," he said.

Melton Residents' Association president Peter Rowan said the Anthonys Cutting project had made the highway a safer road.

Both Mr Rowan and local road safety campaigner Narelle Bowden believed the Melton Highway to be more of a concern.

As reported by the Weekly, Ms Bowden has been calling for the duplication of Melton Highway since the death of a relative.

READY FOR THE WORST IN MOORABOOL

Melton Leader—24th January 2012

<http://melton-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/ready-for-the-worst-in-moorabool/>

Moorabool Council says it is ready to deal with any emergencies this year.

Increased staff training in emergency scenarios and a new control centre at Ballan have put the shire on a firm footing, said Mayor Pat Griffin.

Council's Emergency Management Committee has established a Municipal Emergency Control Centre at the Ballan Council Chambers, which Cr Griffin said had been ready to go since December.

In an emergency, the control centre will be used by police, the CFA, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, the Red Cross, the Department of Human Services and Ambulance Victoria.

"At this time of the year the threat of bushfire is most prominent in the minds of residents, but this control centre is prepared for most emergency situations, including flooding," he said.

Cr Griffin said the Emergency Management Committee would be in a state of readiness all year, not just for the summer.

Bacchus Marsh police Sen-Sergeant and municipal emergency response co-ordinator John Gibson said residents still needed their own emergency plans and should not rely on the new control centre.

"A well-prepared emergency plan for your own property is absolutely necessary and all residents should know what to do," he said.

LEADWEST'S NEWS SUMMARY FOR MELBOURNE'S WEST

27th January 2012



Resources to help residents develop a fire plan can be found on the CFA website.

Fire Ready Kits are also available at Moorabool Council offices, including audio kits for residents who would have difficulty using a printed kit.

BLUE-GREEN ALGAE ALERT FOR MOORABOOL

Melton Leader—24th January 2012

<http://melton-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/blue-green-algae-alert-for-moorabool/>

The Department of Primary Industries has released information for Moorabool landholders about increased blue-green algae blooms.

The information comes after a number of calls about algae growing in Moorabool farm dams.

The algae blooms can appear overnight and rise to the top of a dam.

They appear like a layer of vivid green, acrylic paint-like scum on the water surface, leaving blue marks on the dam edges.

Some algae species produce toxins that can cause health issues for humans and animals that drink or come into contact with the water.

While livestock deaths are rare, poisoning can cause loss of appetite and lower milk yield.

Melbourne Water advised people to avoid contact with Navan Park Lake in Melton West after the detection of blue-green algae.

The DPI states while not all blue-green algae varieties are toxic, they should be treated as toxic until the water has been tested.

The department recommends isolating people and livestock from the water, ensuring that stock have alternate water supplies, collecting samples and sending them for testing.

People are also encouraged to check for signs of blue-green algae at dawn or dusk, as the scum may disappear during the day.

They should also check dams and troughs two to three times a week in hot weather, not use contaminated water on crops, and help control algae by controlling soil erosion and minimising fertiliser run-off.

BIG FLOW AIDS RIVER LIFE IN MOORABOOL

Melton Leader—24th January 2012

<http://melton-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/big-flow-aids-river-life-in-moorabool/>

The Moorabool River will be boosted by the release of 40 million litres of water from Lal Lal Reservoir this week to flush out sediment and increase habitat pools for fish.

The release, over 10 days from yesterday (January 23), is one of three planned this summer and coincides with Barwon Water's release of 27 million litres of water a day over summer.

Corangamite Catchment Management Authority will work with Central Highlands Water and Barwon Water to co-ordinate the water release.

River health executive manager Trent Wallis said up to 31 million litres a day was expected to flush the river system of organic matter and sediment.

"In drought years, environmental flows have been used to avoid catastrophic events such as major fish kills and protect drought refuge such as deep pools, where plants and animals can survive when conditions improve," Mr Wallis said.

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“But due to consecutive winters with improved rainfall, the focus is now to enhance the environmental benefits provided by the wetter conditions, and restore key environmental values, such as fish breeding, that was not possible to maintain in the drier periods.”

People for A Living Moorabool co-ordinator Cameron Steele said co-operation between the water authorities meant a larger flow would reach lower sections of the river, flushing the river out to prevent algal blooms and helping fish migration and breeding.

Mr Steele said while the environmental release was welcome, the river needed more to reduce the stress placed on it.

“Even though we’ve had a lot of rain, the river hasn’t had the benefit of it because it has been filling up the dams,” he said.

“It really should be regarded as a first step.”

MOORABOOL SHIRE'S POPULARITY SOARS

Melton Leader–23rd January 2012

<http://melton-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/moorabool-shires-popularity-soars/>

Moorabool’s country charm is attracting visitors in their droves.

In December 2011, 1568 people visited the Bacchus Marsh Visitor Information Centre up 31 per cent from the year before.

Moorabool Council said annual figures showed an 8 per cent increase on 2010 with more than 14,000 people seeking information from the centre last year. Bacchus Marsh Tourism Association president David Durham said tourists were flocking to the shire for a “taste of the country”.

“We traditionally see a spike in visitors during the lead up to Christmas on the back of the growing success of the annual Strawberries and Cherries Festival in November,” he said.

He said drawcards in the region included the Avenue of Honour, the shire’s heritage, local wine and produce.

“Lerderberg Gorge is a popular drawcard,” he said, adding there was also “an increasing awareness of our great local cafes”.

Mr Durham said a collective effort was needed to expand on the shire’s tourism success.

“It’s all about working together to achieve mutual success and to deliver great customer service to our visitors,” he said.

“There is also the opportunity to encourage more shire residents to come out and experience our region through the eyes of a tourist, especially when they have friends and family visiting from other regions.

“We need to take what we have achieved during 2011 and grow on that.”

MOORABOOL VISITORS CENTRE GETS NEW BOSS

Melton Leader–23rd January 2012

<http://melton-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/moorabool-visitors-centre-gets-new-boss/>

Moorabool has a new head of tourism bringing a wealth of international experience into the shire.

Melissa Fletcher (pictured) has taken on the role as Moorabool Council’s tourism officer and will be responsible for managing the visitor information centre.

She comes highly qualified, with a Bachelor of Management majoring in tourism plus a wealth of industry experience.

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Ms Fletcher also has a background working with international companies on large-scale marketing campaigns, and working with volunteers and customer service teams.

MOONEE VALLEY

LABOUR DEPUTY LEADER ROB HULLS RESIGNS

Moonee Valley Leader – 26th January 2012

<http://moonee-valley-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/labour-deputy-leader-rob-hulls-resigns/>

Labor MP Rob Hulls has announced his resignation.

Speaking to the Moonee Valley Leader, the Niddrie state MP and deputy Labor leader said a health scare last year had prompted the decision.

“I’ve had a great journey, but six months ago I had a very serious health scare and since then I’ve been reassessing my life.”

“I made the decision I wouldn’t run in the election in 2014.

“The best thing I can do for the party and also for the people of Niddrie is to leave the parliament now having made the decision.

“It will give the party the chance to renew and hopefully, they can get somebody new and someone young into the seat of Niddrie.”

Mr Hulls said he wanted to spend more time with his family, which includes his four children Kate, 20, Jack, 8, Nick, 6, and Tom, 4.

Young Nick is starting his first day of prep next week at St Monica’s Primary School in Essendon – something Mr Hulls said he was looking forward to.

A by-election will be held in Niddrie, which is considered a safe Labor seat.

Mr Hulls was elected to parliament in 1994. In 1999, with the election of the Bracks Labor Government, he was appointed Attorney-General.

In 2007, he was appointed Deputy Premier, a post he held until the defeat of Brumby Labor Government last year.

During Labor’s period in office, he also held the Manufacturing Industry, Racing, WorkCover, Planning and Industrial Relations portfolios.

MARIBYRNONG BRIDGE STEP CLOSER

Moonee Valley Leader – 26th January 2012

<http://moonee-valley-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/maribyrnong-bridge-step-closer/>

The Maribyrnong River Bridge in Ascot Vale is one step closer to an upgrade after being shortlisted for federal funding.

As reported last week, a new bridge to improve pedestrian safety is part of \$16.4 million in works proposed along the Maribyrnong River.

Moonee Valley Council submitted a funding application through the Federal Government’s Regional Development Australia Fund.

The proposal includes a cantilever bridge, which will be built along the existing bridge to separate the walking and cycling path from the road.

The Federal Government is expected to make a decision on successful projects from May.

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KITTY CLAWS KEEPS NIGHT-TIME STREETS IN MOONEE VALLEY CLEAR

Moonee Valley Leader– 25th January 2012

<http://moonee-valley-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/kitty-claws-keeps-night-time-streets-in-moonee-valley-clear/>

It seems late nights are a luxury of the past for cats in Moonee Valley, thanks to a curfew introduced last year.

No felines have been caught wandering the streets since the curfew started last July.

All cats are required to stay at home between sunset and sunrise.

The plan was introduced as part of council's domestic animal management plan.

Mayor Jim Cusack said no cats had been caught breaching the curfew in its first six months.

But two residents have been warned after reports about their wandering cats.

Lort Smith Animal Hospital chief executive Liz Walker said the curfew addressed only one part of a wider cat problem.

She said cats would ideally be kept in enclosures, to keep them safe and to prevent them harming native wildlife.

But she applauded the council for taking the first step.

Cr Cusack said owners of cats that breach the curfew are warned.

"If the cat breaks curfew again, the owner will be fined \$122," he said.

Moonee Valley has 3663 registered cats.

MURPHY'S LORE: ABOUT FACE FOR CITY IMAGE

Moonee Valley Weekly– 24th January 2012

<http://www.mooneevalleyweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/murphys-lore-about-face-for-city-image/2429336.aspx>

Moonee Valley is world class, says our council, with its decision to brand and promote the city as an ideal place to live, work, invest and visit under the slogan 'world class locally'.

Creating a brand for the city is an obvious winner but only if it's vigorously promoted over a sustained period.

Historically, our council gets pumped up about branding, but the slogans get little airplay after a couple of years.

We were excited about 'Rich in diversity and culture' for new branding a decade ago.

The new branding reflects ours as a city which is proud, harmonious, welcoming, diverse and vibrant.

But this time can we make more effective and wider use of the branding?

The logo ought to be on council vehicles and stationery, publications, emails, Facebook, the website and the customer service centre.

After three months, the new branding is one of the city's best-kept secrets.

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PRIDE, ARCHICENTRE COME BEFORE A FALL

Moonee Valley Weekly– 24th January 2012

<http://www.mooneevalleyweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/pride-archicentre-come-before-a-fall/2429333.aspx>

Moonee Valley residents have been encouraged to take advantage of a new initiative aimed at preventing falls in the home by people with a disability and older residents.

Free home safety inspections are available for aged pensioners, people with a disability and carers to help identify and address potential hazards that may lead to a fall.

The inspections are conducted by Archicentre, the building advisory service of the Australian Institute of Architects, and are funded by the state government through the Department of Human Services.

Of the 952 Moonee Valley houses inspected by Archicentre to date, 37 per cent had significant trip or slip hazards.

Moonee Valley's community services and partnerships councillor, Miriam Gillis, urged those at risk to take advantage of the free offer.

"Sadly, falls are the leading cause of injury-related deaths and hospital admissions in older people, and most of the falls occur in the home," Cr Gillis said.

"Not only that, but falling in your home can be traumatic both physically and mentally."

The council also provides assistance in general home maintenance and minor repairs for frail aged residents and residents with a disability.

For more information on the home maintenance program, call 9243 8806 or click [here](#).

To register for the state government's free home safety inspection, call 1300 136 513

MOONEE VALLEY WORKER NAMED AN ENVOY

Moonee Valley Weekly– 24th January 2012

<http://www.mooneevalleyweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/moonee-valley-worker-named-an-envoy/2429331.aspx>

Well known for his community work in Moonee Valley, youth worker Ahmed Dini has been named as one of 40 People of Australia ambassadors.

Mr Dini has built a strong reputation for his ability to build bridges between different communities and encourage participation in community events and sport by young African-Australians in Moonee Valley.

At a ceremony on Wednesday night, he will also find out if he has won the Australian Local Hero Award to be announced in Canberra.

Mr Dini said his ambassadorial role was an exciting prospect.

"Basically I'll find out more about what it involves in Canberra on February 27, but I'll be going around Melbourne to various events and speaking on behalf of the Australian Multicultural Council.

"It's a great honour."

Maribyrnong MP Bill Shorten said Mr Dini had been recognised for the impact he was having on people's lives.

"Despite his young age, Mr Dini is a prominent leader in Australia's Somali community and is playing a crucial role in supporting migrant families and advocating for his community.

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"Good work deserves to be championed and I am pleased that Ahmed Dini has been recognised on a national level."

The Ambassador program is a key initiative of the federal government's multicultural policy.

Mr Dini will be asked to provide advice to the government and the Australian Multicultural Council.

His contribution will help strengthen the government's multicultural policies.

The 2012 ambassadors' term starts this week and ends on December 30.

NEW AUSSIES CAN ALSO ENROL TO VOTE

Moonee Valley Weekly– 24th January 2012

<http://www.mooneevalleyweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/new-aussies-can-also-enrol-to-vote/2429330.aspx>

Along with the hundreds of barbecues taking place across the municipality for Australia Day this Thursday, Moonee Valley Council will host a citizenship ceremony for new residents to be sworn in as 'Aussies'.

The ceremony will be at the Moonee Ponds Clocktower Centre, with family and friends of those being sworn in welcome to attend.

The Australian Electoral Commission is also taking the opportunity this Australia Day to encourage Australia's new citizens to enrol to vote.

AEC Maribyrnong division manager Betty Brown said it was 100 years ago that the federal electoral system was changed so that all citizens were obliged to enrol to vote - and 50 years since indigenous Australians gained the right to vote.

"In this anniversary year, it is especially important that our newest citizens take up an important privilege of citizenship by enrolling to vote at their very first opportunity."

AEC staff will be on hand at citizenship ceremonies to help new citizens enrol.

The Clocktower Centre is at 750 Mt Alexander Road, Moonee Ponds.

VICTORIA MCCANN: STRATHMORE STUDENT PUSHES YOUTH SUMMIT'

Moonee Valley Weekly– 24th January 2012

<http://www.mooneevalleyweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/victoria-mccann-strathmore-student-pushes-youth-summit/2429329.aspx>

For all her youth, Moonee Ponds resident Victoria McCann has a wise head on her shoulders.

At 17, and about to enter her final year of school at Strathmore Secondary College, Victoria could be forgiven for being solely dedicated to her studies and social life.

Instead, while preparing for the school year, she's also actively recruiting and promoting a Moonee Valley 'youth summit' to be held in April.

The goal of the summit is simply to make Moonee Valley a better place for its younger citizens.

Victoria says the summit will no doubt discuss "big-picture issues" like drugs, alcohol and mental health, but it would also be a chance to be specific about the local area.

This area has been great to me growing up, so I think it's good to give back [to the community] and keep working to make it a great place for young people."

Victoria also volunteers as the chair of the Youth Advisory Forum, which regularly consults the council on matters concerning young people.

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She hopes people across the municipality will help organise and run the first Moonee Valley youth summit.

Moonee Valley mayor Jim Cusack said it was important for all citizens to have a voice.

"The youth summit will be a great platform for young people to have an input on matters directly relevant to them.

"I particularly value the fact that young people are in charge of organising and running the summit - they will set the agenda."

To join the organising committee, click [here](#) or email youth@mvcc.vic.gov.au

Applications are due by February 3.

MOONEE PONDS RESIDENTS IN STINK OVER SEWER

Moonee Valley Weekly— 24th January 2012

<http://www.mooneevalleyweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/moonee-ponds-residents-in-stink-over-sewer/2429327.aspx>

Moonee Ponds residents fed up with continued sewage and drainage problems are calling on City West Water to take action and upgrade local infrastructure.

Residents living in the area south of the racecourse on Dean, Stuart and Vine Streets have spoken out to the Weekly in the hope it will prompt action.

A dangerously sinking sewage pit, backflow problems, road surfaces being damaged from drainage leaks and even raw sewage flooding onto streets have been reported by residents.

Stuart Street resident Judy Brown said the drainage pit in the lane behind her house was a safety issue.

"City West Water laid some bitumen on it 12-18 months ago and it's sinking into an abyss again.

"One day someone will disappear in it with their car; there's something drastically wrong going on.

"One day this whole sewer is going to collapse."

Another Vine Street resident said he had backflow issues and replaced his washing machine thinking it was to blame for dirty water getting into their machine, but the problem continued.

The resident, Alex, said he contacted Moonee Valley Council, which referred him to City West Water.

"I don't know whether it's the increased population or more houses being built, but the old system isn't coping.

A Dean Street resident who wanted her name withheld, said she also had backflow issues that resulted in washing never cleaning properly.

She said independent plumbers had inspected her domestic plumbing and found no problem.

The resident believes that although an upgrade to local infrastructure is urgently needed, nothing will be done until development plans at Moonee Valley racecourse are confirmed.

An infrastructure report released by the Moonee Valley Racing Club in October includes a paragraph stating the sewerage infrastructure in Dean Street is "at full capacity".

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City West Water managing director Anne Barker City said the utility had received one customer complaint regarding the sewerage system in the Dean Street, Moonee Ponds area.

As a result, in early January, response crews had inspected the sewerage pipes on the property using TV cameras, which did not reveal any problems or blockages with the sewers.

She said City West Water would continue to monitor the performance of the system in the area to ensure it performed as expected.

"While there are no current plans to upgrade the sewers in the area, City West Water has a dedicated area of the business that oversees urban developments in our service area."

NATURE STRIPS DILEMMA IN MOONEE VALLEY

Moonee Valley Leader— 24th January 2012

<http://moonee-valley-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/nature-strips-dilemma-in-moonee-valley/>

About \$90,000 is spent each year repairing nature strips damaged by cars parked illegally in residential streets.

Moonee Valley Council received about 240 complaints about nature strip damage last year and has pledged an awareness campaign to stamp out the practice.

Mayor Jim Cusack said parking on nature strips was against road rules and caused major damage above and below the ground.

"Studies also show that cars parked on nature strips or footpaths can pose increased safety risks for pedestrians as they are less visible to oncoming cars," Cr Cusack said.

The council has investigated 147 streets where there have been complaints about them being too narrow to park safely on both sides, prompting drivers to park on the grass.

About 60 per cent of the streets have been deemed wide enough, but the council is exploring further options on the remaining 40 per cent.

The council transport and traffic spokeswoman Cr Narelle Sharpe said it would be a difficult issue to address with residents, but necessary.

Cr Sharpe said the council was looking into the problem "street-by-street" as part of the Municipal Parking Strategy.

"There're so many streets (where) residents park on the street when they have perfectly good driveways that they don't use," she said.

Cr Sharpe said they were forced to act because cars were doing a lot of damage to nature strips

Options on how to fix the problem streets include:

Line-marking to make available parking clearer.

Making parking only available on one side of the street.

Removing nature strips and turning part of the road into on-street parking.

Changing nature strips into parking would be done at a cost to residents, but would happen only if most households on a street agreed to it.

Residents on the problem streets will be contacted over time with ways to address the issue.

LEADWEST'S NEWS SUMMARY FOR MELBOURNE'S WEST

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VCAT CASES JUMP IN MOONEE VALLEY

Moonee Valley Leader— 23rd January 2012

<http://moonee-valley-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/your-say-vcat-cases-jump-in-moonee-valley/>

The number of Moonee Valley planning applications referred to the state's planning tribunal jumped 30 per cent in the past 12 months, council data reveals.

A total of 98 cases were taken to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal in 2011 as the planning system struggles under the weight of increasingly complex proposals.

Moonee Valley Mayor Jim Cusack said the council assessed more planning applications than ever before in 2011, with a total of 1059 received.

"Many of these applications are more complex than previously experienced so they attracted many more objectors," Cr Cusack said.

The council was taken to VCAT by applicants 77 times and objectors 21 times.

Most cases involved changes to permit conditions, developers wanting VCAT to intervene or the council not making a decision in the required time.

Russell Hocking, a Moonee Ponds town planner with Cityshire Planning, said one of the greatest difficulties facing developers was council delay.

Last year, 18 cases went to VCAT because Moonee Valley Council failed to make a decision within the prescribed 60 days.

"There is not one developer I know who prefers to go to VCAT on a failure appeal," Mr Hocking said.

"They'd much rather an efficient, effective co-operative system.

"When a business person is paying a fee to a council to do that, I can't see why it's so unreasonable for the council to actually do it."

But Cr Cusack said the timeframe was not long enough to assess the rising number of complicated applications.

University of Melbourne urban planning lecturer Alan March said an increase in planning appeals was expected for any council under development pressure.

Dr March said while going to VCAT could be a burden for all parties, the tribunal served as an important check and balance.

The figures reveal that VCAT upheld the council's decision in 57 cases and six were withdrawn by the applicant.

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WYNDHAM

POTSHOTS FIRED AT HOUSING PLANS

Wyndham Weekly– 25th January 2012

<http://www.wyndhamweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/potshots-fired-at-housing-plans/2432163.aspx>

Wyndham councillors have launched a scathing attack on new state government plans to develop Point Cook West.

Victoria's Growth Areas Authority has released a proposal to build more than 2000 homes in a 145-hectare parcel of land between Hacketts Lane and the Princes Freeway, north of Sneydes Road.

The plans include a diamond interchange connecting Sneydes Road to the freeway and a bridge extension of Dunnings Road to cater for extra traffic in and out of Point Cook.

The land, owned by the Department of Primary Industries, was deemed surplus and has been referred to the Treasury and Finance Department to co-ordinate a public sale, government spokeswoman Bianca Lovrecic said.

But Truganina ward's Cr Glenn Goodfellow said a closer look of the plans revealed no money had been earmarked for the \$80million roadworks.

"The government says the new road links will reduce congestion through Point Cook and provide an alternative to Forsyths Road, but there's no funding for VicRoads to construct the diamond interchange," he said.

"So here we have a road in a plan, but guess what? It's a road to nowhere."

Cr Goodfellow said the plans listed the Sneydes Road diamond interchange and the Dunnings Road extension as "short-medium term" projects, which could be up to 15 years away.

He expects traffic congestion to worsen and place an extra strain on Point Cook's already stretched infrastructure and services.

"How can better transport choices be met if they weren't there in the first place? We'll just be adding to the issues residents are already facing in the area."

Cr John Menegazzo said the plans were "unacceptable" in their current format.

"Without funding [for the road upgrades], traffic would be disastrous and even the development industry would be hesitant at this time.

"We need to send a clear message to Spring Street that this is unacceptable."

Committee for Wyndham executive director Nik Tsardakis commended the proposal, saying it would improve Point Cook's links with central Werribee and the freeway. But he added it was essential for the links to be built first.

"We'd like to think the road infrastructure that's needed will be started simultaneously to the commencement of the 2000 new houses."

Western Metropolitan MP Andrew Elsbury said the plans paved the way for Point Cook's continuing growth. "On that eastern side of the freeway, it will provide people with housing across the whole region, keeping house prices as low as possible."

Point Cook Action Group member Loren Bartley said she was disappointed with plans for two new football ovals, and instead would be calling for a pool and recreation facility in the new precinct.

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"This extra growth of Point Cook warrants a facility set up on this side of the freeway."

An information session on the project will be held at 5pm on January 31 at the Point Cook Learning Centre.

Residents are being invited to make submissions to the plans by February 16. More details: gaa.vic.gov.au

RENTAL REJECTION HITS WYNDHAM FAMILIES ON WELFARE

Wyndham Weekly— 25th January 2012

<http://www.wyndhamweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/rental-rejection-hits-wyndham-families-on-welfare/2432149.aspx>

Scores of single parents on welfare are being shut out of private rental homes in Wyndham despite the area's above-average vacancy rate.

Support groups say landlords and estate agents are reluctant to lease to single parents with children, forcing many to couch surf or take shelter in emergency accommodation.

The comments come as new data reveals Werribee's private rental market has a 10.2per cent vacancy rate, soaring above the metropolitan rate of 3.4per cent.

SQM Research figures showed vacancies were higher across other parts of Wyndham, reaching 14.4per cent in Hoppers Crossing and 15.4per cent in Wyndham Vale.

UnitingCare Werribee Support and Housing chief executive Carol Muir said the group struggled to link welfare-supported families with rental homes.

"There are some rentals that sit there advertised for weeks, and we have clients who say they've applied for the same place three or four times. It's clear that real estate agents are looking unfavourably upon single parents on welfare, possibly

because they're perceived as financially unstable and their children may damage the property."

Single parenting payments can be up to \$641.50 a fortnight. Payments for each child can be between \$68 and \$160, depending on age. According to RP Data, the median house rent in Werribee is \$270 a week.

A 12-month program had been successful in securing private rentals for many single-parent families who were living on the edge of homelessness, she said. Out of 50 applicants, UnitingCare housed 34 families, whose sole income was Centrelink's Newstart benefits and parenting payments.

Housing support worker Suzanna Lopez urged Wyndham landlords to show more compassion.

Real Estate Institute of Victoria spokesman Robert Larocca said it was illegal to discriminate on details about family, but the choice of tenant rested with the owner.

Wyndham City Salvation Army's Sue Brookshaw said the situation was worsened by a chronic shortage of public housing in the area.

Housing Minister Wendy Lovell said 90 new public houses had been acquired in Wyndham since mid-2009 through federal and state funding.

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DUMPED RUBBISH 'RUINING' WERRIBEE STREET IMAGE

Wyndham Weekly– 25th January 2012

<http://www.wyndhamweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/dumped-rubbish-ruining-werribee-street-image/2432148.aspx>

Werribee's Ray King is taking a stand against rubbish being dumped illegally.

The Greaves Street resident looked out his front window last Wednesday to find someone had dumped bags of rubbish on the median strip in his street.

He's now calling on Wyndham residents to look out for people who dump their rubbish, believing the practice has got to stop.

"It is not a nice look. It's terrible. The majority of people in my street are very house proud and spend a lot of time making their homes and gardens look nice. This dumping of rubbish has got to be stopped," Mr King said.

His call for action comes as Wyndham Council continues a campaign against illegal dumping.

The council is asking residents to report people who leave household waste, old furniture and other unwanted items on nature strips, vacant land and country roads.

It estimates the cost of cleaning up the rubbish exceeds \$1million each year.

Anyone found dumping rubbish can be fined up to \$4000 and prosecuted by police, Environment Protection Authority or the council.

Residents wanting to dispose of rubbish are being asked to use two free tip vouchers they receive with their rates notices each year and the council's two pre-booked hard and green waste collections each financial year.

WYNDHAM BUCKS HOUSING TREND

Wyndham Weekly– 25th January 2012

<http://www.wyndhamweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/wyndham-bucks-housing-trend/2432145.aspx>

House prices in most Wyndham suburbs dropped by an average of 5per cent between September and December last year.

The latest Real Estate Institute of Victoria figures show a 1.9per cent rise in median house prices across the state in the December quarter.

Wyndham's worst-performing suburb was Wyndham Vale, which recorded a 9per cent fall, bringing the median price down to \$310,000.

Next was Truganina at \$338,750 (down 5.9per cent) and Tarneit, which recorded a 4.9per cent drop to \$350,000.

In Point Cook, prices slid by 3.8per cent, from \$487,500 to \$469,000, while Williams Landing had a decline of 3per cent to \$418,000.

Professionals Triwest Real Estate principal, Paul Nuske, said the figures showed that 2011 was not a great year to sell houses.

He said people who had bought their homes three years ago, at the height of the property boom, would have experienced a drop in prices if they'd tried to sell them.

"Prices rose quite quickly when the market was at its height and now they are starting to drop back.

"Demand is also dropping away and more property is coming on the market, giving buyers more choice."

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Point Cook Real Estate sales manager Peter Gaidzkar said the price fall was good news for first-home buyers. In the past 12 months, prices have come off in the area so there are great buying options for first-home buyers."

Mr Gaidzkar said that while prices were lower in Williams Landing and Truganina, most first-home buyers were choosing to build in Point Cook because of better infrastructure.

The REIV figures also showed that Point Cook had the highest number of house sales in Victoria during the December quarter.

Mr Gaidzkar said this was likely because people who bought their first home five years ago were looking to upgrade and had moved into larger homes in the area.

HAPPY, HAPPY HIPPOS

Wyndham Weekly– 25th January 2012

<http://www.wyndhamweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/happy-happy-hippos/2432143.aspx>

Behind the scenes in the hippo enclosure at Werribee Open Range Zoo, Tom, 12, has learnt about the hard slog of the life of a zookeeper.

This month, pupils from years 7-10 can join the zoo's hands-on Keeper for a Day program. They discover all the smells, sweat and fun of duties ranging from food preparation to animal health checks.

The pupils go on a safari tour of the zoo and can speak with zookeepers about their jobs and experiences.

WHERE THE HANDY BLOKES ASSEMBLE

Wyndham Weekly– 25th January 2012

<http://www.wyndhamweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/where-the-handy-blokes-assemble/2432142.aspx>

Everything old is new again when the members of Werribee's Heathdale and Neighbours Community Shed have finished working on them.

Members are taking part in New Again, a Sustainability Victoria project that sources recyclable materials from tips and turns them into new items.

Shed project co-ordinator Richard Lewczuk said members had collected pieces such as metal, wood, springs and exhausts from Wyndham's tip and made use of parts businesses were throwing out.

The materials are then turned into garden furniture and ornaments.

"It is a great way to recycle things," Mr Lewczuk said.

"Everything we make is donated to people who are less fortunate."

The shed's members have made garden chairs, windmills and rocking horses.

They have also begun restoring old bicycles to be donated to families who would otherwise not be able to afford new bikes.

Mr Lewczuk said about 25 men were taking part in the project.

He said they seemed to enjoy being able to produce items for the public and enjoyed feeling like they were doing something for the community.

The social activities at the shed and having something to fill their day with was also attractive to a lot of members, Mr Lewczuk said.

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The shed is also considering running woodwork, bike maintenance, welding and maintenance workshops as another way to give back to the community.

Anyone interested in joining the shed or being part of its projects should phone 87426448 or email richard@heathdale.com.au

AMBASSADORS TO SPREAD THE WORD

Wyndham Weekly– 25th January 2012

<http://www.wyndhamweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/ambassadors-to-spread-the-word/2432141.aspx>

Three Wyndham residents have been chosen as People of Australia ambassadors, giving them the chance to advise the government on its multicultural policies.

Jennie Barrera, Elleni Bereded-Samuel and Melissa Barbieri were among 40 people appointed to the 12-month position by Lalor MP and Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Immigration and Multicultural Affairs parliamentary secretary Kate Lundy last week.

The government hopes the program will give the ambassadors a platform to promote their good work and share their ideas and initiatives to inspire others.

Mrs Barrera was recognised for her work as chief executive of the Wyndham Community and Education Centre and her efforts with the Wyndham Humanitarian Network and Wyndham Interfaith Network.

Mrs Barrera has worked with refugee and migrant groups for about 30 years. She has been involved in many programs designed to make migrants feel part of the community.

"I would love to be able to showcase what's happening here in Wyndham in terms of resettling refugees and humanitarian migrants. I think what's happening in our city is good practice," Mrs Barrera said.

"We make sure people participate. We run a lot of events around Harmony Day and Cultural Diversity Week so the community can get together and learn from each other."

Mrs Bereded-Samuel was recognised for her work to strengthen education, training and employment opportunities for migrants.

She is a community engagement advisor and co-ordinator at Victoria University, Western Health director, SBS director, chair of the cultural diversity and community advisory committee and has spoken about multiculturalism in Australia at the United Nations.

"I can help people with my experience of coming to a new country [from Ethiopia] and not having anything. I have navigated my way around and built up networks," she said.

Ms Barbieri was selected after working with the Sport Australia Hall of Fame to find ways to promote diversity of gender and ethnicity in the community. As captain of the Australian women's soccer team, she attended a captains' forum to help develop national responses to issues facing Australian sport and the wider community.

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STRAIN TELLS ON MERCY HOSPITAL BEDS

Wyndham Weekly– 25th January 2012

<http://www.wyndhamweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/strain-tells-on-mercy-hospital-beds/2432139.aspx>

A major investment in mental health services is needed in Wyndham, according to local experts.

Amid concern about the stretched capacity of Werribee Mercy Hospital's 29-bed mental health unit, and the strain on the area's general practices taking the load, Tarneit MP Tim Pallas said he would call on the state government to act on a recommendation to boost clinical services in growth areas.

Last year's Victorian Health Priorities Framework 2012-22 report identified a priority to meet growing demand for community clinical mental health services in outer suburban areas, to help up to 800 more adults to access treatment.

"Patients who face debilitating mental illnesses, from psychosis all the way through to eating disorders, often have to travel to places as far as Sunshine or Parkville, and that's not a realistic option for many people," Mr Pallas said.

Mercy Health's mental health manager, Mario Blandin de Chalain, said the hospital's mental health services were running at a 90 to 100per cent occupancy. Werribee Mercy is often forced to turn patients away from the emergency department, because beds are taken up by people waiting more than 24 hours for a mental health bed.

He said Wyndham was facing the largest and fastest growth in the state, placing increased demand on the hospital's mental health services.

But Mr Blandin de Chalain said both state and federal governments were aware of Wyndham's need for greater mental health services, with the Health Department planning to double the number of beds at Werribee Mercy from 29 to 58.

Westgate GP Network chairman Dr Joe Garra said more money was needed to meet increased demand for mental health services in Wyndham.

"In one day, about 20per cent of my patients have come to me for mental health issues ... there are fewer than a handful of private psychiatrists in the area, then the burden ends up on the hospitals.

"We're really limited to where we can refer people for mental health problems."

REPORT TORPEDOES TAKE-A-BREAK FUNDING

Wyndham Weekly– 25th January 2012

<http://www.wyndhamweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/report-torpedoes-takeabreak-funding/2432137.aspx>

The final nail appears to have been hammered in the coffin of the Take-a-Break childcare program, after the state government used a report it kept secret for a year to justify terminating its funding.

The program has been caught up in months of bickering between the state and federal governments over who should provide funding.

The state government released an independent report on Friday recommending the program be dissolved and its funding diverted.

The KPMG report found that the program's "social benefit exceeds social cost".

But it also cited problems with the program including trouble meeting its aim of short-term care at late notice.

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The report suggests funding instead be shifted to the underused Adult Community and Further Education subsidy, assisting parents with childcare while undertaking education and training.

Wyndham Community and Education Centre, a provider of the Take-a-Break service, says it will continue to operate despite the cut.

Manager Kathy Brunton said she would be forced to increase childcare fees from \$23 to \$25 an hour to fund the shortfall.

"It will be a blow, and it will certainly have an effect on our services," she said.

"But we see it as a valuable service to the community that needs to stay."

Children and Early Childhood Development Minister Wendy Lovell defended the move, saying the program was being inappropriately used to address gaps in general childcare services.

Jamila Rizvi, a spokeswoman for federal Early Childhood and Childcare Minister Kate Ellis, said the state government should stop misleading families and follow the lead of other states in committing funding for this type of childcare.

GALVIN PARK: COLLEGE FAILS TO GET EARLY TICK FOR REBUILDING CASH

Wyndham Weekly— 25th January 2012

<http://www.wyndhamweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/galvin-park-college-fails-to-get-early-tick-for-rebuilding-cash/2432135.aspx>

The state government has refused to decide on the future of Galvin Park Secondary College until the state budget, ruling out any possibility of the school being rebuilt this financial year.

Education Minister Martin Dixon's spokesman James Martin told the Weekly a decision could not be made before the May budget.

He said rebuilding would cost millions of dollars so a decision on whether to proceed had to be considered as part of the budget allocations.

Mr Martin would not be drawn on whether the government was likely to rebuild Galvin Park or to fix problem buildings, saying a range of options were being considered.

School council vice-president Anthony Monahan would prefer a decision to be made sooner rather than later.

"We just want [Mr Dixon] to tell us what he is going to do to get [Galvin Park] to an acceptable standard for today's education. We don't want it just patched up. It needs to come up to today's standards."

Tarneit MP Tim Pallas has written to Mr Dixon, concerned that the government's stance means any work on the school cannot start until funds become available in July.

He also expressed concern about the department's removal of furniture and fittings from classrooms two weeks before the start of school because of a mould problem.

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WEST RANKS HIGH IN AFFORDABILITY STAKES

Wyndham Weekly– 25th January 2012

<http://www.wyndhamweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/west-ranks-high-in-affordability-stakes/2432133.aspx>

Werribee, Wyndham Vale and Hoppers Crossing have been ranked among the most affordable suburbs in Melbourne, according to the latest Real Estate Institute of Victoria figures.

Werribee was second on the REIV's affordability list for the quarter to December, with a median house price of \$302,500.

Wyndham Vale was ranked fourth (\$310,000) and Hoppers Crossing seventh (\$340,000).

Hoppers Crossing also scraped into the list of top 20 growth suburbs for the quarter, with house prices increasing by 2.3 per cent.

Hocking Stuart agent George Yacoubian said it was not surprising to see Werribee, Hoppers Crossing and Wyndham Vale on the most-affordable list. "With these areas, in particular, we are finding the number of buyers looking at them is increasing. They are also in great locations 25 minutes outside the city and have development happening around them, which will eventually increase property prices."

Professionals Triwest Real Estate principal Paul Nuske was not sure the REIV figures were an accurate representation of median house prices across Wyndham. He said Werribee, Wyndham Vale and Hoppers Crossing remained attractive to buyers because they were so affordable.

CATERING FOR THE BABY BOOM IN POINT COOK

Wyndham Weekly– 25th January 2012

<http://www.wyndhamweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/catering-for-the-baby-boom-in-point-cook/2432132.aspx>

A new kindergarten in Point Cook is expected to ease long waiting lists for limited places as Wyndham's explosive growth continues.

After last year's waiting list for kindergarten places in Wyndham surged to 243, the council opted to set up a third Point Cook kindergarten at the new Feather brook Community Centre to cater for the baby boom.

The council says there are enough babies born in Wyndham each week to fill two kindergarten classrooms.

The Feather brook centre, which opens next month, will offer 150 kindergarten places for four-year-olds across two rooms. A third room will be added next year.

Point Cook mother Kylie Kennett has enrolled her son Dean, 4, at Feather brook this year after missing out on a place at Jamieson Way kinder.

"If it wasn't for this new kinder he wouldn't be able to attend one in Point Cook, because they've all been so full," she said.

Cheree Robinson has enrolled her daughter Chloe, 4, at Feather brook after her eldest daughter missed out on her first choice last year.

"It would've been too hard to drive her out elsewhere in Wyndham for kinder, just for three-hour sessions, to take them there and come back," she said.

"I'm stoked about Feather brook. It's close to me as well, to where I live, and we got in straight away."

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Despite the new kindergarten, more than 195 Wyndham families missed out on their first-preference kindergarten this year.

A council spokeswoman said group sizes had been increased from 25 to 28 at The Grange, Tarneit, Point Cook and Jamieson Way kindergartens to accommodate the growing demand.

Truganina ward's Cr Glenn Goodfellow said the new service was vital for Point Cook parents. "Point Cook is expected to grow by over 23,000 residents over the next 10 years, which makes facilities like Feather brook Community Centre vital."

PRINCES HIGHWAY FIX URGED AS CRASHES SOAR

Wyndham Weekly— 25th January 2012

<http://www.wyndhamweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/princes-highway-fix-urged-as-crashes-soar/2432131.aspx>

The Princes Highway between the Western Ring Road and Geelong should be improved to reduce the risk of casualty crashes, according to a report.

The Australian Road Assessment Program report found that from 2005-09, there were 291 casualty crashes along 114 kilometres of the road from the Western Ring Road to Geelong.

There were also 15 crashes which resulted in death.

RACV public policy general manager Brian Negus said the figures meant the highway had a poor collective risk score and drivers were at high risk of being involved in a casualty crash.

Also of concern was the Western Ring Road from the Princes Highway to Hume Freeway, with 476 casualty crashes and five deaths recorded during that four-year period.

Mr Negus said the results showed the need to investigate safety measures such as wire rope barriers to prevent head-on collisions.

RoadSafe Westgate chairman Jim Giddings said he had grave concerns about the number of crashes and deaths on the Princes Highway from 2005-09 and called on the state and federal governments to make it a safer road.

"This arterial road carries thousands of motorists each day and at peak times it's not coping with the demand from the unprecedented growth Wyndham is now experiencing.

"These high volumes cause driver frustration and unfortunately that's when they take risks they would not normally undertake."

Mr Giddings called for action to remove roadside hazards, increase road maintenance and line marking and install more lights along the highway.

He also wanted wire rope barriers installed to make the road safer for drivers.

He urged the governments to make Duncans Road a diamond interchange to reduce congestion at other highway exits.

"This high number of crashes demonstrates that action is required now and more planning for the current and future growth of users is needed."

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ZOO MANIA IN WERRIBEE

Wyndham Leader— 24th January 2012

<http://wyndham-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/zoo-mania-in-werribee/>

More people have visited Werribee's zoo these school holidays than any other summer holiday period on record.

The zoo last Thursday surpassed 61,369 visits, with 12 days of the school holidays remaining. It also had its highest ever daily attendance of 4476 on January 15.

Zoo acting director Madelon Willemsen said reasons for the bumper crowds included free entry for children aged under 16 on weekends and school holidays, longer opening hours, and the zoo's new gorilla exhibit.

Ronin, 5, Levi, 7, and Seth, 11, (pictured) were among those who enjoyed the zoo activities. The zoo is open to 7pm until January 29.

Its twilight concert season, Rhythm of Africa, starts next month, with events Saturdays and Sundays from February 4-26.

Details: zoo.org.au/Werribee

WYNDHAM A STEPPING STONE FOR HOME BUYERS

Wyndham Leader— 24th January 2012

<http://wyndham-leader.wherelive.com.au/news/story/wyndham-a-stepping-stone-for-home-buyers/>

Werribee, Wyndham Vale and Hoppers Crossing are among Melbourne's most affordable suburbs when it comes to buying a house, new data has revealed.

Real Estate Institute of Victoria statistics for the 2011 December quarter show that out of all suburbs where at least 30 sales were recorded, Werribee had the second lowest median house price (\$302,500). Only Melton had a lower median at \$280,000.

Wyndham Vale had the fourth lowest median house price for the quarter (\$310,000) and Hoppers Crossing the seventh lowest (\$340,000).

Hoppers Crossing also made the top 20 list of suburbs that recorded the greatest growth in the December quarter, with its median house price rising 2.3 per cent from \$332,500 in September.

Werribee had the 14th highest level of annual growth, with its median house price rising 1.3 per cent between December 2010 and December last year, from \$298,750.

In other Wyndham suburbs, Tarneit's median house price for the December quarter was \$350,000 - a fall of 4.9 per cent from the previous quarter - and Point Cook's median was \$469,000, dropping from \$487,500 in the September quarter.

Williams Landing, Laverton and Truganina all recorded fewer than 30 sales for the quarter.

REIV spokesman Robert Larocca said that housing on the fringe of the city had historically been among Melbourne's most affordable housing.

Mr Larocca also said, because of the population growth pressure in the five years to 2010, there had been "a heavy demand for affordably priced property".

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MICROCHIP YOUR PET

Wyndham Star– 24th January 2012

<http://starnewsgroup.com.au/star/werribee-hoppers-crossing/332/story/147491.html>

As Australia Day fireworks make a racket, Wyndham Council is reminding residents to have their pets microchipped and their contact details up to date.

Summer is the most common time of year for pets to go missing, especially when fireworks cause the furry friends to run away in fear.

Microchips are a small computer chip, approximately the size of a grain of rice, that are implanted underneath the skin, by a vet or other authorized planter.

It is a simple procedure similar to a vaccination. Each microchip has a unique number that is linked to the owner's details.

But council employees are only able to track down owners through a microchip if the owner's details are up to date.

The council is also recommended that you have your pet regularly scanned to ensure the microchip hasn't moved or stopped working.

WYNDHAM DOG LAWS YET TO BITE

Wyndham Leader– 24th January 2012

<http://wyndham-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/have-your-say-wyndham-dog-laws-yet-to-bite/>

Dog owners in Wyndham have yet to feel the full force of new state laws relating to restricted breed dogs, or a local law brought in to control dogs behind fences.

So far, no resident has been fined under either set of laws.

Pit bull owners had until September 29 last year to register and declare their dogs as a restricted breed, or risk being fined and having the dogs seized and put down

by the council. The laws also empower council to declare dogs registered as American Staffordshire terriers as "restricted" if owners cannot prove the breed.

Council figures show the city now has 45 registered restricted breed dogs, with 26 registered by their owners in the month leading up to the deadline. The council said it had done random audits since, and followed up on 23 reports from the public of suspected restricted breed dogs, but had not found any pit bulls without tags.

It had not declared any of Wyndham's 184 registered American Staffordshire terriers as restricted breed, but said it was continuing to assess those dogs.

Meanwhile, the council is yet to issue a single fine under a controversial local law it passed in 2010, making it an offence for dogs to behave in an offensive or threatening way by striking, biting or jumping at people or animals beyond the boundary of the property the dog is on, saying all breaches had been dealt with by educating owners.

As previously reported, the council's "cat control order", or curfew, expired in 2010 after 10 years, without anyone being fined.

CLEAN UP YOUR GARAGE SALE SIGNS OR ELSE

Wyndham Leader– 24th January 2012

<http://wyndham-leader.whereilive.com.au/news/story/have-your-say-clean-up-your-garage-sale-signs-or-else/>

Residents who put up public signs advertising garage sales but fail to take them down afterwards could be fined under a Wyndham Council crackdown.

The council said its legislative services officers would this month start contacting residents hosting garage sales to remind them to take down signs after the date of the sale.

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The council said it would make contact by letter, phone or in person, using details from garage sale advertisements in local newspapers and garage sale signs posted in public.

Cr Marcel Mahfoud said residents could be fined \$375 if they still did not take down the signs.

"Where prior warning has been issued, residents may receive an infringement notice for not removing their signage following a garage sale," he said.

Cr Mahfoud said outdated garage sale signs made the city look unkempt.

"When left up for too long they may also become dislodged, creating litter on our streets," he said.

"I would also like to remind residents that signage is not to be placed over traffic control signage or anywhere it could present a safety risk."

TOYOTA CUTS TO HIT WEST HARD

Wyndham Weekly– 24th January 2012

<http://www.wyndhamweekly.com.au/news/local/news/general/toyota-cuts-to-hit-west-hard/2430625.aspx>

Toyota workers' worst fears were realised yesterday when the company announced it would axe 350 jobs at its Altona North factory.

Toyota Australia President Max Yasuda said falling international demand for Australian-built Toyotas resulting from the high Australian dollar had triggered the decision.

The move sparked fears the job losses could snowball through to the parts supply industry, whose viability, and 40,000 jobs, depends on the number of cars made locally.

Toyota Australia typically exported up to 80,000 cars a year to the Middle East and other overseas markets, but Mr Yasuda said he was looking at little more than half that amount this year.

"We have strong sales forecasts for the domestic market, but the reduction in the export market is so huge we can't cover it with incremental sales in the domestic market," he said.

The company plans to make 95,000 cars this year, almost 40 per cent fewer than its production peak of 149,000 cars in 2007.

Federation of Automotive Products Manufacturers chief executive Richard Reilly said the number of cars produced in Australia was vital to employment levels in the components industry, comprising 180 to 200 companies.

Yesterday, the more than 3300 workers assembled at the plant for a company-wide briefing heard that more than one in 10 jobs will be axed by mid-April. The job cuts will be in vehicle assembly and painting, as well as in management.

Mr Yasuda said the plan would make the company more competitive but would only see it through to the end of current model cycles, or about the next five years. All the jobs axed will be forced redundancies.

The federal secretary of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union's vehicle building division, Ian Jones, said Toyota had reneged on its commitment in the enterprise bargaining agreement signed last month to consult with the union ahead of any job cuts.

"It's extraordinary that there are procedures in the agreement laid out for how you handle these things, and Toyota is simply not following any of them," Mr Jones said.

Mr Yasuda said there would be a 10-week consultation period with the union.

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The decision inflamed an already heated debate in Canberra over the level of government support for the struggling industry.

Manufacturing Minister Kim Carr said Toyota had looked at "every option" to avoid axing jobs. "But the harsh reality of the continuing strong Australian dollar means that Toyota's export markets are under severe pressure and they are struggling to sell enough cars to keep the Altona line at full capacity," he said.

In Sydney, Opposition Leader Tony Abbott said the news did not alter the Coalition's plan to cut \$500 million from the federal car grants scheme, despite reports the idea is unpopular with elements of the Liberal Party.

"Under our proposals, there will be \$1 billion in the automotive transformation scheme ... but we're not prepared to invest beyond the \$1 billion that we say should be in that fund," he said.

"I think that is a lot of money to help the car industry to flourish in this country."

Victorian Premier Ted Baillieu said the state government would "do what we can" to help manufacturers survive in Victoria, saying there was no doubt the dollar was putting stress on the industry.

Local state Labor MP Jill Hennessy said the Toyota decision could have a "devastating" effect on long-term employment prospects in the western suburbs.

ACROSS THE REGION

TREMENDOUS PRIVILEGE, SAYS A CHAMPION OF ENGINEERING

The Age—27th January 2012

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/tremendous-privilege-says-a-champion-of-engineering-20120126-1qjt9.html>

The new Young Australian of the Year says the non-profit program she founded to introduce girls to engineering has been picked up by four US colleges.

Melbourne University engineering undergraduate Marita Cheng said that from next month, branches of Robogals will open at Caltech and Stanford universities in California, Columbia University, in New York, and the University of Arizona.

Robogals will also expand Australia-wide the rural program that visited 1300 girls at 31 schools last year in Victoria.

Ms Cheng, whose ambition is to be head of a robotics company, said it was a "tremendous privilege" to be named Young Australian of the Year.

She spent a heady first day yesterday meeting the Prime Minister and Governor-General at a flag-raising ceremony in Canberra, and then flew to Sydney to sail on the harbour and meet the NSW Governor and Premier. But a highlight was chatting to an idol, the Australian of the Year, Geoffrey Rush.

Ms Cheng discovered she and the Oscar-winning actor were both Queenslanders living in Melbourne.

They share a love of Melbourne's trams. Rush advised her to respect audiences and to use big words.

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"I'm such a big fan of his," Ms Cheng told The Age. "Pirates of the Caribbean is my favourite movie of all time. A lot of the work I do is so serious, so for me the movie is something to be enjoyed. I just love light-hearted movies that have a lot of action and magic."

She formed Robogals in 2008 when one of her Melbourne University professors, Jamie Evans, spoke of the lack of women studying engineering.

From the first visit by Ms Cheng and three classmates to Lauriston Girls' School, in Armadale, using Lego to teach robotics, Robogals now have 17 chapters in six countries, including the Netherlands and Britain. Ms Cheng was raised in Cairns by her single mother, Judy Cho, a Hong Kong immigrant, a hotel cleaner who is now an airport security attendant.

She says her elder brother, Christopher, 26, who has just finished his anthropology masters, was "always curious about how things work", passionate about science and explained what engineering was.

Her advice to others: "Follow your passions and take risks, and it should all work out."

STATE TO CLOSE 24-HOUR MENTAL HEALTH HELPLINE

The Herald Sun—27th January 2012

<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/state-to-close-24hour-mental-health-helpline-20120126-1qjrf.html>

The state government is shutting down Victoria's only 24-hour mental health helpline, provoking outrage from mental health providers.

The move is detailed in a leaked departmental email obtained by The Age, which states that the "decision is based on a government commitment to consolidate investment in the front end of the mental health service system".

The government said that Victorians who wanted to call the advice line - which handles an estimated 800 calls every month - would be "directed to an appropriate service" once the service is shut down in March.

The mental health advice line has been running since 2009 and is manned by mental health practitioners, who advise callers about where they should go to get support and treatment.

It was set up by the previous government as part of a multimillion-dollar strategy to improve the state's struggling mental health system.

Colin Fryer, who chairs the mental health Carers Network, said shutting down such a vital service was "an extreme disappointment" and one which may leave some mentally ill Victorians stranded when they most need help.

"A lot of people have used the service and it is such an important first point of contact. There is no other service like it which runs 24 hours a day," he said.

The manager of family services for the Arafemi mental health service, Helen Kane, also attacked the decision to shut down the advice line, claiming it had been done to save money and would leave distressed Victorians without access to out-of-hours advice.

"It was a brilliant creation. There has been no consultation behind the decision to shut it down. The concern is that this is a really good service and no one checked to see how it was working on the ground before deciding to close it."

But a spokesman for Mental Health Minister Mary Wooldridge said the 24-hour phone line service was underperforming.

"The Mental Health Advice Line has not met expectations since it started in 2009, averaging just over 800 calls per month, compared to other services such as Lifeline, with almost 10,000 monthly calls," he said.

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Opposition mental health spokesman Gavin Jennings, said the move to shut down the service would "compound existing stresses on frontline mental health services".

"People struggling with a mental health issue have enough barriers to accessing care without losing an important service. The government has provided no additional resources and is relying on generic services to pick up the slack."

One of the Baillieu government's election pledges involved spending more than \$100 million on improving Victoria's mental health system.

The revelation of the helpline's closure comes after The Age exposed in recent months alleged clinical failings regarding the deaths of 36 psychiatric inpatients in recent years. It has also exposed several attempts by health services to conceal information about inpatient deaths and sexual assaults from police and families.

LABOR DEPUTY ROB HULLS QUILTS POLITICS

The Herald Sun—27th January 2012

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/more-news/labor-deputy-rob-hulls-quits-politics/story-fn7x8me2-1226255046693>

Former deputy premier Rob Hulls will retire from Parliament today.

Mr Hulls has handed in his resignation, which will be effective from 5pm.

The decision will cause a by-election in his seat of Niddrie, and also create a vacancy as deputy Labor leader.

Mr Hulls said the decision to retire was sparked by his health scare last year.

"This made me reassess my future and I concluded that I would not run at the 2014 election," Mr Hulls said.

"Having made that decision, the best thing I could do for the party was to leave Parliament now."

Mr Hulls suffered a life-threatening condition last June that saw him stop breathing and placed in a coma.

He told Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews yesterday and the rest of his colleagues earlier this morning.

Mr Hulls said today he was now in good health and had resumed jogging.

The long-serving Labor MP has been in State Parliament for 16 years, and served as attorney-general in the Bracks and Brumby governments for 11 years.

He was deputy premier to Mr Brumby.

SCHWEPPE OFFERS \$5000 SWEETENER TO END DISPUTE

The Herald Sun—27th January 2012

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/more-news/schweppes-offers-5000-sweetener-to-end-dispute/story-fn7x8me2-1226254602677>

Schweppes workers locked out for six weeks without pay over a roster dispute are being sent letters offering them a \$5000 bonus to cross the picket line.

The offer is being made to the first 10 workers who sign up as the company attempts to divide workers to end the dispute at its Tullamarine plant.

Others who sign will get a bonus of \$1000.

Struggling workers - facing mortgage payments, the Christmas credit card hangover and bills pouring in - said it was tempting, but they would not be able to face workmates if they took the money.

"You're between a rock and a hard place," one worker said.

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"You've got to go back to work with these people, they're your mates, but it doesn't stop the bills coming in. I have a mortgage to pay."

People on the picket line, who have been locked out since December 15, said yesterday they would not take the company's offer.

"Everyone is enjoying a holiday for Australia Day because of what people like us did in the past," one worker said.

United Voice, the union representing the Schweppes' employees, has not given hardship payments to strikers despite them sacrificing their wages. But no one has taken up the \$5000.

Schweppes could impose the proposed new 12-hour, three-day week roster on short notice during the busy summer period.

Workers would lose up to three days of overtime a fortnight, paid at double time, and the change would significantly disrupt childcare.

Union assistant secretary Ben Redford said Schweppes had refused to discuss a compromise.

Schweppes, owned by Japanese beer company Asahi, has continued to run the factory using management and casuals.

Schweppes said it wanted Fair Work Australia to arbitrate the matter, saying the union had refused to negotiate on a 12-hour roster.

JOBS LOSSES HIT BEFORE TOYOTA CRISIS

The Herald Sun—26th January 2012

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/business/jobs-losses-hit-before-toyota-crisis/story-fn7j19iv-1226253989515>

Victorian car component manufacturers were already slashing staff numbers before Toyota cut 350 jobs.

Supply companies hit by the global financial crisis anticipated the reduced demand that will flow from the Toyota restructure.

Unions predict a further 3000 jobs at suppliers to the Victorian car industry will go as a result of Toyota's decision.

They are fighting for voluntary redundancies instead of "taps on the shoulder" for workers and expect to hear back from the company on Monday.

Craig O'Donohue, deputy manager at Australian Arrow, said suppliers knew the industry was facing tough times.

"There is a lot happening in the industry and we have to keep making counter-measures to combat that," he said.

"We have been preparing for this for some time but the number of orders at Toyota is within our range of tolerance. We have to keep reorganising ourselves as such."

Mr O'Donohue refused to say how many jobs had gone at the electrical wiring manufacturer in the past two years, but said the Carrum Downs-based company still employs 145 people.

Denso, another Toyota supplier declined to answer the Herald Sun's calls yesterday, but told The Australian it had shed 120 jobs at its Croydon plant since the global credit crunch.

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Toyota spent \$2.5 billion on supplies in the 2010-11 financial year buying from almost 2000 companies.

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