

## Parliamentary Enquiry into Regional Tourism

On the 15th November this year, the Greater Shepparton City Council Board room became Parliament of Victoria for the Inquiry into Rural and Regional Tourism. This was an opportunity for operators to voice their concern to the committee about implications that impede on their businesses and the region as a whole. The session was extremely interesting and was beneficial to all. Members of Tourism Greater Shepparton spoke on behalf of their private businesses, whilst Sharlene Putman and Mark Francis spoke on behalf of the municipality and the region. With these enquiries happening right across the state we hope that the Government takes note and acts upon some of the recommendations of the committee. For further details on the inquiry go to [www.parliament.vic.gov.au/rrc](http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/rrc)

**KATE SMITH**

I joined the TGS committee as I saw it as a valuable committee to assist Council and tourist operators to promote Greater Shepparton as a tourist destination for the benefit of the entire community. It is great to be working with such a motivated group of business people from various facets of the tourism industry with great ideas and a wealth of knowledge and experience.

**SHARLENE PUTMAN**

As Greater Shepparton's Tourism Manager it is important to continue on the positive relationship with the industry and the association. Through cooperative marketing opportunities the region can only capitalise on future ventures and opportunities.

**MARK RYAN**

As a new business operator in Shepparton I am passionate about Shepparton and its future through tourism. I believe that Shepparton has its place in this state as a true tourism destination and would like to help in some small way for us to achieve this.



Other members include Lisa Maxfield (Campbell's Soups) and Tony Bevilaqua (Bicaro's).

**STEVE WILSON**

As the SPC Ardmona KidsTown Playground coordinator I joined the TGS committee because I saw it as a great way to network with local tourism and business providers. I believe also that TGS can have an impact on improving the tourism profile of the wider Greater Shepparton areas. By being part of TGS hopefully I will have some input into these profile improvements

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## Meet the new Tourism Greater Shepparton Board Members

INSIDE THIS  
ISSUE:

Profile: 2  
Woodlands Estate  
Lavender

VICKit 3

A note from the  
President 3

Riverside Gardens 4  
wins State Award

Profile: 5  
VIC Volunteer

Local Cheese 5  
Wins Award

Parliamentary 6  
Enquiry

At this year's AGM we saw a number of new members become board members of TGS. We asked the board members why they have put their hand up to participate and contribute to TGS and this is what they had to say.

**FRED O'KEEFE President**

To help promote awareness of the tourism attractions and activities in the Shepparton area through trade shows, networking and media

**CHERYL HAMMER Vice-President**

Originally I was asked to be involved in TGS to strengthen the links between the board and Lifestyle Dookie. Since then I have come to understand and appreciate the Greater Shepparton region's tourism movement and have been able to grow and include my own business on a tourism level as well as destination Dookie. This is my second term as Vice President and while I believe members now need to look collectively at "a bigger picture" for our media and promotional campaigns, I do recognise TGS has made some huge inroads into giving our region a profile and a positive image on the tourism radar.

**LINDSAY & SUE POLLOCK**

Our business is often directly benefiting from tourism in and around Shepparton with a large proportion of the events coming through the visitors centre so we felt that we may be able to "give a little back" by becoming more involved with TGS and helping to promote our city in any positive way we can. By being board members we also felt that we could be more up to date with future events which helps us with long term planning and gives us invaluable exposure to other businesses in the Goulburn Valley.

**DAVID LISZT**

I became part of TGS board to be part of a body that can have a positive influence into tourism within the Greater Shepparton region. It is also important for any regional community to have unity amongst all sectors not only for the financial benefits of each individual business, but also to join forces in ideas, promotions and concepts for the area. TGS is a means to share this information, get involved and understanding the Shepparton region and be part of the vision for tourism within the region, through TGS's close relationship with COGs, the business sector and other local community organisations.



Members continued on page 6.

## The “who’s who” of local tourism operators: Woodlands Estate Lavender

When Cheryl Hammer decided to plant 1500 lavender plants on her Cosgrove farm six years ago, she never dreamt she would be managing three businesses from two locations and welcoming hundreds of tourists a year to the region.

The mother of three boys, aged 11, 9 and 7, is vice president of Tourism Greater Shepparton, works as a free-lance journalist, is involved in women in agriculture programs and runs the only lavender based business in the Goulburn Valley. Her partner, Rhys Sutherland, is a dry land cropping farmer.

Woodlands Estate Lavender opened its newest location, The Churches, five minutes from the heart of Shepparton, in September. It features a gorgeous lavender-themed gift shop full of Woodlands' own natural skin care and body products, gifts and plants, and a beautifully appointed three bedroom self-contained accommodation which is proving very popular with the wedding market and small groups wanting to stay in a more rural, private location.

The accommodation and product shop are housed in grand old church buildings surrounded by hundreds of lavender plants and cottage gardens and are very welcoming to tourists and loyal local customers who often gather there for an outing together.

The pretty courtyard is ideal for a coffee and you can even try lavender shortbread!

Visitors delight in browsing and purchasing from our range of products made on-site giving them the true locally made experience—there is something for all age groups, even the blokes.

The product shop is open every Wednesday to Sunday 10am to 5.30pm and Cheryl likes to work in with other accommodation providers by offering their guests a discount in her gift shop if they tell her they had been referred to her by their host. Please give her a call to confirm these arrangements.

Woodlands Estate Lavender began in 2001 at its original lavender farm at Cosgrove (20 minutes east of Shepparton). The farm has been open to the public for four years and now specialises in providing an on-farm experience for large tour groups. There are 7000 plants and a short talk and demonstration give an insight into the workings of the lavender farm. Devonshire tea is available for groups.

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## Vazzoler Cheese wins another national title

Sandra Vazzoler of Longleat Wines in Murchison has won a gold medal at South Australia's specialty cheese show, CheeseFest 07, which was held at Penfold's Magill Estate Restaurant in October.



Sandra and her co-winner, Janice Roberts, were particularly thrilled with the win as they were up against some tough competition such as Milawa Cheese, King Island Dairy and Woodside Cheesewrights. They felt that as this is the second year in a row that the Wyndham Gold, a washed rind cheese, has won the gold medal it proves that they've got a level of consistency that means they can keep producing the same sort of product year after year.

The cheese was described by one of the judges, Russell Smith, as being fully ripe with a velvety, smooth paste exhibiting that classic washed rind flavour of cooked brassicas.

Both women are trainers at the National Centre for Dairy Education Australia (NCDEA) and this win strengthens the position of NCDEA as a leading trainer for the dairy industry.

Our congratulations go out to Sandra Vazzoler for winning this prize.



### Visitor Information Centre Volunteer Profile—Verity Stewart



Verity Stewart began volunteering at the Visitor Information Centre in early 2007. She was looking for somewhere to volunteer her time and decided that the VIC sounded quite interesting.

Although Verity has lived in the area all her life, she is surprised by the questions people ask that she doesn't know the answer to. Everyday she is learning something different about the area.

Verity loves the fact that the people coming into the VIC are mostly all on holiday, so they are usually in a great mood and don't have much to complain about. She also enjoys talking and loves the great variety of people who come in from around the World.

Verity is very involved in the community and apart from the 2 shifts per week she puts in at the VIC, Verity also volunteers at St. Vinnies opportunity shop and does some cooking at the HUB in Mooropna. On the rare occasion that Verity isn't volunteering she likes to go on garden tours and baby sit her 6 grandchildren.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Verity for her contribution to the centre. Thanks Verity!

## Riverside Gardens Flourishes with State Awards Win

Riverside Gardens was named as the Best Medium Garden Centre in Victoria at the state awards dinner for the *2008 YATES Nursery & Garden Industry Awards*.

The win grants Riverside Gardens the top state wide accolade for medium nurseries and garden centres in the prestigious awards that recognise innovation and outstanding acumen among nursery and garden industry businesses.

The awards were judged through a process which combined the judging of a written submission and an on-site judge's visit.

Through this process, the garden centre was praised by the judges for their business accomplishments over the past twelve months, and for the exceptional quality of their plants, trees and shrubs, while staff received top marks for friendliness and willingness to help customers.

Family owned and operated for 25 years, Bob and Moira Smith moved Riverside Gardens in 1995, to its present location 5 kilometres south of Shepparton. The move onto the new two-hectare site saw the business expand to include an 18 hole mini golf course set amongst display gardens surrounding a man made lake and a large indoor display area.



Riverside Gardens supplies plants and garden care products to customers throughout Northern Victoria and Southern NSW. They also sell cubby houses, sheds and bungalows and offer a complete landscaping service and

short and long term plant hire services.

The garden centre was commended by the Awards judges for many of these additional services that have helped it remain profitable through drought and strict water restrictions. Increasing their revenue by more than 40 per cent over the past four years, the garden centre attributes much of the increase to giftware and garden décor sales and educating staff and customers to be water wise gardeners.

Nursery & Garden Industry Australia's Acting CEO, Robert Prince, describes state award winners like Riverside Gardens as the leaders in the industry. "These businesses are leading the way through innovation, expertise and sound business practices, to help the industry forge ahead in the future. They are helping to ensure that the industry grows and adapts despite the effects of the drought, water restrictions and other such challenges."

The Awards guidelines encourage businesses to strive for exceptional service and innovation, and acknowledge the hard work and dedication of those nurserymen and women who help gardeners achieve their dreams.

Riverside Gardens and all other state winners will now progress through as National Finalists in the *2008 YATES Nursery & Garden Industry Awards*, to be held in March. The awards will be held as part of the NGIA National Conference, with the national winners of all 12 Awards categories announced at the event.

For more information about the *2008 YATES Nursery & Garden Industry Awards* please visit: [www.ngiaevents.com.au/awards2008](http://www.ngiaevents.com.au/awards2008)



## Visitor Information Centre Survey—VICKit.

Tourism industry performance has tended to be measured according to visitor numbers. It is well recognised that this has led to profitless volume in the industry and there are now strong moves to focus on yield in order to deliver more substantial economic benefits. VIC's can play an important role in increasing the yield of tourism within destinations. The kit also allows the VIC to assess the contribution to the tourism yield and to identify strategies for increasing this contribution. Recently the Visitor Information Centre has been conducting these surveys to determine the impact the centre has on the local tourism industry.

Did you know that 62.5% of those surveyed were influenced to undertake more activities in the region—these activities included wineries, factory sales, shopping, mini golf, ten pin bowling, children's activities and much, much more. 38% stated that they would stay in the region longer due to the advice they were given by the staff and volunteers at the centre and 94% of people surveyed said that the information gained at the Visitor Information Centre has influenced their likelihood of returning to the region. 41% of those would return to the area for 2-4 nights and 15% would return for 5-14 nights—this is a fantastic reflection of how the centre is working for the region.

Staff knowledge was good with 65% of those surveyed stating it was very good and 35% stating it was good. Friendliness was rated very good by 86% of respondents and the brochure range was also good with a very good rating.

The centre will be continuing to undertake the VICKit surveys to obtain further statistics and demographics of our visitors. If you are interested in gaining further detail, please do not hesitate to contact Sharlene Putman on (03) 5832 9849.

### A note from the TGS President

It gives me great pleasure to become the President of Tourism Greater Shepparton for the 2007/2008 year, but I must say, what big shoes to fill following on from Kaye Bernardi! Let me take this opportunity to thank Kaye for her contribution to the TGS for a number of years including being President and Treasurer, we will surely miss her as an active board member. With that said, we welcome the new board members to TGS and general members also. This year we are looking to further enhance the profile of Tourism Greater Shepparton as well as the Greater Shepparton region. We welcome feedback from all members and look forward to catching up with you all throughout the coming year.

Our first function for all members was held on the 14th November, which was also our Christmas Party. It was fantastic to see such a turnout on the night and great to meet new faces also. Congratulations to Table number 3 which consisted of myself, Broken River Vineyards, BIG4 Shepparton East Holiday Park, Woodlands Estate Lavender, Goulburn Valley Motor Village and the Country Comfort Shepparton Parklake. On the night, Tourism Manager Sharlene Putman and Rebecca Stait (TGS secretary / treasurer) ran a "Greater Shepparton Trivia" quiz which was fantastic, with a bonus 5% discount given to each business on the winners table for their advertisement for the upcoming Visitor Map. Thank you to Sharlene and the Greater Shepparton City Council Tourism Department for the offer and the fun! Members will need to attend the next general evening to see what specials and offers there might whilst networking with your industry peers. Cheers. Fred.