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Loddon Shire is gearing up for the Victorian government's second Regional Victoria Living Expo, planned for the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre from 19-21 April. Organisers are expecting up to 10,000 visitors and 150 exhibitors. Report, Page 3

Awards to honour top achievers

Organic farmer Neil Druce and musician Mike Brady will be special guests at this year's Loddon Powercor Excellence Awards. Planned for Thursday 30 May at the Eddington hall, the night is the premier event on Loddon Shire's social calendar.

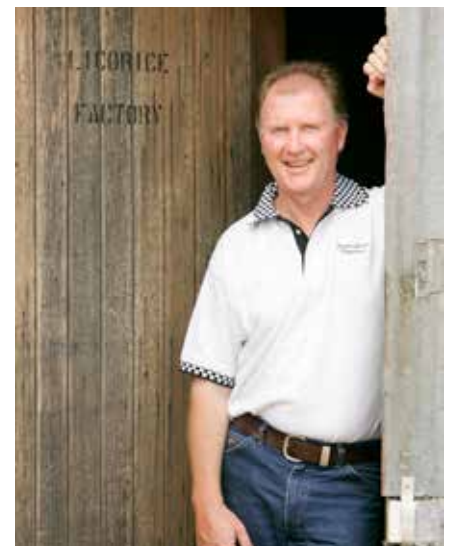
These coveted awards give well-earned recognition for the high levels of professionalism and quality of service that exist among businesses and individuals within the Shire.

Categories in 2013 are Young Achiever Award, Employee of the Year, Major Event Award, Best Tourism Operator, Agriculture and Primary Industries Award, Best Small Business, Best Large Business and Food, Wine and Hospitality Award. The award for Business of the Year will be announced separately.

The Loddon Powercor Excellence Awards have been running annually since 1998, missing only once in 2000. In 2010, Council decided that, after the 2011 event, the awards would be held only every second year. Last year, a Gala Evening at Serpentine filled the gap, with rural women's pioneer Alana Johnson as guest speaker.

Neil Druce was raised on the Green Grove organic farm at Kamarah, near Ardlethan in NSW, about 100km west of Junee, where his father, Alan, had been practising organic farming since 1962. The 1100ha farm has been owned by the Druce family since 1918.

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Licorice maker Neil Druce will be a special guest at this year's Loddon Powercor Awards.

Message from the Mayor

Easter is filled with sweet traditions we are always pleased to share with family and friends – Pancake Day, hot cross buns, Easter eggs and Easter egg hunts.

Stories of the Easter Bunny, too, still seem to cast their spell over our younger children.

Easter is also a time for thinking about suffering, injustice and hardship for those less fortunate, who are close at hand for all of us.

This is a busy time for Loddon Shire as Councillors and staff wrestle with two major tasks, in particular.

The generous flood recovery funding afforded us by state and federal governments runs out on 30 June and this year's budget will have to be built without that monetary support. As a result, our budget planning will need to be tight.

Secondly, staff will be engaging with certain community leaders this month to seek their help in framing the new Council Plan, which will guide this organisation through the next four years.

Through these efforts, one constant we know we can rely on is the high level of support and cooperation so willingly offered by the Loddon community.

That spirit of helpfulness has been demonstrated in full measure during Council's long flood recovery program, with hall committees, sporting and community groups putting shoulders to the wheel to back up the herculean efforts of Council and state and federal governments in restoring and repairing that which was lost.

Inevitably, the four-day break is a great opportunity for brief holidays, day trips and visits to family and friends.

That means a busy time on the roads, so please drive carefully and be safe. Happy Easter!



Cr Geoff Curnow

Awards to honour top achievers

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After graduating from Ambassador University in Pasadena (US), Mr Druce worked in a wide variety of jobs, ranging from teaching woodwork and public speaking to stints as a gym supervisor, butler, chef, concert manager's assistant and a limousine driver.

In 1998, Mr Druce became managing director of Green Grove Organics and the family decided to value-add to its organic wheat by milling flour. Looking for a niche product, Mr Druce settled on licorice, which contains at least 30 per cent wheat flour. There was no other organic licorice producer in Australia at that time. The family bought and restored an old flour mill, a local landmark in Junee, and, these days, the Junee mill is one of the few organic licorice makers in the world.

The Junee Licorice and Chocolate Factory produces a growing range of organic confectioneries, operates a gift shop and restaurant and attracts more than 100,000 visitors each year.

Mike Brady, one of Victoria's most iconic musical performers, will be the second high-profile guest at the Loddon awards night.

Mr Brady is best known for writing some of the biggest-selling musical anthems ever recorded in praise of Australian sport – Up There Cazaly, One Day in September and That's What I Like About Football. Now active as a musician, jingle writer, speaker, MC, panel moderator and radio host, he delves into his life experiences to speak and entertain at events across Australia and around the world.

Nominations for the Loddon Powercor Excellence Awards closed at the end of February, with businesses, organisations and individuals invited to nominate themselves or have their names put forward anonymously by others.

Nominees are now being invited to submit their award entries, with a deadline of Friday 29 March. A panel of independent judges will then have a further month to come up with their three finalists for each category and these will be announced in early May.

Tickets for the event will go on sale on Wednesday 1 May.

For more details about the awards, please phone Christine Coombes on 5494 1200.

Jolie's ready to listen

Jolie Middleton slipped into the driver's seat at Loddon Shire late last year as a community development officer in the area of helping people with a disability feel more a part of community life.

She has filled the Rural Access role formerly exercised by Chris Walters, now on a six-month secondment with Loddon Mallee Women's Health in Bendigo.

Her position, funded under the Department of Human Services' Community Building Program, covers both the City of Greater Bendigo and Loddon Shire and she divides her time between the two.

Ms Middleton has spent the past few months hearing from people across the Shire about what services are being used and what the key issues are in residents' minds.

"Hopefully, by March, we will have completed the community consultation process and have identified some priority areas for action," she said.

"At that time, I hope we will be able to give the community a set of priorities and directions for the Shire's Rural Access team for the following 12 months.

"We may then invite interested community members to form project groups or volunteer their skills and time to support some of the identified strategies.

"Even at that stage, though, we would still welcome feedback from the community on any issue of access and inclusion."

Other projects on Ms Middleton's agenda have been running information sessions about the Companion Card, workshops with community services people, training with Council customer service staff and promoting the use of the National Relay Service within Loddon Shire Council.

She has also finalised the 2013-16 Community Access and Inclusion Plan for endorsement by Council.

To contact Ms Middleton, call her at the Wedderburn Shire Offices on Mondays and Tuesdays on 5494 1200 or email jmiddleton@loddon.vic.gov.au



Jolie Middleton

Telling it like it is

Up to 10,000 visitors and 150 exhibitors are expected to attend the second Regional Victoria Living Expo, planned for the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre from 19-21 April.

The event is a four-year Victorian Government commitment and follows on from the overwhelming success of the inaugural event in April last year.

Announcing the dates, Deputy Premier and Minister for Regional and Rural Development Peter Ryan said the expo would bring together Victoria's 48 rural and regional councils as well as a number of other exhibitors.

"The expo will give Melbourne residents and businesses all the information they need when considering relocating to regional and rural Victoria," Mr Ryan said.

"Visitors will discover these areas provide huge advantages in liveability, jobs, education, housing and business viability that are at least the equal of those on offer in Melbourne."

Mr Ryan said last year's event involved 137 exhibitors and attracted more than 8,000 visitors, with many suggesting they had serious intentions to move to regional Victoria.

Five Council staff members travelled to Melbourne last year to help spread the word on the benefits of living and working in Loddon Shire. They were armed with a range of brochures, a DVD especially made for the occasion and a display of the region's gourmet produce.

The free event included performances from arts, cultural, music and dance groups, input from council ambassadors, seminars on practical aspects of relocating, a kids' "interactive zone" and displays by more than 100 exhibitors.

Popular band Evermore performed amid a program that also featured puppeteers, circus performers, film screenings, instrumentalists and Dreamtime stories.



Loddon Shire's Christine Coombes was one of five Council staff members who manned the stall at last year's expo.

Flood works almost done



Flood recovery worker Richard Smyth (right) works with Council patrolman Bob Montebello repairing the Boort-Wedderburn road near Korong Vale.

The massive task of rebuilding roads and town infrastructure after the floods of 2010/11 is nearing an end, with Council's exhaustive two-year flood restoration program due to be completed next month.

The program was made possible by grants totalling \$36.2 million from the Department of Treasury and Finance under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements, a joint federal/state agreement by which the Commonwealth contributes 50 per cent.

Flood-related damage was widespread throughout the Shire, affecting road, bridge, footpath and drainage networks.

In response, Council beefed up its outdoor plant and equipment resources with the purchase of additional graders, tractors and trucks worth about \$2.9 million.

It also hired 20 new works staff and boosted its use of contractors.

The latest quarterly report to Council, up to 31 December last year, showed just 91km of a targeted 857km of grading, re-sheeting, shoulder re-sheeting and sealed road reconstruction remained to be done.

Alongside that, there were only 30 other jobs still unfinished.

Township streets, drainage structures and safety infrastructure projects were all ticked off and bridges and culvert repairs were 80 per cent completed. Floodway works were 92 per cent complete.

It was expected then that all outstanding works would be done by the end of April, with everything wound up by 30 June.

Chief Executive Officer John McLinden said an enormous amount had been achieved since the first government flood recovery funding came through in March 2011.

"It's been 27 months of intense work for Council's staff and contractors," Mr McLinden said.

"The ready support of federal and state governments has meant Loddon Shire has been able to embark on a far-reaching and ambitious program of repairs and recovery, hand-in-hand with local communities across the municipality.

"We are deeply grateful for the support that's been offered and take great pleasure in seeing the many improvements and advances achieved."

Easter closures

Loddon Shire offices in Wedderburn and Serpentine will close for the Easter break at 5pm on Thursday 28 March, reopening at 8.15am on Tuesday 2 April.

Council's home and community services will also be closed for the break, though a limited personal care program will still be operating. For emergency assistance over these four days, phone 0427 804 736.

Australia Day awards announced

Boort identity Kevin Sutton was one of 14 recipients honoured during formal ceremonies across Loddon Shire in January when the municipality's 2013 Australia Day Awards were announced.

Mr Sutton was named Citizen of the Year, while the award for Young Citizen of the Year was shared between Tyler Nelson and Nick Marlow.

The Community Group of the Year award was also shared – by the Coach House Gallery at Wedderburn and the Goldfields Choir, based at Inglewood.

The Community Event of the Year went to Inglewood Lions Club's Christmas Festival, while Boort doctor Ashraf Takla was named this year's Local Hero. In addition, community service awards were given out in all five wards.

Nine centres across the municipality – from Eddington and Newbridge in the south to Pyramid Hill and Boort up north – saw residents gather around barbecues, lunches and morning tea to salute our national day.

Seven Victorians with notable records in community service visited the Shire as Australia Day Ambassadors. They were barrister Matthew Albert (who spoke at Wedderburn and Arnold), businessman Claude Lombard (Pyramid Hill), paediatrician Dr Bernard Jenner (Bridgewater and Inglewood), oncologist Dr Bronwyn King (Newbridge), sports scientist John Quinn (Jarklin), Crown Casino executive Matthew Christie (Boort) and airline pilot Captain Dale Newman (Eddington).

Citizen of the Year Kevin Sutton was born in Boort and has stayed around the town his whole life. His community involvements have included the Little Lake Boort management committee, Boort Memorial Hall, Boort Power Boat and Ski Club, the Men's Shed, Boort A & P Society, the trotting track, Boort District School, the aerodrome and a number of local sporting clubs. He has volunteered his services to many clubs and organisations in the area, whether or not he was a member.

Joint Young Citizen of the Year Tyler Nelson graduated from The University of Melbourne in 2008 with a Bachelor of Agricultural Science and has since returned to Boort, volunteering his time for the Birchip Cropping Group, Boort Football Club and the CFA. Tyler is also a leader in the youth group at Boort Baptist Church, helping to organise and run events and hosting activities on his farm.

Nick Marlow, an IT technician running his own business, has taught computer classes for the East Loddon Community Network Group, helped establish a computer room for the use of East Loddon P-12 VCAL students and volunteers for the Mitiamo Football/Netball Club.



Loddon's Citizen of the Year, Kevin Sutton

Community Group of the Year joint winner Loddon Arts Inc. was recognised for its efforts in staging a variety of exhibitions each month at Wedderburn's Coach House Gallery. Last year, these included artworks by Wedderburn College VCE students, glass works, mosaics, tea cosies from the Patchwork Group, works by local men and an art exhibition for the Loddon Healthy Minds Network.

The other recipient, Inglewood's Goldfields Choir, has 22 singers and has just celebrated its 10th anniversary. Members come from around the Shire, performing at concerts, churches, hospitals, senior citizens' centres, Christmas parties, community festivals and special events.

Jade Davies, of Eddington, received the Young Citizen Fundraiser Award, after she teamed with a fellow student at Highview College, Maryborough, on a 50km paddle along the Murray River from Barham to Echuca. Jade and her friend – Kirsten Deaker, of Carisbrook – raised \$2561 for the Royal Children's Hospital.

Jane Gould, from Boort, was named Inspirational Achiever, for her considerable contribution to school and community life. Jane, who tackles Year 12 this year, has been a Student Leader Council representative, a school ambassador, a debater, primary school captain and FreeZa committee member. She has also been involved in Boort's hockey, tennis and football/netball clubs and the Boort A&P Society.

The Shire's Local Hero, Dr Ashraf Takla, moved from Northampton (UK) to Boort in 2007 with his wife, Annalaise. Since then, he has immersed himself in the Boort community, helping to significantly boost the town's health care resources and getting involved in local sporting and community clubs and events. In 2010, Dr Takla was the anchorman for the Boort Cycling team's participation in that year's Murray to Moyne ride, raising money for the local hospital.

The 2013 Community Service Awards went to winners in all five wards.

- Jim Nolan (Boort ward) was recognised for his many years of community service, his involvements including Boort Development Committee, Boort Tourism, the lakes and aerodrome committees and Boort hospital.
- Noel Hercus (Terrick ward) is widely known for his willingness to help others, Noel's interests have included the former Yarrowalla football and cricket clubs, Mitiamo Football Club and the Calivil North Tennis Club.
- Frank Canfield (Wedderburn ward) is a founding member of the Wedderburn Historical Engine and Machinery Society and the Men's Shed, a member of the Lions Club for 33 years and in the CFA for 57 years.
- Alan Saunders (Inglewood ward) is involved, among other things, in the Goldfields Choir, ambulance auxiliary, Inglewood Lions Club, Neighbourhood Watch, Inglewood Petrol Co-op, Blue Ribbon Foundation and the Inglewood Christmas Carols event.
- Ken O'Shea (Tarnagulla ward) maintains a full range of community involvements, including the Inglewood Historical Society, Inglewood hospital, Newbridge CFA, Newbridge Progress Association, Newbridge town hall and Tarnagulla Golf Club.

Our student winners

Loddon Shire's Australia Day competition attracted a large number of entries from students around the municipality.

In the colouring competitions, Caitlin Zanker (from Boort) won the kindergarten section, Tayah Ellis (Pyramid Hill) the preps, Carolyn Fergusson (Pyramid Hill College) Grade 1 and Imogen Broad (Pyramid Hill College) the Grade 2 section.

In photography, Cassidy Pearson won the junior category, Maddison Holt was the senior winner and Chris Payne took out the open section.

The winners in the literature competition, writing on the subject "The Flood", were Isabelle Hosking, Eliza Perryman and Nick Scott, from Boort (preps section), Joshua Diss, East Loddon (Grade 1), Roscoe Calder, East Loddon (Grade 2), Chloe Baker, Boort (Grade 3), Matilda Peck, from Tarnagulla, and Trent Jackson, Wedderburn (Grade 4), Deklan Nelson, from Bridgewater, and Zailey Canfield, Boort (Grade 5), and Tyler Wheater, Tarnagulla (Grade 6).

Joint Year 7 winners were Grace Field, from Boort, and Rhordan Holt, Wedderburn, while Jarvis Holt and Abbi Fry, both of Wedderburn, shared top honours in Year 10.

Big win for local clubs

Loddon Shire has just wrapped up a \$1.5 million infrastructure improvement program which has seen 31 projects completed at multiple sites throughout the municipality.

The ambitious building effort was funded under the federal government's Strengthening Basin Communities Program, aimed specifically at climate-proofing sport and recreation facilities in the Shire.

This was a special two-year funding scheme instigated by the government and split into four six-month stages, with all work to be completed by 1 March this year.

The Commonwealth committed \$754,000 and Loddon Shire Council contributed \$264,000. A further \$111,000 came from sporting clubs and there was about \$250,000 worth of in-kind contributions from Council and clubs throughout the Shire.

In addition, the state government, through Sport and Recreation Victoria, allocated almost \$117,000 for two specific projects – netball courts at Calivil and Mitiamo.

Loddon Shire was the only local government authority in Victoria to be signed up for the program.

Completed works have included converting grass playing surfaces to hard or synthetic materials, replacing inefficient irrigation systems, reseeding playing surfaces, installing pool blankets and fitting water storage tanks.

Among the last projects to be completed were:

- new water tanks at Calivil and Newbridge recreation reserves and Boort Park
- a new irrigation system at Korong Vale Bowling Club
- new thermal pool blankets installed at the Wedderburn, Inglewood and Boort swimming pools
- new courts at the Mitiamo Tennis/Netball Club and Wedderburn Lawn Tennis Club
- an infrastructure upgrade at the Inglewood and Wedderburn reservoirs
- resurfacing and re-seeding at the Inglewood and Bridgewater football grounds
- converting two grass courts to hard courts at the Calivil Lawn Tennis Club
- resurfacing and re-seeding Boort Park's hockey and football grounds.

Landfill to grow

Council's Boort landfill site will almost triple in size with a major renovation project now under way.

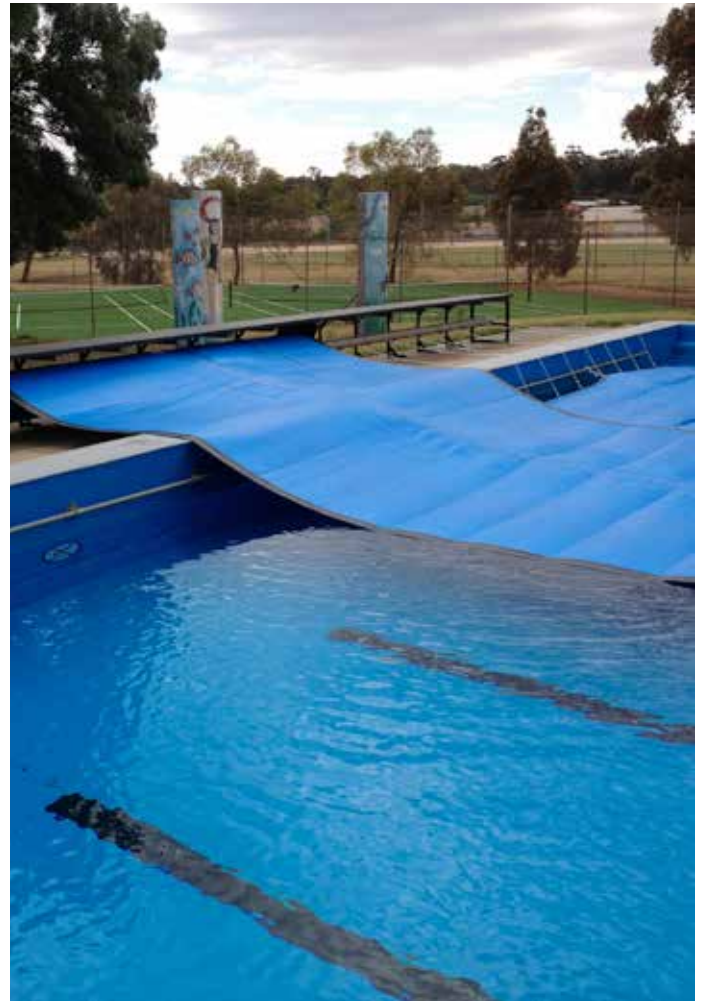
Currently 39,000 square metres in area, the tip is to expand to 108,000 square metres after extensive earthmoving and re-fencing work.

The site is almost full and Council estimates the overhaul will increase its lifespan by about 10 years.

Residents will still have access to the site while the works, expected to take up to a month, are taking place.

The Boort landfill is advanced in its recycling facilities, with paper, cardboard, glass, metals, used chemical drums, e-waste and used oil all accepted.

For more information, phone Darren Schultz on 5494 1200.



The Wedderburn swimming pool has a new thermal blanket, thanks to the drought-proofing initiative.

Carol's on board



Carol Gibbins took up a full-time role with Loddon Shire in January as Council's new Community Care Coordinator, succeeding Julie Nickson, who has resigned.

Based at the Serpentine office, Carol is responsible for coordinating Council's aged and disability services, which include the HACC program and other home care efforts, senior citizens, Planned Activities Groups and assessment and administration services.

Carol trained initially as a radiographer and has worked in health promotion for Breast Screen Victoria and at St John of God Hospital in Bendigo. Her most recent position was as program manager for Breast Screen Victoria's Loddon Mallee region, based in Bendigo.

She and husband Tony live at Powlett Plains and have four adult children.

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FORTHCOMING COUNCIL MEETINGS

Monday 25 March, Serpentine
Monday 22 April, Wedderburn
Monday 27 May, Serpentine
Monday 24 June, Newbridge
Ordinary Council Meetings are open to the public and commence at 3.30pm.

Your Councillors



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