

SUNBURY & MACEDON RANGES

STARWEEKLY

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Domain

Sunbury push for retail fix

By Serena Seyfort

A consortium of Sunbury organisations is pushing for revitalisation of the town's retail precinct.

An unprecedented number of empty shops and a change in shopping habits has prompted Sunbury businesses, community health and Hume council to launch a fight-back.

Sunbury Business Association treasurer Syliva Unferdorben, who has been in Sunbury since 1983, said she had never before seen so many closed shops in the town centre.

"We've now got 10 empty shops in the main street – that's huge," she said.

"We need to work out how to re-ignite Evans Street."

Sunbury resident of 40 years and business owner Jackie McAllister agreed it was "definitely" the worst time for retail in the town she had seen.

Ms McAllister said her business was not directly affected by the downturn in trade, but she was participating in the Business Expansion and Retention program (BEAR) because she wanted to see Sunbury thrive again.

"It's a shame to see all the empty shops at the moment," she said.

Ms Unferdorben has spearheaded the push for participation in the Municipal Association of Victoria's BEAR community workshops, which will help improve Sunbury's business environment.

She said it was important that as many different stakeholders as possible be on board.

"We've all got to do it together," she said. "There's not one fix here."

Hume planning and development director Kevin Walsh said the council supported the introduction of the BEAR

program "to meet current challenges". He said Sunbury was not immune to the "substantial changes" the retail world was going through.

Ms Unferdorben agreed the wider economy and the rise of online shopping were playing a part in Sunbury's struggles.

But said that having talked to community members, she believed Sunbury's "biggest issue" was accessibility, including difficulty finding a carpark and one-hour limits.

"It's a shame to see all the empty shops"

- Jackie McAllister

"You've got to get in and get out [when shopping] – you can't linger," she said.

She said mums at the local school had told her they no longer bothered going into Sunbury for a one-hour park, instead preferring the longer parking times at Watergardens and Highpoint shopping centres.

Ms Unferdorben said the BEAR program would give everyone the opportunity to express their views on what they think is affecting Sunbury's retail precinct, including parking.

The program will unfold in stages in coming months and will include workshops and discussions for residents, businesses and community groups.

An information night will be held on Monday, August 28, to outline the program and ways to get involved. It will be held at Sunbury Youth Centre, from 5.30pm. RSVP to bernieh@sunburychc.org.au



Pat McKenna, Kate Darby, and at back, Mitch Hannon, Lachie Plowman, Macy and Patrick. (Dennis Manktelow)

Kicking goals for footy talent

There's something in the water at New Gisborne's Holy Cross Catholic Primary School. In the past eight years, six former pupils have pulled on their boots for the AFL. Mitch Hannon, Pat McKenna, Lachie Plowman, Tom Sheridan and Jarryd Allen (who retired in 2009), all attended the school. Kate Darby – one of the first women to play for AFL – was also one of the school's pupils. Last week four of the footy stars returned to the school grounds to take part in a Footy Day. The school is currently fundraising with an AFL-themed raffle which includes a prize of two tickets to the AFL grand final. Tickets at www.rafflelink.com.au/hcraffle before August 25.

Serena Seyfort

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