



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

OPENING WARRNAMBOOL RSL RENOVATION

Tuesday 6 March, 2018

Cr Robert Anderson, Mayor, Warrnambool City Council and Councillors

Mr Bruce Anson, Chief Executive Officer, Warrnambool City Council

Mayors, CEOs and Councillors from adjoining shires

Dr Robert Webster OAM, President, RSL Victoria Branch

Brigadier Michael Annett, State Secretary, RSL Victoria

Mr John Miles, President, Warrnambool RSL Sub-branch

Members of the Warrnambool RSL Sub-branch

Warrnambool City Councillors

Veterans

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

First, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their elders past and present and to any elders here with us this afternoon.

Tony and I are delighted to be visiting Warrnambool this week, and to be with you here at the Warrnambool RSL, to officially open your renovated and extended facilities, including the new dedicated Veteran Support Centre.

We are particularly pleased to be in this beautiful spot with its magnificent views, and in the place where Tony's late mother lived as a girl.

It seems especially fitting – after you celebrated your centenary last year – that 2018 will mark this new chapter in your future.

In 1917, when this Returned Soldiers and Sailors Imperial League of Australia (or the R.S.S.I.L.A) was established, to care for the interests of soldiers and seamen – and later, airmen – returning from active service, the Great War was nearing its end.

No-one could have predicted that the Returned Services League—the RSL—as it then became, would be caring for men returning from another world war so soon. Or from other wars after that.

No-one could have predicted that the RSL would also care for so many women who would serve overseas.

Certainly, no-one could have anticipated the body of knowledge and expertise that would develop as to the help needed to re-settle the men and women who returned from active duty.

That housing and accommodation and practical assistance would always be important, but so too would recognition of the care and support needed to nurse wounded spirits as well as injured bodies.

But, perhaps for some of you, like me, there is much that has changed across the better part of the last century that we have seen with our own eyes! It's a shock but, for some of us, 100 years does not seem quite as long ago as it used to!

In any event, I'm sure that, in 1917, nobody could have predicted that - across several sites - this RSL would stand for more than 100 years as an integral part of community life here in Warrnambool.

During the century, you have seen your local men and women represent our country: many to return, some not.

Lifelong friendships have been formed within your walls. Stories have been shared, wreaths have been laid, tears shed, heroes remembered, veterans farewelled and above all, mates have been supported.

Avis Quarrell, the 94 year old World War Two servicewoman who wrote the history of your centenary last year, wrote beautifully of 'mateship'.

She wrote of the Warrnambool RSL being 'warm, wonderful, and very special.'

She described it in this way:

'Whether you are an elderly man or woman of W.W.2, middle aged of Vietnam, or a young one of Afghanistan or East Timor, you have that untaught feeling of sharing so much (even over three generations), when you meet that special 'mate.'

When we think of RSL's, we often talk of mateship. And yet, for many of us who have not served, we can only imagine the challenges for returned service men and women – rebuilding lives at home, perhaps dealing with the psychological traumas, the memories, the pressures of family life, and for some, the health and financial struggles that arise.

What I admire most about the RSL, is that it gives tangible meaning to the concept of mateship.

We see it here in Warrnambool, through the facilities and services offered to thousands of members.

We see it in this dedicated Veteran Support Centre that will enable expanded services to be delivered to more people, including the next generation of veterans. And the newly renovated facilities that can cater for 250 people to gather and dine together.

And what finer example of mateship can there be than the efforts of your 90 or so volunteers who, amongst a wide range of generous contributions, give of themselves to drive vets to appointments, visit them in hospital, deliver meals to them, fix their gardens, or advocate for their pensions.

May I also congratulate Stephen Johnstone -the Club manager -and his staff, for ensuring an efficient, as well as warm and welcoming venue for one and all.

I am particularly pleased today for the opportunity to publicly commend the hard work and generosity of all those involved in this exciting building project.

Today we think of absent friends: Alex Gannaway, who put so much into this project.

May I also mention the President, John Miles. And the Secretary, Fred Chatfield. It is due to their volunteering of time and expertise, their advocacy, and the work of their entire Committee that these major works have taken place.

I'd also like to acknowledge the philanthropists and philanthropic trusts that have made donations to the Veteran Support Centre.

Amongst you all, what beautiful facilities you have created.

So, here's to a new chapter. A new century. New facilities. New challenges. New methods of care. New stories and celebrations, and new communities housed within these walls.

But amidst all that is new, I note that there is much that is unchanged.

As your motto says: 'SERVING STILL'. That is, SERVING with exactly the same generosity of spirit and sense of togetherness that has enabled this RSL to flourish for more than 100 years.

And with the spirit in this room, the Warrnambool community wrapped around you, and beautiful new facilities, it is clear that those who need you will be well served into the future.

I look forward to unveiling the commemorative plaque shortly, to declare the refurbished RSL officially open.