



Men at the Mill Newsletter

Woodend Men's Shed

Nov 2025

2

President's Message

Since our last newsletter in June, the Shed has been very busy and a lot has happened. Sadly, we lost one of our members, Dr Ray Hearn. Ray was a highly intelligent person and a well-respected school teacher and artist. Our sympathies go to his family.



The Shed has begun to produce its own metal garden furniture and ornaments, including round tables, pot planters and tricycle pot stands - all of which look splendid in the garden. This market will continue to grow for us in the future.

Refurbishing garden seats remains a regular and profitable activity, with many household gardens in Woodend and surrounds now featuring chairs lovingly restored by members of the Shed.

We continue to enjoy a good and mutually beneficial relationship with the Woodend Neighbourhood House and are pleased to have built and installed wooden seats around large trees within their precinct.

Our membership continues to grow, to the extent that we have had to review the Shed's opening hours. Traditionally, we have opened on Monday and Wednesday mornings, but have now started opening on Tuesday mornings as well, following a survey of members.

Over the past few months, we have undertaken the large task of refurbishing the tables at the Victoria Hotel, both inside and out. Publican Emily has been a great supporter of the Shed and what it stands for. It has been a logistical challenge for us, but one that has brought great satisfaction.

In the past three months, we have distributed to all members a handbook outlining the policies and procedures applying to the Shed and the Australian Men's Shed Association. This will be a valuable reference tool going forward.

Our pursuit of a site to build a permanent Shed continues, with us responding to the Macedon Ranges Shire Council's draft Woodend Racecourse Master Plan. We have also canvassed several councillors seeking their support and hope for a positive outcome in due course.

As I am not seeking re-election at the annual meeting this coming November, I wish to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to all members and office bearers for their support over the past two years. I also wish the incoming office bearers every success. - **Bob McDonald, President**

Woodend Men's Shed

Please call and see us at 988 Black Forest Drive on a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday morning or email us at info@woodendmensshed.org

Happenings around the Workshop

Boxes for Woodend Rotary

Some time back, in January 2025, we received a request from Adrian for a set of bereavement boxes to be issued to mothers who have lost babies. These boxes were to contain a candle, diary, bath salts, and a number of other small gifts. The initial requirement was for 10 simple boxes large enough to hold the gifts.

An initial prototype box was put together and presented in February. This box then served as the template for the remaining nine boxes. The only change for the new versions was the addition of a brass button latch from Anton Gerner in Melbourne, to complement his brass hinges.

The timber used was a mix of cedar from old cabinets, Burmese teak offcuts donated by Neil, blackbutt from slabs, and some 1800-era floorboards, among others. The boxes are fitted with a soft-close insert, and the lid and base are held in place by a small rebate in the sides. Apart from milling the timber, all cuts were made on the table saw, including the 15-degree bevel on the lid.

All boxes have been finished with an equal-part mix of tung oil, wipe-on poly, and mineral turps, followed by a couple of layers of Gillies cabinet makers wax and finally a couple of applications of Gillies carnauba wax. It's been a long process, but I enjoyed every bit of it and learned plenty along the way.

- Rodney McKee



Team Effort Gets Results

Members of the community often drop by the Shed looking to have small pieces of heirloom furniture restored to their original functionality.

One such item recently brought in was a distressed chair that had been affected by borers. A complete new leg was required, which meant calling on woodturner Barry to manufacture an exact replica. The leg was then fitted, and the chair was returned to its delighted owner.



Kindling Ends for 2025

After a sustained, monumental five-month effort by many members, more than 500 bags of kindling were cut, packed, and delivered to retail outlets across the region. The project raised considerable funds that will contribute to the Shed's future building account.

The efforts of Vice President Paul Muller in coordinating and managing the entire project are highly commended.



Combining Craft and Culture

Originally from Iran, Ali has been a member of the Woodend Shed for over a year, and as time goes on, we are learning more about his culture - and enjoying some traditional treats with our morning cuppa!

Recently, a lightweight wooden frame Ali was constructing piqued the interest of members and prompted an explanation of the operation of a Korsi - a traditional Iranian heater. The Korsi is one of the most creative achievements of traditional Iranian life, providing pleasant and sustainable warmth during cold winters with the simplest tools and minimal energy resources. It was not only an efficient heating device but also the centre of family interactions, nightly gatherings, storytelling, and even collective sleeping.

In its most traditional form, heat was provided by a bowl of glowing coals covered by a layer of ash. More recent models utilise a small electric radiator.

Ali is shown here with the completed Korsi. The heat source is placed centrally under the platform, which is then covered with a heavy quilt or blanket and surrounded by cushions and other quilts.

The traditional Iranian Korsi is a symbol of human adaptation to the environment and a remarkable example of using minimal energy resources for comfort and survival in harsh climates. This simple structure, using wood and charcoal, not only warmed homes but also became the cultural and social heart of people's lives.



September Open Day

The shed held a successful Open Day on Saturday, September 13th, where visitors inspected our facilities, purchased items crafted by our members, and learned about the Men's Shed community work. Over \$1,500 worth of goods were sold, including heirloom toys, turned wooden platters and bowls, and restored garden furniture. These items will next be available at the Woodend Farmers Market on Saturday, December 6th.



Teepees for Mt Macedon Primary School

Members of the Woodend Men's Shed built and delivered three timber teepees for Mount Macedon Primary School, creating unique outdoor spaces for students to play and relax. Made from recycled materials, the project highlights the Shed's craftsmanship, teamwork and community spirit.

These projects bring generations together, giving men purpose, connection and pride in supporting local schools and community groups - a great example of what Men's Sheds are all about.



- Kevin Whelan

Reflecting on a Life of Opportunities - Bill Couche

My earliest memories, although vague and episodic, are of life on our family farm in East Murchison, Victoria, during five years of drought. Much clearer are the subsequent years spent growing up in Warrandyte—a then small-town community on the banks of the Yarra River. Important elements of those years included attending the local three-teacher primary school, where learning was relaxed and morning recess featured a cup of hot chocolate brewed on the open fire that heated the Grades 5 and 6 classroom in winter.



Weekends were often spent exploring the surrounding bush, where signs of earlier gold mining were everywhere. Summers were filled with swimming in various “swimming holes” along the river or building rafts made from the rushes that grew along the banks. As an adolescent, the pinnacle of happiness was owning a boat crafted from a pressed steel “belly tank,” originally designed as a supplementary fuel tank for WW2 aircraft, which could be purchased for five bob at a military surplus store in Kew.

I completed my secondary education at Box Hill High, involving an hour-and-a-half commute twice a day. A significant achievement for me was winning the David Gray Memorial Cup, awarded to the school swimming champion—one of only two individual trophies the school awarded.

After school, I chose teaching as my profession. My first appointment was at Swinburne Technical School, where I taught English and Social Studies in classes of over fifty students, many of whom had little interest in the subjects. Suffice it to say, my first year was a “baptism of fire,” but I relished the challenges and loved my vocation. A key to my success was my genuine interest in each student and the time I spent outside of class in the playground. I coached several school sporting teams and ran extra tutorial classes for students hoping to gain apprenticeships.

After ten successful years of teaching, I resigned to take on an innovative and challenging role with the Anglican Church in Perth. My first project involved redeveloping a children's home that, through ignorance and poor management, had become institutional and out of touch with evolving childcare and child development policies. Next, I worked on restructuring a service for homeless men, again eliminating many institutional practices. Further opportunities arose, allowing me to work with homeless young people trying to turn their lives around and implementing a range of support services for struggling families.

As a result of these successes, I was invited—first by the Western Australian Government and subsequently by the Commonwealth—to join several advisory committees on support services for children, youth, and families, including non-institutional residential services for those with alcohol and drug dependency. A particularly rewarding aspect during this time was developing a professional and personal relationship with Senator Fred Chaney, the then Minister for Social Security.

After ten years in Perth, I returned to Melbourne with my wife, Jan, and our two young boys to continue as a CEO in work similar to what I had engaged in while in Perth. For the next thirty years, we lived in Richmond, opposite the MCG, with Yarra Park serving as the kids' playground. Upon retiring eight years ago, Jan and I moved to Woodend—as a return to the kind of community I had grown up in and an opportunity to continue my commitment to community strengthening and service.