RSL Park veterans attend the Centenary of ANZAC Dawn Service

The smile on Graham Outhred's face said it all. Graham, aged 91 and a veteran of the New Guinea campaigns of World War II, was sitting waiting in the departure lounge of Canberra airport with five other veteran residents from RSL Park and their individual carers.

Graham was all smiles with a new lease of life because two days before he had been one of the 120,000 people who assembled in the Parade Ground of the Australian War Memorial to attend the Dawn Service on the Centenary of ANZAC Day.

The six veterans had flown to Canberra for the ANZAC commemoration. The trip for the veterans was a special project conceived by Jan Semple, Residential Manager of RSL Park and her staff, who wanted to do something memorable for the Centenary of ANZAC.

They discounted Gallipoli as a beach too far, practically and financially, and settled on Canberra instead. “Arranging for our veterans to attend the Dawn the Service was a demonstration of our duty of care, our history and legacy,” says RSL Park Residential Manager, Jan Semple.

Even so, the project of transporting and accommodating a tour group of six veterans and an equal number of personal carers, plus the CEO of Vasey RSL Care to commemorate the centenary of the Gallipoli landing was a major undertaking.

Fortunately, the Dawn Service project received significant support from RSL Sub-Branches and Vietnam Veterans Associations on the Mornington Peninsula. The support of the local ex-service community was coordinated by John Biles, a Vietnam Vet of 4RAR who is Vice-President and Welfare Officer of Seaford RSL. As well as Seaford, four Sub-Branches (Longbeach, Frankston, Rye and Rosebud) contributed almost $10,000 towards the pilgrimage of the RSL Park veterans.

There were also significant sponsorships by Vasey RSL Care’s investment adviser, UBS Wealth Management, and service contractor, Midnight Express, with smaller amounts contributed by the Defence Bank and TENA/Asaleo Care. The project also received in-kind support from Akubra Hats and Piccadilly Circus Coats.

In the pre-dawn dark of ANZAC Day, at 3:30am the carers wheeled this small group of veterans of World War II and Korea, with ages ranging from mid-80s to early-90s, to the War Memorial for the Dawn Service.

Because of their age and the understandable frailty of some of the veterans, the stay in Canberra was extended to four days to allow the group to recover from the flight and prepare for the ceremony. As part of the preparation, the veterans and their carers were given a guided tour of the Australian War Memorial by AWM volunteer and RAN veteran Mike Carr.
The War Memorial tour was an understandable highlight, but also an eye-opener for veterans who hadn’t visited the AWM in many years and who marvelled at the extensions and exhibitions. Two of the veterans, Tony Guest and Kevin Berry, had personally affecting encounters with exhibits. Tony saw a display of one the ships he had served on during his term in RAN, the Australia. Kevin spotted a photo of Sgt Brian Cooper, after he had been awarded a Military Medal, for his actions in the battle of the Hook in the last desperate hours before the armistice was signed to halt the Korean War.

Kevin was with Cooper when the photo was taken. “We were all in a tent together when the Army PR team turned up with a photographer and asked Brian to come out and pose for the photo,” Kevin recalls.

No one expected 120,000 people to attend the Dawn Service at the War Memorial. Ron Benton, a veteran of both the Royal Navy and the Australian Navy, describes looking down Anzac Parade from where the veterans were positioned above the Stone of Remembrance on the Parade Ground as a “magnificent sight”.

Ron was Parade Marshall at Frankston RSL for 17 years. “Being here to see such a ceremony and share it with so many people on the 100th anniversary is incredible,” says Ron. “I’ve never been to a Dawn Service as magnificent as this and I will probably not see another.”

For Kevin Berry, the silence of the crowd before the ceremonies began was unforgettable. “When they turned off all the lights and asked everyone to keep quiet for three or four minutes, that crowd of 120,000 people maintained absolute silence,” Kevin says.

“No one so much as coughed. Then, when the didgeridoo started up, that was really something. And of course the Last Post stirs the hearts of everybody.”

For the six personal carers who paired up with the veterans to look after them around the clock, the tour was a bonding experience and a chance to really get to know these men. “They opened up in a way they don’t usually do at home,” says Mandy Wakely, Quality Administration Coordinator at RSL Park.

“Spending time with them on the trip really opened my eyes to what they went through and the adjustments they had to make when they came home.”

Mandy also knows the efforts some of the veterans made to go on the trip. “Seeing how hard Graham Outhred had to work to be able to get on a bus and a plane, I really admire his spirit. It is something we should all aspire to,” says Mandy.

Reflecting on the significance of the Dawn Service pilgrimage, Vasey RSL Care’s CEO, Janna Voloshin, says the project was a real experience of the ANZAC spirit and values.

“The courage, determination and strength of our veterans, together with the passion, commitment and care of our staff, have overcome all the challenges they faced in preparation and during the trip. This is a strong team of people, both residents and staff, who shared a passionate commitment to a common purpose. It was a privilege to be part of that team, and it is a privilege to lead an organisation that cares for, and employs, people like them,” Janna says.

“Thank you to everybody involved in organising the trip – not just those who were with us during the time, but also our sponsors and all those supporters on Vasey RSL Care Facebook.”

Waiting at the gate to board the flight home, all the men seemed to have found a new lease of life and well being, energised by their experience.

Tony Guest makes the point that while all the vets know each other and see each other around RSL Park, sharing the trip and the experiences has changed them. “Of course a few of us have been friends before this, but we’ll all be better mates from now on,” says Tony.

Another carer on the team, Allan Kirk, who has served with both the Australian Army and the Navy, says the tour has been good for both the veterans and their carers. “This trip has been great for all of us. It has got us - and them - out of our everyday routines. It has let them be part of the world again and be publicly recognised and respected.”

Speaking for all the veterans, Robert Homes, who struggled to recover from a last minute illness to make the pilgrimage, agrees: “I wouldn’t have missed it for quids!”

The veterans’ carers team at the airport
From the CEO

On behalf of the management and staff of Vasey RSL Care I wish to express our sorrow at the death of Michael MacKellar, the former Chair of our Board, who died on Saturday, 9 May following a long illness. I offer our condolences to Michael’s family; his partner Pamela and children Cameron, Duncan and Maggie.

Michael served as a Board Member of Vasey RSL Care from June 2010 and as Chair of the Board from December 2012 until his retirement due to ill health in February 2015. Michael was always very supportive and I benefited greatly from his advice. I appreciated the love and respect he had for Vasey RSL care and his commitment to ensuring we provided the best possible service for our veterans and war widows.

On the subject of best quality service, I am pleased to announce that both ANZAC Hostel and Vasey House successfully achieved their latest accreditation examination by AAQCA. In the Agency’s report the assessors commented very positively on our organisational quality systems, culture and excellent staff. My congratulations and thanks to all staff of both facilities.

Since our last newsletter, Australia has commemorated the Centenary of the ANZAC landing at Gallipoli. I had the experience of a lifetime and the privilege to travel with a group of six veterans from RSL Park who we took to Canberra to attend the Centenary of ANZAC Dawn Service at the Australian War Memorial. For me and the staff who cared for the veterans over the four days of this pilgrimage, this was a real demonstration of the ANZAC spirit and values; of what it means to be Australian.

The courage, determination and strength of our veterans, together with the passion, commitment and care of our staff, overcame all the challenges they faced in preparation and during the trip. This is a strong team of people (residents and staff) who shared a passionate commitment to a common purpose. It was an honour to be part of that team, and it is a privilege to lead an organisation that cares for, and employs, people like these.

Looking ahead, I’m excited to announce that we have completed a long planning approvals process with the City of Kingston and will soon begin building 10 new independent living units on our site at Cheltenham. The sod turning ceremony is scheduled for Tuesday 10 June.

Winter is a time when you need to take extra care of yourself. Make sure you’ve had your flu vaccination and please consider our frail clients and residents. If you’re not feeling well and you plan to visit, phone instead and come to visit when you’re well again.

Janna Voloshin
Chief Executive Officer

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Inspired by the success of our ANZAC Centenary project we are setting up a Hero's Wish fund and would welcome donations towards granting special wishes for our residents. To donate to the Hero’s Wish initiative please complete the coupon below and mail it to:

To: Ms Janna Voloshin
Chief Executive Officer
Vasey RSL Care Ltd
PO Box 203, Hawthorn Vic 3122

Enclosed is my cheque (payable to Vasey RSL Care) for $................... or please debit this amount to my:

[ ] Credit Card [ ] Mastercard [ ] Visa A/c No. ___________________________ Expiry Date: ................/..............

Name on card: ...................................................................................................................
Address: .........................................................................................................................

Signed: ............................................................................................................................

P/C: .................................................................................................................................

Email: ...............................................................................................................................

Phone: ............................................................................................................................

Janna with Graham Outhred

The new units will accommodate the residents now living at our ILUs in Elsternwick, who have been waiting patiently for the chance to join the very vibrant group of residents at Cheltenham.

Winter is a time when you need to take extra care of yourself. Make sure you've had your flu vaccination and please consider our frail clients and residents. If you're not feeling well and you plan to visit, phone instead and come to visit when you're well again.
Vale the Honourable Michael MacKellar AM

It is with great sadness that Vasey RSL Care received the news that the Hon Michael MacKellar AM, the former Chair of our Board, died on Saturday, 9 May following a long illness. Michael served as a Board Member of Vasey RSL Care from June 2010 and as Chairman from December 2012, until his retirement due to ill health in February 2015.

David Paroissien OAM, who succeeded Michael as Chair of the Vasey RSL Care Board, paid tribute to the contribution he had made to the operation of the Board and the organisation during his time as Board Member and Chair.

“On the Board Michael advanced Vasey RSL Care’s commitment to setting and achieving ever higher levels of quality of aged care for veterans and war widows. In his time Michael also oversaw many improvements to the management and recruitment of staff,” said David Paroissien.

Before he joined the Board of Vasey RSL Care, Michael held several executive positions, including a term as President of the National Ageing Research Institute. From 1969 to 1994, Michael was a member of Federal Parliament, as Member for Warringah. He held various ministerial portfolios in the Fraser Government, including a term as Minister for Health. When he retired from Parliament Michael was replaced as Member for Warringah by Tony Abbott.

In his tribute to Michael, Mr Abbott said he was blessed with natural charm and a strong intellect. “He stood for the humane and the decent. I was aware I had big shoes to fill,” Mr Abbott said.

On behalf of the Board and all at Vasey RSL Care, we offer our condolences to Michael’s family: his partner Pamela and children Cameron, Duncan and Maggie.

Jeanette Spike honoured as finalist in ACSA awards

The ACSA Aged Care Award winners for Victoria were announced on Friday, 22nd May. At the awards ceremony Jeanette Spike was presented with a certificate honouring her contribution as a volunteer at Sir William Hall Hostel. During the past four years, Jeanette, with the help of volunteer Helen Gillett, has established a weekly ritual of high teas for residents on Wednesday afternoons, served in fine china cups with cake or scones.

The ACSA Aged Care Awards recognise excellence in contributing to improving the quality of life for older people, people with disabilities and their carers. Congratulations to Jeanette and thanks to all our volunteers, who make such a valuable contribution to the care of our residents.