

# VASEY RSL CARE NEWS

The Quarterly Newsletter of Vasey RSL Care

Spring 2020

## Memories of Victory in the Pacific 1945

Saturday 15 August marked 75 years since the end of World War II. Our Lifestyle Staff spoke with many of our residents about that day and we bring you some of their memories.



**Betty was a nurse and had served in New Guinea. She recalls:**

"It was a very very happy day for everybody. I was on leave from the Heidelberg Hospital and I went home to see my family and on

the way, everyone stopped you and expressed how happy they were. I thought of the girls I'd served in New Guinea with, plus my friend who was in a camp held by the Japanese and I hoped they'd got home safely."



**Ron served in the Navy in WWII. He remembers:**

"I was on the way back - I'd been overseas for two years with the Royal Australian Navy and came back on leave and was on a troop train between Perth and

Melbourne when peace in Europe was declared. We came back and joined the ship. Our ship got torpedoed there, Yankee troop ship, we got detailed off and escorted back home. I was on the way back from that little exercise to Melbourne when peace was declared and everyone on board was so happy."



**Lorna's husband was a Lancaster bomber pilot who had been shot down over France - she didn't know if he was alive. She tells us:**

"It was a very important date for me because

my husband was still in the air force. When they announced the war was over with Japan, everyone communicated in the street and it was a very very happy day. I can see us all congregating and walking down the main street, all singing and happy. No more bombs."



**Conrad served firstly in the army and later transferred to the Air Force:**

"I was in London at the time and we were packing supplies for the war in Japan. We went to the kiosk... we sat down and chatted and later on we joined the festivities in the street. Crowds of people - some of them dancing - all sorts of things."



**Marie's husband, Frank served in the army. She says:**

"In the early hours of the morning, Frank's dad was out with his shotgun firing it off down the street and telling everyone that the war was over and Frank was on his way home.

"Everybody was on the street and it was so exciting - we were all beside ourselves. The next day the whole town was alive and we had a big dance that night.

"...a little bitter-sweet for my family because my father's two brothers didn't come back."

We are very grateful to our residents for sharing these precious and poignant memories with us. You can see our residents speaking on our FaceBook page.

# From Our CEO

## COVID-19 Response

The last three months have been extremely difficult for our entire community. The majority of those we are here for, whether in home care, ex-service accommodation or residential aged care, are over 70, the most vulnerable group. In aged care, many of our residents are highly vulnerable, but they have been a great example to us. They have been stoic and good humoured: at times they have been sad or frustrated, but given the difficulties they have put up with, we have been humbled by the way they have taken this ongoing battle in their stride.

## Our Staff

Our staff have been committed, dedicated and loyal. We are extremely thankful to have the workforce we have: they have risen to the challenge. On Aged Care Employee Day recently, we received scores of messages of appreciation for all that our staff are doing, and these were shared with staff. Thank you to all those who took the time to write - your support through all this has been incredibly important.

We have now had three 'outbreaks'. An outbreak is defined as one staff member or one resident with a positive diagnosis of COVID-19. In each of these cases, there has been one staff member who has tested positive for COVID-19.

This is a very stressful situation for all concerned, with residents confined to their rooms and care staff wearing full personal protective equipment (PPE), which requires changing after every contact with each resident.

The first few days are the hardest: any staff who have been in contact with the staff member affected must go into quarantine, and this results in reduced staff available. While 'surge staffing' is made available through the authorities, it takes a few days to arrive, and in these few days, it is 'all hands on deck'.

Our staff have been outstanding. They have filled in with extra shifts, stayed late and come early, so that our residents are properly looked after at all times. I also want to acknowledge our managers and support staff who have backfilled tasks for the people on the ground, and done everything they can to support our efforts to protect our vulnerable community.



## Our Community

We have seen our whole community come together during this time and we have received support from individuals and organisations for which we are very grateful. One of these has been Ironside Recruitment, a specialist organisation that matches employers with ex-service men and women seeking employment.

CEO, Glen Ferrarotto, has assisted us in providing veterans to support our residential aged care sites during our outbreaks. This is a time when staff are kept extremely busy with the rigorous lockdown requirements, and at the same time, residents are confined to their rooms and it can be very hard on them.

Our veteran support assistants have been a wonderful support to everyone during these tough times.

## Our Strategy

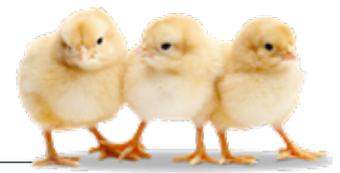
Our strategy is to take an 'abundance of caution' and this has been hard on our aged care residents and their families.

This is the only sensible approach: every extra person on site is a potential danger to our community. While staff are essential, we can limit all others. This has not been universally supported by families, so for those who have supported it, I thank you sincerely. For those who have not, we are sorry that you feel that way.

However, we stand by our approach and will continue to do what we believe is right to protect our whole community.

**Janna Voloshin**  
**Chief Executive Officer**





# Working Towards a Strong Future

In our last issue, we recapped the background to the proposed sale of Vasey RSL Care and why our Board felt they had no option but to launch a public Advocacy Campaign to Save Vasey. This time we focus on one constant: the need to change.

Vasey RSL Care currently offers three important services; residential aged care, home care for older Australians and housing units for the ex-service community.

In its early beginnings, RSL Care Victoria sought to support and provide accommodation for young men returning from World War I, especially those with physical and mental injuries, their motto being 'to turn no one in need away'.

Likewise, when Jessie Mary Vasey set up Vasey Housing, she was looking to help the young women and their small children who had lost their husbands/fathers.

As the years and decades went by, both organisations underwent many changes: the veterans aged, the widows aged, and their accommodation needs changed. Ultimately, aged care homes were constructed by both RSL Care Victoria and the War Widows Guild Australia (VIC) to cater to their ageing communities.

When these two organisations merged in 2004 to create Vasey RSL Care, this was yet another stage in the ongoing metamorphosis.

"It is an ongoing process," said Mike O'Meara OAM, Board Chair. "We hope never again to see the numbers of veterans and war widows that we saw after the two World Wars, but it is clear that more recent veterans and widows have very specific needs relating to their service, or that of their partner. Vasey RSL Care is very

*"We [...] believe it is not in the best interests of current and future generations of veterans. They require a trusted organisation with the strength and expertise to continue to deliver the direct care, housing and social support needed."*

Vasey RSL Care Board, March 2020.

well positioned both to continue to meet the demand from older veterans and their dependants, while adapting to serve the needs of younger veterans and those in transition.

"Department of Veterans' Affairs figures show that demand for the organisation's services will continue to be strong.

"We are passionate about this: we have an exciting ten-year strategy and are close to publishing a detailed white paper presenting our evidence-based plan for the Victorian ex-service community.

"We would like to work with RSL Victoria and the Guild to bring these plans to fruition for the benefit of our unique community and to honour and maintain the vision and legacy of Mrs Vasey."

## Facts and Figures

- Vasey RSL Care is the only aged care organisation in Victoria that prioritises the ex-service community
- War widows and veterans are prioritised regardless of their financial circumstances
- Vasey RSL Care is a Patriotic Fund for the benefit of war widows and veterans – there is no set percentage of veterans/war widows required in order to satisfy the fund's requirements
- Around 75% of our aged care residents are veterans and war widows
- We have 260 ex-service accommodation units solely for veterans and war widows of all ages – approximately a third of new residents each year are younger veterans
- DVA figures show veteran numbers are predicted to increase by 21.8% in the ten years to 2029
- Approx 6000 service men and women leave the ADF each year
- It is predicted that ex-service accommodation needs will increase in younger veterans (<65), retired veterans (65-85) and older veterans (>85)

# Life Under Lockdown: How Residents have been

Here in Melbourne, it is probably safe to say that government restrictions are leaving many of us feeling like caged animals! All we can do is make the best of the situation, keep in touch with those we care about and find ways to look after our physical and mental health.

Thanks to the resilience of our residents and the initiative of our lifestyle staff, we are able to share a few of the many things that have been taking place in these challenging circumstances.



*With staff having to wear face masks throughout their shifts, and face shields as well, it can get quite uncomfortable on the ears. Spending her time in lockdown very productively, Kath, who lives at Vasey RSL Care Ivanhoe, has been crocheting and knitting mask extenders.*



*Cleverly, she even creates a ponytail hole for those who need one.*



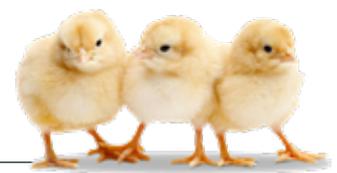
*Residents at Vasey RSL Care Bundoora have been on a journey of technological discovery: they have been attending IT classes and learning how to use iPads so they can be in touch with their families and each other – and even play bingo together!*



## Significant Birthdays

*There have been some very significant birthdays celebrated over the last few months around all our homes: (from left) Clanny at Brighton East turned 101; Stephen at Ivanhoe reached 100; and Beryl at Bundoora enjoyed a Pies-cake in celebration of turning 99. Congratulations!*





# Keeping their Spirits Up

*Winter Wonderland arrived at Vasey RSL Care Brighton East for the month of July. Residents enjoyed crafts, including making snowmen decorations, as well as eating 'snowballs' and having photos at the Winter Wonderland photo booth.*



*Lightening the mood at Vasey RSL Care Frankston South, residents and staff spent the day in their pyjamas – and why not... Completing the cosy day, residents were served hot chocolate and pancakes.*



*At Vasey RSL Care Brighton, it has been the season for birthday celebrations: Rita turned 101 (below – note this was before face masks), Heather (far right) turned 98, Patricia (below right) 99 and Betty (right) 98.*

*Staff made sure that in the absence of their loved ones, all our birthday girls were properly looked after on their special day.*



*Both Betty (above left) and Pat (left) were nurses in World War II. Betty served in New Guinea (see front page) and Pat served in Egypt.*

## Great Neighbours at Frankston South

“I had a baking frenzy,” said Jan (pictured right), a resident at our ex-service accommodation, Frankston South. Her baking frenzy resulted in bags and boxes of ‘Lockdown Treats’ for all of her neighbours.

Jan’s biscuits, cookies, cakes and slices were delivered to each unit to help raise spirits. Shirley (below left) was delighted with hers – as everyone was. What a top neighbour!



## Welcome Natalie West

**A new role has been created to provide additional support to residents of our Ex-Service Accommodation (Independent Living Units), a role that will be a valuable addition to our team. Working in the Property Services Team under General Manager, Steve Best, and closely with Ex-Service Unit Manager, Emil Vanderzee, we welcome Natalie West.**

Natalie was recently discharged from the RAAF and had previously served in the Army as well.

“After my discharge, we decided to settle in Melbourne,” says Natalie. “My husband was super excited to go to the footy every weekend – until the pandemic hit! It’s been pretty tough through this period – a new location and we are unable to meet new people because of the restrictions, but we are making the best of the situation.”

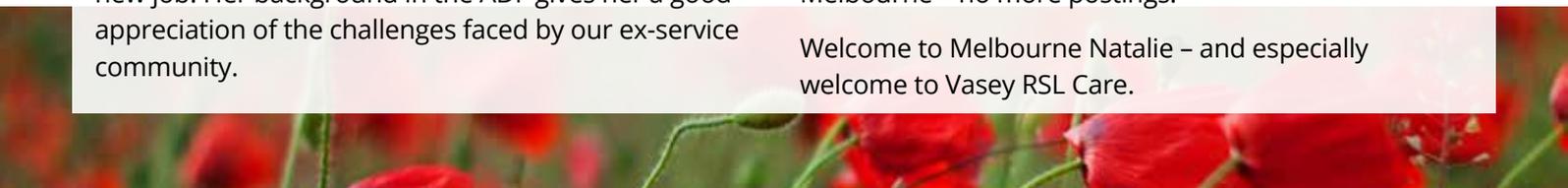
Natalie has extensive experience in working closely with people in human resources and mentoring roles, as well as a range of other expertise to bring to her new job. Her background in the ADF gives her a good appreciation of the challenges faced by our ex-service community.

Natalie has three children and is a new grandparent.

“I’m an extremely proud mum to three adult children who are all out finding their place in society. And one of our greatest joys this past year is the birth of two gorgeous grand babies.

“We are very much looking forward to our new life in Melbourne – no more postings!”

Welcome to Melbourne Natalie – and especially welcome to Vasey RSL Care.





# Thank You RSL Vic, Highett RSL and More!

**Wearing face masks has quickly become the natural thing to do when we go outdoors.**

**But when the new regulation suddenly came in, how many of us had face masks ready to use?**

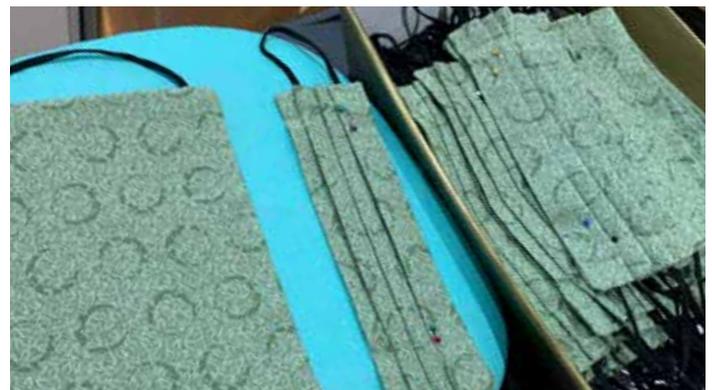
Thanks to the generosity of various groups, residents at our Ex-Service Accommodation (Independent Living Units) all have face masks which have been donated to them.

We are extremely grateful to RSL Victoria who provided packs of reusable cloth masks, including 100 beautiful hand-made fabric masks made by the ladies at Highett RSL – shown here.

A kind donation of disposable face masks was made by Rabbi Greenbaum and the Moorabbin Hebrew Congregation to our Cheltenham residents, who are in their local area.

And our Frankston South residents received some disposable masks generously provided by the Cranbourne Young Veterans.

We really appreciate the thoughtfulness and generosity of all these groups to our ex-service community.



## Are you on FaceBook? If so, check us out.

During the pandemic, we have all turned to technology to keep in touch with the important people in our lives, as well as for news, relaxation and entertainment.

Our FaceBook community is a mix of family members, staff, and those from our home care, ex-service

accommodation and aged care homes – we welcome you to join us and enjoy finding out about some of the many things taking place here at Vasey RSL Care.

**VaseyRSLCareSalutingExcellence**



