



We like getting to know the stories behind our local businesses. Of the 35 stories we've done since taking over, 16 have been about local businesses, and in this issue there are a four more. So if you're a local business; a plumber, an electrician, a builder, and have got a service to offer and a story to tell, preferably funny, get in touch. To our readers, if you would like to write a piece or have an idea for a story, we'd like to hear about that too.

Our other passion is profiling local characters. We've done some great portraits. Quentin Riley's story in the last issue stands out. This time, John Mitchell, recreating Sturt's voyage of discovery in 1999 and perhaps again, is worth a read.

Also in this issue you will find a piece about council size. Are we being sold a dud with this amalgamation? How do they do it elsewhere? The most exciting story is probably the gift of park land we may get from a generous Avocan. That's also the subject of the colour supplement.

By the way, we are very keen to increase the ABCA membership. We are only as powerful as our membership. The more we can act like a local council, the more impact we'll have (See, A Mayor for Avoca story). Come to our next meeting at the Surf Club with your passions and your peevs. It's on 3rd April. MR

The Newsletter Story

Here are a few facts about our newsletter. We've published four issues since the new committee took over a year ago. Each issue costs around \$1400, delivered to every home, business and café. We've thought of going digital but we hope you like the idea of copies lying around in our various coffee shops and being able to pass them on. We pride ourselves on paying the full \$1400 through the advertising revenue. So far so good!

So when you patronise our advertisers, you are helping us to keep this paper edition coming to you. The ads don't cost much and are well worth it, sometimes in strange ways. For example, we did a profile of Dean Warby who runs the Avoca Beach Service Centre. "Will you place an ad this time, Dean?" I ask. "Don't dare," he says, "I'm overwhelmed with work ... but I'm happy to donate." How about that! I hope it's catching.



Avoca Beach Theatre

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PLUG IN TO AVOCA

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— Avoca Beach — *Rural Fire Brigade*

In 1947 Norman Hunter Snr. wanted to start an official bushfire brigade at Avoca Beach. A year later a unit was formed. Ten years after that, the first fire station was built in the Shark Tower car park by the beach, funded by donations and constructed with volunteer labour. In 1978, the current station was built on the corner of The Round Drive and Avoca Drive.

We are more than a rural fire brigade. We also look after house fires and car accidents, but we still rely on volunteers and donations. The state looks after our needs in terms of trucks and personal protective equipment but we need to raise funds for pagers, computers, battery jumper packs and lots of other things to improve our effectiveness.

Also, we need volunteers, male and female and we offer great training at no cost. You can get leadership skills, first aid qualifications and even a truck licence. We train every Wednesday night.

If you want to volunteer or donate, come and talk to us at the markets on the last Sunday of the month or drop in at the station any Saturday morning. Say hi and see the truck, kids are welcome.

— Avoca Beach Community Association —

The association represents the community to Council. We need your involvement to do that. We must be ready to jump on opportunities so we have a list of priority projects.

Some are listed below:

- Foreshore upgrade
- Bike path to Kincumber
- Replacing the cricket nets
- Toilet upgrades at the shark tower and Heazlett Park
- Lagoon monitoring/maintenance and protection
- Clearing saltwater creek

If you want input into priorities or to help us with our work, please come to our meetings at the surf club, first Monday of the month, bi monthly. The next meeting will be 3rd April. Another means of input is via email to avocabeachca@gmail.com. I hope you enjoy this newsletter, it's another one of our association's activities. Editing and stories: Mike Rubbo. Advertising: Julie Pickett, News pages: Helen Polkinhorne

Carol Fortey – President

— Avoca Beach Tennis Club —

We take care of the tennis courts in town on a not-for-profit basis. We raise funds through court hire and we need committee members, so if you care about tennis and can help administer the courts call Trevor Reynolds on 4382 2348.

If you're looking for a social game, go down to the courts and chat with the people playing, they might be able to help you find a game. The juniors group is very popular and lessons are available through Craig Lumsden on 4344 6935. Tennis is great for physical and social health and once learnt you have a skill for life.

If you want to hire the courts you can do so online, or visit/call 'SUBLIME at Home' opposite the courts (192 Avoca Drive, 0420 436 696).

— Avoca Beach Picture Theatre Update —

You would have to have been living under a rock not to know that for the last 15 years Beth and Norman Hunter have wanted to expand Avoca Beach Theatre. This notion has been supported by some people and some have been against it. Well the battle is over. The development is set to go ahead following a decision at the end of February in the Land and Environment Court.

— Avoca Beach — Red Cross

Avoca Beach Red Cross meets on the third Monday of each month at the surf club. Our members work together to raise funds or produce goods for use in Red Cross humanitarian works in Australia and around the world. We are a friendly group who chat and laugh together as we work. Visitors are most welcome to our meetings to learn more about what we do to raise money and to meet our members.

The President is Jan Wade. If you would like more information, give her a call on 0437 250 034.

— 5 Lands Walk —

The 12th Annual 5 Lands Walk will be held on Saturday, 24th of June 2017. This ten kilometre walk from Macmasters to Terrigal is an amazing community event connecting people to people and people to place. Save the date. Invite friends and family and register online now.

For more info go to the 5 Lands Walk website (<http://www.5landswalk.com.au/>)

— Avoca Beach Rugby Club —

Avoca Rugby Club is one of the most successful clubs on the Coast. We pride ourselves on teaching kids, girls and boys, to love the game. Our community presence is strong and we encourage the involvement of all the family.

At Heazlett Oval any Saturday and you will see a local team play, one week the juniors the next week the seniors. Whether you have family playing or not, come along, plonk your chair down and watch the game. We play great rugby and we are a friendly bunch.

The Golden Oldies is for anyone, male or female, that is 'mature' and still wants to put on a pair of boots and play around. It is very popular and held on Thursday night, all year round. The Golden Oldies do a lot of fundraising for the junior teams too, so please help if you can.

If you would like more information, you can call the club's Junior Secretary, Julia Ninness, on 0400 548 646.

— Avoca Beach Public School —

Ross Hallaways is the principal of Avoca Beach Public School and has been for the last year and a half. Apart from educating the 520 students from Avoca, the school offers facilities for our community use. This is a great way to make the most of publicly funded assets. All funds raised go directly to improve our school for our children. A variety of community, sporting, drama, fitness, language and dance groups use our ovals, halls, rooms, dance studio and new covered outdoor learning area. This new learning area has been funded by our P&C and is being used for the first time this year. If you would like to hire one of these facilities, call Mr Hallaways on 4382 1416.

The annual school fete is in the middle of August on a Sunday. It's a big community event and major fundraiser for the year. Make a note in your diary now to either run a stall or buy something.

Our P&C meetings provide a forum for parents to discuss the school's operation with the Principal and are conducted on the second Monday of each month at 7:00pm.

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Heidi and Jacques

The Mosaic café

It's nice that we can now get great Lebanese food in Avoca. The Mosaic Café is open for breakfast and lunch every day of the week except Monday, and for dinner on Friday and Saturday nights. You'd expect it to be run by somebody from Lebanon, which it is. The owner is Jacques from a small village near the Syrian border but what surprised me was to find that his partner, in business and life, is Heidi from Finland. I asked her where they met, hoping to hear of some exotic location. "In a nightclub in Sydney," she says wistfully.

"What are the most popular dishes?" I ask. "Probably the Tapas and the taster plate," said Heidi, as Jacques tossed something aromatic in a pan in the background. "But people especially love our beetroot hummus. We make it with beetroot, walnuts and chickpeas." Mmm! I find it mouth-watering even to write about.

Then there's their famous garlic dip, also a hit. It's a sort of Lebanese butter, you put it on everything, made from garlic, lemon juice, sunflower oil and salt. If you go in for a taster plate, I bet you'll get both of these and a lot of other delicious surprises as well.

"Are you doing OK?" I ask. "We have some customers who come in for three meals a day," says Heidi.

Welcome to Avoca, Mosaic Café.

MR



Anita and Tony

— One Agency – she runs it well! —

Anita welcomes me at the door of One Agency, nicely refurbished. Avoca is not short of real estate agents but only one has a female principal and that's Anita. She's proud of that and proud too that she started out at home five years ago, a young mum with a bub. When she moved the business out, it was first to Copacabana and then three years ago to Avoca when this present location opened and she teamed up with business partner, Tony Fitton.

"Grown by leaps and bounds," she says, marvelling that they're now managing almost one hundred rental properties as well as sales. "Many English expats are settling in the area. The primary school is a great attraction. Everyone wants their kids in its catchment area."

I ask a tricky question as a member of the ABCA, the Community Association. "If the community is concerned about something, for example the beautiful tall gum growing in front of the CWA hall, (the hall is for sale, by the way) would you tell a prospective buyer we don't want it cut down?"

"Of course," she says, "full transparency is always my motto. I don't want clients coming back to me later saying you should have warned us about some issue ahead."

We close with the story of her lucky opening. It was 8.30am on her first day in Avoca, just three years ago. "A guy walks across the road from where he was playing tennis, knocks on the door, and tells me he has a holiday house he'd like to sell in North Avoca. Turns out to be the biggest sale I've ever made." And so began Anita's first day in our lucky town.

MR



A fantastic surprise

How would you react if we told you that a generous Avoca resident wants to give 4 acres of beautiful flat land, an eight minute walk from the village, to the community for a new park? If you consult the map you will see exactly the area we are talking about.

Bob Pickett is someone who doesn't seek the spotlight but who would like to gift the community in a way that would honour his grandfather, Jim Burns, who owned the land almost 100 years ago and who constructed the oval which is today Heazlett Park.

Avoca Football Club (with over 900 members) and other sporting bodies, desperately needs an oval. The south end park overflows with cars each summer. More parkland for sports, for picnics and leisure is sorely needed. Another reason for the donation is to protect the land from future commercial development.

Saltwater Creek, which runs through the land, is presently very overgrown and clogged with debris. It is envisaged that the creek would be cleaned, the banks groomed to natural beauty and it would become navigable by canoe again. It would be very pleasant to paddle up Saltwater Creek to the new parkland.



Quentin Riley paddles Saltwater Creek

But there is a catch and this is where community support becomes vital. The parkland scheme is not worth pursuing unless a piece of overgrown Coastal Open Space System (COSS) land, Lot 317, also 4 acres and west of Bob's Lot 301, is combined to form an area stretching from the bottom of Hillside Road almost to the bowling club.

Why the need for both pieces together? Because that will be an area big enough to move the crowds away from the beachfront, a new centre of gravity, providing a mixture of sporting fields and passive recreation for picnics, family cricket games, et cetera, all of which will make the park truly spectacular, a one-of-a-kind on the coast.

Council is not enthusiastic about releasing COSS land although they acknowledge the merit of the idea. With community support, it is hoped that a delegation can approach Central Coast Council and, if necessary, the State Government. It can be pointed out how poorly endowed Avoca presently is in terms of parkland, and that the stated aim of COSS is, "... the provision of passive recreation areas compatible with the natural environment."

Also, the acquisition of land for COSS has often involved deal making. Owners have swapped their land for development rights on other parts of their property. The swap proposed here is squarely in the public interest and keeps the entire project in public hands.

This is a wonderful opportunity, an inspiring piece of generosity and it would be great to make it happen. The lift out section will suggest what you can do to support this initiative.

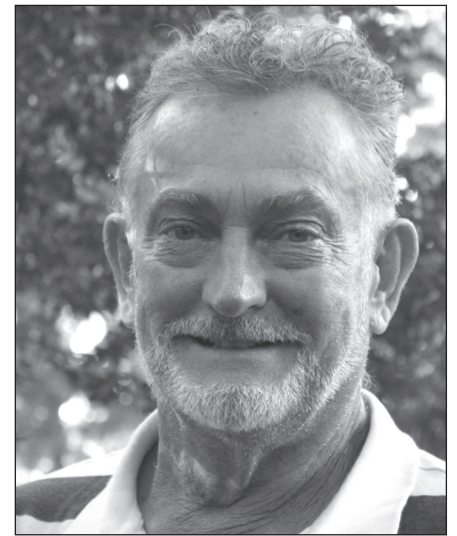
MR



All because of a book



John Mitchell, one of Avoca's best known builders, confesses that at the time he'd read just one book in his life. That book, you ask? He had happened on the diary of Charles Sturt, the explorer, and was so fascinated that he talked the Avoca Surf Club into joining him in recreating Sturt's journey down the Murray, something which had never been done before. John's a force in the club and so it was not hard to get 120 members sign up for the adventure.



What attracted Charles Sturt to the rivers? It was the 1820s and the colonists were puzzled. The two large rivers which ran across New South Wales, the Murrumbidgee and the Murray, (names they were given later) flowed not down the map into Victoria, but west and slightly upwards. Were they going to an inland sea perhaps?

Keen to solve the mystery, Sturt took a small party and a whaleboat inland from Wagga. It was December 1829 and the plan was to follow the Murrumbidgee, find where it joined the Murray and then see if both rivers flowed to an inland sea. Unfortunately, there was not enough water in the Murrumbidgee at Wagga and so, with the disassembled whale boat on a dray, the party trekked 1000 km beside the river before launching near what is now Balranald on 7th January 1830.

Once waterborne, Sturt's party flew downstream to where the Murrumbidgee joins the Murray. They had an early mishap. The raft they were towing capsized. For three days, they dived for their supply of food. Salvage done, they fell asleep and on awakening found that the local Aboriginals had taken off with much of the stuff

they'd saved, including the sheep. But encounters with the indigenous people were mostly peaceful. Sturt was a kindly man and a good negotiator.

On the Murray, Sturt's party found itself going westward and even a little north before the mighty river turned south and after another 1000 km reached Lake Alexandrina. Sadly, Sturt found no inland sea, the mouth of the Murray being lost in sand dunes and marshes. He was expecting a ship to meet him. No ship appeared. His party took eighty days to row back up against the current. Sturt himself went partially blind.

John's recreation took a lot of organising. They would use a specially fitted out surfboat and rather than Sturt's small band of convicts and sailors, John would have a team of one hundred and twenty club members, men and women, all sharing the rowing. This was not an endurance test but something to do together for the fun of it and for the history it recalled.

Planning done, they set off in September 1999, one hundred and seventy years after Sturt. That was the time to go because in that month water is released into the



Murrumbidgee by the Snowy Scheme, flushing the river and providing irrigation along its path. So, by leaving in September there was a current to push them along at a good 6 kph for a combined speed, with rowing, of sometimes 12 kph.

Given this flow, the Avoca party was able to start the river journey on the Murrumbidgee at 1000 km earlier than Sturt's entry point which was near where Balranald is today. It was a delightful row, though submerged logs made for hazards which holed the surfboat several times.

The surfboat had a four person crew who would row for an hour and then swap with a second crew, following in a tinny. After a week's rowing, crews would leave for home to be replaced by others. Only John, two of his kids and two cooks made the whole trip. He was the steersman.

On land, the logistics were organised by Andy Hoban, who planned and supplied the night stop campsites. How great it must've been to round a bend, just when one could row no more, see a wisp of smoke and know a hot meal and cold beers were waiting.

Now, seventeen years later, all those who went remember it as magical – the days on the beautiful Murrumbidgee. Each night there was something of a party around the fire. Best of all was the quiet under a canopy of stars which seemed so close that you could touch them.

John always planned to do the second half of Sturt's trip, the second 1000 km down the Murray, a year later and this they did in 2001 with a party of one hundred and ten. This second row was harder because the Murray is divided up by locks and there is hardly any current. Fortunately, unlike Sturt, the Avoca crew did not have to row back up again.

One of the highlights, says John, was stopping at some of the historic stations along the way. The most memorable was Moorna, 67000 acres of sheep country, run by the amazing Annabelle Walsh. Annabelle's husband had been injured in a road accident and they found her running the property alone with the help of her sons.

Annabelle was welcoming, sending a message that they should go into the kitchen of the main house, look for the two-way radio on top of the fridge and give her a call. She'd probably be out aerial mustering those vast acres in her Cessna. The ABC's Landline has done a fascinating program on Annabelle which was well worth listening to. This amazing woman and others like her is one good reason why John wants to repeat the trip, perhaps next year.

"What was the greatest problem?" I asked. "Hand blisters," said John. "Those are best dealt with when they have burst by pissing on them. The piss is sterile and seems to harden them up," he added. Hmm.
MR



— *Batter down the hatches* —

Brett and Rachael have had an amazing summer at Avoca Beach Seafoods. So busy have they been that they've had twenty three lucky young locals working in the shop, their ages ranging from 14 to 19. Dean Warby, our favourite mechanic, the guy who dares not advertise, has a daughter working there. Brett doesn't

need to advertise either except in the Picture Theatre newsletter. "Many theatre patrons come for a meal before or after a movie," he says.

As for regular customers, some of the locals tend to keep away during the crazy Christmas period when the line stretches out the door, but they're back as soon as school resumes. They use Blue Grenadier for their fish and chips. It's a solid, white fleshed succulent fish, "and not too fishy," adds Brett.

"But what really seems to bring people in is our batter, made with a 'secret recipe'. We pride ourselves on it being thin and crispy, as well as having this marvellous flavour." I'm not a batter lover, but I do like their barramundi, both crumbed and grilled.

One nice innovation for the winter months is the addition of new drop down screens on the south side of the gazebo. "We can now totally enclose that area," says Brett, "and so, with a heater inside, it'll be very cosy in winter." It should be especially inviting on Thursday and Sunday nights when they have live music. "If a storm blows in you'll be able to batter down the hatches!" I quip. "Might use that," says Brett. But I know he won't.

— *A spoon behind the door?* —

The first thing I spot is the spoon hanging on the inside of the front door. I ask Chanel Jones at Avoca Beach Dental what it's doing there. She's not sure but confides that her boss who runs the clinic, Ned Restom, is what you would call eccentric.

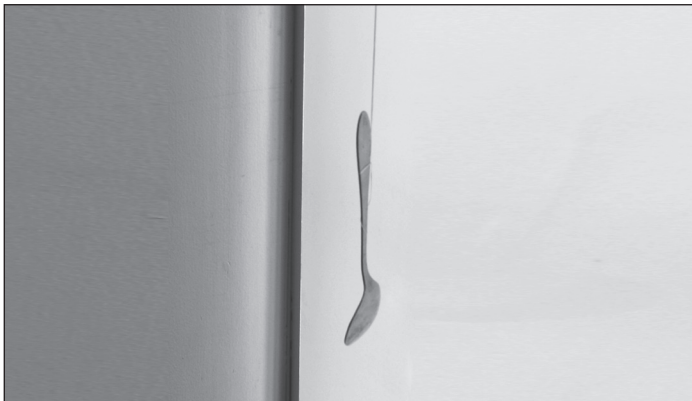
"Very funny too", adds Chanel. "We are always making jokes here, especially Ned. Patients love the atmosphere. It's all about taking the fear out of a visit," she says. "Of course, pain killers are very good these days but we add extras, like the surgeries are all connected for music and if Ned is doing an implant, something big, he'll have his classical music going full bore."



"And the patients like it?" I enquire. "They love it. We also have TV screens so we can run movies for the kids," Chanel adds.

Ned is very civic minded, volunteering for community tasks like helping at St Vincent de Paul; a strong church goer too. After starting in 2010, Ned now has five dental clinics scattered around the area. All have spoons behind the door.

"Building quite a Nedpire, is he?" I ask. Chanel likes that and may add it to the store of surgery jokes. As for the spoon, go ask them yourself. MR



What'll happen to the hall?

By the time you read this, the CWA Hall (Country Women's Association) may have been sold. We have so few halls in Avoca, it would be a shame to see it pulled down.

This hall, tucked behind the gas station, is particularly nice with its wonderful tallow wood floor, fantastic to dance on apparently. Dick Pickett used to play the piano at the dances we're told. Such stories have got us wondering if it could be saved, assuming that whoever buys the land won't want it. Second question, if not wanted, could it be moved? I spoke to John Mitchell, the builder, and he said it might be possible.

But where to put it? Well, if all our ducks lined up, a brilliant solution would be on the land on offer for our new park (see A Fantastic Surprise in this issue). It might be just a pipe dream, but it's nice to think proactively about best outcomes for Avoca, isn't it?

According to local resident Robert Hickell, whose mother was a CWA stalwart, building the hall was really important to the community.

"To raise money for construction, cakes were sold at a stall every Saturday morning in front of the three or four shops which comprised the town at the time. These few shops were where the Mousehole now is." Robert remembers there were two types of cakes, those with cream and those without. Both were delicious.

With the funds raised, Ted Baigent, a local builder built the hall probably in 1960. Ted was the husband of Norma Baigent who, in 1977, was Country Woman of the Year, a great honour. In 1982, another member of the Avoca Beach Branch, Mrs Laura Pickett, was also country woman of the year.

A relative newcomer to our area and another high achieving woman in a different era, is Linda Mottram. You surely know Linda as the presenter on what was then called "702 ABC Sydney, Mornings". She was that familiar

voice for four years, signing off in November 2015. Linda is still with the ABC but now very much enjoys living in Avoca.

Linda comes into this story because she's particularly concerned about the magnificent black butt at the front of the Hall property. Like us, she'd like whoever buys the place to realise that the grand tree is a precious habitat for all sorts of birds and creatures, including a nest of bees and that it's certainly not for cutting.

If you know more about the hall, or have ideas about saving it, please get in touch. And in the meantime, please support Bob Pickett's generous proposal.

MR and HP



Linda Mottram snaps the tree in front of the Hall

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A Mayor for Avoca?



That sounds nonsensical, doesn't it? But it's a way to start talking about how remote the new Central Coast Council will be from our lives. We have been passive until now but more and more people are realising that having one councillor for 28,000 rate payers, as we soon will, means local government won't be local. Getting through to anyone about a local concern will be a joke.

It doesn't have to be like this, especially when you find out that in many developed countries like ours, communities are represented by councils which are much closer to home. I had property in Canada, north of Montréal in a town the same size as Avoca, 4000 people. Morin Heights had its own mayor, 8 councillors, and the rates were no more than we pay. That's one councillor for 600 rate payers instead of one for 28,000. That's an extreme example, but all over rural Quebec and France, it's much the same.

I did research in New Zealand and found that outside the cities, they often have a two-tier system., a regional Council and below that at the town level, a board of councillors elected and paid for by ratepayers, a mini council. These councillors, your first port of call, are locals and thus know the implications of any development proposal that's in the works. Their job is to pass concerns up to the district planning level and they do so, unlike our community associations, with real clout behind them. The conflicts which take up so much time and money here, happen far less in rural New Zealand because they are nipped in the bud.

As I interviewed council staff in various parts of the world for this article, there was astonishment that an issue like the Avoca Theatre development proposal could fester for more than 15 years. Why has this happened? In part because we've had no elected officials close by to insist our concerns be heard in Council. The voice that's heard, often erratically, tends to be that of the developer.

I haven't been able to conduct a global survey, but I find the situation is much the same in the UK where they also have several levels of local government, the lowest being at the town level where the mayor and council positions are often voluntary. The charming town of Frome, for example, in the county of Somerset, has a voluntary mayor and councillors. These positions are so highly regarded that it's deemed a great honour to help retain the charm and character of Frome.

Does this mean less development, less jobs? I was told it means development that people really want, cleverer development, and more chance of retaining beauty and heritage.

What can we do? If we are lumbered with this absurdly large council, maybe we need to petition the state government to retrofit the Central Coast Council with local boards, mini councils like they have in New Zealand, boards based on natural affinities. One can think of natural affinity groups that would share a board: Avoca, Copacabana, and McMasters Beach, for example.

It might sound expensive but other places do it on the same rates that we pay, saving large amounts in avoiding useless conflicts I would guess. Maybe we can't call the head of the local board, our Mayor. We could have a competition for a catchy legal name. John Mitchell tells me that Avoca once had an unofficial mayor, the famous Donnie Bowtell. I hope Donnie's ghost can get a conversation going. What do you think?

MR

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