

AIR MAIL



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RAAFA

Don't forget, for more photos and to keep up to date with what's happening at RAAFA WA, check out our Facebook page 

McNamara Lodge gets a ministerial visit



From left: General Manager Residential Care Carol Dickson, RAAFA CEO Michelle Fyfe, The Hon. Sam Rae MP, RAAFA COO Lauren Meredith, Clinical Care Manager Netsai Chikava, Residential Coordinator Jessica Carr

Last November, RAAFA was honoured to welcome the Hon. Sam Rae MP, Federal Minister for Aged Care and Seniors, to our McNamara Lodge Residential Aged Care home in Meadow Springs. During his visit, Minister Rae and his team were given a guided tour, where he met with staff, chatted with residents, and gained first-

hand insight into the high-quality care and services delivered by our dedicated McNamara Lodge team.

The Minister also took a strong interest in RAAFA's history, providing a valuable opportunity to discuss the needs and experiences of veterans in aged care. Conversations covered the

challenges and opportunities across the sector, including our experience implementing the new Aged Care Act, as well as the coordination between Department of Veterans' Affairs entitlements and funding provided by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.

RAAFA was delighted to share our story and discuss our operations with a Member of Parliament who was clearly engaged with the wellbeing of our residents and staff.

Our thanks go to Minister Rae for taking the time to hear directly from our team and residents.

WRAAF celebrates their 75th anniversary

The Women in the Royal Australian Air Force started in 1951 and was a fully recognised branch of the permanent Air Force, marking a significant step toward the long-term inclusion of women in Australia's armed forces. WRAAF recently held their 75th anniversary at RAAFA's Air Force Memorial Estate.

During the celebration, the crowd was privileged to hear from Air Commodore Fiona Dowse AM CSC (ret'd) in her role as Patron, and listen to stories from both currently-serving and retired women who have served our country across a range of engagements.

The contributions of Women in the Air Force span decades of significant change. With gender-based restrictions lifted in the mid-2010s, women now serve across the full spectrum of Air Force capability – aviation, engineering, cyber operations, intelligence, logistics, medical services and senior leadership – reflecting a fully integrated force in which service is determined by merit, qualification and operational need rather than gender.

Today, women represent over 27% of the RAAF.

This celebration was a special opportunity to honour the service and contribution of these remarkable women.



PURPOSE

Pursuing excellence in care and heritage

VALUES

Respect; Care; Honesty

APPROACH

Creating RAAFA communities open to all

THE RAAFA WAY

President's view



Hello RAAFA Members and friends. Isn't time flying by! Having taken over as President in December 2025, the new Board has already completed one quarter of the year, and the next nine months are full of progress and challenges for the organisation, the members and residents and for the Board.

Developments

We have started progress on building our new Andrew Russell Veterans Living complex in Cannington, and it's looking great. I'm really looking forward to seeing this new building take shape, and what it can do for veterans in need.

Our new Stirling Apartments building is filling up fast, with over 85% of the apartments spoken for. We are also waiting on further information on a potential future development in Rockingham. Stay tuned.

SS Vyner Brooke Commemoration

On Sunday 15 February, I attended a very moving commemoration of the loss of the *SS Vyner Brooke* off Bangka Island during the evacuation of Singapore in February 1942. The service was conducted by the Applecross Sub Branch of RSL WA at the memorial park at Point Walter. Of the nurses aboard, 41 were tragically lost, and 24 survived, including Vivian Bullwinkel, whose dedication and legacy continue through the Aged Care facility at AFME. Please take a look at our article on this important commemoration in this issue.

Getting in touch

While RAAFA WA is made up of many different components, they are all tied into supporting you, our members and residents. Sometimes issues occur for both members who don't live on the

estates, as well as for residents who are living on our estates and the options for letting the administration know can seem to be long winded.

For RAAFA members who aren't living on our estates, the best and quickest option if you have a question is to email our Membership Enquiry Team at membership@raafawa.org.au.

For RAAFA members who are living on our estates, the easiest approach is to visit your Estate Office, and they will be able to answer your query or pass it up the chain to someone who can.

For questions that relate to the Board or to the operation of AFA Limited (our overriding company) queries can be emailed to the Company Secretary at secretary@raafawa.org.au.

Wishing all our members a very happy Easter, please have a safe and pleasant holiday with your family and friends.

Aviation Heritage Museum update

As many of our members and patrons will know, the Aviation Heritage Museum at AFME is home to one of the most significant collections of aircraft, artefacts and aviation history in Australia. These rare and irreplaceable items are held with great pride at RAAFA and they remain a cornerstone of the organisation's commitment to history and heritage.

That being the case, it won't come as a surprise that with precious cargo, also comes the need for an environment best suited to showing and protecting it. Currently with the museum housed in an ageing facility that requires ongoing maintenance and increasing levels of care to ensure the long-term protection of the collection, we are looking at possible ways to enhance what we have.

As we carefully consider the long-term location for the collection and how best to preserve, present and share its stories with future generations, we are exploring a potential relocation of the museum.

This is a complex and deeply thoughtful notion and process. While we have engaged with volunteers and other stakeholders on this prospect, we have not spoken too openly about it previously. This article is to remedy that and reassure members why we are going down this path – specifically, because it is only right that the museum has the best possible home to encourage as many patrons to visit as possible.

Given the scale, fragility and heritage significance of the collection, extensive planning, consultation and funding considerations are required, including



engagement at both local and state government levels.

As part of this exploration, a potential future location has been identified at Whiteman Park. Whiteman Park is a well-established conservation, recreation and tourism precinct that offers the scale and setting required to support a purpose-built museum facility.

Throughout 2025, RAAFA has consulted with a range of local and state government stakeholders and Ministers, who have expressed support for the intent to explore a relocation. This engagement will continue into 2026 as we seek broader funding, partnerships and approvals. In parallel, RAAFA is continuing to develop a detailed business case, which is scheduled for submission for government review early this year.

At this stage, the project remains in the discovery and planning phase. There is currently no confirmed timeline or relocation date, as further investigations, approvals and funding pathways are still being assessed, including determining which items would be best retained at Air Force Memorial Estate and/or other RAAFA Estates. RAAFA is committed to keeping members and residents informed and will provide updates as meaningful progress is made throughout 2026 and beyond.

We appreciate the community's interest and support and will continue to share updates through official RAAFA communications as the project develops.

- The Board, AFA WA Limited

Message from the CEO



Welcome to this latest edition of Air Mail. It is a pleasure to share news and stories from across our RAAFA community, and to reflect on the people, milestones, and moments that continue to shape our organisation's future.

As RAAFA enters a new chapter, we continue to welcome Norm Waldie into his role as President. We look forward to his guidance and stewardship as we continue to grow and evolve. I also encourage you to get to know Air Vice-Marshal Andrew Dowse in this edition's feature article. As RAAFA's new Vice President, Andrew brings a wealth of experience, dedication and passion for service.

At the same time, we recognise the extraordinary contribution of outgoing President Clive Robartson, who was recently honoured with RAAFA Life Membership at our Annual General Meeting. This distinction reflects

Clive's longstanding commitment, leadership and service to the organisation and our members. On behalf of the entire RAAFA community, I thank him sincerely for his remarkable contribution.

In November, RAAFA was honoured to welcome the Hon. Sam Rae MP, Federal Minister for Aged Care and Seniors, to our McNamara Lodge Residential Aged Care home in Meadow Springs. During his visit, Minister Rae toured the facility, met with staff, spoke with residents, and gained first-hand insight into the high-quality care delivered by our dedicated team. Opportunities such as this allow us to showcase the exceptional work happening across our estates and advocate for the needs of Australians.

Our Membership team has also been out and about, recently visiting Amity Village in Albany to share updates on membership news and upcoming events while enjoying a wonderful member

lunch. The team was especially pleased that Erskine residents Mark and Sandy Luckie were able to join the festivities — a reminder of the strong connections that unite our community across locations.

Finally, we are excited about the opening of the 1929 Café on the AMFE estate. Named for RAAFA's founding year, this convenient grab-and-go café provides another welcoming "fuel stop" for residents, visitors and guests to the Aviation Heritage Museum. If you are in the area, I encourage you to drop in, enjoy the hospitality and experience this new addition to the precinct.

Thank you, as always, for your ongoing support of RAAFA and for the role each of you plays in sustaining our vibrant community.

From two plants to eighty : Eileen's growing passion

What began as a simple introduction to gardening has blossomed into something truly special for Gordon Lodge resident Aileen.

After attending her first Garden Club session, Aileen was given two small plants to care for in her room. That small gesture sparked a passion that quickly grew — along with her collection. Today, Aileen lovingly tends to more than 80 plants, caring for them every day with pride and dedication.

With encouragement from the therapy team, Aileen recently decided to share her love of gardening with others by hosting a Plant Sale. Her first sale raised \$110, with all funds going towards resources that

benefit residents across the Lodge. She's already busy preparing for her next sale.

Staff have also rallied behind the initiative, generously donating plants, while cuttings from Aileen's own thriving collection have helped it grow even further. Since discovering her new hobby, Aileen says she feels healthier, happier and more fulfilled.

Supported by staff, visitors and fellow residents, Aileen's green-thumbed journey continues to inspire — proving that even the smallest beginnings can grow into something meaningful.



Green thumb: Aileen and her plants

RAAFA connects with Albany members

Early this year, RAAFA's Customer & Community team took a drive down to Albany to hold our first official member event in the region with over 50 of our residents and members in attendance.

While much of RAAFA's recent focus has been on consolidating and strengthening our membership in the metro area, members in Albany had not yet experienced an official RAAFA event in their own community.

The first day began at Albany Estate, where residents gathered for a presentation outlining the latest developments across RAAFA. The session included an outline of the initiatives RAAFA have been involved with over the past year by Chief Customer & Community Officer Aaron Crowther, and a refreshed articulation of RAAFA's broader vision, purpose and strategic direction by Brand & Membership Experience Manager Kelly Sargent, while other leaders shared updates specific to branches and community initiatives.

Most importantly, the session opened the door for genuine dialogue. Residents asked thoughtful questions about future developments and ongoing projects. Their engagement reflected a deep interest in both their local community and RAAFA's future direction.

A morning of history and reflection

One highlight of the trip was a



Albany Residents & Members: RAAFA Brand & Membership Experience Manager Kelly Sargent presents to the crowd

guided tour of the National Anzac Centre in Albany, a site of profound national significance. The RAAFA Team compared notes with the Curator of the National Anzac Centre, and discussed the challenges of being guardians of Western Australia's rich but often overlooked wartime history.

The theme of history continued in personal conversations. One resident shared that she had been mentored by the legendary Robin Miller. Stories like this are living reminders of the remarkable lives

within our communities.

The second day brought members together for a luncheon at Retravision Stadium, just 450 metres from the Amity Village Estate. Approximately 50 people attended, including some Erskine residents, who travelled to Albany for the occasion and turned the visit into a short holiday.

The atmosphere was warm and vibrant. Albany residents are rightly proud of their beautifully maintained gardens and close-knit environment, and this pride was

evident in every conversation.

One particularly special story came from a resident in her mid-90s who is approaching her 100th birthday—coinciding with RAAFA's own centenary. Her milestone will be a powerful symbol of continuity, resilience and shared history.

The Albany trip reaffirmed that connection with our members matters. By listening and celebrating together, bonds with our members and residents will continue well beyond this event. The team can't wait to go back!

Albany's Amity Village wins Best Commercial Garden

RAAFA's Amity Village, Albany, took out the top prize for Best Commercial Garden in 2025, awarded by the Keep Albany Beautiful team. The judging criteria included garden design, colour, layout, the health of garden beds and lawns, use of heavy mulch and absence of weeds.

The Judges' enthusiastic feedback described Amity Village's garden as "perfect in every way" and a true credit to its residents and the dedicated contract gardener, Karl Kirby from Albany Garden Worx.

After more than 15 years of outstanding service, Karl is relocating north to pursue his dream of growing a tropical garden. Karl was treasured by the residents at Amity Village for his dedication to and passion for the garden.

The beautiful gardens are a defining feature of Amity Village, and they play a significant role in attracting prospective residents. People are naturally drawn to the village's sense of beauty, peace and harmony, which the gardens help create and maintain.



Strategic command comes to RAAFA



■ Darwin, The Blue Mountains, Oklahoma, Canberra, Brisbane, Washington DC, London, back to Canberra, and, finally, Perth - if there's one skill the military teaches you, it's how to pack a suitcase and hit the ground running.

Air Vice Marshal Andrew Dowse's four decades of service have taken the born and bred Queenslander across multiple continents, through radar units, operational commands, embassy postings and strategic planning roles, and now to his latest position at RAAFA.

For the qualified electronics engineer, each relocation added another layer of experience that would prove invaluable for his appointment as the new Vice President on RAAFA's Board.

"Each posting built on the previous position," explains Andrew, who can be found strategising on one of Perth's many golf courses in his spare time.

"From radar operations to international engagement, to leading Air Force strategy, my career has constantly evolved."

Starting at RAAF Base Frognall in Melbourne, where he studied at RMIT as an engineer cadet, Andrew's journey took him from Darwin's radar units to Operational Command in the Blue Mountains, then to Oklahoma for a secondment lasting three years. Multiple Canberra postings followed, along with another radar unit at Amberley and work at the Australian embassy in Washington.

As is often the case, military service is a family affair, with Andrew's wife Fiona having forged her own distinguished military career, culminating in becoming the senior ADF officer in Western Australia. Indeed, after the couple met in Canberra, they soon found themselves navigating postings across the globe that made for exciting career opportunities.

"When I went to Washington, Fiona took leave without pay to join me," explains Andrew, whose wife is now patron of the RAAFA Women's Association of WA.

"Later, when she was posted to London, I did the same. It was how we supported each other's careers continuously."

As his own career progressed, Andrew moved into strategic roles including leading Air Force strategy, joint capability planning and head of ICT operations for defence.

In the latter role from 2014 to 2018, he led a division of 1000 military and public service

staff, as well as a similar number of contractors within Defence's Chief Information Officer Group.

During that time, he was tasked with leading an upgrade of ADF information and communications technology systems in the Middle East, which required regular short deployments to operational bases in and around the United Arab Emirates. Andrew was consequently awarded the honour of Officer of the Order of Australia in 2017, in recognition of his work in these roles.

"I very much transitioned from being an engineer, but my background always continued to remain useful," he adds.

When Andrew retired from active duty in 2018, the couple moved to Fiona's hometown of Perth, where she would later be promoted to Senior ADF officer in WA. It also would be a move that combined fortuitously with an offer for Andrew to join the Divisional Council.

It is that combination of experience and knowledge which positions Andrew well for his subsequent role as chair of the Veterans' and Heritage Subcommittee.

"My focus now is very much on our veteran community," he explains.

"Honouring these men and women and preserving our ADF heritage is where my passion lies, and these two roles with RAAFA allow me to do exactly that."

"I'm proud to bring decades of strategic planning, operational command and an understanding of veteran needs to the organisation, while focusing on working with my fellow board members to secure its future for the next generation of veterans, who will continue to rely on our support."

Why your legacy matters to our veterans

■ Since ANZAC Day 1929, when veterans of the Australian Flying Corps first united to uphold their deep camaraderie and shared values, the Air Force Association has stood as a pillar of support, remembrance and community. What began as the Australian Flying Corps Association has grown into RAAFA - Air Force Association WA Limited, a mission-driven organisation honouring its proud legacy while meeting the needs of veterans, families and community members.

Through our Veterans Services programs, RAAFA delivers practical, life-improving support for veterans. Programs such as the Andrew Russell Veteran Living program (when completed) and Sir Valston Hancock House provide care and stable accommodation. By fostering community connection and involvement, these programs will ensure we continue to honour those who served and support them when it matters most.

RAAFA also invests in the future through scholarships, fellowships, and awards that inspire young Australians to pursue excellence in learning, leadership, and innovation—carrying forward the values of service and resilience.

At the heart of RAAFA's heritage work is the Aviation Heritage Museum in Bull Creek,

home to a nationally recognised collection of aircraft and artefacts. Through guided tours and educational programs, the museum ensures the stories of wartime pilots, engineers and aviation pioneers are never forgotten.

Your lasting legacy

By considering a gift in your Will to RAAFA, you can help ensure that veterans continue to be supported and honoured, future generations are encouraged to lead and achieve, and Australia's aviation heritage is preserved for years to come.

No will or need to update?

We've prepared a range of helpful resources to guide you if you are considering leaving a gift to support RAAFA's charitable programs. While these materials can assist with your planning, we are unable to provide legal or financial advice. We encourage you to seek independent, professional advice to ensure your wishes are documented correctly and in a way that suits your personal circumstances.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss leaving a gift in your Will to RAAFA, please email us at bequests@raafawa.org.au or phone 08 9288 8400.

RAAFA

Leave a lasting legacy for the support of future veterans



By leaving a gift in your Will to RAAFA, your lasting legacy will be to ensure our veterans are supported and honoured, our future leaders are empowered, and Australia's proud aviation history is preserved.

It is a powerful way to honour the past and support the future.

To learn more about leaving a gift in your Will to RAAFA, please email us at bequests@raafawa.org.au or phone 08 9288 8400.

A celebration of enduring love



Renewed vows, endless love: Carol and Bud Zam renew their wedding vows at RAAFA Karri Lodge

When it comes to a happy marriage, honesty, laughter and always having fun is the recipe for success according to Carol and Bud Zam.

But when Alzheimer's began stealing Bud's memories, the Merriwa Estate couple got serious about reaffirming their 39 years of love and devotion by renewing their wedding vows.

"We wanted to do it while we could both appreciate the significance and really enjoy another special day," Carol explains.

"It was such a special day, particularly as I'd been asking Bud for years and his standard reply was 'maybe later.'"

"Then when he said yes, I was over the moon."

And so, surrounded by dozens of friends and family, the couple stood side by side at the estate's Karri Lodge at Merriwa, where 82-year-old Bud now lives - just a stone's throw away from Carol who still lives independently at the popular estate.

But first, let's rewind back to 2002, and their first wedding, a rapidly arranged ceremony which came at a moment when Carol thought she might lose her love forever. The couple had been together for well over a decade at their home in Auckland at that stage, when Bud collapsed with pancreatitis.

"Doctors gave us only a 40 per cent chance that he would survive, so we got married right there in the hospital," recalls Carol, whose octogenarian husband served for 25 years in the New Zealand Air Force.

They married not knowing if Bud would survive the week, but thankfully his fighting spirit won through and he survived the near-death experience, though it took him close to three years to fully recover.

Years later, the couple moved to Perth, settling in Ridgewood where Carol began work at RAAFA in 2012, a connection that eventually led the pair to call Merriwa estate home back in July 2025.



For their vow renewal ceremony, Carol surprised everyone by wearing a dress and hat.

"Everyone was quite shocked that I wore a dress as I'm not really into frocks," the 63-year-old laughs.

But in a wonderful turn of tradition, the outfit that mattered most on the day was in fact Bud's. Carol had kept his original t-shirt with a painted bow tie from their 2002 hospital wedding, carefully preserved through two and a half decades. And serendipitously on 13 December 2025, he proudly wore it again.

"Seeing him in it for a second time, well that was just everything to me," says Carol, who spent time writing both sets of vows.

"We laughed during the ceremony because Bud rushed through his words, eager to get to the afternoon tea celebrations with our guests.

Standing there together, reaffirming our love for each other, was just wonderful. That's what mattered the most, we were able to have that precious day together and it was just so happy."

Merriwa hobby shop open day

Merriwa Estate's hobby shop held a fun open day in March this year, organised by staff and hobby shop members to showcase the capabilities of the hobby shop and projects that the workshop can create and fix for Merriwa Estate residents.

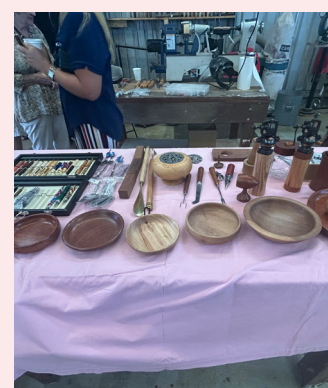
On display were wood turning projects made by talented resident Peter Greene, stations for knife sharpening, bike & gopher tyre inflating, and much more.

Over 30 attendees enjoyed a sausage sizzle, catching up with friends and staff.

The purpose of the open day was to educate and attract new members to the hobby shop, showing what can be created and fixed there. Excitingly, the shop recently welcomed its first female member, Carol Zam to its ranks. It was a great day enjoyed by all.



Merriwa residents Noel Cahill, John Stoneman, and Alan Bentley



Wood turning projects by Merriwa Resident Peter Greene

A decade of leadership leads to life membership for Clive

Clive Robartson was honoured with the Air Force Association life membership during the organisation's Annual General Meeting.

"I've collected a few certificates in my time, but I was genuinely surprised and delighted to receive such an honour from RAAFA. It really was a wonderful gesture, and it was bestowed along with a standing ovation, which was very humbling indeed," says the RAAFA resident who served in Vietnam as part of the Royal Australian Medical Corps.

This latest accolade comes as Clive's tenure as president of RAAFA comes to an end. He has served over a decade on the board, having been appointed to the divisional council in 2013, later becoming vice president in 2018, and eventually president.

"My time with RAAFA has been extraordinarily rewarding, and I feel as a team we were able to achieve a great deal," adds Clive, who will now hand over the reins as president to fellow RAAFA stalwart, Norm Waldie.

"There have been many highlights, in fact too many to name, but I'd say receiving the Tornado GR4 for the Heritage Museum from the Royal Air Force was up there with days to remember. Also, receiving the FA-18 Hornet from the Royal Australian Air Force was an incredible gift."

Clive also points to several key acquisitions of land and property over recent years, including at Two Rocks, the site at Bowman Street in South Perth, and land at Rockingham, as key goals achieved during his tenure.

"All of these acquisitions represent huge opportunities for the organisation as it

continues to grow and plan for the future," explains Clive, who was conscripted into the army in the late 1960s, spending 12 months in Vietnam at the 1st Australian Field Hospital.

"And in recent years, we've been looking further at our military obligations and how we can better provide for our service men and women. This dovetails with our Andrew Russell Veteran Living Program and the Sir Valston Hancock House, which has now become a reality thanks to some very generous donations from the private sector."

As a resident of AFME, Clive also admits that being involved with the planning and construction projects for the estate's contemporary apartments has been a major highlight over the years.

"Our vision was to provide quality, modern homes for our community's ageing population. For that reason, the focus was on building first-class apartments, including Mirage, Orion, Cirrus and most recently, Stirling apartments, which are all absolutely first-class," he says.

And so, after being involved with so many significant projects at RAAFA over the years, is Clive looking forward to slowing down a little, and potentially smelling the roses?

"Well, I am looking forward to spending more time with my family, including my kids and grandkids," admits the born and bred Western Australian, who started out life in East Fremantle.

"I'm looking forward to travelling more too, and am heading off to Norfolk Island early in the New Year. No doubt there will be a bit more



Outgoing RAAFA President, Clive Robartson is awarded a RAAFA Lifetime Membership by new President Norm Waldie

travel as a result of my work on the Order of Australia board too.

"But yes, I may have a little more time on my hands and it will be lovely to do things like wander around the museum more regularly.

"Other than that, I'm always up for a challenge, so I guess it will be a case of watching this space to see what opportunities pop up in the future. It will be interesting to see what happens next."

Farmyard friends visit RAAFA

Residents across our Aged Care Facilities recently enjoyed a series of farm animal visits, bringing something a little different — and very welcome — to their week.

At McNamara Lodge, Old MacDonald's Travelling Farm set up in the Lifestyle Room for a morning of animal cuddles and laughter. Residents were delighted to meet the friendly farmyard crew, including an 11-week-old goat, fluffy ducklings, and a very soft rabbit. To make sure no one missed out, the team also brought a baby goat, sheep and rabbit on one-on-one room visits — a thoughtful touch that meant every resident could enjoy the experience.

Over at Alice Ross-King Care Centre, more farm friends arrived, this time including sheep, ponies and curious chickens. ARK residents were joined by their neighbours from Gordon Lodge, along with family members and even great-grandchildren who were very eager to be part of the visit.

These visits offered residents something hands-on, engaging, and a bit out of the ordinary — all made possible thanks to the efforts of the Lifestyle teams across the facilities.



Alice Ross-King Care Centre, McNamara and Gordon Lodge Residents enjoying the company of their Furry Friends

Introducing the Inaugural Robin Miller Award



Winners are grinners: The first ever Robin Miller Award winner, nursing student Josephine Birch with RAAFA's Charles Page and Denise Bowen Inset: Nurse Robin Miller

The inaugural Robin Miller Award was presented at a special function held at RAAFA Bull Creek on 30 January, celebrating a remarkable legacy of service to rural and remote Australia.

The award was initiated by Board Member Denise Bowen, who proposed establishing an award named in honour of a prominent female aviator. The Board subsequently created an award that commemorates Robin Miller — the much-admired pilot and nurse affectionately known as the “Sugar Bird Lady”. Between 1968-1969, Miller flew her Cessna 182 and then her Mooney VH-REM across north-west Australia, and delivered polio vaccines to children and adults in remote communities. She became famous for administering the medicine in sugar cubes.

Board Committee Member Charles Page was tasked with developing the award in partnership with the University of Notre Dame Australia in Fremantle.

Valued at \$1,000, the Robin Miller Award is presented to a full-time Stage 5 or 6 Bachelor of Nursing student at the University of Notre Dame, Fremantle, who intends to undertake a placement with the Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia (RFDS) in Western Australia.

The first winner of the award is final-year nursing student Josephine Birch, recognised for her outstanding academic commitment and dedication during clinical placements. Ms Birch was selected for embodying the adventurous spirit and commitment to rural and remote healthcare that defined Miller's life and work.

Having completed the Rural and Remote Nursing elective, Ms Birch is a passionate advocate for rural nursing. She has been described by her lecturers as a dedicated and enthusiastic learner, an engaging communicator and a natural leader who inspires those around her. Her strong critical thinking

skills, reflective practice and commitment to lifelong learning distinguished her as a deserving first recipient.

The award has supported Ms Birch to undertake a placement with the RFDS in Port Hedland from 27 October to 16 November 2025, providing her with firsthand experience in delivering frontline healthcare in challenging conditions.

The presentation event was hosted by Education Specialist Remie Paulik, who outlined RAAFA's education initiatives before presenting Ms Birch with her award certificate and a copy of the book *Sugarbird Lady*.

In her response, Ms Birch shared insights from her RFDS placement in Port Hedland, describing the demanding flying conditions of the north-west, frequent call-outs, patient triaging and the importance of remaining calm under pressure.

Mr Charles Page, a member of the Board Committee, delivered the keynote address, speaking about Robin Miller's extraordinary life and legacy. His presentation included archival video footage and a PowerPoint tribute that was warmly received by attendees.

Guests at the event included Ms Birch's family and friends; AFA WA President Norm Waldie; Director Denise Bowen; Dr Cathryn Josif and Ms Chris Adams from the University of Notre Dame; Rebecca Maddern and Paul Ingram from the RFDS; Marie Megaw, Robin Miller's sister; and Paul Brabazon.

The Robin Miller Award not only honours a pioneering Australian aviator and nurse, but also ensures her legacy continues through the next generation of rural healthcare professionals.

Fifteen thousand dollar grant supports veterans with practical life skills

RAAFA has been awarded a \$15,000 Smartgroup Foundation grant to deliver a new cooking and budgeting program for residents at Sir Valston Hancock House.

The four-week, hands-on program, led by a qualified facilitator, will give veterans the chance to develop essential skills in nutrition, meal preparation, budgeting and healthy living. Beyond practical skills, the program is designed to foster social connection, confidence and

independence, supporting long-term health and wellbeing.

The grant reflects RAAFA's ongoing commitment to helping veterans thrive independently and reinforces our mission to advocate for and support those who have served.

Residents and staff alike are looking forward to seeing the program in action—stay tuned for updates on the outcomes and the positive impact on our veterans' daily lives.



100 candles for Royla



Centenarian: The fiercely independent Royla Sailing

Few of us get the opportunity to light 100 candles for someone we love – but when Royla Sailing’s family marked her centenary at Air Force Memorial Estate in January, relatives across four generations travelled from the corners of the country to celebrate her full life.

And in a century that’s seen the great depression, two world wars, the moon landing and a global pandemic, Royla puts her longevity down to keeping physically active and staying busy.

“There’s no real secret to a long life but I’ve always done physical work and kept busy,” says the centenarian, who was born in Manjimup and raised on a dairy farm before joining the Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF) in early 1944.

At 100, family members describe their matriarch as fiercely independent. She’s still driving, tending the plants on her balcony, doing her own housework and remains an active member of the WAAAF branch.

Significantly, Royla comes from a family that is steeped in a long history of service in every major conflict spanning more than a century, including the Boer War, World War I and II and the Vietnam War.

“I felt the need to join up at 18, and had big plans to go away and see the world,” explains Royla, who went on to become an Equipment Assistant, although the journey from Perth to Melbourne for the course took five days by train and proved that service life wasn’t going to be glamorous.

“We slept on the carriage floors and stopped along the Nullarbor for meals of powdered eggs and tinned sausages,” Royla says.

“Life certainly wasn’t easy, but we were happy.”

Royla was posted to various locations across the country, working in stores and equipment depots. It was at her final posting that she met Fred Sailing, a South Australian wireless maintenance mechanic who’d served in the Pacific.

“We married in 1947 in a little wooden church in Mandurah,” she recalls fondly.

“We started married life in a small shed. I cooked on a Primus stove and did the washing outside, even when the northerly winds blew red dirt all over the clothesline.”

When Fred suddenly died in 1975, Royla channelled her energy into music, a passion that has sustained her through life’s challenges.

“I studied singing for three years at the Elder Conservatorium of Music in Adelaide and became drum major in a band, playing tuba and tenor horn,” she says.

She also sang with the University of WA Choral Society for 37 years, her voice carrying through decades of concerts and performances.

Fast forward to today, and Royla’s legacy spans four generations. Her four children, 11 grandchildren and 20 great-grandchildren all gathered to celebrate her milestone birthday.

“I’ve been very lucky,” she says of her family.

Last year, at 99, Royla marched on Anzac Day behind the Women of the Air Force banner, her steps as determined as they were when she first enlisted at 18.

“There is no slowing me down just yet,” she laughs.

Cyber security awareness at RAAFA

Recently, RAAFA held a Cyber Security Awareness Workshop for RAAFA Meadow Springs, Erskine Grove and Air Force Memorial Estate residents to show them how to stay safe online from scams and fraudsters.

In a series of interactive 90-minute sessions, residents were introduced to common (and not-so-common) risks online and invited to share their experiences and ask questions about what to do when suspicious emails or callers contact them.

Over 100 residents were in attendance across all three workshops, and the

sessions covered

- How to spot fake emails, text messages and phone calls
- How to keep personal and financial information private
- What to do if they believe they have been “phished” or scammed

and lots more! Residents said they felt more confident and informed about navigating the online world as a result of the workshop.

We’re planning for more workshops that will be held around our other Estates in the future. Stay tuned, and stay safe!



Stay safe: Cyber Security Awareness workshop at Erskine Grove

Back by popular demand: Dr Tony Bleetman

RAAF's first member event at Cambrai Village went off with a bang, as we brought back our member talk series with Dr Tony Bleetman, all the way from England to give a presentation about his time as a military medic in the United Kingdom.

This riveting talk attracted over 50 members to Cambrai, including members who had never been to any of RAAFA's clubs or events before.

Dr Bleetman spoke about what attracted him to aviation and medicine, his time in combat, the specific challenges he and his medic crew faced dispensing medical attention in a warzone, including deciding where to land a helicopter in the middle of a crisis.

Dr Bleetman took questions from the engaged audience and stayed chatting with attendees after the event.



Dr Tony Bleetman presents to RAAFA Members at Cambrai Village

A gift for our veterans

In memory of her grandparents Frederick (Fred) and Mavis (Ruth) Wedderburn, both of whom served in the RAAF and remained active in community service throughout their lives, donor Kylie Mucciarone contacted RAAFA and expressed her wish to provide a little happiness and festive spirit to those doing it tough, especially with a focus on service personnel.

Kylie and her carers Elle and Nella created

and donated eight bags of festive treats for each of the residents of Sir Valston Hancock House for Christmas. Each bag contained roughly \$100 in value of staples like Weetbix, pasta, and other assortments.

On December 22nd, the residents, RAAFA's Veterans Services Team and Roz and Greg from the Veterans Transition Centre gathered for a small Christmas get together in the garden at Sir Valston Hancock House. The weather was great,

and everyone shared stories of families and time in service, with one resident bringing his guitar and supplying tunes for the gathering.

It was an amazing experience to be able to gift every resident a collection of treats to be able to enjoy over the festive season, and Kylie's gift brightened our veterans' festive season.



Merry Christmas: RAAFA Manager Veterans Services, Isaac Towne passes on a generous gift from donor Kylie Mucciarone to Veteran and Sir Valston Hancock House resident Everard

Club bites

Proof of membership may be required when using facilities available to you. Please have your card available. Non-members are required to be signed in by a member. Want to join? Applications and details available on our website.

CAMBRAI CLUB 9304 5400

Weekly specials

Tuesday, darts, happy hour and Bar snacks available 4.00pm
2nd Tuesday, parmi night, \$20.00. Bookings essential
Wednesday, morning tea, \$6.00 coffee and cake from 10.00am
Wednesday, carvery roast dinner \$25.00. Happy hour from 4.00pm. Bookings essential
Thursday, bar open 3.30pm - 6.30pm. Bar snacks available
Friday, lunch from 11.30am, no booking necessary
1st and 3rd Friday, sundowner and happy hour from 5.00pm

BULL CREEK CLUB 9311 4460

Weekly specials

Monday, roast of the day special \$23.00
Monday to Friday, light breakfast 9.00am to 10.00am
Monday to Friday, lunch 11.00am to 2.00pm
Monday and Wednesday, happy Hour 4.00pm to 5.00pm
Tuesday, fish and chips \$23.00
3rd Wednesday, a la carte night
Friday, dinner and raffles 5.00pm to 7.00pm
Saturday, new opening time 2.30pm to 6.30pm

MEADOW SPRINGS CLUB 9582 5375

All bookings for lunch and dinner can be made at the bar.

Weekly specials

Monday, roast corner – 1 course, choice of 2 roasts \$16.50
Tuesday, a la carte – main meal with glass of house wine or midday \$20.50
Wednesday, club night buffet – meals from \$17.00, chase the ace, bingo and horse racing
Thursday, happy hour, 4.30pm to 6.30pm (Summer hours)
Friday, a la carte – main meal with glass of house wine or midday \$20.50

MERRIWA CLUB 9400 3640

Blue Gum Café

Pop down for one of our daily specials or sample something off the menu. Now open Wednesday 11.00am to 2.00pm and Thursday 10.00am to 2.00pm.

Weekly specials

1st and 3rd Tuesday, club night \$19.00 parmi or pasta. Includes beverage (bookings essential)
Wednesday, roast lunch \$17.00
Wednesday, happy hour 4.00pm
Thursday, morning tea from 10.00am
Thursday, lunch specials \$17.00
2nd and 4th Friday, bistro night (bookings essential)
3rd Saturday, sundowner bar opens 4.00pm

Pickleball now at Merriwa

Pickleball is one of the fastest growing sports in the world, combining elements of tennis, badminton and table tennis into a fun, social and easy-to-learn game.

Played on a smaller court with a solid paddle and a lightweight plastic ball, pickleball is lower impact than tennis and places less strain on the body. The game is mostly played in doubles, with underarm serves and fast, friendly rallies that make it suitable for a wide range of ages and abilities. Its smaller court size means less running, while still providing a great workout.

The sport is known for being welcoming and highly social,

making it a fantastic way to stay active while connecting with others.

Did you know?

Despite popular belief, pickleball was not originally named after a dog. The name is believed to come from the term “pickle boat” in rowing – a crew made up of leftover rowers from other boats – reflecting the way the sport was created by blending elements of different games.

Members or residents interested in joining pickleball at RAAFA Merriwa Estate are encouraged to contact the Estate Office at 9400 3400 for more information.



The friendly pickleball team at RAAFA Estate Merriwa

Remembering Sister Vivian Bullwinkel



Never forgotten: Sister Vivian Bullwinkel and the RAAFA Lodge named after her. Image courtesy of Australian War Memorial

Residents of RAAFA's Vivian Bullwinkel Lodge at Cambray Village have long known their home is named after a remarkable woman whose courage in the face of unthinkable horror helped define what it means to serve.

February marked 84 years since the Bangka Island massacre, one of the darkest chapters in Australian nursing history.

The anniversary holds particular significance for RAAFA and the lodge bearing her name, because Merriwa's 79-suite residential care centre stands as more than just a reminder of an outstanding nurse. It embodies the values Vivian lived by throughout her life, in addition to her dedication to caring for others, resilience through adversity and service that extends far beyond the call of duty.

Lieutenant Colonel Vivian Bullwinkel's story began on 14 February 1942. As Singapore fell to Japanese forces, the 26-year-old was among 65 Australian Army Nursing Service nurses

evacuated on the SS Vyner Brooke. Japanese aircraft bombed and sank the ship. Twenty-two nurses, including Vivian, made it to Radji Beach on Bangka Island.

What happened two days later would haunt her forever. After surrendering to Japanese soldiers, the nurses were ordered to walk into the sea, where machine gun fire suddenly rang out. Vivian felt a bullet tear through her body, yet it missed vital organs. She fell forward and waited, motionless, until the soldiers left.

She dragged herself into the jungle and found wounded British soldier Private Cecil Kingsley. For 12 days she tended his injuries before they surrendered. Kingsley died shortly after. Vivian spent three and a half years in prisoner of war camps, where she and 23 other surviving nurses continued caring for fellow prisoners. Eight nurses died from disease and starvation before liberation in September 1945.

Vivian testified at the Tokyo War Crimes

Tribunal in 1947. She devoted herself to honouring her fallen colleagues, co-founding the Australian Nurses Memorial Centre with fellow POW Betty Jeffrey and becoming Director of Nursing at Melbourne's Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital.

In 1975, as Saigon fell, she led a nursing team into Vietnam for Operation Babylift, evacuating orphaned children on one of the last flights out.

Today, her legacy lives on through memorials including the first statue of an individual woman at the Australian War Memorial, and a new West Australian electorate named in her honour.

"Vivian's story reminds us why commemoration matters so deeply to RAAFA," says Sherry Baxter, RAAFA's Veteran Services Case Manager. "We have a lodge named in her honour because her values of service, resilience and compassion are exactly what RAAFA embodies. This anniversary ensures her story, and the sacrifice of her colleagues, is never forgotten."

Perth lights up green & gold for the WRAAC 75th anniversary

The 75th Anniversary of the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps (WRAAC) Association WA was celebrated in Perth from February 12-16 2026, honouring the 1951-1985 corps. The WRAAC was formed as an all-women's corps of the Australian Army in April 1951, and its Colonel-in-Chief was Princess Margaret, Countess of Snowdon.

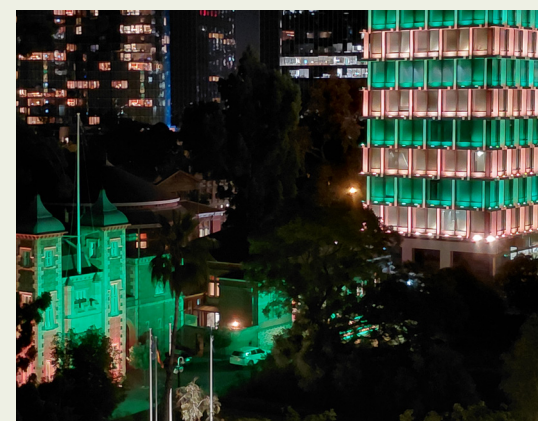
The four-day long celebration included a welcome barbecue, a commemorative service at Kings Park, a formal dinner and a tour of the Army Museum of Western Australia in Fremantle among other events.

A luncheon was also held in the Government House Ballroom, Perth in celebration and reunion of the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps (WRAAC),

where His Excellency, the Honourable Governor Chris Dawson gave an address to the crowd, which included many interstate visitors.

Functions were also held at RSL Cockburn, Anzac House, Kings Park and Government House. In honour of the WRAAC, WA spectacularly lit up various prominent locations in green and gold, including the Mount Street Bridge, the Sky Ribbon Bridge, the Joondalup Drive Bridge, Northbridge Tunnel, the Great Northern Highway, Port Hedland Interchange Bridge, the Perth City Council and Government House.

RAAFA congratulates the WRAAC for 75 years of inspired service to Australia.



WA Celebrates the WRAAC: Government House and Council House, Perth lit up in green and gold